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# Inscribed Administrative Material Culture And The Development Of The Umayyad State In Syria-Palestine 661-750 Ce

Tareq Ramadan  
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**INSCRIBED ADMINISTRATIVE MATERIAL CULTURE AND THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF THE Umayyad State in Syria-Palestine 661-750 CE**

by

**TAREQ RAMADAN**

**DISSERTATION**

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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MAJOR: ANTHROPOLOGY

Approved By:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Advisor

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Date

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the honor and memory of some my very dear friends and mentors who passed away before they could witness the completion of my work and who would have been proud. I miss all of them, dearly and I wish they were all here, today. I will forever be there student. They were all beacons of light and impacted my life in ways that are hard to put into words.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication .....	ii
Acknowledgements .....	iii
List of Tables .....	x
List of Figures .....	xi
Chronology of Early Islamic and Umayyad Leaders .....	xv
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
1. Dissertation Goal .....	1
2. An Introduction to Numismatics .....	8
3. Writing and Literacy in Antiquity: Devising a Theoretical Framework .....	12
4. Dissertation Roadmap .....	18
Chapter 2: A Geographic and Historical Prelude .....	20
1. The Beginning of Arab and Umayyad Rule in Syria-Palestine .....	20
2. Conquest and Annexation of Syria-Palestine .....	26
3. Prophecy, Doctrine and Power in the Arab Imagination .....	34
4. Jerusalem and Palestine: Prized Possessions .....	39
5. Arab Self-Consciousness in Antiquity .....	45
6. The Dawn of a New Political Era in the Late Antique Near East .....	48
7. Muawiya and the Formative Period of the Umayyad Polity .....	53
Chapter 3: Islamic Historiography and Archaeology [Shaping a Discourse] .....	65
1. The Construction of Islamic History: The Debates .....	65
2. ‘Hagarism’ as an Intellectual and Methodological Turning Point .....	70
3. Defining ‘Islamic Archaeology’ and its Role in Shaping Discourse .....	87

Chapter 4: Writing, Literacy and the Rise of the Arab Muslim Polity .....	92
1. Literacy: Theories and Debates .....	92
2. The Birth of the Arabic Orthography and its Power as Political Capital.....	100
3. Literacy and the Arabs Before Islam .....	103
4. The Arabs and their Language .....	111
5. The Pre-Islamic Arabic Language Inscriptions of the Near East .....	121
6. Christianity and the Arabic Script.....	130
7. Literacy, the Arabs, Muhammad, and the Quran.....	146
8. The Arabic Language and Orthography: The Emergence of a New Cultural Milieu.....	162
9. Arabizing and Islamizing Syria-Palestine through the Imposition of Arabic Text .....	165
10. Muslim Appropriation of Christian Expressions .....	174
Chapter 5: The Emergence of Arabic-Inscribed Coinage and the Crystallization of an Islamic State.....	186
1. The Birth of Arabic-Inscribed Coinage .....	186
2. Monetary and Administrative Continuity in the Seventh Century .....	194
3. From Greek to Arabic .....	197
4. Coinage under the Rashidun and Early Umayyads in Syria-Palestine .....	208
5. The First 'Islamic' Coins: Arab Imagery and Arabic Text as Purveyors of a New Order ...	214
6. Islam in Writing: Shaping Muslim Political Culture .....	233
Chapter 6: Umayyad Lead Seals- Instruments of Authority.....	244
1. Introduction to Sealing Practices .....	244
2. The Earliest Islamic Seals.....	248
3. A Lexicon of Umayyad Administration .....	255
4. Seals and Taxes in the Early Islamic Era.....	261

5. Arabic Bullae Bearing Proclamations of Authority.....	272
6. Conflating Religiosity and Political Sovereignty: Spiritual Invocations on Umayyad Bullae.....	277
7. ‘Bismallah’: The Chief Adorner of Islamic Textual Decorum.....	281
8. ‘Al-Wafa Lillah’: The Arabic Equivalent of ‘In God We Trust’.....	284
9. ‘Allahu Akbar’: The Islamic ‘Hallelujah’.....	294
Conclusion .....	301
Catalog .....	311
Appendix: Situating the Coins Archaeologically .....	336
Documented Archaeological Proveniences of Umayyad Coins Found in Areas Corresponding to Historical Syria-Palestine.....	337
Glossary .....	354
Bibliography .....	355
Abstract.....	392
Autobiographical Statement.....	394

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Umayyad Coins Bearing Find-Spot Data .....	342
Table 2: Map of find-spots associated with Umayyad coins recovered in Jordan.....	343
Table 3: Map of find-spots associated with Umayyad coins recovered in Israel and the Palestinian Territories .....	344
Table 4: Map of find-spots associated with Umayyad seals, weights, and coins recovered in the area corresponding to historical Syria-Palestine.....	345
Table 5: Map of Umayyad-era Mints in Syria-Palestine .....	346
Table 6: Map of modern nation-states coinciding with area of historical Syria-Palestine .....	347
Table 7: Umayyad-era mints of Syria-Palestine according to coin type .....	348
Table 8: Key.....	349
Table 9: Page 1 of Coin, Seals, Weights Database Spreadsheet.....	350
Table 10: Page 2 of Coin, Seals, Weights Database Spreadsheet.....	351
Table 11: Page 3 of Coin, Seals, Weights Database Spreadsheet.....	352
Table 12: Page 4 of Coins, Seals, Weights Database Spreadsheet .....	353

## LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1: Map of the ancient Near East .....	6
Fig. 2: A crude lead seal bearing two stars with the word ('al-Shamm') .....	22
Fig. 3: An Arabic map (produced in 1915) of the conquests of Syria-Palestine .....	28
Fig. 4: Part of an undated Arabic map of the 'Arab World at the time of Muhammad' .....	30
Fig. 5: Photo of the Hammat Gader Greek inscription from the time of Muawiya.....	57
Fig. 6: Arab-Sasanian coin bearing the phrase 'Muawiya, Commander of the Believers' .....	59
Fig. 7: Two uniface seals bearing the name of Muawiya (664 CE) .....	60
Fig. 8: Close-up of the Umayyad dam near Ta'if bearing Muawiya's name in Arabic .....	61
Fig. 9: Chart of various scripts used in Arabia and the Near East in the pre-Islamic period.....	123
Fig. 10: Comparative chart of Aramaic, Nabataean, and Arabic orthographies.....	124
Fig. 11: Qaryat Al-Faw inscription in South Arabian musnad script .....	125
Fig. 12: Photograph of the Jabal Usays inscription .....	132
Fig. 13: Sketch of the Harran bilingual Arabic-Greek inscription.....	134
Fig. 14: Photograph of close-up of Arabic text at ancient Dumah .....	138
Fig. 15: Lead coin bearing the Arabic phrase 'Bi'l-Hira' in Arabic script.....	139
Fig. 16: Lead bulla bearing cross and Arabic text and Cross of the East Syrians .....	140
Fig. 17: Umayyad-era oil lamp bearing an East Syrian/Syriac Orthodox cross .....	142
Fig. 18: Square bronze weight bearing imperial figure with Arabic term 'bismallah' .....	142
Fig. 19: Photograph and sketch of lead seal bearing cross and Arabic term 'baraka' .....	144
Fig. 20: Two lead seals both containing the Arabic word 'baraka' .....	145
Fig. 21: Pierced lead Seal containing the Arabic word 'baraka' .....	146
Fig. 22: Folio 1 verso (right) and folio 2 recto (left) of Mingana Islamic Arabic 1572a .....	157

Fig. 23: Arab-Byzantine of ‘Iliya Filastin’ (Jerusalem, Palestine) .....	168
Fig. 24: An Umayyad milestone from the reign of Abd al-Malik .....	171
Fig. 25: Lead seal bearing blessings in Arabic .....	175
Fig. 26: Four pre-Islamic coins struck by Arab polities in the Near East.....	187
Fig. 27: Gold Byzantine solidus and Sasanian Persian silver drachma .....	190
Fig. 28: Three Arab-Byzantine gold dinar coins .....	192
Fig. 29: Arab-Sasanian dirham bearing Muawiya’s name in Pahlavi .....	204
Fig. 30: Byzantine follis with Greek legends and Arabic countermark of ‘tayyib’ .....	212
Fig. 31: Two Arab-Byzantine Imperial Image coins .....	212
Fig. 32: Sculpture of a Standing Caliph from Khirbet al-Mafjar in Jericho, Palestine.....	214
Fig.33: Standing Caliph fils of Amman .....	215
Fig. 34: Arab-Byzantine Standing Caliph fils with ‘M’ on reverse and lengthy Arabic text .....	216
Fig. 35: Two Arab-Sasanian coins of al-Qatari b. Fujaa’a and Abdallah b. al-Zubayr .....	219
Fig. 36: Standing Caliph coin citing Abd al-Malik b. Marwan and ‘Amman’ mint.....	223
Fig. 37: An example of a Tabariyya type bearing an Islamic expression.....	224
Fig. 38: Four examples of Umayyad post-reform coins in gold, silver, copper and lead.....	225
Fig. 39 Chart of standard Arabic texts found on Umayyad post-reform silver dirhams .....	227
Fig. 40: Reverse of Gold solidus of Heraclius and of copper fils of Abd al-Malik.....	231
Fig. 41: Three coins (Ottoman Palestine, British Palestine Mandate, and State of Israel).....	233
Fig. 42: Two photographs of the ornate ‘Great Umayyad Quran’ of Sana’ .....	235
Fig. 43: Umayyad post-reform fils bearing Islamic legends.....	239
Fig. 44: Three examples of Menorahs (5 and 7-branches) used in visual culture/coins.....	241
Fig. 45: Two Umayyad coins bearing symbols (pomegranate and crescent moon) .....	242

Fig. 46: Umayyad fils struck in Damascus and bearing a date of 126AH/744 CE.....	242
Fig. 47: Table outlining visual and stylistic evolution of coinage in Syria-Palestine .....	243
Fig. 48: Photo of one of Muhammad’s letters .....	249
Fig. 49: Close-up of Muhammad’s ring seal impression.....	250
Fig. 50: Greek papyrus bearing seal of Amr b. al-As from 643 CE (PERF no. 556).....	254
Fig. 51: Seal of Amr b. al-As bearing the image of a charging bull.....	255
Fig. 52: Obverse text of uniface, cupped lead seal with hatchet-markings on reverse.....	257
Fig. 53: Greek papyrus decree written by an Arab ‘amir’ (~ 642 CE), PERF no. 555.....	259
Fig. 54: Uniface lead seal bearing the phrase ‘Hisham Amir al-Mu’mineen’ .....	260
Fig. 55: Lead Seal of Metropolis of Jerusalem.....	264
Fig. 56: Two lead seals (one of Damascus and the other of al-Salt) .....	266
Fig. 57: Lead Seal reading ‘al-Urdun’ (‘The Jordan’).....	268
Fig. 58: Lead seal of Homs bearing name of al-Muthana b. Ziyad .....	269
Fig. 59: Two lead seals of ‘Homs’ .....	270
Fig. 60: Lead seal bearing name of ‘Muhammad b. Ubayda.....	271
Fig. 61: Two lead seals (one bearing the name of Jordan and the other of Palestine).....	272
Fig. 62: Lead stamp seal of Wasit dated to 85 AH .....	274
Fig. 63: Complete document seal of the ‘Commander of Tabariyya’ .....	276
Fig. 64: Lead seal bearing phrase ‘Nasr Allah’ (‘God’s victory’).....	279
Fig. 65: Two lead seals bearing religious phrases .....	281
Fig. 66: A coin, weight, and seal bearing the phrase ‘bismallah’ .....	282
Fig. 67: Two lead seals bearing the phrase ‘bismallah’ .....	283
Fig. 68: Rectangular seal of Alexandria .....	284

Fig. 69: Two 'Arab-Byzantine' coins bearing phrase 'al-wafa lillah' .....	285
Fig. 70: Complete eal bearing 'bismallah, al-wafa lillah' .....	286
Fig. 71: Lead seal bearing phrase 'Lillah' ('For God') .....	287
Fig. 72: Lead seal with 'al-wafa llilah' in two lines with star above.....	288
Fig. 73: Lead seal bearing phrase 'bismallah amr Allah al-wafa' .....	290
Fig. 74: Lead weight bearing phrase 'tabarak Allah' .....	295
Fig. 75: Lead seal bearing the phrase 'Allahu akbar' .....	296
Fig. 76: Letter forms of initial 'alef' in words on three different objects.....	297
Fig. 77: Arab-Sasanian coin bearing phrase 'bismallah allahu akbar' .....	298
Fig. 78: Photograph Kufic inscription found near Karbala, Iraq (64 AH).....	299



## **CHRONOLOGY OF EARLY ISLAMIC AND UMAYYAD LEADERS**

Muhammad 622-632 CE (as statesman based out of Yathrib/Medina)

### **THE RIGHTLY-GUIDED/'RASHIDUN' CALIPHS (632-661 CE)**

1. Abu Bakr 632-634
2. Umar b. al-Khattab 634-644
3. Uthman b. Affan 644-656
4. Ali b. Abu Talib 656-661

### **THE UMAYYAD CALIPHS (661-750 CE)\*\***

1. Muawiya b. Abu Sufyan 661-680
2. Yazid I 680-683
3. Muawiya II 683-684
4. Marwan I 684-685
5. Abd al-Malik b. Marwan 685-705
6. Al-Walid 705-715
7. Suleiman 715-717
8. Umar II 717-720
9. Yazid II 720-724
10. Hisham 724-743
11. Al-Walid II 743-744
12. Yazid III 744
13. Ibrahim 744
14. Marwan II 744-750

\*This list refers to the Umayyad leaders of Syria-Palestine and excludes the Umayyads of Spain.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1. DISSERTATION GOAL

The goal of this dissertation is to provide an archeolinguistic examination and interpretation of Umayyad state formation by deciphering the administrative strategies employed by the ephemeral Umayyad caliphate in Syria-Palestine from 661-750 CE through an analysis of the complex interplay between, mainly, state-sponsored, inscribed material culture and Umayyad political policies across time and space. Such materials include coins, weights, seals, and to a lesser degree, documents and public texts, in an effort to understand Umayyad tactics for successfully establishing their polity and maintaining power in a multi-cultural, multi-orthographic and multi-linguistic region. In this work, I make two primary assertions. My main argument is that the Umayyads were the first to adopt and endorse the cursive Arabic orthography as a major administrative technology in their new polity through the production of various categories of inscribed administrative material culture which were used as instruments of cultural and political authority.

In essence, for the Umayyads whose polity encompassed all of the Arabic-speaking lands of the Near East, the Arabic script translated into a serious form of political capital that facilitated their pursuit of power which was then employed in the re-orientation of the region's physical, visual and ideological landscape. Secondly, I argue that, by extension, the Umayyads were also responsible for the universalization of the Arabic alphabet and script by broadly and successfully integrating writing into their visual culture, all of which was also critical to the construction and proliferation of a doctrinal form of Islam that was used to further validate their claims as legitimate political heirs to Muhammad and as rightful leaders of Syria-Palestine and beyond. The inclusion of Islamic (i.e. Quranic) literary expressions on coins, seals, and other

related objects were testaments to their interest in using the holy text to advance their position as deserving successors to the religion's founder.

In other words, writing, particularly in the Arabic alphabet and script, was paramount to Umayyad triumph over both external and internal enemies who posed immaterial, philosophical, and also material challenges to Umayyad rule. I further contend that the physiognomy of Umayyad inscribed material culture reflects an obsession with writing as both decorum and as aggrandizer of social and political relations.

Moreover, the data presented in this work stems from research and museum-based fieldwork that I conducted at several institutions in 2012 and 2015 including the Jordan Museum, the Jordan Archaeological Museum (Amman Citadel), the Jordan National Bank Numismatic Museum, the Madaba Archaeological Museum, the Irbid Archaeological Museum (Dar as-Saraya), and the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology at the University of Michigan. I also had access to a small private collection of lead seals, several examples of which I have included in this study. After accessing the collections at each of the aforementioned facilities, I photographed, weighed, measured, and documented all physical aspects of a total of one hundred and fourteen copper, silver, and gold coins, seventy-nine lead and twenty-two glass seals and stamp seals, and four glass coin weights. Extracting as much information from the objects as artifacts and as historical texts provided me with more avenues of exploration and, of course, more research possibilities. I then spent time deciphering, decoding, and then translating the objects (from Arabic into English) before relating the various categories of material culture to administrative functions.

Later, I spent considerable time, especially in the famed library at the American Center of Oriental Research in Amman, locating and recording archaeological proveniences whenever

possible. I utilized the same methodologies in the examination of twelve lead bullae from a private collection as well. The seals or bullae, in particular, a much understudied category of early Islamic and Umayyad material culture, is a major focus of this dissertation with the final chapter dedicated entirely to them and their administrative and textual qualities. At the end of this work, I also offer a typology of the seals/bullae based upon commonalities in epigraphic and literary content (i.e. place-names, titles, etc.) as part of a larger catalog that consists of all of the seals I personally examined, photographed and recorded.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, the proveniences- that is, the associated, and often transcribed, details of the archaeological contexts from which the overwhelming bulk of the objects studied in this report derived from, are mainly absent. With a few exceptions, most of the coins and all of the seals and weights that were analyzed appear to have been acquired by the institutions that housed them through various means. It is difficult to circumvent the issue of documentation, and I recognize that. While certainly problematic, the objects themselves are still meaningful historical texts whose contents are still of great academic utility as they relate to examinations of state formation, art, visual culture, political economy, fiscal practices, and other areas related of intellectual inquiry.

While only a very limited number of the inscribed objects that I recorded had established proveniences, I did spend considerable time in assembling a list of literature (archaeological, numismatic, historical, etc.) that did contain documented find-spots for Umayyad numismatic and par anumismatic materials. I also mapped all of those materials in hopes that they can be of some utility in future projects.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: None of the coins, seals or other materials presented in this dissertation are to scale. All of the images have been modified- enlarged or made smaller- to maximize the quality and visibility of their respective written content.

Furthermore, despite the seemingly intense focus on epigraphy, this work is situated within a larger and broader anthropological, archaeological, and historical framework that focuses on the intersection of writing/literacy, inscribed material culture, and state formation. Thus, it includes discussions about the development and codification of the Arabic language and the evolution and crystallization of the distinct Arabic script, the role of literate culture among the Arabs of Arabia and Syria-Palestine in both the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods through a discussion of contemporary theories regarding literacy, the emergence and significance of Arabic-inscribed material culture as signifiers of cultural change, as well as how the adaptation and appropriation of Arabic writing was operationalized and utilized by the Umayyads in their efforts to establish a state and become regional and global hegemon.

The year 661 CE marks the genesis of an Islamic magisterial order and 680 CE represents the beginning of a hereditary caliphate which became an almost universal feature of the polities that dominated the Muslim World up until the collapse of Ottoman power at the end of World War One in 1918 (though the office of the Ottoman caliphate was formally abolished in 1924<sup>2</sup>).

The Umayyad era in Syria-Palestine between 661 and 750 CE was one characterized by political savviness and dynamism on the part of the new Arab, Muslims leaders who were embarking on a major campaign of empire-building. During this short time, Umayyad caliphs and their administrators, many of whom were ambitious visionaries, operated in a political landscape where the written word played an integral role in the arrangement and re-arrangement of political machinations, ambitions, and ideals. A multitude of political, religious and economic challenges compelled Umayyad leaders over the course of nearly nine decades to devise pragmatic, and at other times, coercive strategies derived from a meticulous reading of the political terrain which enabled them to, albeit for a relatively brief period, dominate territories

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<sup>2</sup> Zaman 2012, p. 14

across three continents. Their successes as regional and global statesmen, I argue, was intimately linked to their ability to invoke, control, and disseminate material culture bearing the Arabic script, and therefore, writing was a critical technology and a tool to make administrative processes more efficient. In other cases, writing was employed as a weapon in an ideological battle between political movements such as the Zubayrids and Kharijites- all of whom drew from the same, shared literate culture and all of whom tried to raise their own political profiles through the production of inscribed material culture bearing Arabic and Islamic texts and expressions.

As tribal elites from Arabia, who accounted for a small statistical minority governing over a predominantly Christian population in the Near East, Umayyad leadership, particularly during the first two decades (661-680 CE) could not risk upsetting existing social, political, religious and economic communities, institutions and configurations for fear of a withdrawal of support from their constituents in Syria-Palestine, the political epicenter of their state. This led Muawiya b. Abu Sufyan, the dynasty's founder and one of Muhammad's personal scribes according to the famed Muslim historian ibn Katheer<sup>3</sup>, to carefully devise, strategize, and engage in political maneuvers conducive to the maintaining of power through a host of, often, practical political and fiscal measures which rested upon successfully appropriating both Islam, as a growing social and symbolic force, and the Arabic orthography and acquiring a near-monopoly over its administrative usage in the pursuit of domestic and foreign policies.

Further, the inscribed objects they produced constituted instruments of authority that were utilized in instances of both appeasement and coercion, depending on imminent and sometimes pressing circumstances, and were the results of conscious choices made by Umayyad leaders and their administrations.

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<sup>3</sup> See Ibn Katheer's The Caliphate of Banu Ummayah: *Al Bidaya - Wan-Nihaya* under 'The Biography of Muawiya'

Prior to the emergence of Islam under Muhammad in the early seventh century and the rise of large-scale, Arab government that was accelerated by the birth of a new religious movement, the Arabic language and script, by extension, had not yet acquired the status of an imperial *lingua franca* outside of Arabia, although the latter began to already exhibit some orthographic cohesion. The cursive Arabic script that is now universally famous emanated from two major developments during this time: First, the transcribing and propagation of the Quran in textual form and second, the production and dispensation of inscribed material culture bearing Arabic inscriptions by the Umayyads. Before both of these developments, the Arabic orthography was reserved primarily for religious writings associated with Christianity and the faith's ecclesiastical institutions in Syria-Palestine, Mesopotamia and Arabia.



Figure 1: Map of ancient Near East

Still, it is difficult to establish precisely when the Umayyads first began to produce, circulate, and/or utilize inscribed administrative objects in this region but it is certain that the new Arab and Islamic polity, from its inception in 661 CE, used all of these technologies in various capacities. In the case of Syria-Palestine (i.e. the Levant or *Bilad al-Shamm*), centuries of Byzantine rule and Ghassanid vassalship<sup>4</sup> preceded, and even helped facilitate, the rise of the Hejazi Arab Muslims in their journey to political ascendancy, paving the way for a cultural and political takeover.

However, the annexation of traditionally-held Byzantine territories north and west of Arabia was not merely the acquisition of land, but of peoples, existing social arrangements and modalities, traditions, cultural institutions, religious systems, and political cultures which often profoundly impacted and shaped Umayyad worldviews and administrative practices. It is the inscribed material record composed of objects serving a vast array of political, economic and cultural purposes and governmental functions that bear the signatures of the state, produced for and by members of the caliph's bureaucratic apparatuses and which provide us with clues about what and possibly how and why particular policies were enacted and articulated in the region over the course of the state's short life.

As overlords of a vast and growing empire, the Umayyads attempted to control the narratives of the day and dictated the trajectory of both Arabism, as a loose cultural movement, and Islam as a social force, in part, through text. Writing was integral for the promulgation of political and religious doctrine in many ways, and the Umayyad caliphs instituted these technologies to the best of their abilities to mold perceptions about their character as statesmen in an attempt to acquire legitimacy in a hostile and competitive political environment. The

<sup>4</sup> The Arab Monophysite Ghassanids of Syria represented a vassal state tied to Byzantium who provided them subsidies to protect the frontiers of the empire from Arab raider (See Irfan Shahid 'Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century', 1995, pp. 61-65.)



bureaucratic mechanisms and machinery that sanctioned this, thus, relied on individuals who were literate, to varying degrees, as well as artistic and who had the technical expertise to create finished products. For the Umayyads, control of the production and dissemination of material culture bearing the Arabic language was paramount to their success as overlords of Syria-Palestine and the surrounding regions where Arabic had been a common vernacular among the Ghassanid and Lakhmid kingdoms as well as other unrelated north Arabian tribes. For the people of the region, the Arabic script they encountered on coins and other materials was emblematic and symbolic of a new cultural order and political reality, while concurrently serving as a cultural informer. These very objects were used by Umayyad leaders to re-imagine and re-shape the very world, physical and ideological, that their constituents inhabited.

While all of inscribed administrative (including all of the numismatic and par anumismatic) objects presented in this work can be approached as archaeological artifacts, historical texts, and/or as visual decorum<sup>5</sup> (or all three), the primary concern is with what the texts can tell us about their value in relation to the development of the Umayyad state over time.

## 2. AN INTRODUCTION TO NUMISMATICS

For decades, numismatics and archaeology were not treated as separate fields of study but, instead, inseparable areas of intellectual and historical inquiry. It was not until the first quarter of the twentieth century that numismatics became an independent field of study almost divorced from archaeology and cultural history.<sup>6</sup> While few archaeologists are numismatists, there is little doubt about the critical role that coins can play in the identification as well as dating of archaeological sites or strata (with exceptions and limitations). Today, numismatics is a highly specialized field with a standardized and highly specific nomenclature, and in the cases

<sup>5</sup> Baines 2007, pp. 14-18 (see section on 'Decorum')

<sup>6</sup> See Kemmers and Myberg 2011

that archaeologists discover coins in archaeological contexts, they are generally given to numismatists for attribution and identification.<sup>7</sup>

More importantly, though, coins were minted not only as a medium for conducting commercial transactions in money economies throughout the ancient world, but they could also serve as objects of tribute and as, sometimes, powerful proliferators of important signs, symbols, and political messages of the state or authority that produced them. Coins, as a medium of exchange, were also highly mobile and could therefore expedite economic processes while simultaneously providing us with clues about political economy or the geographic extent of a given economic system.<sup>8</sup>

Howgego, in *Why did Ancient States Strike Coins?* attempted to dispel the myth that the singular function of coins in the ancient world was for payment (i.e. expenditure, exchange, etc.), an assertion made by H.M. Crawford in 1970. He contends though that their uses were extensive and that payments in ancient economies were not always dispersed via coins, but sometimes in goods of equal value (including bullion/precious metals).<sup>9</sup> Citing a fourth century numismatic episode in Roman territory, coins were even struck for individuals (for a fee), but that laws were passed that prohibited the practice. It is hard to imagine that any state would willingly sanction or tolerate the formation of a rival monetary system (without exceptional circumstances). The Umayyads, during the late seventh century, contended with such a dilemma- one that ultimately brought them to blows with their adversaries who tried to usurp their authority by issuing coins in their own names, defying the notion that the Umayyads were the sole power and the legitimate

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<sup>7</sup> Walmsley 2007, p. 59

<sup>8</sup> Haldon 2010, p. 114

<sup>9</sup> See Howgego 1990, p. 13 (for discussion)

political successors to Muhammad and the only authority capable of striking and circulating their own currency.<sup>10</sup>

Goux, in arguing for a theoretical numismatics, asserted that the “*interplay of signs, objects, and symptoms appear as governed by values*”<sup>11</sup> (e.g. linguistic, commercial, or legal according to him) that are developed, activated and initiated through historical processes and governed by complex relations between various social forms. According to Kemmers and Myrberg’s *Rethinking Numismatics: The Archaeology of Coins*, since coins circulate amongst individuals in a society, they tend to be encrypted with clues about the broad and complex relationship between human agency, institutions, and social structures. For the archaeologist, coin production and other types of metalwork lend social commentary to those examining them, eliciting a discussion of the “*networks of innovation and tradition*” that manage and regulate their usage and whose “*inseparable material and social components*” can assist in the construction of broader theoretical frameworks.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, this dissertation regards coins as reflectors of social forces, instigators of cultural change and manifestations of broad political currents. These notions are equally as applicable to other aspects of inscribed material culture which consists of various categories of objects that were also created and endowed with meaning by the polity that authorized them, and utilized in a number of political and financial capacities.

Further, coins were only introduced relatively recently on the human scale of economic and political development, likely making their debut in Lydia<sup>13</sup> (Asia Minor) sometime in the

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<sup>10</sup> See Bacharach 2010, p. 9

<sup>11</sup> Goux 1990, p. 10

<sup>12</sup> Ryzewski (in Humphris and Rehren, eds.) 2013, pp. 303-312

<sup>13</sup> Ephesus and Ionia have also received attention and are sometimes regarded as candidates for the home of the world’s first coins.

middle of the first millennium BCE (~600-561 BCE).<sup>14</sup> They are referred to by numismatists today as ‘*stater*s’ and were composed of electrum (a natural gold and silver alloy), and early versions depicted a lion or stag on one side and punched on the other to indicate their weight and value, but bore no text.

In the British Museum exists another early coin, visually distinct, but also composed of electrum and dating from the seventh or sixth century BCE. This time, though, it bears a Greek inscription above the depiction of a stag, reading “*hanos emi Seima*” or “*I am the badge of Phanes.*”<sup>15</sup> This is likely one of the earliest coins to bear text and while it is difficult to gauge the type of social or psychological impact that the inclusion of writing would have on objects initially designed for commercial exchange, the precedent was set and its effects would prove to be profound for subsequent producers and users of coinage.

Although the production and circulation of coinage is a relatively recent phenomenon emerging long after the birth of writing, the standardization and valuation of precious metals such as gold and silver had already begun nearly a millennia and a half earlier in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt.<sup>16</sup> The general idea underlying the technology to strike coins too, has its roots in the Near East where seals had been produced for thousands of years- long before coins. As a standardized form of payment whose value was agreed upon by the parties involved, coins gradually became symbolic of the sovereignty of the issuer and could therefore acquire different functions including the demonstration of power and the articulation of written, literate and/or visual culture.

Coins are also often able to relay information about the cultural, linguistic, political, religious, and economic orientations of a community, state, or nation to its handler (and to

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<sup>14</sup> Friedberg 2009, p. 28

<sup>15</sup> Coins Weekly Archive (I am the Badge of Phanes)

<sup>16</sup> Mudd 2006, p. 15

scholars, today). They also serve as fixed, static historical markers of a given time period and place. However, discerning, identifying, and attributing ancient coins require the expertise of specialists, alongside a familiarity with the histories of their respective issuer. Even then, deciphering the icono-textual properties of coins remains a rather subjective exercise, and this is certainly true about the earliest Islamic-era coins which to the non-specialist appear ambiguous in their stylistic, textual, and iconographic makeup.

Moreover, coins were also generally linked to some centralized, often bureaucratic administrative body (though there are exceptions) but were typically utilized by all segments of society and thus are insightful as both '*historical document and archaeological object.*'<sup>17</sup> In this dissertation, the coins and seals discussed are, for the sake of this work, historical documents whose epigraphic (or textual) details are of the greatest concern and "*may be of some use as evidence for an administrative history of Umayyad Syria. They were not merely contemporaneous witnesses to local administrative structures, they were themselves part of those structures.*"<sup>18</sup>

### **3. WRITING AND LITERACY IN ANTIQUITY: DEVISING A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Relatively little has been written on literacy practices in the early part of the Classical Islamic period (600-1000 CE), apart from commentary on extant inscriptions, graffiti, and the like. The pre-Islamic period, ironically regarded as the period of the *jahiliyya* (era of ignorance) in Islamic literary tradition, has been more popular among epigraphers and historical linguists than the early Islamic era as tens of thousands of, mainly short texts, can be found littered throughout the Near East, the overwhelming majority of which are not linked to any stately

<sup>17</sup> Kemmers and Myrberg 2011, p. 89

<sup>18</sup> Bone 2000, p.16

apparatus. In early and/or ancient states, writing and literacy practices manifested themselves in ways that specialists have only recently conceptualized out of research that has been conducted on contemporary communities.

The study of writing and literacy practices may be useful in deciphering the types of relationships between individuals and institutions; they can facilitate our understandings of conceptions of power, epistemological awareness, communication, and social relations- all of which are deeply and intimately connected to studies about culture and society, more broadly. Such topics are integral to broader studies on literacy in the ancient world and certain frameworks may be conducive to such studies, particularly as archaeological analyses and epigraphic examinations increasingly converge.

The Arabia that Muhammad, Islam's founder, was born in was already enduring a period of spiritual transformation due, in part to extensive trade with the region's imperial powers, which also put the Arabs in contact with diverse religious traditions and doctrines, some of them in written forms. Doctrinal forms of religion had been steadily growing during what Karl Jaspers referred to as the 'Axial Age' between the eighth to the third centuries BCE, which Jonathon Berkey, in *The Formation of Islam*, citing Marshall Hodgson, claims was "*decisive in creating the world out of which Islam eventually emerged*" and which was responsible for producing "*leading religious figures*" and "*the production of foundational religious texts*" in India, China, the Hellenistic cultures, and the Mediterranean region.<sup>19</sup> Jan Retso, entertaining aspects of Patricia Crone's assessment of the historical events leading up to the birth of Islam, refers to the ascent of the Islamic polity under Muhammad, a "*grand finale of the so-called Axial age*" that was expedited by the "*spiritual and material history during the last pre-Islamic millennium*"<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Berkey 2003, p. 3

<sup>20</sup> See Jan Retso's chapter (in Arnason, Eisenstadt, and Wittrock) 2005, p. 350

that was unfolding in Yemen which had been home to several pre-Islamic states and which had long-standing doctrinal versions of monotheistic, Abrahamic traditions and whose people played a major role in the military expansion of the Islamic polity into Syria-Palestine.

To the north of Arabia was Christian Byzantium (with a centuries-old presence in Syria-Palestine, Anatolia, Egypt, and the rest of the eastern Mediterranean), to the west, Christian Axum (based out of Ethiopia, adjacent to the Hejaz and South Arabia), and to the northeast Zoroastrian Iran (led from the Tigris-Euphrates River basin) who had employed a Christian Arab Kingdom, the Lakhmids of Hira, to protect frontier areas that bordered Arabia and Syria-Palestine.<sup>21</sup> None of these cultures or civilizations exploited or employed the Arabic script on administrative objects<sup>22</sup> and so Arabic often found itself subservient to other languages and scripts more closely associated with imperial authority and bureaucratic prestige.

In the pre-Islamic Levant, Greek was the language of administration and economics during the Byzantine period and found extensive usage in the administrative and religious centers, noticeably influencing Christian and Islamic lexicons, in fact. Some of the invocations and dedicatory phraseology found in Syria-Palestine in the form of Arabic texts, for example, often closely mimicked some of the religious writings found in the Byzantine-era Greek Christian inscriptions.<sup>23</sup>

Under the Umayyads, Syria-Palestine, the epicenter of their empire, gradually transitioned from a land culturally Hellenistic with growing Arabisms, and religiously Christian, to one dominated by Arab-Muslim political elites. Evidence of this transmogrification of the region and its peoples is best manifested in the written records where the Umayyads left one of

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<sup>21</sup> Donner 2010, p. 4

<sup>22</sup> To my knowledge, there exists a single lead coin bearing the name of the Lakhmid capital of al-Hira in the Arabic script that is, thus far, unique (see Lutz Ilisch JONS supplement 2007)

<sup>23</sup> Sharon 2004, pp. 26-27

their most impactful and profound legacies. An examination of these records reveals that the Umayyads emphasized writing in their new state and in its administrative material culture which endowed the very objects they commissioned with political, social, religious, cultural, linguistic, and economic value and therefore represent physical manifestations of their bureaucratic decisions across time and space.

However, war with their enemies was also fought out using the written record and as the historical record informs us, the Umayyads, though graphophiles obsessed with the power demonstrated through the imposition of Arabic texts on material culture and monuments, were not the only ones who wrote or produced textual, ‘official’ and ‘stately’ materials. In fact, several politicized communities, all vying for power in the Near East of Late Antiquity such as the also attempted to tilt the balance of power in their favor. This analysis, which sees writing as an instrumental in framing and impacting social and political relations, adapts John Baines’s theoretical model of visual culture, language, writing and decorum as a primary framework while also drawing from Bierman’s *Writing Signs* about the role of public texts in the later, Fatimid state, and applying them to the exploitation of writing in Umayyad Syria-Palestine in the seventh and eighth centuries.

Baines posited that *“Language and visual representation should not be separated, not least because language envelops so much of what human beings do. While language is ultimately arbitrary in its relation to the world, this fact is often ignored. Reification of the relation between words and what they denote, or belief that language can influence the world directly, can be compared with the more or less direct relations that exist (or are believed to exist) between visual representations and their referents and/or the surfaces that bear them.”*<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Baines 2007, p. 8



Using ancient Egypt as a template, he argues that visual culture (that is representational, figural art and texts) serves as a peripatetic stage for people to relate to the nobility and the transcendent. He dubs the material manifestations of elite culture, both temporal and religious, that frame social relations on several levels ‘*decorum*.’<sup>25</sup> Later Muslim empires like the Fatimids similarly exploited the full power of Arabic signs, as Irene Bierman’s *Writing Signs: The Fatimid Public Text* fully illustrates. In it, she argues that the Fatimids articulated their worldview through the construction of monuments, secular buildings, and religious institutions that bore, often extensive Arabic-language inscriptions or ‘signs’ and which were designed and erected to remind their audiences of the “*official Fatimid position*.”<sup>26</sup>

While various forms of material culture and monumental architecture in Syria-Palestine included or bore figural and pictorial art under the Umayyads, much of which closely mimicked Byzantine representations introduced first under the aegis of Greek-Hellenistic culture (and later reinforced by the Romans and Byzantines)<sup>27</sup>, written culture and its visage was more impactful as a medium to relay facts about the cultural disposition of the polity under the Umayyads because it was ideologically more profound and striking than other artistic and architectural forms.

In other words, while the Umayyads certainly invested in the large-scale building projects (e.g. the Dome of the Rock, the Great Umayyad Mosque) that celebrated their political achievements and cultural and religious triumphs, they did so, largely, in the general architectural styles and traditions of their predecessors or enemies. The primary distinguishing feature, however, of Umayyad decorum and visual art was a manifestation of their literate culture which was constructed in Arabic as opposed to the dominant languages and scripts of the region

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<sup>25</sup> Baines 2007, p. 17

<sup>26</sup> Bierman 1998, p. 1

<sup>27</sup> Taragan 1998, p. 95

which were Greek and Aramaic. Writing, for the Umayyads, was not simply an administrative tool but a symbolic form of cultural clout and an indictment of their worldview and sense of self that was divorced from the institutional superstructures that dominated the physical and political spaces that many Arabic-speakers inhabited. Baines further posited that “*writing and representation were crucial for the formulation and presentation of royal and religious ideology*”<sup>28</sup>, a notion that can be aptly applied to the Umayyad elite class which must have understood that inscriptions were essential to the articulation of state power especially in an environment and region that was home to the origins of writing and where the technology had become a staple of essentially all of the Near East’s previous civilizations.

Unsurprisingly, it took a stately enterprise with some level of organizational sophistication, institutions (even if they were rudimentary at the start) and a bureaucratic class that had access to resources, technical expertise, and an audience and only then could epigraphic decorum (Arabic texts inscribed in the latest Arabic font) find regional and then global success. The initial vehicle was the state that began with Muhammad in Medina which was imperialized by Muawiya b. Abu Sufyan in Syria-Palestine, then Arabized and Islamized under Abd al-Malik b. Marwan and his sons.

With that said, this multi-faceted analysis concerns itself, mainly, with inscribed objects primarily produced during the Umayyad period (and to a lesser extent, the Rashidun era) and views these texts, mostly, as historical documents with epigraphic qualities embedded with symbolism and meanings central to the state’s or issuing authority’s governing philosophies and political visions. The script found on Umayyad material culture, should therefore be understood as a form of political capital.

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<sup>28</sup> Baines 2007, pp. 282-283

Providing a broad assessment of the conditions, circumstances, and events that gave rise to the Umayyad state has required the integration of a vast array of studies conducted in a number of fields and disciplines and so this dissertation draws from history, archaeology, historiography, literacy and writing studies, anthropology, studies on state formation, numismatics and numismatic archaeology, epigraphy, as well as Quranic and Hadith studies.

Furthermore, this work is not only concerned with the functions of writing in the seventh century Near East under the Umayyads as it pertains to state formation, but also about the cultural milieu and its accompanying literate traditions that underpinned the utilities of the written word and dictated its social and political qualities, i.e. writing's *raison d'être*. Here, writing is not understood as a neutral, benign, or consequential feature of Arab and Islamic state formation but rather as an explicit framer of political, cultural and socio-economic relations. The Umayyads were benefactors of the technology who then politically operationalized it, employing it as a weapon in a cultural *coup d'état* against both internal and external enemies, alike, in a race for regional and global primacy.

#### **4. DISSERTATION ROADMAP**

The remainder of this dissertation is arranged in chapters with sub-sections. The next chapter provides the reader with an introduction to the geo-political and historical circumstances that helped facilitate an Arab-Islamic takeover of the Levant while chapter three addresses the intellectual debates regarding the issues of historiography and archaeology as well as their impacts on the development of the methodologies and theoretical frameworks useful in the approach towards understanding early Islamic state formation. Chapter four traces the development of the Arabic language and script while also addressing the issue of writing and literacy as it is understood by noted specialists and as it applies and relates to pre-Islamic

Levantine and Peninsular communities as well as the early Muslims in Arabia. It also offers insights into the beginning of orthographic and lexical appropriation of Christian, Arabic expressions by the new Arab, Muslim rulers. Chapter five offers an analysis on the role of inscribed coinage and in the propagation of the Umayyad polity's political character and demonstrates how a growing monopoly over Arabic writing empowered the Umayyads in an environment that saw Arabic acquire great political and religious utility. Chapter six, the final chapter, establishes connections between sealing practices and administrative forms and governing methods instituted by the Umayyad polity, diachronically. The written content of the seals (also known as bullae) are presented as expressions of authority, designed to reify the power of the state and by extension, used to expunge the psycho-social influences wielded over the region's inhabitants by former imperial powers. At the end of this work is an appendix consisting mainly of archaeological proveniences extracted from excavation reports and other related literature, followed by several maps that highlight both minting sites and archaeological find-spots associated with Umayyad inscribed objects- a useful tool for the archaeologist and numismatist. The final section consists of a catalog/sylogie of lead bullae with a built-in typology.

At minimum, there are at least two major contributions offered in this dissertation: A detailed assessment on the role of writing in the development of the Umayyad state through an analysis of archaeological, inscribed (namely, administrative) materials as well as a catalog and typology of lead seals of which no cohesive, English-language study currently exists.

## CHAPTER 2 A GEOGRAPHIC AND HISTORICAL PRELUDE

*Chapter Two provides historical and geographic context to situate events associated with the rise of Islam and the emergence of the Umayyad polity in the seventh century. Here, I offer a reconstruction of the geo-political, cultural, linguistic and religious landscape out of which the conquests and annexation of the Levant were made possible and drawing from a wide range of source materials.*

### 1. THE BEGINNING OF ARAB AND Umayyad RULE IN SYRIA-PALESTINE

A twelfth century Syrian historian once reported *“the most holy spot on earth is Syria; the most holy spot in Syria is Palestine; the most holy spot in Palestine is Jerusalem; the most holy spot in Jerusalem is the Mountain (Temple Mount); the most holy spot on the Mountain is the place of worship; and the most holy spot on the place of worship is the Dome.”*<sup>29</sup>

Syria-Palestine, in the seventh century, was without a doubt, home to remarkable change and transition. There were innumerable political happenings that unfolded that had the long-term consequence of transforming the Near East in a number of ways and on a multitude of fronts and levels. The religious and linguistic realities that existed prior to the Muslim takeover of Syria-Palestine, an area that corresponds with the region that makes up the Levant, would gradually change as new rulers and new policies altered the political, religious, cultural, demographic, linguistic and social landscapes. With the advent of Islam in Arabia, Muslim armies quickly conquered vast stretches of territory, ultimately incorporating them and the peoples they hosted, into a new political order so that by the end of the seventh century, an Arab-led Muslim Empire stretched from North Africa in the west to border of India in the east.

However, few regions were as important to the early Muslim rulers as Syria-Palestine which lay closest to the northern peripheries of the Arabian Peninsula and which primarily consisted of a Christian population that was culturally Hellenistic, but also, to various degrees,

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<sup>29</sup> Robinson 2007, pp. 1-2.

literate in Arabic.<sup>30</sup> Geographically, to the north were Syria-Palestine and the *Balqa* (the elevated plateau east of the Jordan River), to the west were the Sinai and the rest of Egypt and to the northeast was Mesopotamia and Iran.<sup>31</sup> By 637, under the leadership of Umar b. al-Khattab and his Muslim generals, most of the Near East came under Arab and Muslim rule, ushering in a new era of political dominance.

Syria-Palestine, in this historical context, refers to two interconnected regions that make up the basis of the old territorial conception of '*Bilad al-Shamm*' (بلاد الشام). Five centuries before the Arab conquests, the Emperor Hadrian founded the Roman province of Syria-Palaestina in 135 CE which resulted in the integration of the former Kingdom of Judaea (stretching from the eastern Mediterranean coast, from Gaza to the Syrian coast and inland towards the *Balqa* region of modern Jordan) after the failure of the Bar Kochba Revolt- with the old province of Roman Syria, the area mainly to the north and northwest of Judaea.<sup>32</sup>

Collectively, this new territorial entity consumed the whole of modern-Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Israel as well as parts of southern and southwestern Turkey, including Antioch. To better reflect the Arab conceptions of this region at the time, I am using the term Syria-Palestine in recognition of the territorial distinctions that the Umayyads made between the seemingly special province of *Filastin* and that of the rest of the Levant, namely Dimashq, the metropolitan province and center of gravity for Umayyad administration, along with the remaining *ajnad* of al-Shamm which included the military districts of al-Urdun, Homs, and al-Jazira.

Whether or not the capital Dimashq (although it ceased being the capital after 744 CE) and the more general territorial term of 'Syria' (typically referred to as *al-Shamm* then, although

<sup>30</sup> Sharon 2004, p. 27

<sup>31</sup> Howard-Johnston 2010, p. 373

<sup>32</sup> Butcher 2003, pp. 82-86

now that term applies primarily to Damascus) were conflated, the former found heavy usage in the epigraphic and numismatic record while the latter found a voice in the later documentary sources (i.e. hadiths and Arab histories). For example, on milestones found in Israel, Turkey and Syria and Umayyad coins of all types, Dimashq is used, not just as a reference to the city, itself, but to the larger province, it is believed.

Several prophetic narrations from all of the hadith compilers mention Syria<sup>33</sup>, Damascus<sup>34</sup>, and al-Shamm<sup>35</sup> but their usage may have been dependent on how well the authors/chroniclers understood the geography of the region as well as how specific they intended to be in their descriptions and designations. Unfortunately, prior to the Islamic period, there are few, if any documented and/or dated inscribed administrative objects that have been attested to by archaeologists, epigraphers, historians, or otherwise that bear any of these geographic designations in Arabic that I am aware of.



*Fig. 2: A crude lead seal bearing two stars with the word الشام ('al-Shamm') in lower, center-right (Jordan National Bank Numismatic Museum)*

The tenth century geographer, al-Maqdisi (a Jerusalemite) completed a major work in 985 CE that illustrated Arab conceptions of the region's territorial arrangements and in it, he

<sup>33</sup> Imam Malik's Muwatta Chapter No: 37, Wills and Testaments, Hadith no: 3

<sup>34</sup> Sahih Bukhari Chapter No: 10, Times of the Prayers, Hadith no: 507

<sup>35</sup> Tirmidhi, *Fitan*, p. 59

acknowledged that Syria-Palestine consisted of six semi-distinct territorial enclaves, each one referred to as a 'kura' from the Greek 'chorion'<sup>36</sup> for 'district' and included Damascus, Palestine, Jordan, Homs, Qinnasrin, and al-Sharah.<sup>37</sup> Under the Romans and Byzantines, Palestine had been administered as three separate territories consisting of *Palaestina prima*, *Palaestina secunda*, and *Palaestina tertia* as part of an imperial decree of 409 (which was included in the Theodosian Code) and the Palestine of the Umayyads did not conform, specifically, to any of the former territorial delineations.<sup>38</sup> The name "*Palaestina*", under the Romans and Byzantines, derives from the Biblical 'Land of the Phillistines', which was adopted later by the Arabs who dubbed the territory "*Filastin*" (in Arabic).<sup>39</sup> Prior to the Arabian incursions into the region, the local Arabs under Banu Ghassan i.e. 'the Ghassanids' (الغساسنة), operated in the Levant as Byzantine vassals and raised the region's Arab character prior to the Muslim arrival. The Ghassanids, an Arab tribe that migrated from South Arabia<sup>40</sup> in the third or fourth century<sup>41</sup>, rose to power as an autonomous Arab and staunchly Christian kingdom allied to the Byzantines<sup>42</sup> who would become the most privileged federate state, situated in parts of the old Roman *Provincia Arabia* and areas of Syria-Palestine.<sup>43</sup>

The Ghassanids inhabited a strategic geographic zone that stretched from the Euphrates River in Mesopotamia all the way to the Gulf of Aqaba in Trans-Jordan often referred to as the '*Limes Arabicus*', a frontier zone that served as the unofficial border between the Sasanian

<sup>36</sup> Hoyland 2015, p. 265, footnote 21 'chorion/kura'

<sup>37</sup> Al-Maqdisi. *Kitab Ahsan al-Taqasim fi Ma'rifat al-Aqalim* (Book of the Best Partitions for Recognition of the Territorial Divisions).

<sup>38</sup> Gil 1992, p. 110

<sup>39</sup> Gil 1992, p. 113

<sup>40</sup> Shahîd 1994, p. 20

<sup>41</sup> Naval Intelligence 2006, p. 447

<sup>42</sup> Suwaed 2015, pp. 86-97

<sup>43</sup> Zahran2006, pp. viii (map) and ix (preface)



Empire and that of Byzantium.<sup>44</sup> Although the Byzantines had acquired the whole of al-Shamm, administering it as several provinces, the Ghassanid Arabs were entrusted with securing the peripheral regions of the Byzantine state against raiding Arab tribes (like the Nestorian, Sasanid Arab allies, the Lakhmids) and Persian troops.<sup>45</sup> During the first half of the sixth century, under the reign of Justinian, the Byzantines bestowed upon the Ghassanid leader, al-Harith b. Jabala (Arethas), the titles of *gloriosissimus*, *patrikos*, *spectabilis* (control over Roman Arabia) while his brother, Abu Karib (*Abocharabus*), was regarded as a tribal chief or *phylarch* (φύλαρχος) of the Arab population in *Palestina Tertia*.<sup>46</sup>

While Christians, the Ghassanids had an unwavering zeal for Monophysitism and were instrumental in the proliferation of their version of Christianity in the region, often engaging in supporting religious institutions as well as mediating between local Christian communities.<sup>47</sup> Their conversion to Christianity was allegedly facilitated by the *Salihids*, an Arab tribe (*phyle*) that already inhabited Roman Syria, and who sought permission for their stay through the emperor Anastasius- whose reign the first Byzantine mention of the Ghassanids is attributed to.<sup>48</sup> It is under his rule that the Ghassanids acquire the status of *foederati* (allies) in the Levant.<sup>49</sup>

However, despite the obvious Ghassanid attachment to their faith, and as a result of a shifting religious and political landscape, they suffered persecution at the hands of the emperor Justin as well as other Chalcedonians including the bishop Paul<sup>50</sup>, during the first half of the sixth century. The relationship between the Monophysite Ghassanids and the Chalcedonians, who now represented the orthodox, imperial class, was molded and shaped by changing political

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<sup>44</sup> Arce 2012, p. 55

<sup>45</sup> Bowersock, Peter Brown, Oleg Grabar 1999, p. 468

<sup>46</sup> Shahîd 1995, p. 127

<sup>47</sup> Zahran 2006, p. ix

<sup>48</sup> Bowersock, Brown, Grabar 1999, p. 468

<sup>49</sup> Shahîd 1995, p. xxix

<sup>50</sup> Butcher 2003, p. 388

circumstances and the adoption and implementation of new ecclesiastical policies which often dictated the official status of the Ghassanids in relation to the Byzantine state.

More importantly, though, is that Ghassanid cultural identity was intimately tied to their Arab heritage and its leaders maintained tribal and linguistic connections to their Arab counterparts in Mesopotamia and the Arabian Peninsula. While conversant in Greek and partaking in Byzantine imperial and Christian religious practices and traditions, including the erection of monuments bearing Greek inscriptions, their Arab identity was often made explicit in these instances (as they often chose to use maintain some of their Arabic names and titles). They also produced several major poets including Hassan Ibn Thabit and Al Nabighah al Thubyani<sup>51</sup> and contributed immensely to the development of literary Arabic<sup>52</sup> as well as its orthography.

By the first half of the seventh century, the Ghassanids, who fought on the side of the Romans during the Persian assault on the Levant in the 610's, are also reported to have joined their Byzantine counterparts at the Battle of Mu'tah in 629, with Jabala b. al-Aiham, a Ghassanid chieftain, engaging Muslim ambassadors sent by Muhammad in diplomatic talks.<sup>53</sup> However, not all Ghassanids, nor all of the Arab Christian tribes of Syria-Palestine supported the Byzantines against the Muslims. The fragmented Ghassanid kingdom, after assisting in the defeat of the Muslim armies at Mu'tah, lost out on *salaria* after the Byzantine victory, which also led to a cancellation of subsidies<sup>54</sup>, laboring under the belief that the invading Arab armies had been quieted.<sup>55</sup> Other Ghassanids, as Muslim historians claimed, championed the cause of the Arab takeover.

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<sup>51</sup> Shahîd 2002, p. 232

<sup>52</sup> Zahran 2006, p. ix

<sup>53</sup> Bowersock, Brown, Grabar 1999, p. 469

<sup>54</sup> Kaegi 2000, p. 91

<sup>55</sup> Bowersock, Brown, Grabar 1999, p. 469

In some ways, the Ghassanids of *Oriens* were liminal historical actors that bridged the late Roman world with that of the Arab and Muslim political orders. Over the past few decades, increased historical attention and archaeological excavations have helped uncover the Ghassanid material legacy at a number of sites that include surviving elements of their architecture as far south as Aqaba, near Rusafa, in northern Syria, where a Ghassanid audience hall still stands<sup>56</sup>, the Hauran region (home to their main military camp and capital for some time, Jabiya<sup>57</sup>), northern Jordan at Umm al-Jimal (where a Ghassanid *palatium* and *quadriburgium* are believed to have been revealed)<sup>58</sup> and even in the far reaches of northeastern Jordan reflected in the basalt desert castle of Qasr Burqu.<sup>59 60</sup>

## 2. CONQUEST AND ANNEXATION OF SYRIA-PALESTINE

Before the conquests of the areas immediately outside of Arabia, Muslim soldiers fought a number of historically important battles with their Meccan counterparts. In fact, there is little debate in regards to how momentous and decisive the earliest of Muslim-Meccan battles were in helping to cement Islam in the peninsula and in helping to forge a new and powerful Muslim identity in the heart of the Middle East.<sup>61</sup> The battles of *Badr* (624), *Uhud* (625), and *al-Khandaq* (627) have been ingrained in the psyche of both early and modern Muslims as powerful, historical achievements that allowed for the development of a new social order as well as a new religious movement to excel.<sup>62</sup> The early battles had definitive political, military, and

<sup>56</sup> Milwright 2010, p. 36

<sup>57</sup> Shahid 2002, p. 96

<sup>58</sup> Arce (in Kennedy) 2006, p. 42

<sup>59</sup> Gaube 1974, pp. 93-100, figs. 1-4, pis. 31-38

<sup>60</sup> Betts 2003, pp. 89-97

<sup>61</sup> Revisionist historians like Yehuda Nevo, Judith Koren, and Patricia Crone argue otherwise, but in reality, their position reflects the thinking of a relatively small group of scholars that argue against the historical authenticity of the Arabic narratives regarding the impact the early Muslim battles had on shaping the Islamic state. See Yehuda Nevo's "*Crossroads to Islam: The Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State*", pp. 89-103 ("The Takeover")

<sup>62</sup> Ochsenswald and Fisher 2004, p. 33

psychological impacts and, ultimately, helped pave the way for Arab and Muslim expansion in Arabia and the rest of the region.

Muhammad, himself, in an attempt to raise his profile as both prophesized religious leader and Arabian statesman reportedly issued letters to several of the ancient world's heads of state including, but not limited to, the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius, the Abyssinian King Negus, and the Persian King Chosroes II.<sup>63</sup> To Heraclius, imperial head of Syria-Palestine, Muhammad allegedly wrote, via Dihya b. Khalifa al-Kalbi (Muhammad's envoy to Syria-Palestine<sup>64</sup> and who was buried in Palestine) to the Byzantine Governor of Busra, who delivered it to the emperor:

*"In the name of Allah the Beneficent, the Merciful (This letter is) from Muhammad the slave of God and His Apostle to Heraclius the ruler of Byzantine. Peace be upon him, who follows the right path. Furthermore I invite you to Islam, and if you become a Muslim you will be safe, and God will double your reward, and if you reject this invitation of Islam you will be committing a sin by misguiding your Arisiyin (peasants). (And I recite to you God's Statement:) 'O people of the scripture! Come to a word common to you and us that we worship none but God and that we associate nothing in worship with Him, and that none of us shall take others as Lords beside God. Then, if they turn away, say: Bear witness that we are Muslims (those who have surrendered to God).'*"<sup>65</sup> (3:64).

After the death of Muhammad in June of 632, the Rashidun Caliphs, consisting of Abu Bakr, Umar Ibn al-Khattab, Uthman Ibn Affan, and Ali Ibn Abu Talib, set out to subdue and Islamize the Arabian Peninsula, the eastern Byzantine provinces that made up *al-Shamm* (Greater Syria/Syria-Palestine), as well as Mesopotamia and Persia, and did so in astonishingly swift fashion.<sup>66</sup>

Though *Bilad al-Shamm* fell under the Muslim rule during the era of the Rashidun, it was Muhammad, himself, who began initiating raids into southern Syria-Palestine first, in September

<sup>63</sup> El-Cheikh 2004, p. 43

<sup>64</sup> Gil 1992, p. 25

<sup>65</sup> Sahih Bukhari, Chapter No. 1, Revelation, Hadith no. 7, narrated by Abdullah b. Abbas

<sup>66</sup> Ochsenswald and Fisher 2004, pp. 38-47

of 629.<sup>67</sup> By 630 Muhammad was confident in his army's strength and began issuing 'letters of protection' to various towns situated at the northern reaches of Arabia including *Ayla* (Aqaba, at the mouth of the Red Sea) and *Adhruh* (a frontier town between the Hejaz and Syria in the *Balqa*; in modern-day Jordan) as well as the Arabian oasis towns of *Maqna* (south of Ayla) and *Jaraba* while he was stationed in *Tabuk* (300 miles northwest of Medina) in northern Hejaz.<sup>68</sup>



Fig. 3: An Arabic map (produced in 1915) of the conquests and early Islamic empires with a geographic focus on Syria-Palestine (The terms 'Filastin', 'Ghassan', and 'Badiyat al-Shamm' are all present)

According to the ninth century Persian historian Ahmad b Yahya al-Baladhuri, the Byzantine town of Ayla surrendered to Muhammad in 630 CE (9AH).<sup>69</sup> As a result, an arrangement was concluded that guaranteed security for the city's ships and caravans in exchange for an annual payment of three hundred dinars.<sup>70</sup> The arrangement was negotiated

<sup>67</sup> Gil 1992, p. 22

<sup>68</sup> Al-Baladhuri, pp. 92-93

<sup>69</sup> Philip Mayerson 1964, p. 171

<sup>70</sup> Mayerson 1964, p. 173

between Muhammad and the Bishop of Ayla, Yuhanna Ibn Rubah.<sup>71</sup> Muhammad's letter to the people of Ayla reads:

*“To Yuhanna B. Rubah and the worthies of Ayla, Peace be with you! Praised be Allah, there is no god save Him. I have no intention of fighting you before writing to you. Thou hast to accept Islam or pay the tax, and obey God and his Messenger and the messengers of His Messenger, and do them honour and dress them in fine clothing, not in the raiment of raiders; therefore clothe Zayd in fine robes, for if you satisfy my envoys, you will satisfy me. Surely the tax is known to you. Therefore if you wish to be secure on land and on sea, obey God and his Messenger and you will be free of all payment that you owed to the Arab [tribes] or non-Arabs, apart from the payment to God [which is] the payment of his Messenger. But be careful lest thou do not satisfy them, for then I shall not accept anything from you, but I shall fight you and take the young as captives and slay the elderly. For I am the true Messenger of God; put ye your trust in God and his books and his messengers and in the Messiah son of Maryam, for this is God's word and I too, put my trust in Him, for he is the Messenger of God. Come then before a calamity befalls you. As for me, I have already given you my envoys instruction with regard to you; give Harmala three wasqs of barley, for Harmala is your well-wisher, for if it were not for God and if it were not for this, I would not be sending you messengers altogether, but rather you would be seeing the army. Therefore if you obey my messengers, you will have the protection of God and of Muhammad and all that stand at his side. My messengers are Shurahbil and Ubayy and Harmala and Hurayth b. Zayd who is one of the sons of Banu Tayy. All that they decide with regard to you shall be according to my wishes, and you will have the protection of God and of Muhammad the Messenger of God. And peace will be with you if you obey me. And the people of Maqna thou shall be lead back to their land.”<sup>72</sup>*

For Muhammad and the ensuing Muslim armies, neutralization and pacification of Ayla meant that the door to Syria-Palestine was open for future incursions.<sup>73</sup> As such, Abu Bakr wasted no time in continuing the military policies of Muhammad and under him, Arab-Muslim armies raided and penetrated further into Palestine and the rest of Syria, while the Hejaz and the remainder of the peninsula were incorporated into the growing Arab polity.<sup>74</sup> Abu Bakr dispatched the Muslim commander Amr Ibn al-‘As to fight a Byzantine force near the Dead Sea,

<sup>71</sup> Mayerson 1964, p. 173

<sup>72</sup> Gil 1992, p. 28

<sup>73</sup> Mayerson 1964, p. 176

<sup>74</sup> Ochsenswald and Fisher 2004, pp. 38-39

which led to defeat for the Byzantine governor of Palestine in 634.<sup>75</sup> Khalid Ibn al-Walid was then recalled from his expeditions in Mesopotamia to Palestine where he defeated the Byzantine army at the Battle of Ajnadayn near Jerusalem, between *al-Ramla* and *Bayt Jibrin*.<sup>76</sup> Khalid and his forces were victorious and the consequential battle opened up all of Syria-Palestine to the Arab-Muslims.<sup>77</sup> By late 633 or early 634, the Muslim conquest of *al-Shamm* came into full swing. *Baysan* (Bet Shean/Scythopolis) fell in 634 and between 636 and 638 the major Syrian towns of *Dimashq* (Damascus), *Baalbek* (Heliopolis), and *Homs* (Emesa) were all conquered as well.<sup>78</sup> In June or July of 637, the Muslims captured *Gaza* and *Iliya* (Jerusalem) and by 639/640 *Asqalan* (Ashkelon) and *Qaysariyya* (Caesarea Maritima) fell too, thus concluding the capture and conquest of al-Shamm.<sup>79</sup> The Arab-Muslims continued westward into Egypt and by 642 *Isqandariyya* (Alexandria) was taken.<sup>80</sup>



Fig. 4: Part of an undated Arabic map of the 'Arab World at the time of Muhammad' which includes the phrase 'Filastin' along the edge of the eastern Mediterranean coast and 'Bilad al-Shamm' to the northeast)

<sup>75</sup> Ochsenswald and Fisher 2004, p. 39

<sup>76</sup> Gil 1992, p. 42

<sup>77</sup> Ochsenswald and Fisher 2004, p. 39

<sup>78</sup> Kaegi 2000, p. 67

<sup>79</sup> Kaegi 2000, p. 67

<sup>80</sup> Ochsenswald and Fisher 2004, p. 41

Two more monumental battles were also won by Umar b. al-Khattab's generals and included the *Battle of Yarmouk* in 636, which ejected Heraclius and the Byzantines from much of the Near East, relegating them mainly to the western half of Anatolia, as well as the *Battle of Qadisiyya* in 637, which spelled defeat and dissolution for the Persian, Sasanian Empire.<sup>81</sup> In 636, Jabala b. al-Aiham's Ghassanid kingdom was engulfed by the Arabs under the caliph Umar b. Affan, and after negotiations failed between them, Jabala escaped to north of Syria.<sup>82</sup> With some of their Ghassanid allies defeated, *al-Shamm* was ripe for the taking. Al-Baladhuri, in his *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan* details Khalid's capture of Damascus, where he outlined the terms of capitulation for its inhabitants to the city's bishop:

*"In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. This is given by Khalid bin al-Walid [to the people of Damascus. When the Muslims enter, they (the people) shall have safety for themselves, their property, their places of worship and the walls of their city, of which nothing shall be destroyed. They have this guarantee on behalf of God, the Messenger of God, the Caliph, and the Muslims, from whom they shall receive nothing but good so long as they pay the poll-tax."*<sup>83</sup>

Alternatively, Robert Hoyland entertains one reading of history which places the Arab conquest of the Levant as an interrelated component of a broader Arab revolt in the region against Byzantine and Sasanian rule which helped to precipitate the Islamic conquests and describes the collective uprisings as a series of 'insurrections'<sup>84</sup> that opened the geographical floodgates to Ghassanid and Lakhmid Arab territories.<sup>85</sup> He draws these conclusions from the historian, Abū Ismā'īl Al-Azdī al-Basri (best known as al-Azdi), and his *Tarikh Futuh al-Shamm*, or 'History of the Conquest of Syria', one of the earliest, but lesser known histories of the Arab/Muslim capture of Syria-Palestine, who described the conquest of al-Shamm as having

<sup>81</sup> Ochsenswald and Fisher 2004, pp. 40-41

<sup>82</sup> Bowersock, Brown, Grabar 1999, p. 469

<sup>83</sup> Sahas 1972, p. 18

<sup>84</sup> Hoyland 2015, p. 95

<sup>85</sup> See Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, 116 (Bali) and Theophilus, 101-2



been facilitated, in part, by ‘*ahl al balad*’ (the natives) against ‘*al-Rum*’ (a general term for the Romans and their Byzantine successors).<sup>86</sup> While it is difficult to verify to whom ‘*ahl al balad*’ refers, whether parts of the general populace or more official political elements attached to the Ghassanid chiefs, it appears that not all of the Arab tribes, including those operating independently of the Ghassanid phylarchs, took to the side of the Romans. Hoyland’s attention to this historical episode was first noted by the early twentieth century Arab nationalist and writer Nadrah Majran, who once commented in 1913, that the Ghassanids:

*“Instead of fighting the Muslims and standing in their faces, were stirred by the sentiment of brotherhood and abandoned the religious bond and the political tie which made them clients of the Romans and contracted friendship with and fidelity to the speakers of their language, the sons of their father.”*<sup>87</sup>

To what extent such an inter-Arab uprising occurred or affected the conquests is unclear, but it may lend credence to the argument which posits that major social or economic disruption stemming from the hostilities does not seem to be supported by the archaeological evidence which implies a rather smooth transition of power that left settlements and economic arrangements largely intact.

Nonetheless, at some point during the early 630’s, Syria-Palestine faced a geographic partitioning and political reconstitution. The region was reportedly divided into four main districts for administrative and military purposes by Abu Bakr, Muhammad’s first political successor.<sup>88 89</sup> These provinces were referred to as *الجناد* / *ajnad* (military districts, singular *جند* / “*jund*”- a Persian term found in the Quran which refers to armed troops/military settlements)<sup>90</sup> and consisted of *Jund Dimashq* (Damascus), *Jund Hims* (Emesa), *Jund al-Urdun* (Jordan), and

<sup>86</sup>See A.M. Amir (ed), *Al-Azdi’s Futuh al-Sham* 1970, pp. 97, 150

<sup>87</sup> Hourani, Houry, Wilson (eds) 1993, p. 388

<sup>88</sup> Hawting 2000, p. 38

<sup>89</sup> Sourdel 1991, pp. 601–602 (under ‘*Djund*’)

<sup>90</sup> Sourdel 1991, pp. 601–602 (under ‘*Djund*’)

*Jund Filastin* (Palestine).<sup>91</sup> In 680 under the Umayyad caliph Yazid b. Muawiya, a fifth military province of Jund Qinnasrin was added.<sup>92</sup> The *ajnad* represented an attempt to organize settlements along the northern reaches of the new Arab polity- that is, the territories closest to Byzantium, so as to be able to quickly mobilize the garrisons for protection of the northern reaches of the burgeoning Arab state as the political center of gravity began to shift from Arabia and into Syria-Palestine. The garrison camps, themselves, known as ‘*amsar*’ were staffed and operated by Arab tribesman- the machinery and bodies behind the conquests, and were erected throughout the Levant including at Homs, Tabariya, al-Jabiyah, Ludd, ‘Amwas, and elsewhere.<sup>93</sup> These were collectively maintained by subsequent Umayyad caliphs, along with the entirety of the *ajnad* structure, although the precise territorial demarcations and boundaries are still debated today. The names of the provincial military districts are also attested to on Umayyad coins and seals as we shall see in chapter six.

Palestine, in particular, appears to have occupied a truly meaningful religious space in the minds of the early Muslim rulers and the documentary record paints a portrait of early Muslim leaders, including Muhammad himself, believing that the capture and liberation of Jerusalem symbolized the fulfillment of ancient Biblical, as well as Quranic prophecy. This infatuation with *al-ardh al-muqadassa* (the ‘Holy Land’) helped fuel Arab-Muslim ambitions to wrest Syria-Palestine from the Byzantines and by extension, from Christianity, operating under the belief that, as *sons of Ishmael* (or as members of ‘*millatu Ibrahim*’), the Arab, Muslims were entitled to this land, believing it to be their rightful earthly inheritance and a reward from God. Muhammad, while successful in his unification of Arabia under a centralized regime, was, as Jan Retso put it, a “*direct heir of the Himyarite Empire*” of South Arabia which was home to the nearest pre-

<sup>91</sup> Hawting 2000, p. 38

<sup>92</sup> Hawting 2000, p. 38

<sup>93</sup> Wheatley 2001, p. 41

Islamic, ‘Arab’ states, in both time and geographic proximity, and whose peoples, once wrested from the grip of the Iranian Sasanids, embraced Islam and joined his ranks, bringing the bulk of Arabia under Arab rule.<sup>94</sup> The integration of Yemeni soldiers into Muhammad’s army must have galvanized large parts of Arabia’s population in joining the early Muslims, contributing to a sense of tribal, cultural and political pride, Retso argues.<sup>95</sup>

### 3. PROPHECY, DOCTRINE AND POWER IN THE ARAB IMAGINATION

While it is true that many of the details relating to the conquests that make up the traditional, internal narrative about Islam’s ascent are derived from late Arabic writings, there are a number of contemporary non-Arabic sources that have recently received scholarly attention and which may be useful in reconstructing some aspects of the early Muslim conquests of Syria and Palestine.<sup>96</sup> For example, a contemporary Armenian bishop and historian named Sebeos (Սեբեոս) wrote a history of the region in the seventh century, which included references to both Muhammad and the conquests (of Abraham’s country, i.e. Palestine) at the hands of the “*sons of Ishmael*.” Chapter thirty of *Sebeos’ History* claims that:

*“Twelve peoples [representing] all the tribes of the Jews assembled at the city of Edessa. When they saw that the Iranian troops had departed and left the city in peace, they [122] closed the gates and fortified themselves. They refused entry to troops of the Roman lordship. Thus Heraclius, emperor of the Byzantines, gave the order to besiege it. When [the Jews] realized that they could not militarily resist him, they promised to make peace. Opening the city gates, they went before him, and [Heraclius] ordered that they should go and stay in their own place. So they departed, taking the road through the desert to Tachkistan to the sons of Ishmael. [The Jews] called [the Arabs] to their aid and familiarized them with the relationship they had through the books of the [Old] Testament. Although [the Arabs] were convinced of their close relationship, they were unable to get a consensus from their multitude, for they were divided from each other by religion. In that period a certain one of them, a man of the sons of Ishmael named Muhammad, a merchant, became prominent. A sermon about the Way of Truth, supposedly at God’s command, was revealed to them, and [Muhammad] taught*

<sup>94</sup> See Jan Retso’s chapter (in Arnason, Eisenstadt, and Wittrock) 2005, p. 349

<sup>95</sup> See Jan Retso’s chapter (in Arnason, Eisenstadt, and Wittrock) 2005, pp. 349-350

<sup>96</sup> Berkey 2003, p. 58

*them to recognize the God of Abraham, especially since he was informed and knowledgeable about Mosaic history. Because the command had come from On High, he ordered them all to assemble together and to unite in faith. Abandoning the reverence of vain things, they turned toward the living God, who had appeared to their father--Abraham. Muhammad legislated that they were not to eat carrion, not to drink wine, not to speak falsehoods, and not to commit adultery. He said: "God promised that country to Abraham and to his son after him, for eternity. And what had been promised was fulfilled during that time when [God] loved Israel. Now, however, you are the sons of Abraham, and God shall fulfill the promise made to Abraham and his son on you. Only love the God of Abraham, and go and take the country, which God gave to your father, Abraham. No one can successfully resist you in war, since God is with you."<sup>97</sup>*

Initially, Sebeos describes a peculiar series of events and then frames the Muslim conquest in terms of prophetic fulfillment. *Sebeos* is probably drawing from the Biblical passages in the Book of Genesis where God states “*I have heard your prayer for Ishmael. I have blessed him and made him fruitful. I will multiply his descendents; he shall be a father of twelve princes and I will raise a great nation from him.*”<sup>98</sup> Apart from *Sebeos’s* Armenian writing, another contemporary text known as *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, a seventh century treatise written in Syriac tells us, further, that:

*“He [Ishmael] shall lead captive a great captivity amongst all the peoples of the earth and they shall spoil a great spoil, and all the ends of the earth shall do service and there shall be made subject to him many lordships; and his hand shall be over all, and also those that are under his hand he shall oppress with much tribute: And he shall oppress and destroy the [rulers of the] ends [of the earth]. And he shall impose a tribute on the [earth], such as was never heard of. he that shall be reckoned in their days as though he had not, and he that builds and he that sells as one that gets no gain.”<sup>99</sup>*

Like *Sebeos*, G.R. Hawting, a recent historian, too believes this ‘*great nation*’ to be that of the Arabs and *Sebeos’s* framing of the conquests as being fueled and facilitated by the desire to fulfill Biblical prophecy becomes more transparent with further historical, literary exploration. In regards to *Sebeos’s* writings on Muhammad and the Arabs, there appears to be two important

<sup>97</sup> Robert Bedrosian, *Sebeos’ History* (translation), Chapter 30

<sup>98</sup> Hawting and Shareef 1993, p. 254

<sup>99</sup> Kaegi 2000, p. 215

issues to consider in attempting to understand Arab affinities towards Syria-Palestine. First, local Jews allegedly formed an alliance with the Arabs directed against the oppressive and intolerant Byzantine rulers, and secondly, Muhammad preached to his Arab counterparts that God promised the Arabs ‘*that country*’ just as he promised the Jews, earlier in history, at a time when ‘*God loved Israel.*’ Thus, the Arabs are inclined, by prophetic injunction it seems, to conquer the same ‘country’ God had previously awarded to their forefather, the patriarch Abraham, and to liberate it. Thus, the stage is set for the conquest of Syria-Palestine as promised to the son of Abraham; and with that:

*[The Arabs] crossed the Jordan and encamped at Jericho. Then dread of them came over the inhabitants of the country, and all of them submitted. That night the Jerusalemites took the Cross of the Lord and all the vessels of the churches of God, and fled with them by boat to the palace at Constantinople. [The Jerusalemites] requested an oath [from the Arabs] and then submitted.*<sup>100</sup>

In response to the Arab-Muslim encroachment, some Syrio-Palestinian Christian writers, like the Muslims who believed the conquest of Palestine to be a religious act, too framed their defeat in religious terms, best represented by Jerusalem’s seventh-century Orthodox Patriarch, *Sophronius*, who stated:

*“Whence occurs war against us? Whence multiply barbarian invasions? Whence rise up the ranks of Saracens [i.e. the Arabs] against us? Whence increases so much destruction and plundering? Whence comes the unceasing shedding of human blood? Whence birds of the heavens devour human bodies? Whence is the cross mocked? Whence is Christ, Himself, the giver of all good things and our provider of light, blasphemed by barbarian mouths.? The defiled would not have achieved or gained such strength to be able to do and to utter such things, if we had not first insulted the gift and if we had not first defiled the purification, and by this we injured the gift-giving Christ and impelled this wrath against us.”*<sup>101</sup>

British Historian Robert Hoyland adds additional and intriguing insight into the way in which the Muslim invaders understood and perceived the conquests, altogether, arguing that the

<sup>100</sup> Bedrosian, Chapter 30 *Sebeos’ History*

<sup>101</sup> Kaegi 2000, pp. 210-211.

Quran, itself, oftentimes, speaks of conquest and religion in inseparable terms. For example, in *Surah al-Tauba* (Chapter 9: The Repentance), verse twenty-nine, God commands Muhammad and the believers to *'fight those who do not believe in God and the Last Day.until they pay tribute.'*<sup>102</sup> Hoyland continues with a key point, and that is that certain Quranic passages indicate that the territories which the Muslims were on the verge of conquering were to be their inheritance.<sup>103</sup> He quotes *Surah al-Ahzab* (Chapter 33: The Parties), verse twenty-seven, as proof, which reads: *"He made you inherit their land, their homes, their money, and lands you had never stepped on. God is in full control of all things."*

According to the writings of *Abu Jafar Muhammad ibn Jarir at-Tabari*, better known as *al-Tabari*, a ninth century Persian historian, Arab generals were heard justifying their invasion of the Byzantine and Sasanian territories by claiming that the lands were actually promised to them (i.e. the Ishmaelites/Arabs) by God (*maw'ud Allah*).<sup>104</sup> Jodi Magness, an archaeologist who focuses on Syrio-Palestinian archaeology and a scholar of Jewish and Religious studies, likens the Muslim conquest of Palestine to that of the Israelite conquest of Palestine and claims that the *"parallels are striking: hoards of invading tribesmen conquer and replace an established, prosperous civilization, symbolizing the victory of the desert over the sown."*<sup>105</sup> Syria-Palestine, during the last decade of Muhammad's life saw continuous warfare between the Sasanians and Byzantines but he and his military commanders likely understood that both empires had exhausted themselves.<sup>106</sup> Understanding the Byzantine's military fragility and less than firm

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<sup>102</sup> Hoyland 1997, p. 130

<sup>103</sup> Hoyland 1997, p. 130

<sup>104</sup> Hoyland 1997, p. 131

<sup>105</sup> Magness 2003, p. 2

<sup>106</sup> Kaegi 2000, pp. 70-71

control over Syria-Palestine, Muhammad began to initiate raids, himself, into the southern Levant towards the end of his life.<sup>107</sup>

Muhammad was further motivated by the belief that God had promised the Muslims an 'earthly inheritance' and was likely quite enthusiastic about capturing Jerusalem, in particular. Two years after his death, the major conquests began.<sup>108</sup> Thus, even the Muslim sources, including the Quran and later narratives, corroborate the descriptions and motivating factors that led to the Muslim conquests provided by *Sebeos's* seventh century writings. With that said, in the decade following Muhammad's death, both the Byzantine and the Sasanian empires had been defeated and Jerusalem, Islam's first *qibla*, now became part of the new Arab and Islamic order.<sup>109</sup> Upon capturing Aelia Capitolina (Byzantine Jerusalem) the energetic caliph Umar b. al-Khattab, laying down the groundwork for Muslim foreign policy, proclaimed:

*"In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful! This is the assurance granted to the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Iliya) by the servant of God, Umar, the commander of the Believers. He grants them safety for their persons, their goods, churches, crosses - be they in good or bad condition - and their worship in general. Their churches shall neither be turned over to dwellings nor pulled down; they and their dependents shall not be put to any prejudice and thus shall it fare with their crosses and goods. No constraint shall be imposed upon them in matters of religion and no one among them shall be harmed. No Jew shall be authorized to live in Jerusalem with them. The inhabitants of Jerusalem must pay the jizya in the same way as the inhabitants of other towns. It is for them to expel from their cities Romans (Byzantines) and outlaws. Those of the latter who leave shall be granted safe conduct... Those who would stay shall be authorized to, on condition that they pay the same jizya as the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Those of the inhabitants of Jerusalem who wish to leave with the Romans, to carry away their goods, abandon their churches and Crosses, shall likewise have their own safe conduct, for themselves and for their Crosses. Rural dwellers who were already in the town before the murder of such a one, may stay and pay the jizya by the same title as the people of Jerusalem, or if they prefer they may leave with the Romans or return to their families. Nothing shall be exacted of them."<sup>110</sup>*

<sup>107</sup> Gil 1992, p. 12

<sup>108</sup> Gil 1992, p. 12

<sup>109</sup> Ochsenswald and Fisher 2004, pp. 39-40

<sup>110</sup> Gil 1992, p 54

Though Muhammad would not live to see the conquest of al-Shamm or the capture of Jerusalem, he, nonetheless, helped to initiate the construction of the region's Arab and Islamic character. Later, one of Muhammad's Palestinian companions, *Tamim al-Dari ibn Aws al-Lakmi*, who converted to Islam in 631 and moved to Medina from Palestine, was appointed governor of Jerusalem following the death of the caliph Uthman in 656.<sup>111</sup>

#### 4. JERUSALEM AND PALESTINE: PRIZED POSESSIONS

Relatively little time was wasted in pursuing and subduing the land regarded as 'holy' by the Muslim's Jewish and Christian counterparts as the acquisition of Syria-Palestine and Jerusalem undoubtedly carried meaning to the newfound Arab polity and would ultimately provide the region's leaders with a special form of political capital that combined religious legitimacy and political validation.

However, despite the fact that there are no direct references to Jerusalem in the Quran, past Muslim scholars like *Ibn Kathir*, *al-Qurtubi*, *al-Razi*, and *al-Maqdisi* all advocated the belief that the sacred book does contain numerous indirect references to the city.<sup>112</sup> According to a very popular interpretation of the Quran, it was Jerusalem that Muhammad was transported to during his visionary night journey known as '*al-israa' wal mi'raaj*.'<sup>113</sup> Muhammad, in this Quranic episode, traveled to the sacred mosque (noble sanctuary) in Mecca to the farthest mosque in Jerusalem, and from Jerusalem he visited the heavens on the back of a mystical horse-like animal named *Buraq*.<sup>114</sup> The first verse of *Surah Bani Israel* (Chapter 17: The Tribe of Israel), in the Quran, relates the story of Muhammad's night journey, stating the "*Most glorified is the One who summoned His servant (Muhammad) during the night, from the Sacred Mosque (of Mecca)*

<sup>111</sup> El-Khatib 2001, p. 29

<sup>112</sup> El-Khatib 2001, p. 53

<sup>113</sup> El-Khatib 2001, p. 26

<sup>114</sup> Gil 1992, p. 96



*to the farthest place of prostration (Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem), whose surroundings we have blessed, in order to show him some of our signs. He is the Hearer, the Seer.*"<sup>115</sup>

Commemorating this spiritual feat, the caliph Umar, accompanied by a Jewish convert to Islam, *Ka'b al-Ahbar*, visited Jerusalem in 637, after its capture, and decided to build a house of worship in *'front of the rock.'*<sup>116</sup> The 'rock' (*sakhra*) referred to here is that very rock in Jerusalem from which Muhammad ascended to heaven, which, later, became the site of the still-standing Dome of the Rock.<sup>117</sup> The Christian pilgrim, *Arculf*, who visited Jerusalem between 679 and 688, recorded some of his observations on early Islamic Jerusalem, including some notes on what was regarded as Umar's wooden mosque, which would later become home to *masjid al-aqsa* (The al-Aqsa Mosque).<sup>118</sup> *Arculf* observes the following:

*"In that famous place where once stood the magnificently constructed Temple, near the eastern wall, the Saracens (i.e. the Arabs) now frequent a rectangular house of prayer which they have built in a crude manner, constructing it from raised planks and large beams over some remains of ruins. This house can, as it is said, accommodate at least 3000 people."*<sup>119</sup>

*Ka'b* later informs Umar that the capture of Jerusalem, in essence, fulfilled a five hundred year old prophecy that predicted the rise of Jerusalem and the fall of Constantinople.<sup>120</sup> Moreover, though the Quran refers to a *'masjid al-aqsa'* almost a century before the actual *al-Aqsa* mosque complex was built, the verse, some argue, uses the phrase to mean the furthest monotheistic place of prayer from Mecca, i.e. Jerusalem.<sup>121</sup> Muslims later asserted that Muhammad's very footsteps left imprints on the rocky outcrop that sat at the ancient 'noble sanctuary' (*haram al-sharif*) before he ascended to heaven, and as a result, a magnificent

<sup>115</sup> El-Khatib 2001, pp. 34

<sup>116</sup> Gil 1992, p. 66

<sup>117</sup> El-Khatib 2001, pp. 34-35

<sup>118</sup> Rosen-Ayalon 2006, p. 32

<sup>119</sup> Hoyland 1997, p. 221

<sup>120</sup> Gil 1992, p. 66

<sup>121</sup> El-Khatib 2001, p. 35

building was constructed at that very site- a building that became known as *qubbat al-sakhra* (Dome of the Rock), although the structure's inscriptions make no mention of Quranic ascent story.<sup>122</sup>

Moreover, Muhammad is said to have been familiar with the religion of the Monophysite Christian Ghassanid Arabs of Syria-Palestine through contacts he made during his travels as a merchant.<sup>123</sup> The *Monophysites*, believing in the singular nature of Jesus (as either human or divine but not both), clashed with the Greek Orthodox (official Byzantine) Church who were *dyophysites*, that is, they accepted the dual nature of Jesus as both human and divine.<sup>124</sup>

According to Islamic tradition, Muhammad's father, *Abdallah ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib* and great grandfather, *Hashem ibn 'Abd al-Manaf*, had close commercial ties there where they sometimes engaged in business while traveling with the *Quraish* caravans.<sup>125</sup> Hashem is even said to have died in Gaza in 497 CE after returning from Syria.<sup>126</sup> His tomb is believed to be situated underneath the dome of the Sayed al-Hashem Mosque situated in Haarat al-Daraj quarter in northwestern Gaza City.<sup>127</sup> Thus, the Arabic sources paint Muhammad as having followed in his ancestors footsteps by traveling to Syria-Palestine to engage in commercial activity; a narrative that is corroborated by a mid-eighth century Syriac account (partially reconstructed from the chronicles of *Michael the Syrian*, a twelfth century patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church who draws parts of his chronicles from the earlier writings of the patriarch *Dionysius of Tellmahre*) and reads:

*"This Muhammad, while in the age of stature and youth, began to go up and down from his town of Yathrib to Palestine for the business of buying and selling.*

<sup>122</sup> Gil 1992, p. 103

<sup>123</sup> Ochsenswald and Fisher 2004, p. 28

<sup>124</sup> Donner 2010, p. 11

<sup>125</sup> Gil 1992, p. 16

<sup>126</sup> Gil 1992, p. 16

<sup>127</sup> Hooda 2006 'Mosque of Sayyed Hashim – Gaza'

*While so engaged in the country, he saw the belief in one God and it was pleasing to his eyes. Then he went back down to his tribesmen, he set this belief before them, and he convinced a few and they became his followers. In addition, he would extol the bountifulness of this Land of Palestine, saying: "Because of the belief in one God, the like of this good and fertile land was given to them." And he would add: "If you listen to me, abandon these vain gods and confess the one God, then to you too will God give a land flowing with milk and honey." To corroborate his word he led a band of them who were obedient to him and began to go up to the Land of Palestine plundering, enslaving, and pillaging. He returned laden [with booty] and unharmed, and thus he had not fallen short of his promise to them.<sup>128</sup>*

Also worthy to note is that during Muhammad's early stay in Yathrib, which began in 622, it was towards Jerusalem that the early Muslim community prayed towards. Arabic sources refer to Yathrib, renamed *al-Medina* (from 'Medinat al-Nabi' or, 'City of the Prophet'), as a town northwest of Mecca where survivors from the Jewish revolt against the Romans several centuries earlier had settled and therefore had a sizeable Jewish population.<sup>129</sup> While it is true that Jerusalem served as the first Muslim *qibla*, revelations would assign the *ka'ba*, the ancient square sanctuary in Mecca, as the new focal point for the *sala'* shortly thereafter.<sup>130</sup> In *Surah al-Baqara* (Chapter 2: The Cow, v. 144), God tells Muhammad and the believers:

*"We have seen you turning your face about the sky (searching for the right direction). We now assign a Qiblah that is pleasing to you. Henceforth, you shall turn your face towards the Sacred Mosque (in Mecca). Wherever you may be, all of you shall turn your faces towards it. Those who received the previous scripture know that this is the truth from their Lord. God is never unaware of anything they do"*

Some 'ulama have argued that the Quran is littered with subtle references to Jerusalem and that the text may contain up to seventy of these. Some reported examples include *Surah al-Tin* (Chapter 95: The Fig), verse one, which reads, "By the figs, the olives, by Mount Sinai and

<sup>128</sup> Hoyland 1997, pp. 129-130

<sup>129</sup> Gil 1992, p. 11

<sup>130</sup> Ochsenwald and Fisher 2004, p. 32

by *this secured town*” and is meant to refer to the *Mount of Olives* in east Jerusalem.<sup>131</sup> There is also mention of “*ardth al-muqadassa*” (i.e. the Holy Land) in *Surah al-Ma’ida* (Chapter 5: The Tablespread, vs. 21), with regards to Moses and the Israelites, and is considered to be a reference to Jerusalem and its surrounding areas by the respected Muslim scholars *Ibn Kathir* and *al-Maqdisi*.<sup>132</sup> Other Quranic verses speak of a ‘*blessed land*’ (21:71, 21:81) and ‘*honorable dwelling place*’ (10:93, 34:18), all of which have been considered by some Muslims scholars to be ambiguous references to the holy city as well.<sup>133</sup> Another, more likely, reference to Jerusalem is found in *Surah al-Baqara* (Chapter 2: The Cow, vs. 58) which reads “*And remember when We said: Enter al-Qarya (i.e. ‘the town’) and eat bountifully therein with pleasure and delight.*”<sup>134</sup> Usage of the definite article ‘*al*’ in ‘*al-Qarya*’ (the town) was considered to be of primary importance to early Muslim scholars in interpreting the location of ‘*The Town*’ as none other than Jerusalem.<sup>135</sup>

However, various *hadith* (i.e. prophetic narrations) attributed to Muhammad mention Jerusalem (known then by the Arabs as ‘*Iliya*’) by name, numerous times. For example, in *Sahih Bukhari* we read:

*Narrated 'Abdullah bin 'Abbas: Abu Sufyan bin Harb informed me that Heraclius had sent a messenger to him while he had been accompanying a caravan from Quraish. They were merchants doing business in Al-Shamm (Greater Syria), at the time when Allah's Apostle had a truce with Abu Sufyan and Quraish infidels. So Abu Sufyan and his companions went to Heraclius at Jerusalem (Iliya).*<sup>136</sup>

Again, within the same *hadith* compilation we are told:

*Abdullah bin Abbas that Allah's Apostle wrote to Caesar and invited him to Islam and sent him his letter with Dihya Al-Kalbi whom Allah's Apostle ordered to hand*

<sup>131</sup> Gil 1992, p. 99

<sup>132</sup> El-Khatib 2001, p. 37

<sup>133</sup> El-Khatib 2001, p. 39

<sup>134</sup> El-Khatib 2001, p. 39

<sup>135</sup> El-Khatib 2001, p. 39

<sup>136</sup> Sahih Bukhari, Book 1, Hadith #6

*it over to the Governor of Busra who would forward it to Caesar. Caesar as a sign of gratitude to God, had walked from Hims (Emessa) to Jerusalem (Iliya) when God had granted Him victory over the Persian forces.*<sup>137</sup>

The hadiths also often refer to Jerusalem as ‘Bayt al-Maqdas’ (بيت المقدس) ; literally ‘The Holy House’ and is regarded as a derivation of the Hebrew בית המקדש ‘Bayt Ha-Miqdash’<sup>138</sup> Thus, there is little doubt over the instrumental and even outsized religious role that Jerusalem played within the realm of classical Muslim thought. Both, the Quran and Hadith- the texts upon which Islamic doctrine, theology and law, rest, clearly contain both indirect allusions and direct references to Jerusalem in Palestine. After all, Palestine was home, at some point or another, to nearly all of the Biblical prophets and messengers that had been revealed to the Arabs in the Quran including Abraham, Moses, Jesus, David, Solomon, and Lot.<sup>139</sup>

Greater Syria, home to an array of ancient Christian communities, old Arab polities and home to a great number of historically significant ecclesiastical figures, pronouncements, and institutions, as well as captivating religious monuments and architectural gems, succumbed to Arab and Muslim rule under the Rashidun by the late 630’s and early 640’s. Upon capturing Damascus from the Byzantine Armies, the famous general Khalid b. al-Walid proclaimed:

*“In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. This is given by Khalid bin al-Walid to the people of Damascus. When the Muslims enter, they (the people) shall have safety for themselves, their property, their places of worship and the walls of their city, of which nothing shall be destroyed. They have this guarantee on behalf of God, God’s Messenger, the Caliph, and the Muslims, from whom they shall receive nothing but good so long as they pay the tribute (jizya).”*

Building on the momentum of the Ghassanids, the early Muslim armies, as well as the Umayyads likely understood the historical significance of this region of eastern (former) Rome to the Arabs as it had already been home to a strong Arab presence, attested to as far back as the

<sup>137</sup> Sahih Bukhari, Book 52, Hadith #191

<sup>138</sup> Sahih Bukhari, Book 4, Hadith #151

<sup>139</sup> El-Khatib 2001, pp. 43-44

Assyrian period while also home to past Arab vassals and kingdoms that included, but was not limited to the Ghassanids and the Nabataeans- both of whom became Christianized under the Romans.

Thus, the historical stage is set which, less than three decades later, would to the birth of the Umayyad polity. The subsequent chapters will direct their attention to several issues including historiographical debates and the shaping of a recently emerged discourse that takes into account archaeological methods and materials, the founding of the Umayyad polity under Muawiya and the material culture associated with his reign, the role of literacy and the rise of Classical Arabic as a literary language, the codification of an Arabic script tailored to the language, and its role in the mechanization of the Umayyad state under Abd al-Malik that fully utilized both Islam and the Arabic orthography to legitimate themselves as regional (and even semi-global) overlords.

## **5. ARAB SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS IN ANTIQUITY**

The Umayyads, or *Bani Umayya*, the first family to introduce dynastic rule to the ‘Islamic world’, occupy an intriguing and unique space in the annals of the early history of the Islamic polity. A prominent family belonging to the Quraish tribe, the early Umayyads were bitterly opposed to Muhammad and his followers before ultimately, albeit reluctantly, converting to Islam shortly before the prophet’s death.<sup>140</sup> Even before establishing their expansive empire in 661 CE, the Umayyads produced a number of powerful political figures during the time leading up to and immediately after Muhammad’s passing. Abu Sufyan, one of the wealthiest and influential of Mecca’s elite class of rulers, his son Muawiya, the powerful and pragmatic governor of Syria from 639 until his rise to the caliphate, and Uthman b. Affan, the third of the

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<sup>140</sup> Hawting 2000, p. 11

Rashidun caliphs all hail from Bani Umayya and were instrumental in shaping the world out of which Islam would emerge.<sup>141</sup>

According to G.R. Hawting, traditional Muslim narratives allege that the Umayyads, as well as the Quraish and all of the northern Arab tribes, descended from the biblical patriarch Abraham, through his son, Ishmael.<sup>142</sup> The notion of Arab descent from Ishmael, via Abraham's second wife Hagar<sup>143</sup>, was not only understood by the Arab writers of early Islamic history, but even outsiders who contemporaneously wrote (in a multitude of languages and scripts) about the Muslim invasion of Syria-Palestine in the seventh century referred to the newly arrived Arab conquerors using several terms including 'Saracens', 'Ishmaelites', 'Hagarenes' (Ἀγαρηνοί)<sup>144</sup>, or 'Mhaggraye' (ܡܗܓܓܪܝܐ).<sup>145</sup> The contemporary seventh-century writer and Armenian archbishop Sebeos described the Arabs as the 'sons of Ishmael (or Bani Isma'il بني اسماعيل)', implying his familiarity with the belief that the Arabs either were, or saw themselves, as descendants of Abraham. It should be noted that the Arabs were also well aware of Abraham's personal connection to Syria-Palestine which was later reflected in the Arabic name for the city of Hebron (*al-Khalil*) in Palestine.<sup>146</sup> Biblical, as well as other, Jewish, non-Biblical accounts of Abraham refer to him as God's 'friend', which is later reiterated by the many Muslim narratives that also refer to him as "*khalil*" or 'friend', thus earning Hebron, Abraham's place of burial, the Arabic name of *Medinat al-Khalil* or, simply '*al-Khalil* (City of the Friend).<sup>147</sup> It was even mentioned in some Muslim traditions that Muhammad stopped in Hebron during his night

<sup>141</sup> Hawting 2000, pp. 24-27

<sup>142</sup> Hawting 2000, p. 21

<sup>143</sup> Hagar is regarded as Abraham's second wife in the Islamic traditions but is considered a concubine in the Biblical account.

<sup>144</sup> Penn 2015, p. 68

<sup>145</sup> See Crone and Cook's *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, 1977

<sup>146</sup> Gil 1992, p. 100

<sup>147</sup> Gil 1992, p. 100

journey from Mecca to Jerusalem and that one of Muhammad's shoes was kept in the mosque there.<sup>148</sup>

It has been argued that the disparate Arab tribes of Arabia and the Levant in the centuries leading up to the rise of Islam shared little sense of collective cultural consciousness and did not necessarily see themselves as belonging to a cohesive, albeit imagined, Arab community. This lack of cultural cohesion was either facilitated by or reinforced by the existence of such a great number of orthographies and letter forms employed by Arab tribes across the Near East- some of which were not mutually intelligible or discernible for those unfamiliar with them.

While the term for 'nation' appears in the Quran and has often been understood as relating to the Arabs as a single language community, Goldziher and, later, Bashear conceded that the term '*umma*' (nation) in verse 110 of Surah al-Imran, is not an ethno-linguistic reference to the Arabs as a whole, but relates to a much smaller movement- that of the Prophet's community of believers.<sup>149</sup>

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ  
بِاللَّهِ وَلَوْ أَنَّمَنِ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابِ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُمْ مِّنْهُمْ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَأَكْثَرُهُمْ  
الْفَاسِقُونَ

The Quran, as Bashear writes, makes no attempt to conflate a sense of Arab nationhood with that of the early Muslim community in Arabia. Therefore, the term 'Arab' during the early Islamic period, represented a far less concrete category of people, with the Quran constantly differentiating between the *a'rab* (Arab) and *al-mu'mineen* (believer).<sup>150</sup> In fact, one literary account from the tenth century asserts that Ali charged Muawiya with being a Bedouin (*a'rabi*)

<sup>148</sup> Gil 1992, p. 100

<sup>149</sup> Bashear 1997, p. 9

<sup>150</sup> See Quran, Surat al-Tawba- 9:99 for its description of the Bedouin and their attitudes towards Islam



while Ali referred to himself as an emigrant- that is a *muhajjar* (i.e. emigrant)- someone who accompanied Muhammad from hostile Mecca to Medina which is regarded as a critical juncture in the survival of the new faith community, further highlighting inter-Arab ethno-religious tensions.<sup>151</sup>

Both historians and chroniclers al-Tabari and Tabarsi, in their own respective works noted that the *'arabi* (settled Arab) and the *a'rabi* (nomadic Bedouin) occupied two different spaces within the socio-economic hierarchy of the ancient Near East.<sup>152</sup>

Some Arabists have even claimed that without the Quran (in its written form), no, such nation of Arabs, united under language and tribal culture would have emerged. Hoyland argues that the Arab Muslims concocted an 'origins narrative' at some juncture that was, in part, used to garner legitimacy among some of the regions ancient communities. It was one rooted in the belief that the Arabs were connected to Abraham, through his son Ishmael, and therefore had a legitimate claim to the lands and histories of the region.<sup>153</sup>

The invention of the Arabs as a community rooted in the history of the region with ties to Ishmael and the patriarch Abraham founded on a sense of tribal and linguistic cohesion, sharing some sense of collective historical memory, having territorial cognizance and now united under language and religion proved to be a powerful force in the re-crafting of the region's cultural orientation.

## **6. THE DAWN OF A NEW POLITICAL ERA IN THE LATE ANTIQUE NEAR EAST**

Unfortunately for students of the period, internal Islamic, Arabic historical records are rather inimical towards the Umayyads, and anti-Umayyad narratives found in the earliest writings authorized and compiled by both political and religious opponents of the Umayyad

<sup>151</sup> Bashear, 1997, p. 11 footnote #19

<sup>152</sup> See Tabari's, *Tafsir* 21/142 and Tabarsi's *Majma' al-Bayan*, 195, 10/123

<sup>153</sup> Hoyland 2001, p. 243-244

leaders, namely the Abbasids, have both colored and dictated the trajectory of Umayyad historiography despite these biases.<sup>154</sup> This after-the fact, narrative-crafting on the part of later Muslim historians and scholars whose works, in some cases, were influenced by the ideological positions of political opponents has made reconstructing Umayyad political history a rather arduous task. Because of the politically charged nature of many of the Muslim accounts concerning the Umayyads, using the ‘traditional’ literary sources (i.e., the popular histories and writings of later Muslim writers writing retrospectively about the Umayyads) makes it difficult to contextualize the dynamic and intricate political, religious, linguistic, cultural and social landscapes that influenced the formation of the Umayyad state and its development over the course of time.

Fortunately, advances in the archaeology of the Near East in the era Late Antiquity, alongside a growing body of literature on the material culture of the Umayyad state through archaeological excavations, epigraphic studies, and a growing interest in early Islamic art and architecture, a far more colorful and vivid picture of the Umayyad rulers and their state(s) has begun to emerge.

While its early leadership was regarded as tolerant of non-Muslims, Umayyad rule was marred by accusations of impiety and political illegitimacy by some Muslim groups who strongly contested the power and authority of the Umayyad caliphs, especially the dynasty’s founder Muawiya b. Abu Sufyan, his son Yazid I, and its best-known reformer Abd al-Malik b. Marwan.<sup>155</sup> Political, religious, and economic grievances culminated in local revolts as well as

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<sup>154</sup> Shoemaker 2011, p. 243

<sup>155</sup> Berkey 2003, p. 77

two major civil wars- one during the Rashidun era and the other at the end of the seventh century, decades before the Umayyad caliphate in Syria-Palestine unraveled.<sup>156</sup>

However, despite the establishment of Arab and Muslim rule there towards the mid-seventh century, the Umayyad ruling political elite were a minority whose Syrian constituents remained overwhelmingly Christian.<sup>157</sup> As a result, Umayyad authority was being challenged on a number of levels and by an array of institutions and ideologues. This also included Byzantium which, though weakened after their defeat at Yarmouk in 636, was still in a position to encroach on the caliph's authority and some of their political decisions, and, in some cases, did.<sup>158</sup> During Muawiya's tenure as both governor and caliph, he engaged in a number of combative gestures which included strengthening its military readiness, battling with the Byzantines by land and sea (mainly in the peripheral areas of the state), and reinforced the coastal areas of Syria and Palestine by assigning troops from Iraq and Iran<sup>159</sup>, though this did not prevent the Byzantines from launching attacks against the Arabs in Antioch.<sup>160</sup>

Like their Byzantine imperial predecessors, the Umayyads faced a series of demographic, economic, and political challenges and had to find ways to adapt to them. In order to maintain a semblance of administrative stability, the Umayyads had to devise and undertake policies conducive to maintaining authority in an unpredictable political and economic environment. All of the obstacles they faced must have impacted and affected their strategies for survival, which often manifested themselves in the institutional and administrative attitudes reflected in the archaeological record and articulated in state-sanctioned objects bearing formal, official written content. The epigraphic record is, thus, crucial to the issue of historical contextualization in an

<sup>156</sup> Berkey 2003, pp. 71-77

<sup>157</sup> Ochsenswald and Fisher 2004, p. 55

<sup>158</sup> Hendy 2008, p. 631

<sup>159</sup> See Foss (in Haldon) 2010, p. 82

<sup>160</sup> Baladhuri: 148

attempt to frame Umayyad domestic and foreign policies, since much of the state's material culture tends to be endowed with some inscriptive qualities- messages to be conveyed to, oftentimes, very different audiences, but with a common political goal in mind.

As noted by many scholars tackling the subject of state formation, one of the major problems that faced the Umayyads early on in Syria was how to establish authority over the existing non-Muslim populations.<sup>161</sup> The issue of navigating a political terrain dominated by diverse religious and political communities lies at the crux of the Umayyads' political and economic challenges. Demographically, it took more than a century before Muslims became a majority in this new state, and so the Umayyad Arab-Muslim elites ruling from Damascus had to devise ways to manage it, especially since non-Muslims, namely Christians, made up the bulk of the Syrian populace.<sup>162</sup> In Arabia, conversion was expedited as "*the tribal patriarchal characteristics of Hijazi society were incorporated into the new religion, thus making conversion easier by maintaining the same social structure.*"<sup>163</sup>

Despite this shift in the political fortunes for the people of the seventh century Levant, most contemporary scholars of the early Islamic period believe that the documentary records insist that life for people in early Islamic Syria-Palestine did not change drastically.<sup>164</sup> The conquests certainly, albeit, unevenly impacted the region's peoples, institutions and aspects of the general political and economic arrangements that existed in the Levant, but for most, life went on as usual with some, mainly minor modifications (such as the imposition of a new form of tribute tax imposed on free, non-Muslim males).

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<sup>161</sup> Whitcomb 2004, p. 3

<sup>162</sup> Ochsenswald and Fisher 2004, p. 55

<sup>163</sup> Seikaly 1994, p. 417

<sup>164</sup> Haldon 2010, p. 1-11

One general trend appears to rein true throughout Syria-Palestine which is the continued influence of both Byzantine and Christian cultural, economic, religious, linguistic, and political icons and expressions. For example, the earliest coins minted in Syria-Palestine and attributed to the Umayyads for much of the seventh century remained Byzantine in style, iconography, and form. Churches continued to be built and remained influential in the lives of Christians throughout the Umayyad period while art and general commodities and goods produced remained almost undifferentiated from those produced during the late Byzantine period, while Greek persisted as an administrative language (used to record bureaucratic messages, economic transactions, etc.).<sup>165</sup> Despite the seemingly slow rate of change, the Umayyads did ultimately construct a world that differed from that of its imperial predecessor, but as the epigraphic and numismatic materials reveal, it did not unfold abruptly, and a distinct Arab polity coalesced and crystallized some thirty years after its founding, under the fifth Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik b. Marwan.

And while the historical record is clear that the Umayyads led an empire based out of Damascus in 661 CE, how a relatively small group of political elites from western Arabia were able to effectively unite and govern demographically diverse, religiously varied, and linguistically disparate populations has been intensely debated by scholars over the last few decades. Unfortunately, for those aiming to understand the processes involved in early Arab and Islamic state formation, a sparse contemporaneous, internal literary and documentary record makes this a difficult task.<sup>166</sup> This is problematic, considering that the seventh and eighth centuries represented an exceptionally important transitional period in the history of the Near East whose leaders were instrumental in forging new identities and realities. To date, the major

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<sup>165</sup> Haldon 2010, p. 1-11

<sup>166</sup> Ende 1977 and Hoyland 2006, p. 395

works that have attempted to examine Umayyad administration and policymaking from an archaeological or historical standpoint have typically focused on a single medium as their unit of analysis.

Continuing, the Umayyad caliphs had to contend with expressions of discontent on a large scale in a number of separate episodes that engulfed the Near East for years. The first *fitna* (civil strife)- as it is called by Muslims, lasted from 656-661 and pitted the Kharijites, Umayyads, and Alids against one another and ultimately led to the assassination of the caliph Ali b. Abi Talib and the establishment of the Umayyad Caliphate by Muawiya. The second *fitna*, beginning around 680 CE and lasting more than a decade (until around 692 CE) led to the elimination of two major Umayyad political adversaries. The first was Hussein b. Ali, the son of the fourth Rightly-Guided Caliph Ali b. Abu Talib, and short-term caliph who was defeated by the Umayyad army under Yazid b. Muawiya at the Battle of Karbala in 680 CE. The second rival was Abdallah b. al-Zubayr who claimed the caliphate for himself after Hussein's martyrdom and who was catapulted to a leadership position by the people of Mecca. He then went on to conquer large swaths of Umayyad territory including in Arabia and Iraq and who was ultimately defeated by one of Abd al-Malik's governors, al-Hajjaj b. Yousif in Mecca in November of 692 CE.

By the middle of the eighth century, the rival Abbasids, representing another political movement vying for power, were able to successfully topple the Umayyads by slaughtering many of their leaders at a banquet outside Jaffa in 750.<sup>167</sup>

## 7. MUAWIYA AND THE FORMATIVE PERIOD OF THE Umayyad POLITY

*“Muawiya did not wear a crown like other kings in the world. He placed his throne in Damascus and refused to go to Muhammad's throne.”* – The Maronite Chronicle <sup>168</sup>

<sup>167</sup> Ochsenswald and Fisher 2004, p. 61

<sup>168</sup> Hoyland 1997, p. 136

The establishment of what would become the Umayyad caliphate would begin in Syria-Palestine in 661 CE, immediately following the death of the fourth rightly-guided caliph and cousin, adopted son, and son-in-law of Muhammad, Ali b. Abi Talib. It is necessary, as background to the ascent of the Umayyads that before Muawiya's claim to the caliphate, he served as governor of Syria and Palestine under the Rashidun Caliph Umar b. al-Khattab beginning in 639.<sup>169</sup> The region's importance to the early Muslims was reconfirmed when Muawiya was inaugurated as the caliph in Jerusalem in 661 CE before ultimately making his administrative capital at Damascus.<sup>170</sup> Though Hoyland argues that the chronicle erroneously reports the following events as having occurred in 660 CE and not 661 CE, for religious reasons (as a major earthquake in 660 is made to forcefully coincide with Muawiya's takeover) the seventh century 'Maronite Chronicle' also records the following events about the Umayyads rise to power and states:

*AG 971 (The Seleucid Era; The year 660-661 CE): "Many Arabs gathered at Jerusalem and made Muawiya king and he went up and sat down on Golgotha and prayed there. He went to Gethsemane and went down to the tomb of the blessed Mary and prayed in it. In those days when the Arabs were gathered there with Muawiya, there was an earthquake;" much of Jericho fell, as well as many nearby churches and monasteries;"*<sup>171</sup>

Muawiya was known to frequent a multitude of Syrio-Palestinian towns during his governorship where he had spent considerable efforts to establish a local support base amongst many of the local Arab tribes<sup>172</sup> including the *Bani Quada'a*, the *Banu Kinana'*, the *Madhkhij*, the *Banu Lakhm*, the *Banu Judham*, the *Banu Hamadan*, and the *Banu Ghassan*.<sup>173</sup> Archaeologist Donald Whitcomb too noted, that "*Mu'awiya was reputed to have built up a system of tribal*

<sup>169</sup> Al Biladuri (translated by Hitti) 2011, pp. 217, 287

<sup>170</sup> Palmer 1993, p. 31

<sup>171</sup> Hoyland 1997, p. 136

<sup>172</sup> Gil 1992, p. 78

<sup>173</sup> Gil 1992, p.78

*alliances based on acceptance from the Kalb in the south and the Tanukh in the north*<sup>174</sup> as part of a campaign aimed at the securing of allegiances (*bay'a*) from among the Syrio-Palestinian and Hejazi tribes. The *bay'a*, as it related to the acknowledgment of the caliph's acquisition of power, was a "ceremony usually involving hand-to-hand contact- stroking or pressing rather than shaking" and that "such ceremonies could be grand in public occasions, a very visible sign that the public accepted their new ruler, and marked the inauguration of a new reign."<sup>175</sup> Individual members from all of these groups, among other ones as well, played a crucial role in validating Muawiya's ascent to the throne as head of the new political order there. His twenty-two year long governorship of Syria provided him with the foresight, experience, and with plenty of time to cultivate strong political ties to powerful factions, some of which aided him in constructing the foundation for his expansive, imperial, quasi-tribal chiefdom that stretched from across North Africa to Iran. His reign as regional administrator was a period of political acclimatization, providing him a chance to familiarize himself with the social terrain, and his negotiating and diplomatic experience serving as a natural abutment to his rise to sole Arab-Muslim powerbroker and as 'commander of the believers' (i.e. he saw himself as head of the various religious communities, that now lived under his rule, including non-Muslim ones).<sup>176</sup>

Further, Muawiya was responsible for the creation of at least two major institutions during his lengthy administrative tenure and included the *Diwan al-Rasa'il* (Department of Correspondences) and the *Diwan al-Khatam* (Department of Seals) which he used to facilitate diplomatic and administrative operations and both of which were staffed with literate employees tasked with producing materials reinforcing Muawiya's position as hegemon. As Clive Foss lays out, in his chapter 'Muawiya's State', the Umayyad caliphate's founder was a visionary who

<sup>174</sup> Whitcomb (ed. by Szuchman) 2009, p. 247

<sup>175</sup> Kennedy 2016, p. 35

<sup>176</sup> See Fred Donner's 'Muhammad and the Believers' (2010)



modeled some of his administration and state along imperial lines, establishing or adopting a variety of existing institutions and practices including utilizing a postal system, employing a chamberlain at his court, using bodyguards, ordering the construction of a defensive enclosure at the mosque to protect him during the Friday *khutba* (from enemies), and creating a chancery to create and use seals, including ones that bore his name in Arabic.<sup>177</sup>

The power of the written word continued to be exploited by Muawiya (who was advised by Amr b. al-As) against his rival Ali b. Abi Talib in the now historical episode between them at the Battle of Siffin in 657 when Muawiya commanded his Syrian army to hold up pages from the Quran at the tip of their swords so as to create a conundrum for the Iraqi soldiers (and Ali's supporters).<sup>178</sup> It was a political ploy that, for Muawiya, succeeded (Ali's soldiers prevented him from continuing) and represents one of the first major instances in which Islam (in a doctrinal form) was instrumentalized in an ideological and literal battlefield. The skirmish ended in a stalemate and in arbitration. Four years later, Ali was assassinated by Kharijite rebels while praying at a mosque in Kufa. Muawiya, then, essentially forced his Ali's son, Hassan, to vacate the caliphate before his brother, Hussein, battled for the office against Muawiya's son, Yazid I, which ended serious Alid claims to the institution.<sup>179</sup>

Ali's death, by default, afforded Muawiya an opportunity to consolidate power as head of a growing Arab and Islamic polity and taking the title of 'caliph, for himself ('caliph' was mostly a temporal title cloaked in a kind of religious veneer). Now that his main enemy had been disposed of, he could shift his attention to state-building, and he apparently, wasted little time in devising the administrative tools required for a successful run at regional hegemony. Foss argued that Muawiya "*relied on an existing bureaucracy to collect the taxes and to take care of the*

<sup>177</sup> Foss (in Haldon) 2010, p. 83

<sup>178</sup> Al-Tabari (trans. by Hawting) 1996, p. xiii

<sup>179</sup> Donner 2010, p. 178

*paperwork of government*”<sup>180</sup> that was made possible by an experienced class of administrators that he had at his disposal. It is under him that the first classes of inscribed material culture sees production, culminating in the striking of coins and seals, while also commissioning public texts bearing his name and title (as *commander of the believers*), thus investing in a marketing campaign which saw the construction of Umayyad visual culture aimed at conveying his authority across his newfound state.

The Umayyads under Muawiya, in many ways, acquired political accreditation through Byzantine capitulation and the gradual asseveration of Arab and Muslim sovereignty through both measures. The building of positive public perceptions occurred through the averment of Umayyad material (e.g. visual) culture superimposed on the existing administrative traditions of their predecessors, the late Romans to invoke familiarity and continuity. Thus, even if Muawiya did not construct a state of his own as some have suggested, he inherited one and used it as a vehicle to entrench himself as statesman and regional sovereign, emulating Byzantine government while challenging his political mentors militarily by launching and commanding two separate invasions of their capital at Constantinople in 669 and between 674-677.<sup>181</sup>

One of the earliest references to Muawiya in a dated and formally sanctioned public text occurs in Greek and dates from the first few years of his reign as caliph (662-663 CE).

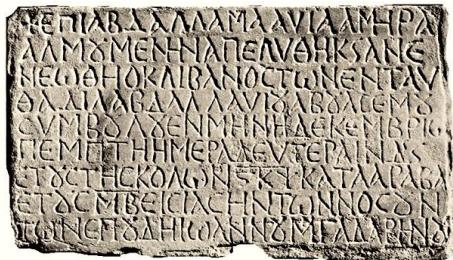


Fig. 5: Photo of the Hammat Gader Greek inscription from the time of Muawiya (J. Blau *Israel Exploration Journal*, 1982)

<sup>180</sup> Foss (in Haldon ed.) 2010 , p. 83

<sup>181</sup> Donner 2010, p. 174

At Hammat Gader<sup>182</sup>, a bath complex located some seven kilometers east of the south shore of Lake Tiberias (Sea of Galilee), an inscription consisting of nine lines in Greek reads:

Line 1: *In the days of the servant of God Mu'āwiya (abdalla Maavia), the commander*

Line 2: *of the faithful (amēra almoumenēn) the hot baths of the*

Line 3: *people there were saved and rebuilt*

Line 4: *by 'Abd Allāh son of Abū Hāshim (Abouasemou), the*

Line 5: *governor, on the fifth of the month of December,*

Line 6: *on the second day (of the week), in the 6th year of the indiction,*

Line 7: *in the year 726 of the colony, according to the Arabs (kata Arabas) the 42nd year,*

Line 8: *for the healing of the sick, under the care of Ioannes,*

Line 9: *the official of Gadara.*<sup>183</sup>

There are several important features of this inscription. First is that the public text is prefixed with a cross (all of the letters, including the cross measure some three centimeters in height) while simultaneously including a date in the Arab (Muslim) calendar (year 42 AH, equivalent to 662-663 CE), symbolizing a rather syncretic cultural orientation, which, we will see, was reflective of Muawiya's quasi-imperial polity on a whole. Secondly, it refers to Muawiya as ἀμερμουμνῆς (*Amermoumnês; Greek for 'amir al-mu'mineen*)-'commander of the believers'- likely the first written instance of this title in Greek, but which also pre-dates the first time the phrase was applied to him in Arabic insofar as the extant epigraphic evidence suggests.

Some aspects of the layout of the text are reminiscent of a Byzantine mosaic bearing the Greek inscription "*For the salvation [and] offering of Matrona*" from a church at Mount Nebo which, albeit is much shorter than the Hammat Gader inscription, also bears a cross at the top left.

Moving east, the lengthier, more prestigious version of the title was also applied to Muawiya on Arab-Sasanian silver dirhams/drachms struck in Iran (namely from Fasa and

<sup>182</sup> Hasson 1982, pp. 97-101

<sup>183</sup> Blau 1982, p. 102.

Darabgird) which bore a Pahlavi legend ‘*Maawia amir i-wruishnikan*’ (Muawiya, Commander of the Believers) beginning in the year forty-one after hijra, i.e. 661-662 CE.<sup>184</sup> <sup>185</sup> The Hammat Gader inscription alongside the Arab-Sasanian silver drachma represent the first time in history that the religious title ‘Commander of the Believers’ appears on monuments or material culture dating from the Islamic era. While anachronistically applied to the Rashidun Caliphs in later Muslim writings, to date, no contemporaneous texts appear to affix this title to any of them in the historical, documentary record.

Further, the first and only known coin type to bear Muawiya’s name does so employing the Pahlavi script ‘MYAWYA AMYR/WYRWYShNYKAN’ (‘*Muawiya, amir al-mu’mineen*’) and reserving Arabic for the phrase ‘*bismallah*’ which occurs on the outer rim of the obverse.



*Fig. 6: Arab-Sasanian coin bearing the phrase ‘Muawiya, Commander of the Believers’ in Pahlavi script next to the bust of the Persian shah in the center, with the Arabic phrase ‘bismallah’ on the obverse outer margins (43 AH/ 663-664 CE) (private collection)*

Muawiya not only struck coins in his name, but also accepted booty in his ninth year as Caliph, accepting gold, silver and other valuables that stemmed from the loot acquired during military campaigns in Central Asia under al-Hakam b. Amr.<sup>186</sup> He used a multi-script, multi-lingual strategy, emphasizing his authority as sole leader of the region to various audiences of diverse linguistic backgrounds using the orthographies his constituents in that area were most

<sup>184</sup> Walker 1941, pp. 25-26.

<sup>185</sup> Album 2002, p. 15

<sup>186</sup> al-Tabari, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk*, II, 110.

familiar with. In the Byzantine territories, he used Greek and in former Sasanian lands, he used Persian, while in Arabia and some of its peripheral areas with strong Arab, cultural ties, he used Arabic.

There exist at least two examples of Arabic-only seals that bear his name and refer to him as the ‘commander of the believers’ (*amir al-mu’mineen*), demonstrating both the extent of his rule and his consolidation of power, while simultaneously illustrating the level of development of his governing institutions, even during the earliest years of his caliphate.



Fig. 7: Two uniface seals bearing the name of Muawiya (664 CE)<sup>187</sup>

The six lines of Arabic text read “Among those things ordered by the Commander of the Faithful, Mu‘āwīya to dismiss the amīr ‘Abd Allāh bin Amīr from the rule of al-Baṣra.” Below is the English transliteration:

1. *mimma amara bi-hi*
2. *amīr al-mu‘minīn*
3. *Mu‘āwīya bi-‘azl a-*
4. *l-amīr ‘Abd Allāh bin A-*
5. *mīr min wilaya fī-*
6. *al-Baṣra.*<sup>188</sup>

<sup>187</sup> Baldwin and Sons Ltd. London, UK, Lot 5, Classical Rarities of Islamic Coinage Catalog. Islamic Coin Auction 19, Wednesday 25, April 2012 and Ancient & World Coin Signature Auction - New York (Heritage Auctions), 2013 January 6-7, Lot 21575.

<sup>188</sup> Baldwin and Sons Ltd. London, UK, Lot 5, Classical Rarities of Islamic Coinage Catalog. April 2012 and Ancient & World Coin Signature Auction - New York (Heritage Auctions), 2013 January 6-7, Lot 21575.

The dismissal of a governor, as the bullae reveal, implies an obvious chain of command and a political hierarchy that places Muawiya atop his polity while the seals bearing his name indicate he used these media as instruments of authority. These seals had both practical and symbolic value. The documentary record in Arabic, albeit, late, attests to Muawiya's usage of seals. Robert Hoyland cited the historian Ya'qubi, writing in the ninth century, who remarked that Muawiya established a chancery and used bullae to seal and secure documents.<sup>189</sup> It was even recorded that Muawiya appointed tax collectors, himself, in the provinces<sup>190</sup> that, almost certainly carried their own seals and were responsible for documentation of administrative services. His power even extended to the realm of jurisprudence and he is reported to have both judged and executed some of his foes (including supporters of Ali ibn Abu Talib such as Hujr b. Abdi).<sup>191</sup>



*Fig. 8: Close-up of the Umayyad dam near Ta'if bearing Muawiya's name in Arabic*

<sup>189</sup> Hoyland 2006, p. 403, n. 38

<sup>190</sup> Foss (in Haldon ed.) 2010, p. 80 (cites Tabari II, 177f)

<sup>191</sup> Foss, (in Haldon, ed.) 2010, p. 80

Near Ta'if, in the Hejaz, is an inscription produced towards the end of his life that bears a lengthy Arabic text that also cites Muawiya as *amir al-mu'mineen* (أمير المؤمنين) which is separated from his Arabic seals by some fourteen years. The full text reads:

Line 1: *This dam [belongs] to servant of God Mu'āwiya,*  
 Line 2: *Commander of the believers. 'Abdullāh b. Ṣakhr built it*  
 Line 3: *with the permission of God, in the year fifty eight. Oh*  
 Line 4: *God, pardon servant of God Mu'āwiya, c-*  
 Line 5: *[c]ommander of the believers, and strengthen him, and make him victorious, and grant the*  
 Line 6: *Commander of the believers the enjoyment of it. 'Amr b. Ḥabbab wrote [it].*

The inscription dates to 678 CE (the year 58 AH) and while located some 1,700 kilometers from the Umayyad capital at Damascus, it exemplifies his reach in a turbulent political realm that would witness a major civil war just a few years later. Muawiya's policies were rooted in cultural sensitivity, pragmatism and simplicity. Another Arabic-language text, also inscribed on a dam in Medina, refers to Muawiya with the same title (although it lacks a date).<sup>192</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Muawiya felt most comfortable in Syria-Palestine and had a particular affinity towards the Holy Land, it seems. At one point he took up residence in *al-Sinnabra* near the Sea of Galilee, towards the mouth of the Jordan River at Khirbet al-Karak.<sup>193</sup>

It has been said that he often visited Jerusalem and even ordered its grounds cleared and its walls restored at some point. In promoting Jerusalem's religious heritage, he is said to have claimed that "*what are between the two walls of this mosque is clearer to God than the rest of the Earth*" and even referred to the city as the '*Land of the Gathering and Resurrection.*'<sup>194 195</sup> It

<sup>192</sup> al-Rashīd, *Dirāsāt Fī al-āthār al-Islāmiyya al-Mubakkira bi-l-Madīnat al-Munawwara*, 2000 and Hoyland 2006, Volume 69, No. 3, p. 413.

<sup>193</sup> Gil 1992, p. 78

<sup>194</sup> Necipoğlu and Bailey 2009, p. 19.

<sup>195</sup> Livne-Kafri 2006, p. 186.

was also noted that upon a visit to Jerusalem with this son Yazid, Iraqis attempted to assassinate Muawiya but failed.<sup>196</sup>

Archaeological evidence for Muawiya's literal state-building, which coincides with his role in establishing Islam in Syria-Palestine, is demonstrated by more recent discoveries in Jerusalem. Beatrice St. Laurent has recently posited that architectural remains from the southeast corner of the *haram* (oft regarded as the area coinciding with Solomon's Stables) can be attributed to Muawiya's reign.<sup>197</sup> According to new findings, the mosque likely began construction at the start of his governorship in 639-640 and represents a "*multi-aisled vaulted <quadrangular> building of monumental proportions 3390 square meters.*"<sup>198</sup> This assertion, based, in part on an examination of building phases (and materials) at this locale, alongside literary accounts, including one regarded as contemporaneous, have led her and others to implicate Muawiya in breaking ground at Jerusalem in the Rashidun period. Citing Ibn Khaldun, Simon Montefiore points out that Muawiya, himself, even led Friday prayers (*and gave khutbat al-juma'a/Friday sermons*) from a protected, 'latticed minbar' out of fear of assassination.<sup>199</sup> Congregational mosques were already a feature of early Islamic settlements in the Rashidun period, as the archaeological record has revealed.

St. Laurent cites an account by Arculf, a 'holy bishop, a Gaul by race'<sup>200</sup> who visited Jerusalem towards the end of Muawiya's reign and recorded his observations, noting the existence of a large mosque there.<sup>201</sup>

<sup>196</sup> Gil 1992, p. 78

<sup>197</sup> St. Laurent and Awwad 2013, pp. 7-30

<sup>198</sup> St. Laurent and Awwad 2016, p. 443

<sup>199</sup> See footnote in Montefiore 2011, p. 188

<sup>200</sup> Description of Arculf in Adomnan, *De locis sanctis* "intro.," 183 (tr. Wilkinson, 93) as cited by Hoyland 1997, p. 220.

<sup>201</sup> Mattia Guidetti believes Arculf visited Jerusalem in 680 CE in *In the Shadow of the Church: The Building of Mosques in Early Medieval Syria*, p. 32 while St. Laurent and Awwad provide a date between 679-682 CE (2016, p. 442) but generally this event is oft-described as having occurred during the 670's CE.



*“In that famous place where once stood the magnificently constructed Temple, near the eastern wall, the Saracens now frequent a rectangular house of prayer which they have built in a crude manner, constructing it from raised planks and large beams over some remains of ruins. This house can, as it is said, accommodate at least 3000 people.”<sup>202</sup>*

It has even been argued that Muawiya, himself, may have been responsible for the initial planning of the Dome of the Rock too<sup>203</sup>, whose general style was highly imitative of existing, early Christian octagonal churches, some of which he may have seen himself during his life in Syria-Palestine. Rina Avner likens the Dome of the Rock to the fifth century Church of the Kathisma (Seat of Mary) on stylistic and structural grounds and posits that this structure was quite possibly the model on which the Dome of the Rock was ultimately built on, slightly more than a decade after Muawiya’s death.<sup>204</sup> The construction of the Dome of the Rock, ultimately, relied heavily on the expertise and artistry of Byzantine builders, architects, and artists who all played pivotal roles in both the physical layout and geographic space it would come to occupy.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Hoyland 1997, p. 221

<sup>203</sup> Grabar 1990, p. 156

<sup>204</sup> Avner 2010, pp. 31-49

<sup>205</sup> Galor and Bloedhorn 2013, pp. 161-162

## CHAPTER 3 ISLAMIC HISTORIOGRAPHY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

### SHAPING A DISCOURSE

*Chapter Three provides a discussion of the role of contemporaneous source materials used in the construction of early Islamic history, i.e. historiography. Thus, the debates between traditionists and revisionists are visited alongside an examination of the role of an 'Islamic archaeology' in the re-interpretation of the early Arab history and of Islam as a cultural force.*

#### 1. THE CONSTRUCTION OF ISLAMIC HISTORY: THE DEBATES

For centuries and up until today, an internal historical narrative about Islam's genesis, the formative decades that followed, and the era of the Umayyads crafted by ninth and tenth century Muslim historians and transmitters of 'prophetic narrations' attributed to the religion's founder, Muhammad, coalesced to form a rather definitive and standardized version of Islam's own history. However, over the past four decades, an increasing number of scholars have begun arguing that this monopoly on historiography should end considering this historico-religious account has gone mostly unchallenged and uncontested for much of history.<sup>206</sup>

The rather standard, traditional, and popular (Sunni) account, which provides a rather linear, clear-cut historical trajectory of events regarding Muhammad's rise to prophethood, the spreading of Islam through conquest, and the emergence of and general character of the Umayyad Dynasty, has often been accused of lacking textual or historical veracity since the materials do not correspond to the time contemporaneous with the events that allegedly occurred.<sup>207</sup>

Fortunately for the ever-so evolving discourse, views about this particular 'origins narrative' have begun to drastically change over the course of the past few decades. In fact, the specialized field that is 'Early Islamic Historiography' is one that has undergone a massive

<sup>206</sup> Berkey 2003, p. 58-59

<sup>207</sup> Donner 2010, p. 50-51

transformation in recent times. One particular motivation for foraying into this area of inquiry is to address the seemingly unproblematic straightforward ‘origins’ narrative about Islam’s birth, which has for some time, been accused of lacking historicity since it is thought to have derived from late and biased internal Arabic sources (sometimes as late as two centuries after the events they describe). Scholars from several fields have argued that the account has long-dominated the discourse and defined the parameters of early Islamic historiographical studies but that with the availability of new resources, ranging from the archaeological to the numismatic, new, increasingly layered interpretations of early Islamic historical processes are being negotiated and discussed.

Today, the state of Islamic historiography is one that can be characterized as a literary battleground between various ideological camps who approach and treat the available historical sources in different ways, resulting in conceptions of early Islamic history that sharply diverge in several respects. These camps, which include a handful of vocal ‘revisionists’, some who have called for a complete re-examination and re-construction of Islamic history using essentially, anything except the Arabic sources, and the so-called ‘traditionists’ who, to varying extents and degrees, rely on the established or ‘traditional’, internal account of Islamic history as part of the framework for which to situate Islam’s emergence. However, the more nuanced reality is that the approaches and methodologies employed by both groups are dependent upon a number of important factors including, but not at all limited to, area of specialization, familiarity with the materials (.e.g. numismatic, literary, archaeological, etc.) personal politics, and other factors.

While categorizing opposing conceptions of early Islam’s genesis into ‘camps’ (essentially composed of two primary competing perceptions and interpretations of the rise of Islam and the political realities that existed subsequent to Muslim expansion in the region) of

scholarly opinions may seem constraining. The terms ‘traditionists’ and ‘revisionists’ are not meant to suggest that there are only two distinct groups of scholars composed of inflexible ideologues promoting their version of history. These are terms used as broad classifiers of two rather polarizing general conceptions of early Islamic historiography while simultaneously including various intellectual approaches, methodologies, interpretations, and conclusions that may not always fully reflect the most vocal opinions associated with these ‘camps.’

What some scholars, whether contesting or working within the more traditionist paradigm, can agree on is that Islamic historiography must consider sources external to its own literary traditions including non-Arabic sources that are more or less contemporaneous with the events they describe, unlike the overwhelming majority of the Islamic sources that has, until recently, served as the primary source materials for reconstructing Islam’s genesis and development in both religious and political terms.<sup>208</sup>

However, the application of contemporary non-Arabic source materials should not dilute the level of objectivity in their analysis. Writers of history were rarely impartial observers and therefore all literary accounts, contemporary or not, must be scrutinized, criticized, interpreted and re-interpreted as our knowledge of past events increases and as archaeological and other historical materials become available.

Norman Calder, recognizing the significance of using broad literary materials in regards to constructing a historical Islamic origins’ narrative, posited that “*all of the communities of the Middle East participated in the political, social and intellectual consequences of Arab political hegemony*”, and therefore, the writings of non-Muslims under early Muslim rule should be carefully considered in historiographic studies.<sup>209</sup> Apart from an examination of textual sources,

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<sup>208</sup> Donner 2010, pp. 52-53

<sup>209</sup> Calder 1993, p. 244

scholars must also be willing to delve into the archaeological record including but not limited to information extracted from excavations, epigraphic evidence, and numismatic studies. Unlike previous works aimed at interpreting and/or constructing Islamic historiography that tended to situate themselves within an already established intellectual paradigm rooted in a particular historical, contextually-dependent epistemological awareness, current studies have employed a more multi-faceted, holistic methodology that tries to either question or reconcile the Arabic/Islamic textual and literary records with other sources external to it.

While the standardized, or, rather, ‘popular’ version of history is often accused of having been constructed retrospectively and based on biased sources that appear late in the historical record, a complaint that many scholars have lodged against early Islamic historiography altogether, historian Chase Robinson acknowledges in his book *Islamic Historiography*, that despite this, early Islamic history can, in effect, be constructed due to a preserved chain of transmission in regards to the earliest accounts of Islam’s emergence.<sup>210</sup> Robinson as well as Fred Donner represent scholars who, while aware of the ongoing literary debate over the validity of ‘late’ Islamic textual sources, do not outright call for a complete paradigm-shift, but instead offer historical analyses partly within the established and seemingly ‘traditional’ historiographic parameters. Similarly, Jaroslav Stetkevych in *Muhammad and the Golden Bough*, like Robinson, addresses the issue of the construction of Islamic history, arguing that the oral and literary traditions partook in by early Islamic historiographers are rooted in conceptions of history and text in pre-Islamic Arabian myth.<sup>211</sup> Therefore, inclusion of Arabic sources, internal to the Islamic literary traditions provides a window into how history was conceived and consequently constructed.

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<sup>210</sup> Robinson 2003, p. 53-54

<sup>211</sup> Stetkevych 1996, pp. ix-xi

Apart from the oral traditions that made up the foundation for the hadiths, or prophetic narrations, other historical, albeit textual, records include the works of several other writers from the first two to three centuries of Islamic rule. These include individuals like Persian historian Muhammad Ibn Jariri al-Tabari and his tenth century *Tarikh al-Rasul wal Muluk*, or *History of the Prophets and Kings* which has often been considered one of the primary sources of the traditionalist account.<sup>212</sup> Al-Tabari's history may be the most well-known, but other equally insightful historiographic literary works from the same era do exist including the important *Futuh Al-Sham* or *Conquest of Syria* by Abu Ismail al-Azdi, an early Islamic scholar from Basra in Southern Iraq, and whose work details the Muslim military campaigns aimed at wresting greater Syria from the Byzantines in the 630's.<sup>213</sup>

Like al-Tabari, the Persian writer Ahmad Ibn Yahya al-Baladhuri was responsible for assembling the tenth century *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan* or *Book of the Conquests of the Lands* which provided, yet another perspective on the Muslim incursions into the areas outside of Arabia, beginning with Muhammad himself and the subsequent caliphs. However, like other writings that seek to describe and explain the events associated with early Islamic state formation and expansion, al-Baladhuri's work no longer exists in its original form but parts of it were copied and preserved a couple of centuries after and which have come down to us.

In *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, Walter Kaegi argues that just as scholars attempt to understand the history of early Islamic conquests from a social, economic, political, and religious standpoint, it is vital that we attempt to examine military events from a military-

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<sup>212</sup> Robinson 2003, pp. 53-54

<sup>213</sup> Mourad 2000, p. 577

historical vantage point while using the Islamic documentary record as its primary source of information- something he heavily relies on for his historiographic reconstruction.<sup>214</sup>

Others, including Donner and Berkey do maintain that secondary sources may be problematic in the construction of early Islamic historiography, and they are for many other scholars, but because primary, contemporaneous sources are so far and few between, it does not mean that secondary textual sources are useless or inherently inaccurate and thus scholars are often forced not to ignore them for pragmatic and practical reasons. Critique of the late Islamic sources is welcome, but in dismissing the large corpus of Arabic materials, altogether, our assumptions about how history was recorded and transmitted over time (in socio-cultural contexts we may not fully understand yet) will also require a complete, paradigmatic shift.

## 2. 'HAGARISM' AS AN INTELLECTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL TURNING

### POINT: AN OVERVIEW OF CRITIQUES

Much of the excitement surrounding the Islamic historiographic scene began very recently- some forty years ago. In 1977, co-authors and cohorts Patricia Crone and Michael Cook set the world of Islamic historiography ablaze with their controversial work '*Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*' when it sought to debunk the traditional accounts of Islam's origins and re-route Islam's historiographic trajectory. At the outset, Crone and Cook criticized the methods used in examining and interpreting early Islamic historiography by arguing that there is an overreliance on internal documentary sources and that most scholars are unwilling to work outside of the established paradigm.<sup>215</sup> They asserted that this constrained attempts to objectively analyze the rise of Islam because its sources are inherently biased and that up until that point, no systematic approach towards understanding early Islamic history focused on the

<sup>214</sup> Kaegi 1992, pp. 2-25

<sup>215</sup> Crone and Cook 1977, p. 3

seemingly more ‘neutral’ or ‘objective’ historical sources- namely, the contemporary, non-Arabic literary records as well as archaeological examinations and material culture.<sup>216</sup>

Thus, in the minds of some scholarly circles, Islamic historiography requires the objectivity of European scholars, as neutral outsiders with no political motivations or religious biases, to understand and explain the rise of Islam using the non-Arabic sources untainted by the hands of Muslim writers. The current political climate that almost universally sees Islam as a socially archaic, political anathema has enabled and even sanctioned unrelenting assaults on the narratives that underpin Islam’s origins.

In offering a complete re-imagined history of Islam’s birth by re-constructing events (or outright dismissing them) by drawing on non-Arabic, external contemporary literary materials written in a host of other languages including Aramaic, Greek, Syriac and Armenian and recorded by non-Muslim observers in seventh century Syria-Palestine. Much of their interpretive, revisionist philosophy appeared to have been rooted in previous efforts by scholars who were critically examining the Biblical traditions and scrutinizing their narratives in light of other, external, non-Biblical, historical, documentary sources. Crone and Cook thus felt that a similar inquiry into the textual integrity of the late, Islamic sources was necessary for a more historically accurate, more politically correct and more authentic rendering of the events of Islam’s first century.

In Hagarism, Crone and Cook challenged the popular discourse with accusations about Islam’s origins and its founder, Muhammad by claiming that early Muslims were actually members of a Messianic Jewish-inspired cult who used their affiliation with the Patriarch Abraham as a platform to unite with other Jews in order to capture Palestine (i.e. the Holy Land)

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<sup>216</sup> Crone and Cook 1977, p. 3



and wrest it from the Byzantines.<sup>217</sup> This religious pseudo-Judaic movement was called ‘Hagarism’ by Crone and Cook, and named after Abraham’s slave-wife Hagar, whom the Arabs traced their ancestral lineage from.<sup>218</sup>

Muhammad appeared to play the role of military leader bent on capturing Jerusalem and who essentially had to create the parameters of his own religio-political position that would garner him a status like that of community and exodus-leader Moses since Muhammad, similarly, led his own exodus of followers from Mecca to Yathrib.<sup>219</sup>

Further, they claim that there was nothing recognizable as ‘Islam’ until sometime in the eighth century, and that this Arab religious movement blended both Christian and Jewish religious traditions and ideologies that ultimately gave way to a more unique, Arabian form of monotheism that would become Islam with the passage of time.<sup>220</sup>

Crone and Cook rely on seventh century non-Arabic writings which are thought to attest to the historical origins and ideological principles of these Hagarenes, which is what followers of ‘Hagarism’ are called in some early sources.<sup>221</sup> Using archaeological observations, albeit sparingly, the authors remark that excavations of early mosques outside of Arabia (in the Levant) reveal that their *mihrab* (prayer niche which faces a designated direction for its worshippers to pray towards) faced Jerusalem and not Mecca, thus supporting the idea that the early Muslims were in fact Judeo-Christians who held Jerusalem in high esteem before the crystallization of a distinct ‘Islamic’ identity emerged that regarded Mecca as its holiest city.<sup>222</sup>

<sup>217</sup> Crone and Cook 1977, pp. 3-6

<sup>218</sup> Crone and Cook 1977, p. 9

<sup>219</sup> Crone and Cook 1977, pp. 17-20

<sup>220</sup> Crone and Cook 1977, p. 29

<sup>221</sup> Crone and Cook 1977, pp. 4-9

<sup>222</sup> Crone and Cook 1977, pp. 21-26

While their views certainly helped spawn a ‘historical revisionism’ genre in the field of early Islamic historiography, their rather antagonistic work (the authors referred to their book, *Hagarism*, as “*by infidels, for infidels*” in the preface) also caused great uproar within the field. Many of Crone’s and Cook’s contemporaries, who have become prominent historians in their own right, blasted the authors for their radical interpretations, collectively sounding off about the book’s deficiency in terms of providing convincing evidence, while offering far too many arguments. For example, historian Steven Humphreys, wrote in his 1991 book ‘Islamic History’: “*Unsurprisingly, the Crone-Cook interpretation has failed to win general acceptance among Western Orientalists, let alone Muslim scholars.*” He goes on to say that “*The rhetoric of these authors may be an obstacle for many readers, for their argument is conveyed through a dizzying and unrelenting array of allusions, metaphors, and analogies. More substantively, their use (or abuse) of the Greek and Syriac sources has been sharply criticised. In the end, perhaps we ought to use Hagarism more as a 'what-if' exercise than as a research monograph.*”<sup>223</sup>

John Wansbrough, a Harvard-educated historian who spent many of his teaching years at the University of London’s School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), like Cook, and author of an equally controversial 1977 Oxford book-*Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* asserted that some of the documentary evidence used to advance their main thesis in *Hagarism* were misused or fallacious, altogether, and nearly all of the textual sources used by Crone and Cook were either difficult to ascertain in regards to historicity or that in the cases that they were truly contemporary, the writers were not impartial, neutral observers and actively mischaracterized the Hagarenes (i.e. the Arab-Muslims).<sup>224</sup> French Art Historian and author of several leading works on the formation and development of Islamic Art, Oleg

<sup>223</sup> Humphreys 1991, pp. 84-85

<sup>224</sup> Wansbrough 1978, pp. 155-156

Grabar, also spoke harshly of the methodologies employed by Crone and Cook and essentially dismissed their work as lacking a real historical basis but simultaneously applauded their efforts at trying to bring this period of late antiquity into the broader theoretical debate concerning historical transition and acculturation.<sup>225</sup> Whether or not the critical responses they received for their daring hypotheses were to influence the authors' own, internal positions about their work, both Crone and Cook themselves have, since, relinquished their views on Hagarism and no longer accept their own central thesis laid out in their seminal work.<sup>226</sup>

According to Washburn University law professor Liaquat Ali Khan, both Crone and Cook were interviewed by him on separate occasions and admitted that Hagarism was more of a 'graduate essay' than a serious or incontrovertible statement about how Islam came about and out of what historical circumstances it arose from.<sup>227</sup> Providing more introspection, Crone, according to Khan's conversation with her, proclaimed that "*We were young, and we did not know anything. The book was just a hypothesis, not a conclusive finding*" and that Hagarism basically got it wrong.<sup>228</sup> UCLA History Professor Michael Morony and Islamic history specialist provided some of the harshest criticism of Hagarism, arguing that "*Despite a useful bibliography, this is a thin piece of Kulturgeschichte full of glib generalizations, facile assumptions, and tiresome jargon. More argument than evidence, it suffers all the problems of intellectual history, including reification and logical traps.*"<sup>229</sup>

Robert Bertram Searjeant, an expert on Islamic tiles, went as far as calling the book "*bitterly anti-Islamic in tone' and its arguments rather spurious and ludicrous.*"<sup>230</sup> Even Khan,

<sup>225</sup> Grabar 1978, pp. 795-799

<sup>226</sup> Khan 2006 (interview with Patricia Crone and Michael Cook)

<sup>227</sup> Khan 2006

<sup>228</sup> Khan 2006

<sup>229</sup> Morony 1982, pp. 157-159

<sup>230</sup> Searjeant 1978, p. 78

himself, openly criticized his interviewees' work referring to Hagarism as “*yet another book in the large dump of attack literature*” and that “*Cook and Crone have made no manifest effort to repudiate their juvenile findings in the book*” which he regards as a “*scandalous thesis.*”<sup>231</sup>

By most accounts, Hagarism has been largely dismissed by the bulk of serious Islamicists and has been summed up as a theoretical and historiographical failure that has been “*almost universally rejected.*”<sup>232</sup> Despite the critical and sometimes scathing responses that Hagarism received from both scholars who belonged to the ‘revisionist’ camp at SOAS, including colleagues and non-colleagues, alike, Hagarism, is still providing a theoretical framework for several other publications aimed at debunking Islam’s origins narrative. In 2003, Israeli authors Yehuda Nevo (who held a B.A. in Archaeology from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem) and Judith Koren (an ‘information specialist’ according to the book) assembled another highly controversial and radical assessment of the rise and development of early Islam- one that undoubtedly rivaled ‘Hagarism’ in its methodology and conclusions.

Nevo and Koren attempted to trace the origins of Muslim identity and the formation of the ‘Arab State’ and its religion utilizing a host of potential sources including archaeological excavations, contemporaneous non-Arabic documentary/literary evidence from seventh century Syria-Palestine, epigraphic evidence from Palestine, and numismatic materials from Greater Syria. They were fixated on using only contemporary sources as a means to construct Islamic historiography and argued that non-contemporary writings were ‘*inadmissible as evidence*’- a polite way of rejecting the Arabic sources, wholesale.<sup>233</sup> The authors even go as far as

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<sup>231</sup> Khan 2006

<sup>232</sup> Waines 1995, pp. 273-274

<sup>233</sup> Nevo and Koren 2003, p. 9

challenging ‘traditionalist’ historians to “*produce one piece of clearcut contemporary evidence to support their versions of history.*”<sup>234</sup>

Furthermore, the authors waste no time in making extravagant claims at the outset by arguing that there were no major battles fought between the early Arab-Muslims and Syria’s Byzantine overlords, that the early Arab-Muslim political elite were actually part of a monotheistic, Judeo-Christian sect while many Arab commoners remained pagan in areas under their rule (e.g. in Palestine), that Muhammad never existed, and that the Quran is a literary product that developed over time but was codified as a standard religious text sometime in the late eighth century CE, some one hundred and fifty years or so after the proposed ‘traditional’ narrative places it.<sup>235</sup> Defending their belief that no major battles were fought between the Arab-Muslims and the Byzantines, they cite a lack of archaeological evidence from the major, alleged battle sites (i.e. Mu’tah and Yarmouk).<sup>236</sup>

Nevo’s cursory analysis of seventh century Arabic inscriptions in the Negev desert led him and Koren to believe that paganism was still rampant in some Palestinian settlements decades after Muslims made their way there, thus contesting Muslim accounts of how quickly Islam penetrated Arabia’s peripheries.<sup>237</sup> Furthermore, the authors, similar to the argument espoused by some that Jesus never existed because of a lack of references to him in the contemporary early first century records, conclude, based on an assessment of the numismatic record that Muhammad, too, was not an actual historical figure because the first time his name appears on any (dated) written materials is some sixty years after his death, on an Arab-Sasanian

<sup>234</sup> Nevo and Koren 2003, p. 13

<sup>235</sup> Nevo and Koren 2003, p. 11

<sup>236</sup> Nevo and Koren 2003, p. 135

<sup>237</sup> Nevo and Koren 2003, p. 231

coin from the 690's.<sup>238</sup> Here, I invoke Jeremy Johns's assertion (citing astronomer Carl Sagan), that in the case of Muhammad's name missing from administrative objects until the 690's, that "*absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.*"<sup>239</sup> The tiresome, logical danger in Nevo and Koren's assertion, of course, is the general insinuation that writing validates and operationalizes the historicity of past events.

In fact, Shraga Qedar, the very numismatist whose expertise they depended on was disappointed with the way they used the information about early Islamic coins as he did not agree with their conclusions.<sup>240</sup> While Nevo's and Koren's work stirred up hostile sentiments among historians, it nevertheless, again tried to shake up the foundations of Islamic historiography by making exorbitant claims but attempting to qualify them with arguments rooted in the misuse of archaeology, ancient literature, and numismatics.

But unlike previous scholars who called for a reinterpretation of early Islamic historiography, Nevo and Koren dismiss it entirely and reject the Arabic sources' historicity and their place in Islamic historiography, completely. For example, they claim that an early anti-Jewish text called the *Doctrina Iacobi* that dates from 634 CE which mentions the name of one 'Muhammad' who led a military campaign against the Byzantines a few years earlier, cannot possibly be referring to Islam's prophet Muhammad because there were no great military campaigns and therefore that text must be referring to a completely different Muhammad.<sup>241</sup> This has caused scholars to harshly criticize the authors for their literary cherry-picking and questionable revisionist motives. In fact, Patricia Crone, herself, writing many years later, wrote the following: "*True, on Arabic coins and inscriptions, and in papyri and other documentary*

<sup>238</sup> Nevo and Koren 2003, p. 247

<sup>239</sup> Johns 2003, p. 416

<sup>240</sup> Nevo and Koren 2003, p. 138 footnote

<sup>241</sup> Nevo and Koren 2003, pp. 114 and 208-210

*evidence in the language, Mohammed only appears in the 680s, some fifty years after his death (whatever its exact date). This is the ground on which some, notably Yehuda D Nevo and Judith Koren, have questioned his existence. But few would accept the implied premise that history has to be reconstructed on the sole basis of documentary evidence (i.e. information which has not been handed down from one generation to the next, but rather been inscribed on stone or metal or dug up from the ground and thus preserved in its original form). The evidence that a prophet was active among the Arabs in the early decades of the 7th century, on the eve of the Arab conquest of the middle east, must be said to be exceptionally good.*<sup>242</sup>

One Bryn Mawr review written the following year after the book's 2003 release stated *"Crossroads to Islam hangs together with the same superficial, reality-challenged coherence that allows Christian fundamentalists to argue, for example, that God created the fossil record as is, and that therefore it can't be taken as representing evidence of past life forms. As I've suggested right along, this book reeks of being argued backwards from a conclusion. That may, of course, be an unfair accusation. But in the end the skeptical reader is entitled to weigh two likelihoods. The first, certainly a possibility, is that everyone else -- including generations of accomplished Byzantinists and Orientalists -- got it completely wrong. The second is that two comparatively untrained Israelis might have an undeclared contemporary motive for attempting to discredit the cherished beliefs of Arabs and other Muslims."*<sup>243</sup> Prometheus Books, the company that published Crossroads to Islam, have been active in the dispensation of controversial texts aimed at critiquing, dismissing, and attacking Islam from multiple vantage points over the past decade.

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<sup>242</sup> Crone 2008

<sup>243</sup> Wells 2004 ( review)

Such works include those written by Ibn Warraq, ex-Muslim author and founder of the Institute for the Secularisation of Islamic Society include *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, *Leaving Islam: Apostates Speak Out*, *What the Koran Really Says: Language, Text, and Commentary*, *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, *The Origins of The Koran: Classic Essays on Islam's Holy Book*, *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said's Orientalism*. *Which Koran?: Variants, Manuscripts, and the Influence of Pre-Islamic Poetry*, and *Why the West is Best: A Muslim Apostate's Defense of Liberal Democracy* to name a few. In 2010, Karl Heinz-Ohlig (Historian of Religion) and Gerd-R. Puin (scholar on Quranic orthography) edited and published *Hidden Origins of Islam* (another Prometheus Books publication with a provocative book cover that depicted the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem with the authors' names embedded in the front upper facade where a band of Islamic calligraphy actually exists) which was a collection of essays aimed at, again, completely re-writing Islamic historiography from the ground-up.

In it, the authors claim that the numismatic record, alongside textual evidence, supports the notion that early Muslims were, again, not 'Muslims' at all but adherents to an obscure Christian sect that heavily revered John the Baptist as some late Byzantine/early Arab coins allegedly depict the head of John the Baptist either being held by a standing figure or on the ground in the background of the coin.<sup>244</sup> The claims laid out in this book are equally as provocative as those posited in some of the previous revisionist works and include some of the following claims: The first is that the early 'Muslim' practitioners were mostly Aramaic-speaking Christians, not fellow Arabs, and thus, Aramaic and Syriac Christian religious sources profoundly shaped the writing of the Quran.<sup>245</sup> The second is that Muhammad, himself, was not an actual historical figure but that because seventh century Arab-Islamic coins contain

<sup>244</sup> Ohlig and Puin 2010, pp. 40-45

<sup>245</sup> Ohlig, Puin, Luxenberg and Gilliot 2010, pp. 125-165



Muhammad's name alongside Christian iconography, this can only mean one thing: that the name '*Muhammad*' is an 'honorific' meaning 'praised one' and is actually referring to Jesus Christ.<sup>246</sup> The third is that the Quran contains a multitude of Aramaic and Syriac words and therefore Islam really represents or resembles a pre-Nicean form of Syrian Christianity.<sup>247</sup>

Lastly, this new Arabo-Syrian Christianity eventually evolved into 'Islam' and therefore the Quran, by extension, must be viewed as product of these major historical developments that took place between the seventh through ninth centuries.<sup>248</sup> Again, the contributors of this work believe that no, or so few, Arabic documentary sources exist from the first two centuries of Islam that the traditionally accepted popular narrative cannot possibly be rooted in historical reality and therefore it provides them free reign to re-draw Islam's historical parameters and to reconstruct the discourse's historiographic framework, altogether. In fact, Crone and Cook called on scholars to ignore the established, popular Islamic origins narrative and to completely "*step outside the Islamic tradition altogether and start again.*"<sup>249</sup>

The 2013 Prometheus publication, *Early Islam: A Critical Reconstruction Based on Contemporary Sources*, edited by Ohlig, continues in this revisionist tradition, garnering contributions from many of the same scholars who provided material for his 2010 publication including Volker Popp and Christoph Luxenberg, the latter who wrote the controversial *A Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran: A Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran* which argued that the Quran has linguistic and theological roots in Syriac and Aramaic Christian

<sup>246</sup> Ohlig and Puin 2010, pp. 63-65

<sup>247</sup> Ohlig, Puin and Luxenberg 2010, pp. 125-151

<sup>248</sup> Ohlig, Puin and Luxenberg 2010, pp. 125-151

<sup>249</sup> Crone and Cook 1977, p. 3

texts and that the Quran was a literary work that developed and was codified over the course of two centuries.<sup>250</sup>

However, over the past few decades, important works that tend to be more conservative, at least methodologically, have added to the growing, but rich, discourse. Stephen Humphreys, author of *Muawiyah Ibn Abi Sufyan: From Arabia to Empire* is an example of this syncretic methodological process of combining both Arabic and non-Arab accounts in examining early Islamic narratives, events and figures.<sup>251</sup> In his work, which is part of a series of texts edited by Patricia Crone, herself, he criticizes both Muslim and non-Muslim writing traditions, claiming that even among the early non-Arab writings only about three texts are actually contemporaneous while most others tend to copy historical events, but at a much later date.<sup>252</sup> What is important to note is that even during the Umayyad era, the era immediately succeeding that of the Rashidun Caliphs (632-661 CE), there was still no “*official or centralized control over this tradition, not even a generally agreed-upon master narrative.*”<sup>253</sup>

Chase Robinson, in *Empire and Elites after the Muslim Conquest* elaborates on the current state of the discourse stating that “*To write seventh- and eighth-century history we must come to terms with our sources. this means coming to terms with authors who wrote well after the events they describe.*”<sup>254</sup> Adopting a similar attitude is Nancy Khalek, author of *Damascus after the Muslim Conquest: Text and Image in Early Islam* who, while acknowledging a lack of contemporaneous Muslim accounts about Islam’s own history might make discerning it a challenge, it is not impossible and the Muslim sources cannot be completely ignored.<sup>255</sup> In it, she

<sup>250</sup> Ohlig, Luxenberg 2013, pp. 336-337

<sup>251</sup> Humphreys 2006, p. 15

<sup>252</sup> Humphreys 2006, p. 14

<sup>253</sup> Humphreys 2006, p. 15

<sup>254</sup> Robinson 2000, p. viii

<sup>255</sup> Khalek 2011, p. 10-11

draws from a number of texts that range from Palestinian and Syrian Christian writings, biographies, hadiths, and histories that were assembled by later Muslim writers, to help paint a picture of life in early Islamic Damascus.<sup>256</sup> Many of the texts she and others allude to, including, Humphreys, Nevo and Koren have been compiled by Robert Hoyland and Andrew Palmer in two separate books. Both scholars have put together works that provide translations of dozens of contemporaneous and/or near-contemporary writings (which were originally transcribed in a number of languages) from the first few centuries of the Islamic period.

In Robert Hoyland's *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* and Andrew Palmer's *The Seventh Century in West-Syrian Chronicles* readers are exposed to a plethora of writings that may reshape how we perceive Islam's origins in places like Palestine, Greater Syria, Mesopotamia, Egypt and Persia in the seventh through ninth centuries. However, as Humphreys and others have noted, it is important that we do not take the writings at face value simply because they may be contemporary or near-contemporary, as some of the writers may have had a political or religious axe to grind with the new rulers. In other words, there is a subjective bias in some of the texts which must not be ignored. Palmer, himself, acknowledges this in his introduction, arguing that the best of the texts are those that were composed in an 'objective style' which are mainly citing 'bare facts', rather than those composed of polemical narrations whose aims are to ideologically and morally appease members of the recorder's religious community.<sup>257</sup> He makes this argument because he is aware of the religious slants contained in many of the Syriac-language, Christian documents included in his book. This is not to say that all of the writings

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<sup>256</sup> Khalek 2011, p. 10-11

<sup>257</sup> Palmer 1992, p. xxix

contained a teleological twist, but many of them did and thus call some aspects of their integrity into question.

Robert Hoyland, however, was seemingly less critical of the source materials he presents, noting that more attention should be paid to texts that are external to the Muslim tradition but shows disappointment because “*this line of inquiry has not been pursued*” outside of Patricia Crone, Michael Cook’s, and a few others works (at the time that Hoyland’s book was published).<sup>258</sup>

In many of the revisionist works, it would be no exaggeration to assert that there lies, in many publications, an overreliance on and misuse of archaeology too alongside a complete dismissal of the sources that scholars had long-relied on in their construction of Islamic historiography. This approach seems radical, as it is hard to imagine that the existing Arabic-language documentary record was completely fabricated or, was not at least partly, rooted in some kind of historical reality. Critique of the late Islamic sources is necessary, but in indiscriminately dismissing the large corpus of Arabic materials, altogether, our assumptions about how history was conceptualized, recorded and transmitted over time (in socio-cultural contexts we may not fully understand yet) will also require a complete, paradigmatic shift.<sup>259</sup>

It is true that the revisionist approach holds some value, in that it factors archaeology and studies of material history as potential sources that may be applied towards the reconstruction of the rise of Islam or events surrounding its advent and development. However, the overdependence on objects that are already subjective in nature (due to the fact they are sometimes difficult to read, contextualize, or accurately attribute or date) can lead to radical positions that are based on either narrow interpretations or help to foster claims unsubstantiated

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<sup>258</sup> Hoyland 1997, p. 3

<sup>259</sup> Humphreys 2006, p. 15

or unsupported by other evidences. In the case of many of the revisionist cases made against the ‘traditional’ account about Islam’s ascent, their appears to be a strong, sometimes explicit, ideological axe-grinding and/or political agenda on the part of the authors that belies their works.

‘Hagarism’, and other works it later spawned, called for the complete dismissal of the Arab writings that reflect on the advent of the new religion while advocating a change in methodologies and a reliance on new sources that had not previously been considered. Crone and Cook’s work inspired a number of other vocal and mainly Western European scholars like Karl Heinz-Ohlig and Gerd-R. Puin, as well as Israeli scholars like Yehuda Nevo and Judith Koren, to not only challenge, but collectively denounce nearly every major cornerstone of Islamic history and views about its emergence, in unison.

Ironically, Edward Said’s ‘*Orientalism*’ (1978) and Crone and Cook’s ‘*Hagarism*’ (1977) were published within a year of each other. Orientalism was, at minimum, a robust rebuttal of the vitriolic, perpetual essentialism that has long dominated European conceptions of the Arabs, Muslims, and other ‘Orientals.’ Hagarism, published a year before Said’s work, contended that Arab writings from the Islamic period should play no role in the construction of Islamic historiography, but instead, the focus should be on using archaeology as well as the contemporary non-Arabic writings which they deem as having more textual integrity and historicity. Chase Robinson referred to Crone and Cook’s early works as, more or less, manifestations of ‘Orientalism.’<sup>260</sup> In agreement with Said’s insistence that Orientalism was driven by ideology as much as politics, Gabriele Marrancisi’s *The Anthropology of Islam*, contends that the Arabs and Muslims were ‘otherized’ by European writers (including both academics and politicians) and that “according to an ‘Orientalist’ perspective, Muslims not only

<sup>260</sup> See Chase Robinson’s forthcoming piece *Crone and the End of Orientalism*

*miss some historical events which have enhanced Europe, such as the enlightenment, but they also lack the capacity for representing (leave aside understanding) themselves.”*<sup>261</sup>

Hagarism (and some of Crone’s later books), it has been argued, represented an escalation of Orientalist thought, advocating characterizations of alleged incompetence, carelessness, and untrustworthiness of Arab and Muslim writers and their sources in the crafting of Islamic history, reinforcing long-held European views about the people of the Near East as unsophisticated and unoriginal (many of these views, as Walid Khalidi once noted, were rooted in the historical and turbulent political relations between Western Christendom and Islamic powers of the day). Edward Said, in *Orientalism*, reflected on the role of these political leanings (many of which are still prominent in public as well as in intellectual and political circles) in the dispensation of Orientalist myths as a weapon for the intellectual degradation of the Arab and Muslim peoples (regarded as *Mahometans* by Western writers for centuries)- and their methods of scholarship. He said:

*“The closeness between politics and Orientalism, or to put it more circumspectly, the great likelihood that ideas about the Orient drawn from Orientalism can be put to political use, is an important yet extremely sensitive truth. It raises questions about the pre-disposition towards innocence or guilt, scholarly disinterest or pressure-group complicity, in such fields as black or women's studies. It necessarily provokes unrest in one's conscience about cultural, racial, or historical generalizations, their uses, value, degree of objectivity, and fundamental intent. More than anything else, the political and cultural circumstances in which Western Orientalism has flourished draw attention to the debased position of the Orient or Oriental as an object of study.”*<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Marranci 2008, p. 33

<sup>262</sup> Said 1977, p. 96

Contrasting Said's refutation of long-held views on the peoples of 'the Orient' are the words of famed historian Bernard Lewis, Crone's dissertation advisor, who in 2008, claimed that *"Islam and Islamic values now have a level of immunity from comment and criticism in the Western world that Christianity has lost and Judaism has never had."*<sup>263</sup> This statement, of course, disregards the fact that tens of thousands of popular and 'best-selling' books, alongside a multitude of scholarly works, critical of all aspects of Islam and Islamic history have circulated heavily for centuries in much of the Western world.

Additionally, the Orientalist slants of many of the revisionist historiographical contributions that draw from archaeology, epigraphy, and numismatic studies are essentially neutralized, muddled by often, personal, blatant biases and intellectual vendettas (see Crone and Cook's 'infidel' quote and Prometheus Books reputation for providing a platform for books critical of Islam, Muhammad, and Muslims, etc.). In terms of methodologies, the revisionist works encourage re-analyzing long-held beliefs about early Islam, which is necessary and critical to Islamic Studies and historiography, but the highly politicized nature of their conclusions have made many such works unpopular among experts, especially in the specialty fields of early Islamic numismatics, Arabic epigraphy, and Islamic archaeology. Despite many of the problems associated with the conclusions laid out in many of the aforementioned revisionist works, I must credit Nevo and Koren's 2003 work for accelerating my interests in early Islamic numismatics, historiography, and archaeology. Still, while there is little doubt that sanctioned excavations and material culture analysis, epigraphy, and integration of contemporary non-Arabic sources are vital to a fuller understanding of the first century of Islamic rule, the exclusionary revisionist position is too radical, dogmatic in its essence, and far too dismissive to serve as a foundation for any broad analysis of early Islamic or Umayyad state formation.

<sup>263</sup> Korade (in the Congressional Quarterly) 4-27-2008

### 3. DEFINING 'ISLAMIC ARCHAEOLOGY' AND ITS ROLE IN SHAPING DISCOURSE

While this dissertation's aim is to provide an examination of the role of the written word as it relates to Arab and Umayyad state formation, its epigraphic focus and its reliance on inscribed material culture situates it within the broad confines of [Islamic] archaeology. Usage of the phrase 'Islamic Archaeology' may prompt those unfamiliar with the field to interpret it as denoting an Islamic version of 'Biblical Archaeology', where a vocal and well-funded group of archaeologists use the Jewish and Christian scriptures as literal historical documents to guide them in their efforts to corroborate events described in the Biblical narratives. Of course, this is not entirely what Biblical Archaeology is about, but Islamic Archaeology is neither analogous to it nor is it geographically constrained to a single region or rooted in the history of a single text (i.e. like the Quran). However, where Biblical archaeology has succeeded in forming a theoretical and methodological cohesiveness, Islamic archaeology is a much more eclectic enterprise devoid of spiritual dogma.

Marcus Milwright, in his 2006 article *Defining Islamic Archaeology: Some Preliminary Notes* actually takes exception to the concept of an 'Islamic archaeology', arguing that affixing the phrase 'Islamic'-which could refer to an incredibly vast array of diverse cultures, civilizations, and societies representing equally assorted and divergent cultural modalities, beliefs, and practices is hardly a fair and representative way to characterize the archaeology that is being conducted in lands 'Muslims' inhabited.<sup>264</sup> He also contends that 'Islamic archaeology', as it exists today, represents, not a unified field of intellectual inquiry consisting of scholars with shared perspectives on the development of Islam and Muslim communities over time and space but is mostly an isolated area of specialization dominated by disparate literature (predominantly

<sup>264</sup> Milwright 2006, pp. 1-11



field/excavation reports) from around the Muslim world that were rarely utilized to create broad theories or descriptions of social, economic, political, religious, or cultural development on the regional level.<sup>265</sup>

Timothy Insoll, author of *The Archaeology of Islam*, shares similar sentiments and posits that one of the primary catalysts for the disjuncture between those in the field of ‘Islamic Archaeology’ and seemingly more mainstream archaeologists (such as those studying the Classics, Mesoamerica, Persia, Mesopotamia and the pre-Islamic Near East) is that most of the ‘Islamic archaeologists’ are specialists in fields and departments other than archaeology.<sup>266</sup> As a result, there has been a major disconnect between ‘Islamic archaeology’ and other archaeological sub-fields that, for decades, impeded its ability to become a mainstream discipline and/or popular area of inquiry and research. Insoll further argued that highly specialized Islamic archaeological studies, in general, tended to suffer from a form of academic discrimination, with departments often sidelining or withholding studies on Islamic sites intentionally because of their more ‘exotic’ nature, making research difficult.<sup>267</sup> For example, in *Archaeologies of the Middle East: Critical Perspectives (2005)* edited by Susan Pollock and Reinhard Bernbeck, the authors acknowledge that they were faced with challenges over how inclusive this particular work should be, noting that “*there is little or no discussion of Iran or the Gulf States*” or of ‘Islamic Archaeology’, reinforcing the belief that the field suffers from blatant marginalization or collective disinterest on the part of some institutions and even some scholars.<sup>268</sup>

Despite these setbacks, within the last two decades or so, attempts have certainly been made with the hopes of bringing Islamic archaeology to the forefront. A plethora of excavation

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<sup>265</sup> Milwright 2006, p. 11

<sup>266</sup> Insoll 1999, p. 3

<sup>267</sup> Insoll 1999, p. 3

<sup>268</sup> Pollock and Bernbeck 2005, p. 3

reports, monographs, books, and articles on topics related to Islamic archaeology including works on Islamic art, coins, settlements, identity, architecture, and inscriptions, and other forms of material culture have been published and continue to with rapidity. Unfortunately, violence has wracked several Middle Eastern and Muslim-majority countries, making access to sites sometimes impossible and therefore retarding efforts to document the region's Islamic history in many ways.

A point worth raising is that so many texts that focus on Islamic material culture and art were not the works of archaeologists at all, but of specialists in fields such as history and art history, epigraphy, numismatics, architecture, and other fields, confirming what Insoll alluded to earlier about Islamic archaeology's underlying theoretical, methodological, and intellectual heterogeneity and diversity.

Whitcomb acknowledged this art-centered phenomenon in his introduction to the 2006 Oriental Institute Seminars work noting that Islamic archaeology has, historically, contributed to various other fields of intellectual inquiry, especially art, but has only recently begun to reach a wider and broader audience -which was also the point made by Stephen Vernoit in his 1997 work *The Rise of Islamic Archaeology* where he argued that interest and appreciation of Islamic art and architecture was lacking in the western world and therefore an archaeology of Muslim sites was 'delayed.' For example, *Qusayr 'Amra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria* (2004) by Garth Fowden which provides the first, major interpretation of the small Umayyad desert complex in eastern Jordan (one of the only still-standing Umayyad structures from the first half of the eighth century), focuses primarily on the 'art' found inside the various rooms of the building which is used to then draw conclusions about its usage by the Arab elites in Syria and by extension, the political decisions that went into defining power relations there. *The*

*Umayyads: The Rise of Islamic Art- Jordan* (2000) which was the result of a Department of Antiquities Project in Jordan headed by Fawwaz Al-Khraysheh provides a guide to early Islamic settlements, excavation sites and the material culture unearthed there and offers a richly illustrated archaeological overview of Umayyad material culture in Jordan from the seventh and eighth centuries.

However, while art and architecture tend to garner so much interest because of they are aesthetically-pleasing and though they are rightly situated within the purview of archaeological analysis, narrowly focusing on art alone provides a limited view of the nature of the state and/or cultural system in question. In *Changing Social Identity with the Spread of Islam: Archaeological Perspectives* (2004), multiple case studies are provided by several archaeologists aimed at constructing a broad, comparative archaeological analysis of material culture and architectural styles with the intent of identifying elements of social and cultural transformation and adaptation over time and space during the Muslim periods. This work stems, in part, from studies on settlement and urbanization of Syria-Palestine during the Umayyad era, offering interpretations about the formation, organization, and construction of early Muslim cities outside of Arabia.

Despite major, concentrated efforts aimed at crafting a truly Islam-focused archaeology that relies predominantly on standard and broad archeological methodologies, today, what the field currently constitutes is an eclectic amalgamation of scholars from a host of disciplines and departments who engage in a variety of activities and practices aimed at interpreting human social history in or at sites once part of the Muslim world (though a more precise and more operational definition is still lacking). As Milwright notes, archaeological practices include utilizing a broad range of technologies used to analyze, assess, and interpret archaeological sites

such as “satellite photography; geophysical survey; the reconstruction of the phasing of buildings through analysis of construction techniques (‘buildings archaeology’); and marine archaeology, the examination” which collectively represent, at least a portion of the methodologies employed in Islamic archaeological contexts.<sup>269</sup>

The growing number of works dedicated to the material culture of Islamic polities and societies indicates that while Islamic archaeology is a growing field, the textual materials available tend to be focus on specific sites or micro-regions, art, or focus on particular countries, only. Whitcomb offers a definition of sorts, a description of what the field’s broad value asserting that “Islamic archaeology represents a process which is specifically indigenous to the Middle East and forms an essential part of the identification of heritage practice in these countries.”<sup>270</sup>

Whether or not a cohesive ideological superstructure would help to raise the profile of this field is yet to be seen, but it is certain that its practitioners continue to make serious contributions, accelerating its foray into mainstream archaeological discourses while providing material useful in the construction of a broad reassessment of the cultures associated with Islam, diachronically.

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<sup>269</sup> Milwright 2010, p. 3

<sup>270</sup> Whitcomb 2010 (Harrassowitz Verlag), p. 3

## CHAPTER 4 WRITING, LITERACY AND THE RISE OF THE ARAB MUSLIM

### POLITY

*Chapter Four provides an in-depth examination of writing and literacy as they are understood in relation to social contexts in antiquity, alongside an introduction to the historical developments of both the Arabic and Arabic-related languages and the emergence of a distinct Arabic script deriving, in part, from studies on the extant epigraphic record. This chapter offers an analysis of the origins of the cursive Arabic script and its evolution across time and space and delving into its utility as a cultural tool beginning as a Christian ecclesiastical feature of the sixth century before transforming into a conveyer of Islamic political expression in the seventh century.*

*“Forgive my Lord the one who wrote this document and the one who recites (and) afterwards says Amen, Lord of the Worlds” –Anonymous Arabic graffito from the Negev Desert<sup>271</sup>*

#### 1. LITERACY: THEORIES AND DEBATES

Before venturing into the role of writing in this newly-found Arab polity, a discussion of the theoretical frameworks and the intellectual foundations on which writing and literacy studies were born out of is warranted. Like early cultural and social anthropological works whose aims were to make sense of local, regional, and global social and cultural phenomenon and whose pioneering authors attached themselves to, formed, or advocated evolutionary models of the ‘human state’, so too did linguists and their academic counterparts who pursued studies of writing systems and literacy. Much of the early work centered on understanding the origins and current state of literacy was interested in trying to trace and classify the developmental process of writing as having occurred in defined stages. And like early cultural anthropological pieces, studies on language also suffered from the same Eurocentric biases that were so rampant during the first half of the twentieth century.

A prime example of this is I. J. Gelb’s *A Study of Writing*, which provides a conceptual framework that examines writing within evolutionary parameters and offers a relatively

<sup>271</sup> Nevo and Koren (2003) p. 371

straightforward typology of writing systems as well as how writing, as a communicative system of expression, representation, and symbolism developed over time.<sup>272</sup> Like the cultural evolutionist models presented by early anthropologists like Lewis H. Morgan and E.B. Tylor, Gelb's work provides a structural examination of writing systems that associates increased social functions alongside, what he deems, as enhancements to writing.<sup>273</sup> Although Gelb is often credited with being a talented epigrapher who partook in the decipherment of Hittite hieroglyphs, his linear model of the evolution of writing is today, regarded, as overly simplistic and outdated.<sup>274</sup> Like Gelb, German Hittitologist Johannes Friedrich applied great significance to the decipherment of scripts, praising the ('western') decipherers far more than the inventors of the scripts they deciphered.<sup>275</sup> Given the contemporaneous attitudes and ethnocentric academic cultures that dominated academia, especially the social sciences, such a position can hardly be viewed as revelation.

Attempting to draw practical and applicable theoretical materials from models is clearly frustrating. Gelb discounted the literary and epigraphic achievements of many a people including Native Americans, Mayans, and the Chinese- all of whom produced their own systems of writing and/or record-keeping- and argues that either they borrowed their writing system from elsewhere through some sort of diffusive process or that the writing they employed should barely be considered writing.

Today, such convictions are not entertained in the mainstream discourse, except as reminders of the intellectual transformation that the field has undergone over the past seventy years. Archaeologist Michael Coe, author of *Breaking the Maya Code*, pulling very few punches,

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<sup>272</sup> Gelb 1952, v, 1

<sup>273</sup> Gelb 1952, p. 238

<sup>274</sup> Pollock and Bernbeck 2005, p. 317

<sup>275</sup> Friedrich 1957, p. vii-x

accuses Gelb of being a highly ethnocentric ‘hyperevolutionist’ who felt that non-European peoples were incapable of devising their own systems of writing, downplaying their intellectual capabilities.<sup>276</sup> Coe also notes that Gelb applied a social evolutionary taxonomic model aimed at classifying writing systems into developmental stages which begins with ‘picture writing’ and ends with writing ‘phonetically’- which, for him, represents the apex of written language.<sup>277</sup> Jack Goody criticized this rather linear and oversimplified, and mostly diametric approach as restrictive and, therefore, troubling in his *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*.<sup>278</sup> Archaeologists, too, similarly proposed social and cultural typologies that were rooted in neo-evolutionist thought, in some instances, laboring under the impression that, for example, ancient non-state level societies were antiquated relics<sup>279</sup> and that long-held beliefs about the roles of material culture in ancient communities as bound by the notion that genetic and biological determinants are the primary guides for technological innovation “*constrain its ability to move beyond measurement and prediction in discussing meaning, agency, and history.*”<sup>280</sup>

One theme found in neo-evolutionary archaeology, particularly in the 1960’s and 1970’s, was that ideology helped drive the transition of past peoples through developmental phases marked by technological advancement (i.e. the transition from stone to metalwork) and sociopolitical achievements (i.e. the passage from chiefdom to state to empire),<sup>281</sup> but such archetypal gradations are no longer popular, nor useful models for interpreting social, political and economic phenomenon in history. Archaeology, as a scientific mode of inquiry, still often finds itself on the offensive, struggling to position itself and define its purpose, its qualities, and

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<sup>276</sup> Coe 1992, p. 26

<sup>277</sup> Coe 1992, p. 26

<sup>278</sup> Goody 1977, p.1

<sup>279</sup> Yoffee. 2005, p. 19

<sup>280</sup> Hodder and Hutson 2004, p. 41

<sup>281</sup> Hodder and Hutson 2004, p. 23

its utilitarian function in broader intellectual arenas. Some have even argued that archaeology should become a more ‘pragmatic’ enterprise that must come more to terms with the subjectivity of its data-based theoretical assumptions about human behavior.<sup>282</sup>

While the ideas of Gelb and Friedrich have long been refuted and countered by fellow linguists, tragically, there is still a major sociological (and historical) current in the form of Orientalism that persists in conversations about non-European writing in other disciplines, especially those focused on cultural history and Islam, in particular. This has been the case with the growing political commentary and scholarly attacks on Islam, as a faith and as a value system, the Quran, as doctrine and text, and Islamic history and historiography, as areas of intellectual inquiry, some of which will be addressed in the next chapter.

Returning to Goody, despite acknowledging the problems associated with hierarchical, unobstructed developmental explanations for how literacy is attained and understood, he nevertheless, accepts that such a model of social evolution is, in fact, a reality within the discourse and that, from the beginning, this framework served as a foundation for what he calls some of the ‘*best sociology*.’<sup>283</sup> He goes as far as to imply that comparative studies, almost automatically incite discussion of evolution and development.<sup>284</sup> Contemporary epigraphers and paleographers have mostly refrained from devising typological schemes in which to present the trajectories of writing systems and literacy in the ancient realm although we do see such studies more appropriately applicable to seemingly less abstract processes such as in pottery development.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Preucel and Mrozowski 2011, p. 34

<sup>283</sup> Goody 1977, p. 3

<sup>284</sup> Goody 1977, p.2

<sup>285</sup> Rollston 2010, p. 5



Several more recent works on literacy have adopted and interweaved a multitude of perspectives, discourses, and disciplines in an attempt to more sufficiently address a broader range of questions and ideas related to literacy and society. Scholars from several fields have reached across academic disciplinary lines and have integrated methodologies and theoretical principles external or foreign to their specialized areas including, but not limited to social scientists like Maurice Bloch, Sylvia Scribner, Michael Cole, and Brian Street to name a few.

Brian Street, Jack Goody's academic counterpart (or more accurately, his nemesis), describes Goody's perspective on literacy which is rooted in the idea that literacy, autonomously, impacts people cognitively at the individual level, but can also alter and affect social organization, too, irrespective of the historical circumstances that led to their initial illiteracy, as representing the 'autonomous' model of literacy.<sup>286</sup> Street argues that this model, which he believes, falsely portrays social intellectual suppositions as somehow culturally ubiquitous and that literacy positively affects societies in broad ways, suffers from a Eurocentric bias that universalizes social and cultural phenomenon and treats literacy's impact on them equally and neutrally.<sup>287</sup>

Such attitudes undoubtedly present problems for modern-day epigraphers, especially as they related to discussions over how we think people in antiquity behaved, thought, and organized their world. Epigraphers and archaeologists would be wary to assume that there is a disjuncture between writing and the social, economic, or political infrastructure from which it emerged and therefore un-inclined to accept the autonomous line of reasoning to apply to writing

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<sup>286</sup> Street 1984, pp. 1-11

<sup>287</sup> Street 1984, p. 29

in ancient spheres. Baines asserted that “*writing in turn no doubt affected social organization, although the extent and manner in which its earliest forms did so are quite uncertain.*”<sup>288</sup>

Like Street, cultural and religious historian Walter Ong also agrees that literacy is not a neutral, inconsequential social practice that not only affects culture but that it is as equally as affected and rooted in existing cultural modalities.<sup>289</sup> These pre-existing orally rich, complex social and cultural systems and structures need not be ignored, argues Ong, as they were paramount to the emergence of reading and writing in the first place. In Brian Street's ethnolinguistic study in Iran, we see the existence of another type of linguistic phenomenon that shares some commonalities with that of Goody's ‘restricted literacy.’ In Cheshmeh, a northeastern Iranian town, local Shi'ite Iranians students who attended Islamic religious schools (often referred, outside of the Arab World, as *madrassas*) were instructed in the Arabic alphabet (and only sometimes Farsi) using the Quran as a study text, thus creating a group of students who were well-versed in how to read Islam's holy book through memory and familiarity with the written Arabic script but who were not able to converse in or understand Arabic while simultaneously mostly illiterate in their own native language. Street regarded this ‘*mix of oral and literate modes of communication*’ that consisted of instruction in Quranic Arabic alongside the scholar's religious ideologies and philosophies ‘*maktab literacy.*’<sup>290</sup>

In ‘maktab literacy’, the students acquired various oral and literacy skills, albeit unevenly, but usually never attained full literacy in either Arabic or Farsi. This did not prevent such individuals from developing and utilizing certain aspects of their literacy and transferring them and functionalizing them in other social or economic environments where the conventions of writing took on new forms and sometimes mimicking existing forms of authority and power

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<sup>288</sup> Baines 2007, p. 117

<sup>289</sup> Ong 1982, pp. 3-9

<sup>290</sup> Street 1984, p.132

when needed, especially in commerce.<sup>291</sup> What Street is describing may very well be applied towards the situation of the Bedouins of Arabia who were exposed to multiple scripts and languages and who, because they were nomadic, had to negotiate social relations sometimes using an adopted script or a contextually-dependent, socially-conducive form of literacy. Their societies, largely on the move, likely prevented them from acquiring any real, functional form of literacy and therefore maintained a strong oral tradition that they took with them wherever they went.

Orality, however, was and is still an effective and essential form of communication (among the *Bedu*, for example), even in societies where there is widespread literacy in one script and one language. MacDonald noted how in the 1970's, the Rwala Bedouins of Jordan resisted government/military-sponsored schooling out of a concern that learning read and write would stunt their traditional, economic way of life as camel-herders and ultimately chip away at the time required to maintain long-standing cultural habits and traditions.<sup>292</sup> Inhabitants of the Swedish countryside are another example of an oral enclave in a largely literate society, as nearly eighty percent of the rural population can read and only ten percent can write.<sup>293</sup> Street would agree with Ong, but while disagreeing with Goody's seemingly crass analysis of literacy's effects on social practices, he offers a vastly different perspective that promotes the notion that literacy is, in fact, not neutral but a process whose effects are dependent on varying social and cultural contexts and conditions.<sup>294</sup> Bedouin societies in the deserts of the ancient Near East also may have seen little use for writing and the fact that "*in a tribal society there are distinct disadvantages to the use of writing as a means of record. At its most basic, a tribal society is one*

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<sup>291</sup> Street 1984, p. 153

<sup>292</sup> Macdonald 2005 (Papers in Honour of Alan R. Millard), p. 47

<sup>293</sup> Macdonald 2009, p. 71

<sup>294</sup> Street 1984, p. 43

*in which all social and political relationships are conceived, expressed, and explained in genealogical terms*”, thus negating the critical need for literacy and written culture.<sup>295</sup>

Street dubbed this perspective the ‘ideological’ model of literacy and claimed that the practice of reading and writing is rooted in particular epistemological, ontological foundations and specific cultural practices as well as social forms and that his model of literacy acknowledges the importance of power dynamics, relations, and structures, whereby facilitating an environment of constant social contestation between resistance and authority.<sup>296</sup> In essence, some literate practices are motivated and directed by some form of ideology or worldview and are almost never ‘neutral’ or ‘autonomous.’<sup>297</sup>

Linguistic and cultural anthropologists have not been the only ones interested in studying the issues of writing and literate practices across societies and cultural systems. For example, psychologists Sylvia Scribner’s and Michael Cole’s 1999 anthropological and ethnographic work on the Vai people- a largely Muslim society in Liberia that utilized multiple languages, scripts and literacies, even developing their own unique script, revealed that literacy, in and of itself, did not provide cognitive edge or notable psychological benefits to literate peoples over non-literates- something that Street would not be surprised by.<sup>298</sup> Rather, the way in which literacy is used is more crucial to the way societies develop and not simply whether or not literacy exists.<sup>299</sup>

Maurice Bloch, whose focus has often been on the ways that contemporary anthropology and studies on literacy have converged, shares some similarities with Scribner and Cole’s work. Bloch is particularly concerned with the interconnectivity and relationships between, for example, things like memory, the transmission of knowledge (which is only sometimes written),

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<sup>295</sup> Macdonald 2005, p. 47

<sup>296</sup> Street 1984, p. 43

<sup>297</sup> Street 1984, p.1

<sup>298</sup> Scribner and Cole 1999, p. 241

<sup>299</sup> Scribner and Cole 1999, p. 234

and social events and thus asserts that literacy is not the qualifier for such phenomena.<sup>300</sup> He argues, to some degree, that literacy is important, but overvalued in anthropological, psychological, and linguistic discourses because concepts and conceptualizations, and logic, for example, are essentially permissible even without writing.<sup>301</sup> Like Street, Macdonald, Wogan, Bloch, Scribner and Cole, and some of the other scholars previously discussed, Bender argues that *'the study of writing is also the study of culture, history, and power'* so that studies of literacy cannot be divorced from broader epistemological realms or spheres of inquiry.<sup>302</sup> It is, in other words, impossible to divorce the practices of reading and writing from the social arrangement and cultural milieus that spawned, facilitated, and/or maintained them.

## **2. THE BIRTH OF THE ARABIC ORTHOGRAPHY AND ITS POWER AS POLITICAL CAPITAL**

Writing, since its inception, has been inextricably linked to social forms, cultural modalities, and conceptions of the self. Before that, language, itself, was the primary conveyer of such commentary and on another level, so was material culture. Writing is an arbitrary exercise, an adaptation to a socialized world meant to ossify the conventions of language designed to communicate thought and expression. Its application and appositeness to the social order in which the practice is found is subjected to the nuances of that system, reifying power structures and often operationalizing them in the form of political currency.

Literacy, which requires some level of both reading and writing, but which can be acquired separately, cannot be divorced from the social, religious, economic, political, and cultural conditions and circumstances in which it exists and studies aimed at trying to grasp the

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<sup>300</sup> Bloch 1998, p. 14

<sup>301</sup> Bloch 1998, p. 14

<sup>302</sup> Bender 2002, p. 25

functions of literacy often highlight a multitude of facts external to it in order to make sense of what kinds and why certain literacy choices are made by the community in question.

It is essential, then, that we consider a number of socio-historical factors crucial to current understandings of the functions, uses, and effects of writing, as well as literacy in the context of the ancient state before focusing on the Umayyad polity, specifically. For the archaeologist, historian, and epigrapher interested in the role of writing in state formation, the written record provides glimpses into the ways people related to and conceptualized power dynamics, authority, identity, social relations, and by extension, how they influenced or impacted the ways in which societies were organized and governed. The discovery of new and more texts as well as the improved access to the written record has proven beneficial to scholars, facilitating an acknowledgment of the great diversity found, not only in the content of the ancient written record, but in the functions and materials in which writings were recorded.<sup>303</sup>

Writing, a graphical representation of some aspects of spoken language, is a technology and like every technological innovation, people, processes, and structures undergo alterations and changes as a result of the implementation of that technology. Jack Goody, in his 1986 book *The Logic of Writing and Organization of Society*, using religious writings as an example, posited that literacy has an undeniable and forceful impact on sociopolitical development and, consequently, on the way in which societies are ordered.<sup>304</sup> Thus, it was writing that often provided a platform for sometimes religious, cultural, or political homogeneity within the parameters of a given community and which allowed for the creation of states, the unification of their sometimes culturally disparate populations, as well as their expansion into new geographic and cultural realms.

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<sup>303</sup> Rollston 2010, p. 81

<sup>304</sup> Goody 1986, pp. xii, 20-26

In fact, he asserts that writing collectively, albeit unevenly, impacts the development of social organization and has the power to advocate the sovereignty or ‘autonomy’ of social and political units, especially major institutions of the state such as its judicial branch, its economic and religious structures, and other aspects of the administrative apparatus associated with political complexes.<sup>305</sup>

Ancient states and their developmental trajectories were undoubtedly affected by writing, but in ways that scholars still do not agree on. Many in the field see writing as a mechanism for stratification at the state level, given that the technology was, for the most part, reserved for servants of the state and, therefore, positioned higher on the socioeconomic ladder. As Wang noted in *Writing and the Ancient State*, thinkers like Claude Levi-Strauss and Jack Goody regarded writing as a tool designed to create and maintain certain hierarchies and spheres of exclusion, empowering the state by allowing them to devise monopolies over institutions, which was facilitated by writing. Wang argues that many activities and uses associated with writing led to specialized education, which, in turn, led to the ‘*perpetuation of the state, itself*’ which was further facilitated by the construction of ‘elite culture’- some of which was a bi-product of writing.<sup>306</sup>

Within these theoretical parameters, the level (or levels) of literacy within a given state or polity would be major forces in the development and organization of society. For example, in the Greco-Roman world, it is unlikely that literacy reached any more than ten percent of the population at any point in time.<sup>307</sup> There is little reason to believe that the period of Late Antiquity in the Near East- an era characterized by Byzantine and Sasanian decline and Arab and Islamic ascent fared much differently, given orthographic innovations in the late sixth century

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<sup>305</sup> Goody 1986, pp. 20-26

<sup>306</sup> Wang 2014, p. 6

<sup>307</sup> Bodel 2001, p. 15

had not yet translated into a language of governance or prestige before the Umayyad period (under Abd al-Malik).

Further, social and political development at the state level is believed to be intimately tied to an enhanced level of administrative sophistication, and so writing materials must also be abundant and accessible to a larger, literate society.<sup>308</sup> In other words, widespread literacy is not possible without the proper writing paraphernalia and without such materials, popular literacy cannot be attained, and by extension, neither can large-scale political structures. In the parched, arid deserts of the Near East of fourteen centuries ago, writing stationary and accouterments were likely not always readily available as limited resources would have strained their ability to keep extensive records or produce many lengthy literary accounts.

### 3. LITERACY AND THE ARABS BEFORE ISLAM

In the ancient Near East, pre-Islamic Arab tribes who prided themselves on memorizing and reciting lengthy *qasidas* (a form of monorhyme, Arabic poem) and other, often long, structured poems may have viewed writing as a personal shortcoming and in some ways, writing rivaled memory.<sup>309</sup> Assessing and analyzing the large corpus of pre-Islamic inscriptions in the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula prior to the birth of Islam, as well as in modern-day Jordan and Syria revealed to epigrapher M.C.A. Macdonald that while it is clear that some form or level of literacy was achieved in some ancient Arab societies, the forms of most of the existing inscriptions, which are often short and formulaic, meant that literacy was likely limited as were its functions.<sup>310</sup> The tens of thousands of inscriptions in several different Arabic-language scripts including ones in *Safaitic*, *Thamudic*, *Hismaic*, *Nabataean*, *Dedanitic*, *Lihyanite* and various other peninsular orthographies found littering the rugged mountains of Arabia and Syria-

<sup>308</sup> Goody 1986, pp. 136-137

<sup>309</sup> Macdonald 2009, pp. 75

<sup>310</sup> Macdonald 2009, pp. 81



Palestine mainly consist of graffiti containing either proper names or concise spiritual blessings and invocations for protection. Some are funerary, others dedicatory, but on a whole, most tend to be simple, succinct texts. The lack of lengthy inscriptions and the dominance of short ones likely imply that writing was still associated with religious expression, a tool to connect with the transcendent, and therefore of some immaterial and symbolic utility (i.e. magical).

Further, the lack of universal standardization in writing before Islam indicates that there was likely no formal instruction on how to write and thus, by extension, no centralized institutions that directed social arrangements, relations, or organization in the pre-Islamic Near East.<sup>311</sup> This is exemplified by the fact that pre-Islamic Safaitic inscriptions followed no particular course of direction and were read *boustrophedon*, which may be telling about the socio-political environment its writers belonged to and the likelihood of a lack of bureaucratic mechanisms tasked with facilitating literacy (i.e. a lack of schooling). Similarly, little literary evidence has been uncovered alluding to any institutions tasked with the instruction of Arabic for the populations of the Levant or Mesopotamia in the seventh and eighth centuries during Umayyad or early Abbasid rule.<sup>312</sup>

However, despite this seemingly ambiguous linguistic and epigraphic reality, one must not presume that the existence of literate culture implied a phasing out or obsolescence of oral culture in the ancient world, including in ancient Arabia. It is much more likely that both existed concurrently and served different functions. It is also arguable that literacy and writing were not meant to supplant orality or simply reproduce speech<sup>313</sup>, but could be applied to make oral traditions permanent, cementing them into the fabric of the culture for the long-term.

<sup>311</sup> Macdonald 2009, pp. 80-81, 89

<sup>312</sup> al-Sharkawi 2010, p. 7

<sup>313</sup> Sampson 1985, p. 26 and Houston 2012, p. 105

The general lack of long Arabic texts prior to the seventh century CE bearing considerable literary substance has prompted epigraphers to re-consider what literacy meant in these contexts too. Because there is no comparable, extant epigraphic corpus on portable materials like bone, animal-skins, and papyrus from the pre-Islamic period, it becomes tempting to comment on what this potentially could imply about the range of literacy. Ancient writers certainly understood that writing on stone reflected a more permanent testament of their self-expression and the process of engraving and chiseling words into rock faces was a much more arduous task that required more energy and precision than writing on parchment and other perishable writing materials. This is likely why such texts are generally short (with several exceptions). However, the lack of texts in more mobile forms (on materials that would have long disappeared after use and at the hands of the environment) should not simultaneously imply a lack of literacy and it is less clear whether or not writing and literacy were used as a tool to augment conceptualizations of a social order among the transient Bedouin of Arabia who clearly wrote.

In fact, in the dry, desert environment of the Arabian Peninsula and much of Syria-Palestine which is also dominated by semi-arid desert and rugged mountains, where writing materials were small in number and subjected to a harsh climate, (mass) literacy was almost certainly a daunting task.<sup>314</sup> In one documented instance in the late twentieth century, literacy was even met with resistance by Arab Bedouins and the process of becoming literate has, at times, been viewed as economically and socio-culturally disruptive. For example, for the *Rwala* Bedouins of Jordan, parents prefer that their children learn how to herd sheep and camels rather than spend their days in the classroom learning to read and write.<sup>315</sup> Sheep and camel-herding

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<sup>314</sup> Macdonald 2009, p.75

<sup>315</sup> Macdonald 2009, p. 51

serves as the economic base of Bedouin society and has been for millennia, preserved, as an integral aspect of Bedouin life.

Introducing schools aimed at creating a literate class of nomadic Bedouins that live in the desert was mainly a failure by Jordanian administrators and educators as it posed a threat to Bedouin culture, tradition, and economics.<sup>316</sup> Its utility, in this instance, was downplayed by the perception that learning to read or write was detrimental to the economic and social arrangements that the Rwala wanted to maintain and thus, rejected writing, believing it could effectively re-orient and re-arrange power dynamics in their society.

It is nearly impossible, at this juncture, to gauge how profoundly impactful literacy was on pre-Islamic Arab communities, both settled and tribal (and those who occupied a middle ground between these two modes of life) and to know, with any certainty, how the technology transformed their social lives. Unlike in other parts of the pre-Islamic Near East, where there existed major, and often powerful, institutional structures tasked with administration and education in places like Mesopotamia, Persia, Egypt, and Israel writing was often generally, albeit not exclusively, restricted to a prestigious scribal social class tied to the bureaucracy. For example, scribes, who were usually instruments of the state or of specific, influential institutions, were exempt from engaging in the day-to-day physical labor that a significant portion of the population was subjected to.<sup>317</sup> Social organization in ancient states, where writing did exist, was almost certainly tied to literacy practices, unlike the Bedouin populations who lived on the peripheries of the settled, urban areas and who lacked defined institutional structures. This lack

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<sup>316</sup> Macdonald 2009, p. 51

<sup>317</sup> Rollston 2010, p. 85

of centralization and/or institutions stemmed, in part, from the lack of resources in the rugged Hejaz where there was little agriculture.<sup>318</sup>

In the old states found in Egypt and Mesopotamia, where writing systems were pre-alphabetic with an expansive catalog of characters, writing helped to either form or reinforce social hierarchies in that the ability to write was an exhausting task relegated to a specified class of scribes who could essentially re-define social boundaries.<sup>319</sup> To clarify, and this was internally noted and acknowledged by literate Egyptians and Mesopotamians themselves, professions which required physical labor were beneath that of the scribe as was noted in the ancient Egyptian text *Satire of the Trades*<sup>320</sup>. A similar literary phenomenon is found in the Biblical Hebrew texts which tend to almost always link the scribe to royalty or to political or religious institutions, and, by default, ‘elite society.’<sup>321</sup> If the positionality of the scribe within the broader social environment of a given place or state imply certain types of social relations, power dynamics, and the ways in which societies were organized, the inscriptions and texts left behind by both scribes and other non-scribal literate members of society also provide us with clues about both the functions and potential audiences of the writing, itself. One should not be inclined to believe that texts and inscriptions had massive audiences or that a sizeable corpus of written media implied mass literacy. It has been suggested that literacy levels in Mesopotamia and Egypt did not exceed one percent, while in ancient Greece, ten percent of the population may have been literate to some degree while Niditch notes, and rightfully so, that the difference between pre-

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<sup>318</sup> Donner 2010, p. 28

<sup>319</sup> Rollston 2010, p. 92

<sup>320</sup> Rollston 2010, p. 87

<sup>321</sup> Rollston 2010, p. 88

alphabetic and alphabetic writing systems certainly had a profound effect on who and how many people acquired the skill of reading or writing.<sup>322</sup>

Many epigraphers and archaeologists reject the notion that mass literacy ever existed in ancient states because there is little evidence to suggest that there was large-scale formal schooling in which to acquire such a skill. It is unreasonable, scholars like John Bodel say, to assume that a singular conception and level of literacy existed across a vast social plane at any given historical period, anywhere.

Baines, too, noted that although inscriptions became more abundant in Pharaonic Egypt with the passing of time, this did not necessarily correlate with newly found or additional uses for writing.<sup>323</sup> Li Feng and David Branner in *Writing and Literacy in Early China*, argued that literacy, as a social practice is encoded with a variety of social, cultural, and political markers of meaning, symbolism, ideas and more, thus complicating the process of contextualizing the written record.<sup>324</sup> In ancient Egypt, the relationship between literacy and social organization appears to be more clear-cut and observable. In the case laid out in *Visual and Written Culture in Ancient Egypt*, writing and art, as manifestations of socio-political expression, were intimately tied to broader Egyptian political culture.<sup>325</sup>

For Baines, written and visual culture were of great societal and bureaucratic importance as they collectively conveyed particular meanings about the intricacies of social relations at a given time and place.<sup>326</sup> He regards both art and writing as political tools of the ruling class, the King being at the apex of Egyptian society, that granted him and his elitist cohorts to control

<sup>322</sup> Niditch (ed. by Knight) 1996. p. 39 citing the works of Harris (1989), Larsen (1989), and Baines and Eyre (1983)

<sup>323</sup> Baines 2007, p. 13

<sup>324</sup> Feng and Branner 2011, p. 5

<sup>325</sup> Baines 2007, p.3

<sup>326</sup> Baines 2007, p. 3

access to particular social, religious, and political domains. He dubs this fixture ‘decorum’- a precept of pictorial-epigraphic representations embedded in specific forms of social order whose visual qualities and components instigate negotiations over social relations. To Baines, although the primary intention of Egyptian decorum is not to serve as an impetus for the facilitation and reinforcement of hierarchies, it undoubtedly had that effect considering each representation of written and visual culture is encoded with symbols, conventions, and characters that demonstrate the forms of relations between institutions and those that do or do not have access to them.<sup>327</sup>

All visual culture, including texts, inscriptions, the monuments or features on which they are inscribed, their location and the style of script, collectively reflect kinds of communal arrangements and contexts for which to situate social organization. Bodel, similarly, asserts that writing not only ‘activates speech’ but that inscriptions, themselves, embody only part of what the scribes and institutions that they belong to, are trying to relay to their audience.<sup>328</sup> The rest of the message is embodied in all of those other aspects that the inscription and or artistic representation is situated in- the physical, geographic, material, etc.

Archaeological and epigraphic analysis of the written/visual art of ancient Egypt reveals that decorum was not a stagnant component of institutional authority but rather an evolving process of re-defining social boundaries. Baines notes that the symbols, expressions, and artistic representations in them changed across time and coincided with ideological shifts in both religion and political orientation. For example, in some public institutions, the decorum often excluded religiously explicit content at some points in Egyptian history, while as time progressed, visual representations on non-royal monuments gradually began to include

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<sup>327</sup> Baines 2007, pp. 3, 14-18

<sup>328</sup> Bodel 2001, p. 25

depictions of Egyptian deities- something which was previously uncommon and, therefore, evidentiary of a change in the religio-political orientation of the state.<sup>329</sup>

Unlike other Near Eastern communities and civilizations, in less urban, less settled parts of Arabia (particularly in much of the Hejaz), literacy's role in reinforcing social or political hierarchies among tribal and Bedouin Arab communities was likely minimal when compared to the effects of literate culture in more cosmopolitan states that surrounded them. In other historical eras and geographic realms (i.e. ancient Sumer, Assyria, Babylon, Israel, Egypt, Persia, etc.), social organization was more affected by literacy and the technical skills that were appropriated for writing served as a way to arrange, define and perpetuate social categories, particularly in states with strong, centralized bureaucracies. This is not to say that writing was useless among Arab tribes of the region (some of whom were sedentary, others more migratory) who constituted one cross-section of the population (there were several Arab settlements, and other evidences of sedentary Arab populations under the Ghassanids in Syria-Palestine prior to the Islamic conquests as Whitcomb has illustrated<sup>330</sup>). It would not be incorrect to assume, though, that for the Arabs of the Near East, writing, as a technology and communicative practice, was disattached from a recognizable body politic, i.e. a cohesive citizenry, and therefore few, if any, governing bodies could exploit writing and literate elements within that community on a broad scale.

Despite the nomadic character of a sizeable segment of Arab populations during the pre-Islamic period in the Near East, MacDonald believed that *“literacy seems to have been extraordinarily widespread, not only among the settled populations but also among the nomads. Indeed the scores of thousands of graffiti on the rocks of the Syro-Arabian desert suggest that it*

<sup>329</sup> Baines 2007, pp. 18-21

<sup>330</sup> Whitcomb (ed. by Szuchman) 2009, p. 241

*must have been almost universal among the latter.*"<sup>331</sup> Of course, literacy, here, likely refers to the skill in its most minimal form, which is mainly the replication of symbols in a memorized order much like the way a child can write their name before ever learning the alphabet. By 'universal', he is likely implying that the practice of basic writing skills (i.e. etching one's name into stone or carving a short formulaic inscription into the rock) were almost certainly prevalent among some of the region's 'Arab' populations (that is, societies that spoke a form of Arabic) as is evidenced by so many rock-carved texts.

While the number of Umayyad inscriptions and public texts pales in comparison to those produced by its most immediate predecessors, the Byzantines or Sasanians, this is mainly due to the polity's short lifespan. Despite the quantitatively unremarkable number of documented Umayyad texts, public or otherwise, from Syria-Palestine, the increasingly urbanized Arab societies of Bilad al-Shamm saw both Islam and the Arabic script as potent proliferators of Arab identity and played a major role in the invention of a new-found sense of political pride which also helped to facilitate the creation of new political classes (i.e. the caliph and his bureaucrats, the tribes, the Syrian soldiery, and the ulama) and that saw Arab Muslims as hegemonic. Both innovations, the advancement of written Arabic and doctrinal Islam would mold the socio-linguistic, orthographic, and literary landscapes immensely and which, some would say, ultimately brought the Arabs onto the stage of world history.

#### **4. THE ARABS AND THEIR LANGUAGE: ARAB WRITING FROM PRE-ISLAMIC TIMES TO THE DAWN OF ISLAM**

The terms 'Arab' and 'Arabic', as a language and a people(s) are inextricably linked. In pre-Islamic times, the Arabs represented an amalgam of disparate populations and communities,

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<sup>331</sup> Macdonald (in Woodard) 2008, p.179



both settled and nomadic that lived throughout the Near East and who are attested to, in writing, as early as the 9<sup>th</sup> c. BCE.

Arabic (*al-‘arabiyya*), as a language, belongs to the Central Semitic language group and, like its Semitic counterparts, is based on a tri-consonantal root system.<sup>332</sup> In this system, three consonants typically form the basis for a multitude of interrelated words. For example, the Arabic consonants that make up the word-phrase “to write” are *k-t-b* (*kataba*), but upon shifting the placement of the vowels, you are able to create related words like *kitab* (book), *katib* (writer), *maktab* (office), *maktaba* (library) and so on. The Arabic alphabet consists of twenty-eight letters while, as Bateson points out, “the Arabic writing system is in many ways a fair reflection of linguistic facts of the language.”<sup>333</sup> In other words, Arabic words are written almost exactly as they are pronounced. The Arabic verb morphology is represented by *C1aC2VC3a* in its perfect, base form<sup>334</sup> while employing an SVO (subject-noun-object) order.<sup>335</sup> Moreover, “gender and number are obligatory categories in both the verb and the noun systems in Arabic” while most Arabic nouns have “broken plurals.”<sup>336</sup> One primary feature that separates Arabic from other related languages is usage of the definite article ‘*al*’ instead of *h-/hn* as is the case in Arabic’s sister languages, Aramaic and Hebrew, as well as many earlier forms of Arabic-related languages and/or dialects in the pre-Islamic Near East.<sup>337</sup>

Like all languages, Arabic, in spoken form(s) and as a writing system, endured a lengthy period of uneven and even haphazard development. While scholars still debate the genesis of Arabic, there has been some progress made in regards to identifying the linguistic and

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<sup>332</sup> Bateson 2003 p. 1

<sup>333</sup> Bateson 2003, p. 3

<sup>334</sup> Bennet 1998, p. 104

<sup>335</sup> See DeYoung 1999

<sup>336</sup> Bateson 2003, pp. 12-13

<sup>337</sup> Hoyland 2001, p. 201

orthographic origins of the Arabic script through the discovery, analysis, and interpretation of a plethora of mainly rock-strewn inscriptions scattered throughout the Arabian Peninsula and the Levant. These inscriptions, utilizing the Arabic language or, in some cases, ‘Arabisms’, were often written in borrowed scripts, however. It was probably not until sometime in the two centuries preceding Islam that a distinct and universal script was constructed to specifically transcribe the Arabic language in. It is this distinct script that found its imperial and, ultimately, universal voice with the rise of the Umayyads, who mobilized and mechanized Arabic as a language of administration, political culture, literature, religion and of history on a mass scale.

To the philologists, Arabic, as a spoken language can be historically divided between South and North Arabian groups.<sup>338</sup> According to Robert Hoyland’s system of classification, South Arabian languages are defined by “*the existence of three non-emphatic sibilants (letters pronounced by a hissing sound) and a definite article attached at the end of the word.*”<sup>339</sup> This category consists of four principle members including Qatabanic, Hadramitic, Sabaic, and Minaic and was used in the southern portion of the Arabian Peninsula, primarily in modern-day Saudi Arabia and Yemen.<sup>340</sup> Dialects associated with Northern Arabic, however, “*contain only two non-emphatic sibilants and a definite article at the beginning of the word*”, distinguishing them from the southern group.<sup>341</sup> Though there existed a number of structural and linguistic variations amongst the southern group, the northern group tended to consist of linguistic codes that would have been more closely related to one another as well as being mutually intelligible.<sup>342</sup>

<sup>338</sup> Macdonald (in Woodard) 2008, p.179

<sup>339</sup> Hoyland 2001, pp. 200-201

<sup>340</sup> Hoyland 2001, p. 200

<sup>341</sup> Hoyland 2001, p. 201

<sup>342</sup> Hoyland 2001, pp. 200-201

This northern group consisted of Thamudic, Dedanitic, Taymanitic, Lihyanitic, Safaitic, Hismaic, Dumaitic, and Hasa'itic although the scripts they employed all derive from South Arabian orthographies.<sup>343</sup> Members of the proto-Arabic group represent 'codes' rather than 'dialects' or 'languages as it is a more neutral term that can represent a language or any variety within a language.<sup>344</sup> The aforementioned codes were all interrelated and spoken by both sedentary and nomadic peoples of ancient north and central Arabia and were not wholly distinct languages.<sup>345</sup> Two other important codes were Nabataean and Palmyrene and which may represent the most immediate forerunners to the Classical Arabic language as well as to the distinct Arabic script.<sup>346</sup>

In a nutshell, the language codes mentioned in the preceding paragraphs are considered to be possible local or regional, spoken dialectal pre-cursors to a distinct literary Arabic language and which share various linguistic commonalities with each other as well as with Classical Arabic. As Baines noted, "*language and writing are not a single institution but two connected ones.*"<sup>347</sup> The literary Arabic, which later set the groundwork for a standardized, formal Arabic, appeared to have diverged from the colloquial one sometime during the pre-Islamic period, according to most linguists.<sup>348</sup> This literary language still existed alongside other contemporaneous language codes but, when written, was done so using either a local or regionally dominant script.<sup>349</sup> There are two main categories of ancient Arabic so pertinent to our understanding of the rise of Arabic; proto-Arabic and Classical Arabic. Proto- Arabic (or "Old Arabic") is the phrase used to describe the many dialectal variations and linguistic codes of

<sup>343</sup> Macdonald (in Woodard) 2008, pp. 181-183

<sup>344</sup> Wardhaugh 1986, p. 87

<sup>345</sup> Macdonald (in Woodard) 2008, p. 181

<sup>346</sup> Versteegh 2001, pp. 28-29

<sup>347</sup> Baines 2007, p. 7

<sup>348</sup> Versteegh 2001, p. 46

<sup>349</sup> Hoyland 2001, p. 203

the ancient Near East known for containing “Arabisms”, i.e. certain grammatical qualities and characteristics that later became permanent features of Classical Arabic.<sup>350</sup> Proto-Arabic, in its many forms, is always found written in a number of scripts that usually pre-date the more literary, later, Classical Arabic.

The phrase ‘Classical Arabic’ is used to distinguish between the multitude of Arabic dialects that contemporaneously existed throughout Arabia, Mesopotamia, and Syria-Palestine and the literary form of the language that is found in a number of inscriptions prior to the advent of Islam, including pre-Islamic poetry, but which is most associated with the language of the Quran.<sup>351</sup> Some have argued that there existed a ‘*poetic koine*’, an archaic form of Arabic that the *shu’araa* (poets) specialized in, that was so profound in the shaping and standardization of the literary Classical Arabic language.<sup>352</sup> Unfortunately, identifying the precise historical and linguistic roots of Classical Arabic is difficult, however, and the language itself has even been described as an ‘*enigmatic chimera*’.<sup>353</sup>

Moreover, the phrase ‘Classical’ Arabic refers only to a language and not a script as they seemed to follow different developmental trajectories. According to Federico Corriente, a scholar of Arabic, the classical form of the language represents “*the endpoint of the development within the complex varieties of Old Arabic*.”<sup>354</sup> While the Quran is viewed as the oldest major body of literature that contains Classical Arabic language, much shorter, but highly significant inscriptions containing similar and sometimes nearly identical language, albeit written in various, local scripts have been discovered throughout Arabia and Syria-Palestine.<sup>355</sup> Classical Arabic is

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<sup>350</sup> Versteegh 2001, p. 26

<sup>351</sup> Versteegh 2001, p. 39

<sup>352</sup> Versteegh 2001, p. 46

<sup>353</sup> Owens 2006, p. 5

<sup>354</sup> Owens 2006, p. 5

<sup>355</sup> Versteegh 2001, p. 31

regarded as having fixed syntactic, grammatical, structural and lexical features unlike proto-Arabic, which, in light of the many inscriptions found, appears to be more fluid.<sup>356</sup> Owens, while commenting on Blau's classifications of Arabic, proto-Arabic (or Old Arabic) and Classical Arabic, pointed out that all three existed coterminously.<sup>357</sup> Moreover, most historical linguists view one of the north Arabian, and not south Arabian languages or dialects, as the likeliest and most direct ancestor of Classical Arabic.<sup>358</sup>

Furthermore, the earliest forms of Arabic, as written pre-cursors to the standardized literary form of the language, are represented by tens of thousands of inscriptions scattered throughout the Arabian Peninsula, the Levant, and Mesopotamia.<sup>359</sup> These languages belong to what Versteegh refers to as 'Early North Arabic' or 'proto-Arabic' and are represented by four kinds of inscriptions, all of which employed scripts that derived from Epigraphic South Arabian.<sup>360</sup> These northern proto-Arabic codes are Thamudic, Lihyanitic, Safaitic, and Hasa'itic whose inscriptions contain a number of structural elements that, according to scholars like Versteegh and Macdonald, are '*closely related*' to Classical Arabic.<sup>361</sup> Thamudic texts, found mainly along the caravan routes in central and west Arabia and modern-day Jordan, are represented by nearly fifteen thousand inscriptions and use the definite article '*h-* as in *h-gml*' ('the camel') and not '*al* like in the later Classical Arabic.<sup>362</sup> Such inscriptions range, in date, from the sixth century BCE until the fourth century CE and share several basic grammatical and lexical features as Classical Arabic.<sup>363</sup> Lihyanitic inscriptions have been found along the incense route stretching from Syria in the north to Yemen in the south and are represented by only five-

<sup>356</sup> Versteegh 2001, pp. 26-28

<sup>357</sup> Owens 1998, p. 54

<sup>358</sup> Hoyland 2001, p. 201

<sup>359</sup> Versteegh 2001, pp. 26-29

<sup>360</sup> Versteegh 2001, p. 26

<sup>361</sup> Versteegh 2001, p. 26

<sup>362</sup> Versteegh 2001, p. 26

<sup>363</sup> Versteegh 2001, p. 26

hundred or so inscriptions and date mainly between the fourth and first centuries BCE.<sup>364</sup> Though it uses the definite article *h-* or *hn-*, it contains words that are clearly Arabic, as in *h-gbl hn-‘‘aly* (*‘the highest mountain’*), while also using the preposition *l-* which typically preceded a proper name, something found in Classical Arabic.<sup>365</sup>

Safaitic, a language and script used over the span of some four hundred years, beginning in the first century BCE, was used primarily in the desert of northeastern Jordan, northern Saudi Arabia, and southern Syria.<sup>366</sup> To date, there have been nearly twenty-thousand Safaitic inscriptions found throughout the Syrian Desert (which spreads over the three countries mentioned).<sup>367</sup> Although most of these inscriptions are short, oftentimes containing proper names, alone, they are always accompanied by the preposition *l-* immediately preceding each name (e.g. *l‘-abdallahi-* *‘for the servant of God’*).<sup>368</sup> Additional elements that link Safaitic to Classical Arabic are its usage of the term *‘snt* (*in the year that.*), the usage of the feminine word ending, *‘t* (which in Classical Arabic is *‘ah*), and the implementation of *‘n* in the case of sound plurals (*had-dalilun/in* in Safaitic and *ad-dallun/in* in Arabic meaning *“those who err”*).<sup>369</sup> Safaitic inscriptions, which provide much more information about early Arabic sentence structure and grammar than Thamudic ones, also record contemporary political events and the location of Bedouin camp sites, while other inscriptions make reference to the mourning of the dead.<sup>370</sup> Like Classical Arabic, Safaitic uses the causative stem *‘-* like in the phrase *“to go east”* or *‘srq/ysrq* in Safaitic and *‘asraq/yusriqu* in Classical Arabic.<sup>371</sup>

<sup>364</sup> Versteegh 2001, p. 27

<sup>365</sup> Versteegh 2001, p. 27

<sup>366</sup> Macdonald (in Woodard) 2008, p. 183

<sup>367</sup> Macdonald (in Woodard) 2008, p. 183

<sup>368</sup> Versteegh 2001, pg. 27

<sup>369</sup> Versteegh 2001, pg. 27

<sup>370</sup> Versteegh 2001, pg. 27

<sup>371</sup> Versteegh 2001, pg. 27

Hasaitic, the least represented amongst the four main groups of Arabic pre-cursors, is represented by only forty inscriptions found in northeastern Arabia, near the Gulf, and date anywhere from the fifth to second centuries BCE.<sup>372</sup> Unfortunately, the known Hasaitic inscriptions say very little about the structure of the language, itself, and provide mostly genealogies.<sup>373</sup> Like its counterparts, though, and contrasting with Classical Arabic, Hasaitic also uses the definite article 'h- instead of 'al as in *hn- 'lt* (the goddess *Al-Ilat*).<sup>374</sup> Based on the proper names found in the inscriptions as well as other “characteristic expressions such as *d'l* (*of the lineage of.*), Hasaitic is regarded as an Ancient North Arabian language despite that the script it employs is Sabaic, a south Arabian script.<sup>375</sup> Other North Arabian dialects, dubbed “Oasis North Arabian” by Macdonald, include Dumaitic, whose inscriptions are rare and date from the first millennium BCE, Taymanitic, whose inscriptions are short but distinct and date from the sixth century BCE, and Dadanitic which is represented by graffiti in northwest Arabia and dates anywhere from the sixth century BCE to the first century CE.<sup>376</sup> While Arabic, as mentioned earlier, contains twenty-eight letters in its alphabetic repertoire, other members amongst the North Arabian dialects have alphabets that contain anywhere from twenty-six to twenty-eight signs.<sup>377</sup>

In regards to who spoke to some of the dialects or languages alluded to above, speakers included mainly settled peoples who inhabited some of the major oases of northwest Arabia, including Tayma, Dadan, and Duma and whose speakers were significantly involved in the frankincense trade between South Arabia, Egypt, Syria-Palestine, Mesopotamia and the eastern

<sup>372</sup> Versteegh 2001, pg. 28

<sup>373</sup> Macdonald (in Woodard) 2008, pp. 183-184

<sup>374</sup> Versteegh 2001, p. 28

<sup>375</sup> Macdonald (in Woodard) 2008, p. 184

<sup>376</sup> Macdonald (in Woodard) 2008, pp. 181-183

<sup>377</sup> Macdonald (in Woodard) 2008, p. 185

Mediterranean coastal area.<sup>378</sup> These Oasis North Arabian dialects were likely spoken since the fifth or sixth centuries BCE and died out either shortly before the rise of Islam or shortly thereafter.<sup>379</sup>

The remaining aforementioned north Arabian linguistic codes, dialects, and languages were spoken by both nomadic and settled populations in central and northern Arabia, Syria-Palestine and include Safaitic, Hismaic, Thamudic, and Hasaitic.<sup>380</sup>

The Nabataeans who represented a powerful pre-Islamic Arab dynasty based out of southern Jordan with their capital at Petra, have left us with a number of inscriptions that represent the integration of spoken Arabic (very much like the Classical Arabic of the early Islamic age) features into their texts.<sup>381</sup> Nabataean inscriptions can be dated to a period mainly from the first century BCE to the first century CE.<sup>382</sup> Unlike other Arabic-language inscriptions, though, Nabataean was written in a form of Aramaic and not in a script borrowed from South Arabia.<sup>383</sup> Further, what separates Nabataean from the many proto-Arabic dialects discussed earlier is that unlike them, Nabataean uses the definite article *'al* and not *'h-/hn*.<sup>384</sup> Therefore, its link to the literary form of Classical Arabic is particularly strong as exemplified by the structure and grammar found in terms like *'mlk nbtw* or 'the king of the Nabataeans' and *'bd'lhy'* *'abdullahi'*-servant of God, albeit with the case endings for proper names that Classical Arabic only partially retained.<sup>385</sup> However, Versteegh notes that these *"endings occur independently from the syntactic context and are apparently quoted in their isolated form, which is not surprising since these Arabic names are intrusive elements in Aramaic, which has no case*

<sup>378</sup> Macdonald (in Woodard) 2008, p. 181

<sup>379</sup> Macdonald (in Woodard) 2008, p. 181

<sup>380</sup> Macdonald (in Woodard) 2008, p. 181

<sup>381</sup> Versteegh 2001, p. 28

<sup>382</sup> Versteegh 2001, p. 28

<sup>383</sup> Versteegh 2001, p. 28

<sup>384</sup> Versteegh 2001, p. 28

<sup>385</sup> Versteegh 2001, pp. 28-29



*endings.*”<sup>386</sup> In effect, the Nabataeans altered certain structural or syntactic characteristics of Aramaic in order to accommodate their colloquial, spoken language of Arabic that crystallized with the passing of time.

Like Nabataean, Palmyrene inscriptions (from the southeastern Syrian oasis town of Tadmur/Palmyra) similarly include Arabic proper names and other interferences from their colloquial spoken Arabic, while also using the definite article ‘*al.*’<sup>387</sup> Palmyra, as some of the epigraphic evidence indicates, was an Arab settlement (and even headed by an Arab dynasty) that was destroyed by the Romans in 273 CE.<sup>388</sup>

Given the many Arabisms that existed in these various inscriptions and codes, it is probable that what later becomes Classical Arabic was primarily a literary language that may have been understood and used by people from a number of Arabic-speaking groups scattered throughout the Near East but whose colloquial language forms and orthographic script was something else.

Macdonald contends that this literary Arabic “*seems to have coexisted with Ancient North Arabian throughout north and central Arabia but, in contrast to Ancient North Arabian, it remained a purely spoken language.*”<sup>389</sup> The pre-Islamic linguistic situation and arrangement may be somewhat diglossic, reflective of an environment where speakers communicated in two “*distinct codes which show clear functional separation*” and where “*one code is employed in one set of circumstances and the other in an entirely different set.*”<sup>390</sup> This could very well have been the situation among the disparate Arabic-speaking tribes, as Macdonald implies. The various settled and nomadic groups of Arabia were probably, in most cases, bilingual, speaking a local

<sup>386</sup> Versteegh 2001, p. 30

<sup>387</sup> Versteegh 2001, p. 29

<sup>388</sup> Versteegh 2001, p. 29

<sup>389</sup> Macdonald (in Woodard) 2008, p. 180

<sup>390</sup> Wardhaugh 1986, p. 88

dialect reflected in their writing as well as a literary form of the language used for poetry and for communication with members of a different Arabian dialectal group that was not always transcribed (except, it appears, in limited circumstances and contexts).

Also, whether or not the speakers of these various dialectal variations regarded themselves as ‘Arabs’ is difficult to prove, as the term ‘Arab’ is ambiguous and relates to geographic orientation and socioeconomics as much as it does to ethnicity or language. The oldest securely dated historical reference to the ‘Arabs’ is a stele inscription dedicated to the Assyrian King Shalmaneser III who fought against a “*Gindibu the Arab*” as well as some Syro-Palestinian leaders in 853 BCE during the Battle of Qarqar (associated with the archaeological site at the town of Tell Qarqur/ تل قرقور in northwestern Syria in the Orontes River valley).<sup>391</sup> There are also Biblical references to Arabs in the Old Testament in 2 Chronicles 9.14, “*Then the Lord stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines and the Arabs who bordered the Ethiopians;*” (New American Standard Bible) and several pages later in 2 Chronicles 26.7 where “*God helped him in his wars against the Philistines, his battles with the Arabs of Gur, and his wars with the Meunites*” (New Living Translation).

However, whether or not ‘Arab’ has any linguistic connotations in the aforementioned contexts is uncertain, as the term is seemingly used to describe nomadic peoples who lived on the peripheries of settled, more urban and heavier populated areas of the Near East.

## **5. THE PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIC LANGUAGE INSCRIPTIONS OF THE NEAR EAST**

There are no documents or texts of the Quran’s magnitude and length in the history preceding the birth of Islam, nor one as culturally impactful on the Arab communities of Late Antiquity. The Quran’s existence, arguably, is indication of the permanence and structural codification of the Arabic language.

<sup>391</sup> Hoyland 2001, p. 59

The Quran (lit. “*that which is read*”), in a moment of introspection, refers to itself as a ‘*Quran ‘arabiyyun (an Arabic Quran)*’ in the third verse of the forty-third chapter, which reads: “*Indeed, We have made it an Arabic Qur'an that you might understand.*”<sup>392</sup>

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاهُ قُرْءَانًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ

A common literary form of Arabic (in both spoken and written form), was likely widespread by the mid-seventh century, continued to be standardized even after the Quran, especially after the need for administrative centralization in the new Umayyad state and once Islam and the Arabic language began to spread beyond its former linguistic and cultural borders.

It has become clear that with the passing of time, proto-typical forms of the Arabic orthography gradually gave way to what became a set of standardized Arabic characters, as well. The most popular theory regarding the formation of the cursive Arabic script is that it derives from a cursive form of the Nabataean Aramaic script.<sup>393</sup> The Nabataean script is generally believed to be a stylized version of Aramaic and that it was the immediate pre-cursor to the Arabic script even though the overwhelming majority of Nabataean letters do not connect.<sup>394</sup> However, some aspects of this theory are refuted by Abulhab who argues that the *Jazm* script, a peninsular orthography whose letters connect along a horizontal line (unlike Nabataean characters which are mostly unconnected), actually derived from the cursive *musnad* script, with influences from Nabataean, Aramaic and Syriac in the third century CE and likely in al-Hira, is likely the closest orthographic ancestor of cursive Arabic.<sup>395</sup> It is worthy to note, too, that other orthographies in the Near East already exhibited a tendency to acquire cursive forms with letters

<sup>392</sup> The Quran; Sahih International (translation)

<sup>393</sup> Hoyland 2001, pp. 198-200

<sup>394</sup> Gruendler 1993, p. 10

<sup>395</sup> Abulhab 2011, p. 233

connecting, such as Pahlavi<sup>396</sup>, which may have influenced the style of the Arabic orthography. Nevertheless, Abulhab believes that it was the *Jazm* script which served as the immediate forerunner to the distinct Arabic orthography that emerges before Islam's advent.



Fig. 9: Chart of various scripts utilized in Arabia and the Near East in the pre-Islamic period (Reproduced from Sa'ad D. Abulhab, 2007)<sup>397</sup>

Since there was an apparent trend to employ local or popular scripts when writing in Arabic, it is certainly possible that texts that were inscribed in Arabic had the potential to serve as a statement about the writer's identity or tribal affiliation, possibly reflecting a certain cultural orientation of the inscriber as well as his/her audience.<sup>398</sup> Hoyland claims that "*texts written wholly in [pre-Classical] Arabic are so rare that the commissioning of them must have been a conscious and deliberate choice. Presumably the intention was to make a statement about their ethnic and/or cultural affiliation, about their Arab identity.*" While such statements are difficult, if not, impossible to verify, the existence of texts in a multi-orthographic environment raises questions over why individuals chose to write in one script over another. Certainly, social, cultural, geo-political, economic, tribal, religious, and other considerations factored in such decisions, but, ultimately, we can only hypothesize. Below is a comparative chart highlighting the visual differences in letter-forms between the Aramaic, Nabataean, and Arabic orthographies.

<sup>396</sup> Windfuhr (ed.) 2010, pp. 197-200

<sup>397</sup> Abulhab 2007-2009

<sup>398</sup> Hoyland 2001, p. 203

	Aramaic	Nabataean	Arabic		Aramaic	Nabataean	Arabic
,	𐤀	𐤁	ا*	l	𐤌	𐤍	ل
b	𐤂	𐤃	ب	m	𐤎	𐤏	م
g	𐤄	𐤅	ج**	n	𐤐	𐤑	ن
d	𐤆	𐤇	د	s	𐤒	𐤓	
h	𐤈	𐤉	ه	ʿ	𐤔	𐤕	ء**
w	𐤊	𐤋	و	p	𐤖	𐤗	فا
z	𐤌	𐤍	ز	ṣ	𐤘	𐤙	ص
ḥ	𐤎	𐤏	ح**	q	𐤚	𐤛	ق
ṭ	𐤜	𐤝	ط	r	𐤞	𐤟	ر
y	𐤠	𐤡	ي	ṣ̣	𐤢	𐤣	س
k	𐤣	𐤤	ك	t	𐤥	𐤦	ت

All Arabic letters are isolated forms, except \* denotes final form, and \*\* denotes initial form

Fig. 10: Comparative chart of Aramaic, Nabataean, and Arabic orthographies (Ancient Scripts- Nabataean <http://www.ancientscripts.com/nabataean.html>)

Further, there a number of rather important and well-documented Arabic language texts composed in an array of orthographies from the pre-Islamic period. For example, there exists a rock-carved text that was discovered at *Qaryat al-Faw* in modern-day south-central Saudi Arabia near al-Sulayyil. Historically, Qaryat al-Faw served as the capital of several Arab tribes, primarily the tribe of *Kinda*. It is home to a dedicatory Arabic text inscribed in the *musnad* script (an orthography composed of independent, individual alphabetic symbols used to write Old South Arabian and other related languages in and dating as far back as the ninth century BCE), a style of writing that was borrowed from the Sabaean Kingdom of South Arabia (namely Yemen).<sup>399</sup> The script, itself, does not resemble the cursive Arabic script of later, and is, instead

<sup>399</sup> Beeston 1979, pp. 1-6

composed of disconnected letters. The content of the inscription, itself, is known as a form of ‘Old Arabic’, a phrase dubbed for the pre-Islamic language(s) that served as the forerunners of the Classical Arabic language used in the Quran.<sup>400</sup>

Moreover, this inscription is considered to be the “*earliest known Arabic inscription written in the musnad script*” written by an ‘Igl Ibn Haf’am, and dates from the first century BCE.<sup>401</sup> Structurally, some aspects of the Qaryat al-Faw inscription differ slightly from their Classical Arabic counterpart. Though the dedicatory text implements usage of the definite article ‘al such as in its mention of the pagan god, *Athtar al-Shariq*, it also includes terms such as “*banā*”, instead of “*banaya*” (*building*), the *afa’l* form of the causative stem, while the preposition “*mn*” is found in place of “*bn.*”<sup>402</sup> Despite the Quran post-dating this text by some six centuries, the apparent grammatical and lexical differences appear to be very slight. In other words, the language employed in this inscription at al-Faw is very closely related to the Classical Arabic made universal with the spread of Islam.



Fig. 11: Qaryat Al-Faw inscription in South Arabian musnad script (photograph from A.R. al-Ansary 1982, p. 146)

<sup>400</sup> Beeston 1979, pp. 1-6

<sup>401</sup> Beeston 1979, pp. 1-6

<sup>402</sup> Beeston 1979, pp. 1-6

At Najran, a former center of Christianity in the southern reaches of modern-day Saudi Arabia, near the border with Yemen, there exists a rare bilingual inscription transcribed in *kufic* Arabic characters, a form of cursive Arabic used in some early Islamic texts in places like Medina.<sup>403</sup> What is noteworthy about this text is that the *kufic* inscription is nearly a translation of the same text in the *musnad* script, implying that there was a gradual phasing out of other orthographies once used to transcribe Arabic language texts in.<sup>404</sup>

Like the inscription found at Qaryat al-Faw, the Ein Avdat inscription is an example of spoken Arabic and dates between 88 CE and 150 CE.<sup>405</sup> The inscription, itself, contains six lines, but only the last two lines are in the Arabic language (written in Nabataean), while the preceding four lines of text are Aramaic.<sup>406</sup> The Arabic lines, according to Bellamy, are verses of poetry and after some comparison, he asserts that Arabic poetry composed at the turn of the first and second centuries CE closely resembles the Arabic poetry written after the birth of Islam.

Like the text at al-Faw, the definite article ‘*al*’ is used in the phrase ‘*al-Mawtu*’ (‘the death’) in the Ein Avdat text, which appears in the first line of the Arabic portion of the inscription.<sup>407</sup> Other Arabic-language texts include the Nabataean inscription (found one-hundred kilometers southeast of Damascus) dated to 328 CE at Namarah that refers to the Lakhmid King Imru al-Qays as ‘*king of all Arabs*’<sup>408</sup> and the *Raqush* text found at Mada’in Saleh (northwest Arabia) appears to blend Nabataean and cursive Arabic characters, uses the definite article ‘*al*’, utilizes diacritics on the letters *د*, *ش* and *ر*, and dates to 267 CE<sup>409</sup>

<sup>403</sup> Abulhab 2009, p. 9 (in PDF)

<sup>404</sup> al-Said 2004, pp. 15, 84–88

<sup>405</sup> Testen 1996, pp. 281-292

<sup>406</sup> Testen 1996, pp. 281-292

<sup>407</sup> Testen 1996, pp. 281-292

<sup>408</sup> Bellamy 1985, pp. 31-48

<sup>409</sup> Healey and Smith 1989, pp. 77-84

A mid-fourth century inscription at Jabal Ramm (fifty kilometers from the Jordanian port city of Aqaba) also uses a rudimentary form of the cursive Arabic script in three lines and also containing diacritical markers for the letters ج, ي and ن.<sup>410</sup> Both the Raqush and Jabal Ramm texts are accompanied by notes in the Thamudic alphabet. Arabic orthography texts were also discovered at Sakakah (northern modern-day Saudi Arabia) one of which uses diacritical markers, in this case, over the letters ت, ب, and ن<sup>411</sup> and a fifth or sixth century text at Umm al-Jimal (in northern Jordan near the Syrian border) written in the Classical Arabic language and in the cursive Arabic script reading “*This [inscription] was set up by colleagues of ‘Ulayh, son of ‘Ubaydah, secretary of the cohort Augusta Secunda Philadelphiana; may he go mad who effaces it.*”<sup>412</sup>

Khaleel al-Muaikel, who wrote about the inscriptions, believes that “*the discovery of these two inscriptions is of considerable importance in confirming suggestions of the evolution of the Arabic writing inside the Arabian Peninsula rather than outside its borders.*”<sup>413</sup>

Now, why some inscriptions bear diacritical markers and others do not is certainly subject to debate, but likely relates to the grammatical knowledge of the inscriber. It is also possible that inclusion of these signifiers is intended to make a social statement of sorts, relaying facts about the language, and therefore, reifying the nuances of the Arabic language and its written representation to an audience.

Further, since so many features of pre-Classical Arabic have appeared in various other north Arabian Arabic dialects, as indicated by the inscriptions in this section, it lends credence to the belief that a literary form of Arabic must have had some linguistic prominence before Islam,

<sup>410</sup> Bellamy 1988, pp. 369-372

<sup>411</sup> Winnett and Reed 1970, p. 11 and picture on p. 12

<sup>412</sup> Bellamy 1988, pp. 369-372

<sup>413</sup> al-Muaikel 2002, pp. 157-169



but was likely employed by communities who chose to write in other scripts (for whatever reasons).

What we can conclude from these inscriptions and ancient graffiti is that various language codes (dialects and proto-Arabic languages or languages with Arabisms) existed throughout the Near East, particularly in Arabia and Syria-Palestine, many of which contained features associated with Classical Arabic (the standardized literary form of the language reserved for poetry and texts). Through the discovery and examination of the multitude of inscriptions left behind by several of these settled and nomadic Arab peoples, glimpses of the evolution and development of the Arabic language and script appear.

As time progressed, the various writing conventions used to represent the Arabic language began to be replaced, albeit slowly, by a common alphabet and writing system composed of a cursive script that overwhelmingly connected and where individual letters acquired new forms depending on where they were situated in a word. Abulhab argues that this system, composed of letters connecting at a horizontal base, began in the third or fourth centuries CE in both Arabia and neighboring Persia and that “*the trend was most likely the result of the introduction of newer inscription media and tools.*”<sup>414</sup>

The reorientation of Nabataean-Aramaic characters to serve as the likely basis for a new orthography was like due to the fact that roughly twelve of the twenty-eight letters in the Arabic alphabet are nearly identical to Nabataean characters as they appear in various Nabataean texts.<sup>415</sup> The lexical, syntactic, and orthographic similarities between both Nabataean and Arabic texts are further exemplified by the existence of transitional Nabataeo-Arabic texts that combine elements of both scripts and which likely represented an intermediate phase from cursive

<sup>414</sup> Abulhab 2007/2009, p. 5 (in pdf)

<sup>415</sup> Gruendler 1993, pp. 127-128

Nabataean Aramaic and mainly unconnected characters to distinctly Arabic letter forms, most of which connect at a horizontal baseline. The Nabataean-Aramaic or cursive *Musnad* style of writing gave way to the *Jazm* orthography<sup>416</sup> which was then used to write the early Qurans in.

The various writing systems used in the pre-Islamic period, as paleographic analysis contends, represented a number of interrelated Arabic dialects or language codes but, despite their similarities, standardizing the Arabic language and script was not an uncomplicated process, though. First, the peoples of Arabia never truly represented, it can be argued, a homogenous, monolithic ethno-linguistic or cultural community under a single political authority. Communities that spoke Arabic (or any Arabic dialect or related codes) lived throughout the Near East and represented a number of disparate populations, some settled, others nomadic, and adhered to a variety of religious beliefs, tribal traditions, and writing systems. In many ways, it was the grammarians who created new linguistic facts that helped to catapult and ossify a more cohesive and public Arab identity, a sense of collective consciousness and memory, and which brought some level of linguistic and cultural uniformity to a number of communities who had already, albeit disjointedly, likely shared some sense of imaginative belonging across time and space but who were also had religious, socio-economic and/or geo-political differences.

It is difficult to conclude, with any certainty though, the psychological impact that these two major linguistic and orthographic contributions made to Arab self-awareness in the eras leading up to the birth of Islam and in the ensuing centuries after the major period of the Arab conquests. It is not even certain that those peoples who wrote in, for example, North Arabian scripts or the Nabataeans, for that matter, referred to themselves as ‘Arabs’<sup>417</sup> at all, yet it is

<sup>416</sup> Abulhab 2007/2009, p. 10 (in pdf)

<sup>417</sup> Macdonald 2009, p. 179 (IV)

clear, many communities with varying spoken vernaculars and scripts were ultimately brought together under a common form of writing by the seventh century. What is likely is that by the time Arabic-speaking Christians in the Ghassanid and Lakhmid kingdoms of Syria-Palestine and Mesopotamia began to acquire more autonomy from their political overlords (both Roman and Persian), they began to culturally assert themselves through the use of cursive Arabic texts in, as the record makes clear, religious spaces associated with ecclesiastical institutions.

## 6. CHRISTIANITY AND THE ARABIC SCRIPT

Paleographic analysis and epigraphic examinations have revealed that inscriptions which were transcribed in cursive Arabic characters began to acquire prestige when it became a tool of Arab Christianity in the Levant. Early, lengthy texts using the distinct, cursive Arabic orthography mainly include blessings, invocations, dedications, translations of Greek texts, names, etc. and often appear linked to churches where a literate class of scribes was employed.

It has been argued that the last major pre-Islamic Arab dynastic kingdom of Syria-Palestine, that of the Ghassanids (a Roman ally and vassal state), while likely adopting and/or imitating various aspects of Byzantine culture, imperial traditions (including adopting Greek titles like “*Archiphylarch*” and “*Basileus*”<sup>418</sup>), using the Greek language (for business and liturgy), ultimately created their own categories of art, material culture, and architecture and were critical to the spread of the Arabic orthography that became popularized and universalized by both the birth of Islam and the rise of the Umayyads. By the early seventh century, the Byzantine Near East saw the emergence of several religious faultlines that also saw an acceleration in linguistic and orthographic divergence with members of East Syrian churches, as well as Syrian Miaphysites speaking and writing in “*the Aramaic dialect of Syriac.*”<sup>419</sup> In other

<sup>418</sup> Arce 2010, p. 56

<sup>419</sup> Penn 2015, p. xvi

words, there was no shortage of languages or scripts in this part of the world to express any aspect of a community's cultural, religious, or political identity.

Furthermore, the Ghassanids were not merely a nation of paid soldiers but rather an ambitious vassal of a major empire who engaged in its own version of state-building, constructing palaces, fortresses, churches, and other secular and religious monuments throughout parts of the Levant into the seventh century. They also played a role in the spread of Christianity in Arabia, engaging in missionary work in distant places like Najran<sup>420</sup> (located nine hundred kilometers southeast of Mecca near the border with modern Yemen), which became a major Christian center in the century prior to the birth of Islam.

Irfan Shahid, in *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, summed up the influence of Christianity on the literate culture of Syria-Palestine's Arab population with the following:

*“Christianity influenced the literary life of the Arabs in the fifth century as it had done in the fourth. The conclusions on this are mainly inferential, but less so for poetry than for prose. If there was an Arabic liturgy and a biblical lectionary in the fifth century, the chances are that this would have influenced the development of Arabic literary life, as it invariably influenced that of the other peoples of the Christian Orient. It is possible to detect such influences in the scanty fragments of Arabic poetry and trace the refining influence of the new faith on sentiments. Loanwords from Christianity in Arabic are easier to document, and they are eloquent testimony to the permanence of that influence in much the same way that other loanwords testify to the influence of the Roman imperium.”*<sup>421</sup>

Highlighting evidence for the emergence of the monophonic Arabic in Christian Ghassanid Syria-Palestine is the text found at Jabal Usays, east of Damascus, which is home to a distinct inscription written solely in the new Arabic orthography by one “*Ruqaym son of*

<sup>420</sup> Berkey 2003, p. 44

<sup>421</sup> Shahid 1989, p. 528

*Mu'arrif the Awsite....*”<sup>422</sup> “*on the occasion of his dispatch by Harith the king*” that dates to 528 CE.<sup>423</sup>

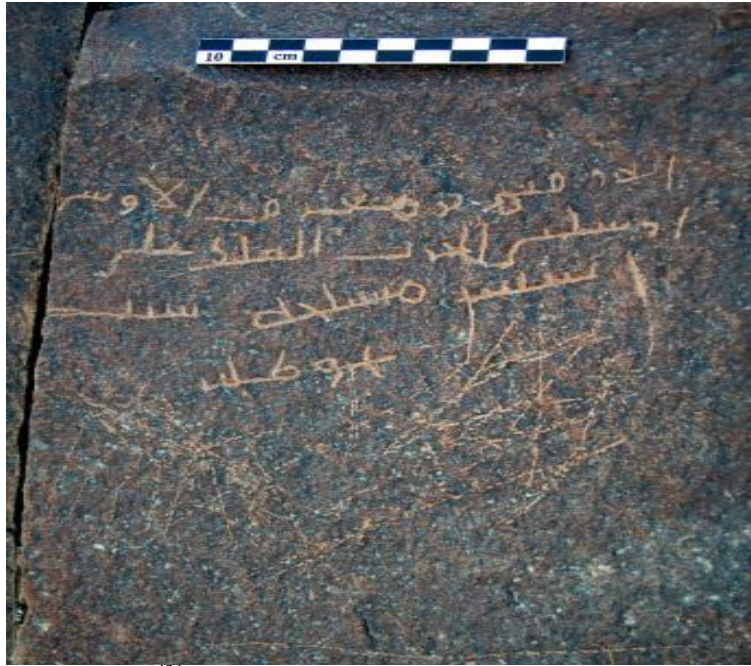


Fig. 12: The Jabal Usays inscription<sup>424</sup> (photo at University of Oxford's Online Corpus of the Inscriptions of North Arabia)

The Jabal Usays text was commissioned by an Arab leader who had some literate scribes at his disposal. Why so few Arabic texts from this period are known to exist is somewhat puzzling, but as M.C.A. Macdonald asserted, and which is supported by Robert Hoyland, is that changes in script tend to appear ‘on paper’ before they appear on public monuments (i.e. ‘*pen before the chisel*’ was Hoyland’s analogy, referencing Macdonald<sup>425</sup>). Both believe that texts in the Arabic script existed sometime before their emergence on public buildings and in graffiti, but that they have all perished with the passing of time due to the fact they were recorded on perishable materials.

<sup>422</sup> Macdonald 2010, pp. 141–143 (Seminar for Arabian Studies 40)

<sup>423</sup> Hoyland 2001, p. 202

<sup>424</sup> Shahîd 1995, p. 117

<sup>425</sup> Hoyland, 2010, p. 35 (Supplement to the Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies 40)

However, Hoyland does note, and rather importantly, that nearly many of the earliest known Arabic texts from the pre-Islamic era were produced in the Hawran region (today, located in southeastern Syria and northwestern Jordan), a region that was, at the time, fully under Christian, Ghassanid vassalship. In the absence of positive evidence of extensive writing on parchment, papyrus or other easily destructible materials which were more appropriate and practical for lengthier texts, we are left to speculate about their number or the extent of literacy and writing. It is also much more difficult to consider writing's psycho-social impact on societies or better grasp how communities in pre-Islamic Arabia (both settled and nomadic) or subsequent historical eras since an entire category of inscriptions are essentially absent (with some exceptions).

Other cursive Arabic texts have been discovered in Syria including the one at Zebed, just south of Aleppo (Halab), where a trilingual inscription containing Greek, Syriac, and Arabic text appears over a doorway inside the church of St. Serge.<sup>426</sup> Though the Arabic text merely lists the names of prominent social and church figures, many of the names are Arabic (e.g. *Amat Manaf, Sa'd, Imru'l-qais*), and provides some insight in terms of the geographic extent of the Arabic language by the early sixth century CE, the period from which the inscription dates from. This inscription is considered by several scholars to be one of three oldest texts written in the cursive Arabic script (the others include the Jabal Usays and Harran inscriptions).<sup>427</sup>

South of Damascus, at Harran, lays a bilingual Greek-Arabic inscription in the martyrium of St. John.<sup>428</sup> Drawing on the works of a number of German scholars (including Grohmann, Littman, Schroeder), Gruendler asserts that the “*Greek version repeats the first part of the Arabic text, including the name of the builder, Sharahil bar Zalim.*” The inscription dates from 568 CE

<sup>426</sup> Gruendler 1993, pp. 13-14 (A2)

<sup>427</sup> See Hoyland 2010, p. 29 (Seminar for Arabian Studies 40)

<sup>428</sup> Gruendler 1993, p.14

(or 463 after Bosra).<sup>429</sup> The author notes that the Aramaic ‘bar’ (son of) is used instead of the Arabic ‘bin’ in the builders name (according to the translator and which is also believed to be the case at Jabal Usays).

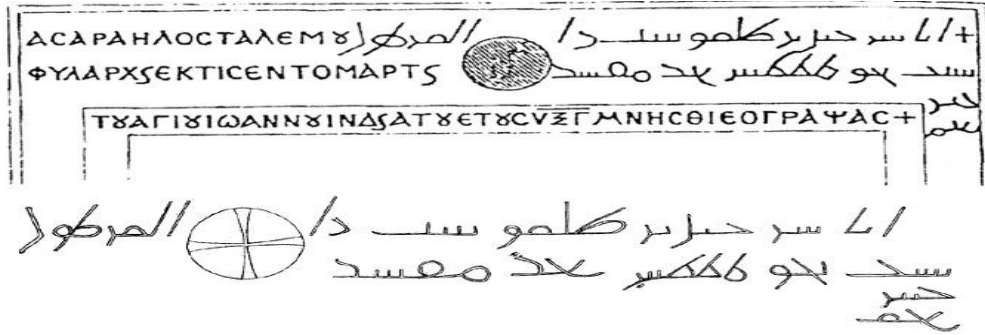


Fig. 13: Sketch of the Harran bilingual Arabic-Greek inscription (G.S. Reynolds 2008)

Hoyland remarked that “texts written wholly in [Classical] Arabic are so rare that the commissioning of them must have been a conscious and deliberate choice.”<sup>430</sup> Thus, when epigraphers and historical linguists have come across Arabic-language inscriptions, they may speculate that the writer was making a clear cultural or political statement. Whatever the case, the Zebed and Harran church inscriptions were produced during a time in which the Ghassanid Arabs were a major demographic in the region and are, therefore, the products of a cultural and religious landscape in which Christianity was dominant.

In 2014, a joint French-Saudi archaeology team discovered a Nabataean-Arabic hybrid text (carved into a large stone) near *Bir Hima*, one hundred kilometers north of the ancient Christian center of Najran in southwestern Saudi Arabia that dates to 469-470 CE now regarded as the ‘missing link’ between Nabataean Aramaic and the beginning of the Arabic script.<sup>431</sup> Epigrapher Frédéric Imbert regards it as an initial phase of Arabic writing and like other public Arabic inscriptions from the era up to the rise of Islam, it is adorned with a cross. It is also dated

<sup>429</sup> Gruendler 1993, p. 14

<sup>430</sup> Hoyland 2001, p. 203

<sup>431</sup> Actualité du réseau culturel – Arabie saoudite - Découverte de la plus ancienne inscription en alphabet arabe par des archéologues français (31 juillet 2014)

and contains the name ‘*Thawban (son of) Malik*’ (whose name appears in a total of eight inscriptions in the area) as well as several other Christians who are also mentioned in a nearby (commemorative) text and who were likely religious martyrs who may have perished at the hands of the Himyarites of South Arabia.<sup>432</sup>

The choice to employ this script instead of a South Arabian orthography, and to utilize crosses on several of the discovered stelae, testifies to the Christian identity of the community. The geographic and social contexts in which the aforementioned inscriptions were produced tend to support the notion that Christianity, as a cultural superstructure and repertoire of symbols and words, was the catalyst for the generation and diffusion of the Arabic script. Hoyland, in his analysis of the Arabic text in the martyrium at Harran, argues that the choice of orthography was due to the fact that “*Christian texts were translated into Arabic for the purpose of instructing new Arabophone converts.*”<sup>433</sup>

By the sixth and early seventh century, the inclusion of Arabic in public texts in Syria-Palestine and Mesopotamia may have symbolized the gradual (re-) Arabization of societies whose attachment to Byzantium and Sasanid Iran was waning due, in part, to the perception that they were both increasingly viewed as ‘foreign occupiers’<sup>434</sup> or it may just have easily served as a message with political overtones- the assertion of their Arab identity and a contestation of the Byzantine state’s policies in the *Limes (Limes Arabicus)* in the case of the Ghassanids. A series of collapses in relations between Byzantium and the Arab tribes towards the end of the sixth century ultimately led to a break between them which then led to persecution on religious grounds, as well as mutinies, since the Ghassanids were predominantly Monophysite Christians

<sup>432</sup> Actualité du réseau culturel – Arabie saoudite - Découverte de la plus ancienne inscription en alphabet arabe par des archéologues français (31 juillet 2014)- See the full 100-page report in the French Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres

<sup>433</sup> Hoyland 2010, p. 35 (Seminar for Arabian Studies 40)

<sup>434</sup> Rassam 2005, p. 76



and held doctrinal beliefs seen as heretical to the Byzantine church.<sup>435</sup> Many Christians fled Syria-Palestine<sup>436</sup> after episodes of state-sponsored oppression that opposed the Syrian Orthodox Church which they branded illegal, thus providing an impetus for resettlement in Lakhmid territories in neighboring Iraq.<sup>437</sup> This certainly affected the political psyche of some Arab Christian communities since it has been reported by historians that Syrian Orthodox Christians of Lakhmid Iraq welcomed the invading Arab Muslims as liberators.<sup>438</sup>

Nevertheless, by the fourth century, the Nabataeans, whose kingdom preceded that of the Ghassanids, had converted to Christianity and while Greek became the language of administration, law, and religion, Arabic still, and simultaneously, persisted in both written and spoken forms among them.<sup>439</sup> At their former capital at Petra, a one-word inscription carved into wood was discovered in the cursive Arabic script that read ‘*nayyif*’ (نایف), usually a proper name which means ‘exalted.’<sup>440</sup> Commenting on the fact the word carries diacritical markers, al-Ghul remarks that “*this fact is of a special significance, since the inscription carries diacritic marks, and becomes thus to be the earliest evidence for the use of the diacritic marks in the Arabic script. This inscription from the northern Hejaz represents a further example for the rather small corpus of early Arabic inscriptions.*”<sup>441</sup> Diacritics were just one reflection of the process of orthographic reform, i.e. an attempt at standardization, while letter-forms similarly,

<sup>435</sup> Shahid 1995, pp. 34-35

<sup>436</sup> See Nancy Khalek’s assessment of Ghassanid-Byzantine relations in the late sixth and early seventh centuries, p. 43 (Damascus after the Muslim Conquest) where she posits that the Ghassanids, during that time, in some instances displayed a sense of ambivalence towards Christianity as a result of political as well as inter-confessional disputes in Syria-Palestine.

<sup>437</sup> Rassam 2005, p. 76

<sup>438</sup> Rassam 2005, p. 76

<sup>439</sup> Taylor 2001, p. 171

<sup>440</sup> Al-Ghul 2004, pp. 105-118

<sup>441</sup> Al-Ghul 2004, pp. 105-118

began to stabilize and become more commonplace in Arabic texts as proven by the inclusion of them in the papyri of Zuhayr which dates to the 640's CE.<sup>442</sup>

Despite the fact that most of the long Arabic texts that have survived were found in former Ghassanid lands, it was the neighboring Lakhmids of Hira that have often been painted by historians as the inventors of the Arabic script. In the preceding three centuries before the rise of Islam, the *Banu Lakhm*, originally Peninsular Arabs, settled in Iraq and northern Arabia and crafted an Arab kingdom there.<sup>443</sup> Their capital at al-Hira, south of the famed city of Kufa, was likely home to the first Arab population center that “*wrote and spoke in Arabic.*”<sup>444</sup>

At the Monastery of Hind (*Dayr Hind*) at al-Hira, there exists a lengthy sixth century ‘Arabic Christian inscription’<sup>445 446</sup> that refers to its founder, Hind, as “*The Maid of Christ and the mother of his slave and the daughter of his slaves*”<sup>447</sup>, a reflection of the community’s long-standing connection to Christianity that go back to the late fourth century.<sup>448</sup>

A fuller articulation of the Arabic script and, by extension, a growing sense of Arab identity continued to coalesce during the late sixth century. These circumstances allowed the new Arab-Muslim rulers to capitalize on growing pro-Arab sentiments during the first half of the seventh century. The increase in wholly Arabic texts attests to this gradual change in the cultural orientation of the Lakhmid and Ghassanid kingdoms and other Arab tribes of Syria-Palestine, Arabia and Mesopotamia. Al-Hira was already regarded as a center for Arab poetry, literature, and culture with a monarchy that gradually adopted Christianity (and which had been accommodating of it in previous times) and where a diocese had already existed since at least the

<sup>442</sup> Ghabban 2008, p. 232 (comments by Robert Hoyland)

<sup>443</sup> Zahran 2009, p. 19

<sup>444</sup> Zahran 2009, p. 19

<sup>445</sup> Kashouh 2012, p. 170

<sup>446</sup> See Toral-Niehoff 2010, pp.323-248 (chapter in ‘The Quran in Context’)

<sup>447</sup> Rassam 2005, p. 43

<sup>448</sup> Rassam 2005, p. 43

end of the fourth century.<sup>449</sup> Arab writers even referred to its inhabitants as ‘*ibad*’ or ‘worshippers’ (of Christ).<sup>450</sup>

More evidence of Christian Arabic writings has been uncovered in the Arabian Peninsula. Near ancient Dumah in northwest Saudi Arabia, a short dedicatory text from 548 or 549 CE was found that includes a multi-line inscription in Arabic that reads “*May be remembered. May God remember Hg {b/n}w son of Salama/Salāma/Salima {in} the m[onth] (gap) year 443 [ad 548/549].*”<sup>451</sup> Near the bottom of the text is a cross and therefore Nehmé believes the author to have been a Christian.<sup>452</sup> Below this inscription is an older Nabataean text while the first line above the Arabic is Nabateo-Arabic (representing a middle stage of orthographic development between Nabataean and cursive Arabic characters).<sup>453</sup>

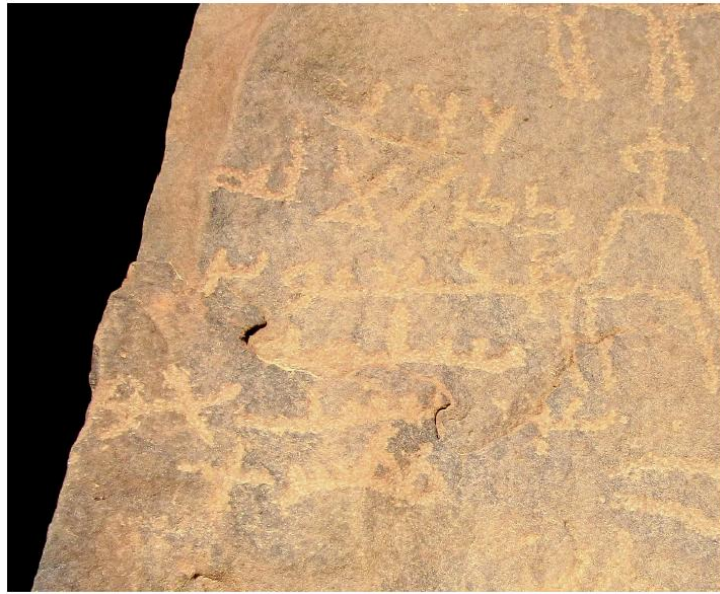


Fig. 14: Photograph of close-up of Arabic text at ancient Dumah DaJ144PAr1 (G. Charloux)

Thus far, though, it has proven difficult to find much administrative material culture bearing Arabic legends from the pre-Islamic period but one seemingly unique lead coin

<sup>449</sup> Rassam 2005, p. 43

<sup>450</sup> Rassam 2005, p. 43

<sup>451</sup> Nehmé 2017, p. 128

<sup>452</sup> Nehmé 2017, p. 130

<sup>453</sup> Nehmé 2017, p. 128

specimen struck in al-Hira may be such an example.<sup>454</sup> The coin bears two crosses with a frontal bust situated between them on one side and a profile of a figure who appears to be holding his or her right hand up with the Arabic phrase '[struck] in al-Hira' or '*bi'l Hira*' (قري حلب) to the left of the figure.<sup>455</sup> There may have been additional text along the outer margins but it is not clear.



Fig. 15: Lead coin bearing the Arabic phrase '*Bi'l-Hira*' between eight and ten o'clock in the Arabic script<sup>456</sup> (Ilitsch 2007)

By 410 CE al-Hira was home to a Nestorian Bishopric<sup>457</sup> and may have played a role in the Christianization of some Arab communities in Arabia, particularly at Najran.<sup>458</sup> Extant inscriptions from Lakhmid areas, such as the Namara inscription (dated to 328 CE) of the famed Lakhmid king Imru al-Qays, were being transcribed in Nabataean Aramaic although the language contained therein is remarkably close to Classical Arabic.<sup>459</sup>

While fascinating because it is likely the first type of coin to bear the Arabic orthography that became famous with the writing of the Quran, the uniqueness and lack of additional examples prevents us from making any concrete conclusions about when it was struck, although Lutz Ilitsch likens it to a sixth century Byzantine *dekanummia* that it bears some resemblance to.<sup>460</sup> The letter forms closely resemble the letter forms found on Arab-Byzantine coinage of the

<sup>454</sup> Ilitsch 2007, p. 22

<sup>455</sup> Ilitsch 2007, pp. 22-23

<sup>456</sup> Ilitsch 2007, p. 22 JONS supplement

<sup>457</sup> Starkey 1998, p. 288

<sup>458</sup> Rassam 2005, p. 44

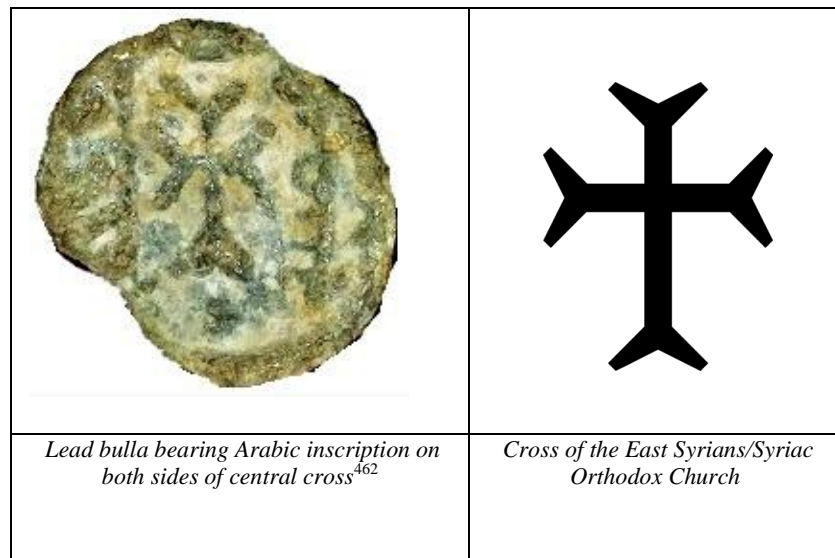
<sup>459</sup> Shahid 1984, p. 357 and Versteegh 2001, p.31

<sup>460</sup> Ilitsch 2007, pp. 22-23 JONS supplement

seventh century, however, including the *ba-alef* ( ﺒ ), *lam-haa* ( ﻻ ), *ra* ( ﺭ ) and *ta marbuta* ( ﺕ ) which are nearly identical to letter forms found on Umayyad administrative objects.

Since most of the earliest known texts in the cursive Arabic script relate to either church activity or were commissioned by a Christian scribal class, it is likely that the script was primarily used for missionary purposes directed at the tribes of Arabia.<sup>461</sup> In other words, the birth of the cursive Arabic orthography is closely linked to the propagation of Christianity in Arabia, Mesopotamia, and the Levant.

Apart from the seemingly unique coin of al-Hira, there also exists a small lead bulla in a private collection, bearing what appears to be two unidentified Arabic terms- one on each side of a central cross. With a provenance in Jerusalem, it is cup-shaped like some Umayyad-era lead seals that bear religious texts. Thus, it is possible that this was issued by some local religious authority in the late sixth or seventh century CE. The letters to the right all connect at a horizontal base going downward ending with three vertical strokes.



*Fig. 16 Lead bulla bearing cross and undeciphered Arabic text and Cross of the East Syrians*

<sup>461</sup> Robin (in *Roads of Arabia*) 2010, pp. 130-131

<sup>462</sup> Private collection (owner reported that it was found in Jerusalem)

Whether this bulla is associated with Byzantine Jerusalem is difficult to ascertain without a proper reading of the inscription. However, the city's Patriarch until 638 CE was Sophronius (Σωφρόνιος); a Damascus-born, Greek-Syriac bishop who after negotiating the surrender of Jerusalem with Umar b. Khattab passed away.<sup>463</sup> He is venerated by both Eastern Orthodox Syriac Christians and Catholics and is also believed to have authored several ecclesiastical and secular works during his life including a tract describing the Muslim invasions and his communications with Umar.<sup>464</sup>

Because of internal disputes in the Church of Jerusalem after Sophronius, and the fact that Muslim rulers throughout the seventh and eighth centuries interfered in church matters there, the record after Sophronius until Anastasius II is fragmented and therefore, poorly understood. Thus, without an interpretation of the text, it remains an undeciphered, anonymous, Arabic inscribed seal of Christian significance and likely from the late Byzantine or early Islamic period. Under the Rashidun and Umayyads, Christian symbols and Byzantine imagery still featured heavily in the public sphere as the numismatic, par anumismatic and epigraphic evidence attests to. Archaeologists have documented a similar trend in the material record. For example, some oil lamps produced during the Umayyad period bore crosses and sometimes contained Greek inscriptions.<sup>465</sup> Other inscribed oil lamps have also been unearthed during archaeological excavations at Sde Boqer.<sup>466</sup> The pottery oil lamp below bears a cross similar to the Arabic seal, both of which are associated with East Syrians/Syriac Orthodox Church of the Levant.

<sup>463</sup> Grypeou, Swanson, and Thomas 2006, p. 39

<sup>464</sup> Daniel J. Sahas's chapter (in Grypeou, Swanson, and Thomas) 2006, pp. 33-44

<sup>465</sup> Bisheh, Kehrberg, Tohme, and Zayadine 2000, p.160. (*see pottery oil lamp inv. Num. 130*).

<sup>466</sup> Magness 2003, p. 140



Fig. 17: Umayyad-era oil lamp bearing an East Syrian/Syriac Orthodox cross towards the nozzle (Irbid Archaeological Museum, Dar as-Saraya)

Christian symbols also appeared on Arabic-inscribed weights. Below is the image of a square *wuqiyya* (Greek *ouggía*, οὐγγία) bronze weight bearing an imperial Byzantine figure holding a staff topped by a cross, a *globus cruciger* in one hand and a cross on his head/crown along with the Arabic phrase ‘*bismallah*’ (‘in the name of God’) to the left, going downward.<sup>467</sup>



Fig. 18: Square bronze weight bearing Christian imperial figure with Arabic term ‘*bismallah*’ to left, going downwards (photograph from A.H. Baldwin and Sons, Ltd.)

<sup>467</sup> A.H. Baldwin and Sons, Ltd., Islamic Coin Auction 16 (Description: Islamic Coins, Arab Byzantine. Anon. temp. pre ‘Abd al-Malik, Bronze Wuqiyya/ounce weight, probably of Syrian origin, 27.23g. Good very fine and extremely rare.)

It is described as having been produced prior to Abd al-Malik b. Marwan and is thought to have originated in Syria while weighing 27.23 grams<sup>468</sup> which was the standard for Byzantine weights after Justinian's administrative reforms (which included the standardizing of weights and measurements) went into effect towards the first half of the sixth century. While undated, it represents yet another example of the Arabic orthography utilized in a Christian context in the seventh century. For the Umayyads, each *waqiyya* was valued at ten silver dirhams, and twelve *waqiyya* amounted to a '*ratl*' at 29.7 grams, while the Byzantine libra, the equivalent of a twelve ounce weight, weighed approximately 27.29 grams, making the *ratl* and its Byzantine counterpart rather close in weight.<sup>469</sup> Evidence of Arab-Muslim emulation of Byzantine weights, seals, and coins (as you will see in chapter four) makes clear that the Umayyads adopted several Byzantine administrative practices, modifying some features in order to suit their needs. The Umayyads even re-used existing architectural elements and visual décor, some of which contained crosses reintegrating them back into their own structures and monuments. At Tell Jawa, for example, archaeologists discovered re-used lintels adorned with crosses alongside Quranic verses (in Arabic) etched into door frames.<sup>470 471</sup>

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<sup>468</sup> Skinner 1967, pp. 85-87

<sup>469</sup> Skinner 1967, pp. 85-87

<sup>470</sup> Daviau and Pietersma 1994, pp. 77-78

<sup>471</sup> During excavations at Shuqayra al-Gharbiyya in 2013, a multi-period site home to an Umayyad palace complex near Kerak, our joint team led by Zakariya Ben Bedhan uncovered a marble capital bearing a cross that potentially dated to the late Byzantine period and was likely reused in the construction of one of the interior walls.





*Fig. 19: Photographs of two lead seals bearing cross and Arabic term 'baraka' ('blessings') in the Jordan National Bank Numismatic Museum*

Two more Arabic-inscribed seals bear Christian symbols at the Jordan National Bank Numismatic Museum (see next paragraph). Both uniface lead seals, one of which is pictured above, bears a cross above the Arabic word 'baraka' ('blessings') which is broken up into three lines. These thick-rimmed seals may have been issued by church authorities to validate documents in commercial church contexts (e.g. a stamp applied to wax on a receipt for tithing/donations, etc.) although it is impossible to say with any certainty.

Given that institutional monopolies over writing were common in ancient polities, the fact that so many of the earliest materials inscribed in Arabic are associated with Christianity and the church, where literacy was essential to the teaching and spreading of the faith, should come as no surprise. Likewise, the spread of Islam and the formation of the Umayyad state were both dependent on the successful application and imposition of the Arabic language and script. The types of literacies that stemmed from the success of these two independent, albeit, overlapping mechanisms is difficult to measure but Arabic was adapted for usage in ecclesiastical contexts, illustrating its significance to the cultivation and spread of Christianity among Arabic-speaking people before it was re-adapted and appropriated for use as the language of religious prestige (i.e. for Islam) under the Umayyads.



*Fig. 20: Two lead seals both containing the Arabic word 'baraka'*

The phrase was similarly used under the Umayyads, re-employed by Muslim elites as the bulla below attests to. The perfectly round disk seal contains three lines and contains a message declaring the bestowing of 'baraka' upon one 'servant of God, son of [..]' (the piercing in the center of line two, in the middle of the seal distorts the term in the middle, making it difficult to read).



*Fig. 21: Pierced lead Seal with legend 'Li'abd Allah bin... ..li'baraka (For Abdullah, son of.. (for) blessings..) (Jordan National Bank Numismatic Museum)*

The emerging and rapidly popularizing lexicon of Arabic phrases under the Muslim rulers was no overnight development. Dedicatory texts and short spiritual phrases in a slew of Levantine and Peninsular, Arabic-related scripts centuries before Islam attested to the usage of such invocations and dedications in pagan contexts, then in Christian ones before the Muslims continued in those traditions. The latter two groups certainly modified the particular religious and inscriptional forms such texts took, and with the passing of time, Islam gained a monopolistic grip on certain expressions, wielding them as purveyors of a new force.

## **7. LITERACY, THE QURAN AND THE ARABS OF MUHAMMAD'S TIME**

Bloch argued that contemporary scholarship tends to exaggerate social qualities attributed to literacy, and one can certainly apply this logic in the case of some ancient and contemporary societies because, as Macdonald showed us, literacy was not always perceived as a positive quality nor did it always serve a wide purpose nor utilized with great reverence. Scholars like

Goody would be less inclined to accept such a model since he sees certain aspects of literacy as somehow independent of the specific social or cultural foundations of a society in which literacy is found. Unfortunately, in antiquity, assessing the processes involved in activating and spreading literacy and measuring all of its consequences is incredibly challenging given the disjointed and fractional archaeological and epigraphic record that pertains to schooling in most of the ancient Classical and Near Eastern worlds.<sup>472</sup>

As Sharkawi noted, a great variety of *lughāt* (languages and dialects) existed in the ancient Near East, concurrently, among the settled and nomadic Arabs of Arabia in pre-Islamic times and later grammarians were cognizant of both the linguistic and orthographic diversity as is evidenced by works dating from the late eighth and early ninth centuries that detailed tribal dialects of Arabic.<sup>473</sup> Limited forms of literacy certainly existed among both the Arab populations in the time leading up to the birth of Islam and writing is assumed to have been “fairly common in the urban centers of the peninsula, in Mecca and to a lesser degree Medina.”<sup>474</sup> Later, due to the fact that diacritics were not always or often incorporated into early and fully Arabic texts, some problems arose once the frontiers of the Arab-Muslim state expanded considering it was difficult for non-Arabic speakers to distinguish between certain phonemes such as *sin/shin*, *saad/daad*, *ba/ta* etc. without vowel markers.<sup>475</sup>

With regards to the codification of a universal form of literary Arabic, the Quran and the existence of various codices, Arabic-language grammarians were tasked with further standardizing the Arabic language in the late seventh to ninth centuries in regards to its spoken

<sup>472</sup> Charpin 2010, p. 17

<sup>473</sup> See the eighth century Arab linguist Yūnus ibn Ḥabīb’s (d. 182/798) *Kitāb al-lughāt* (تأغلل اباتك) and ‘Abu Amr aš-Šaybānī’s (d. 213/828) in *Kitāb al-Jim*

<sup>474</sup> Versteegh 2001, pp. 53-54

<sup>475</sup> Versteegh 2001, p. 55

and literary forms.<sup>476</sup> The most prominent, early grammarian was Sibawaih, whose “*Kitaab is, even by modern standards, a paragon of detail and completeness.*”<sup>477</sup> Sibawaih’s text dates from the end of the eighth century (only a few decades after the Umayyad collapse), represents the oldest grammatical work on Arabic and is considered “*one of the most detailed grammars of Arabic ever written.*”<sup>478</sup>

Further, Sibawaih’s apparent goal was to “*functionally distinguish lexically determined from syntactically determined short vowels*” which contributed to the further standardization of the Arabic language which was wholly standardized and cemented by the tenth century.<sup>479</sup> Other grammarians such as Abu al-Aswad ad-Du’ali, who came before Sibawaih and died around 688 CE is “*credited with the introduction of a system of colored dots below and above letters to indicate three short vowels.*”<sup>480</sup>

For some highly oral communities, writing systems facilitated a sense of social autonomy and political independence. They could also, simultaneously, be viewed as a threat to oral tradition and as a weapon that could be used to undermine aspects of longstanding culture. Even in the ancient pre-Islamic Near East, literacy was not always a welcome quality. Amongst nomadic Bedouins, literacy may have helped some groups assimilate when and if they traveled to or settled in more urban areas, but becoming literate sometimes had the effect of ostracizing them from their native Bedouin societies, most of who could neither read nor write.<sup>481</sup>

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<sup>476</sup> Versteegh 2001, pp. 53-55

<sup>477</sup> Owens 2006, p. 87

<sup>478</sup> Owens 2006, p. 87

<sup>479</sup> Owens 2006, pp. 88-90

<sup>480</sup> Versteegh 2001, p. 56

<sup>481</sup> Macdonald 2009, p. 382

Furthermore, the issue of literacy is no stranger to the biographical discourse surrounding the Arabs during the formative years of Islam, either. Muhammad, himself- someone raised by Bedouins as a boy, and who, by most accounts, is believed to have been illiterate.

However, this view, which is controversial among some, is primarily anchored in the belief that the Quran's nature is inextricably tied to Muhammad's alleged inability to read or write, thereby compounding and increasing its essence and implicating its miraculousness and amplifying Muhammad's abilities to deliver such a profound literary and theological masterpiece. On the other hand, while the traditional Sunni narrative posits that Muhammad could neither read nor write, i.e. an illiterate, a survey of Quranic verses including an etymological analysis of Quranic words used by Muslim scholars to argue for his illiteracy, in addition to a reading of the prophetic narrations, and a historical reconstruction of Muhammad's world (as well as his place in it, i.e. the existing circumstances of his childhood education) collectively lead us to a far more convoluted and nuanced perspective on this matter.

According to a popular narrative about Muhammad's initial response to the command to read by the archangel Gabriel in relation to the first revelation he is believed to have received while meditating in a cave at Mount Hira (on the Meccan outskirts),

*"...The angel came to him and asked him to read. The Prophet replied, "I do not know how to read."*

*The Prophet added, "The angel caught me (forcefully) and pressed me so hard that I could not bear it any more. He then released me and again asked me to read and I replied, 'I do not know how to read.' Thereupon he caught me again and pressed me a second time till I could not bear it any more. He then released me and again asked me to read but again I replied, 'I do not know how to read (or what shall I read)?' Thereupon he caught me for the third time and pressed me, and then released me and said, 'Read in the name of your Lord, who has created (all that exists) has created man from a clot. Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous.'" (96.1, 96.2, 96.3) Then Allah's Apostle returned with the Inspiration and with his heart beating severely. Then he went to Khadija bint Khuwailid and said, "Cover me! Cover me!" They covered him till his fear was over and after that he told her everything that had happened and*

*said, "I fear that something may happen to me." Khadija replied, "Never! By Allah, Allah will never disgrace you. You keep good relations with your kith and kin, help the poor and the destitute, serve your guests generously and assist the deserving calamity-afflicted ones."*<sup>482</sup>

While the belief in Muhammad's illiteracy is widespread in much of the Muslim world today, it is difficult to confirm that this view is supported by the many written accounts about Muhammad as a statesman, and it can be certainly argued that there is plenty of circumstantial, literary evidence to conclude otherwise. For example, Muhammad was reportedly a merchant for part of his adult life and, therefore, likely knew the gematrical values of the Arabic *abjad* (e.g. the letter س represented a value of '60' in the Levantine system)<sup>483</sup>, which served as an alphanumeric calculator of sorts (for his commercial transactions) considering there was no independent numeral system yet to utilize in financial contexts. The orientation (i.e. 'letter order') of the Arabic alphanumeric system has its roots in the older Hebrew and Syriac systems of the Levant<sup>484</sup> which provided time for its users to become accustomed to it.

If Muhammad did not know the Arabic values, other systems of numerical notation had already existed including Aramaic (as well as 'Greek alphabetic numerals', as Chrisomalis has explained), which had been widely used in the Levant prior to the rise of Islam among the Levant's disparate populations.<sup>485</sup> While circumstantial evidence at best, his merchant activities and his use of numbers as they pertained to trade and commerce certainly alludes to the possibility and even probability of an acquired form of literacy on Muhammad's part.

Moreover, and according to Muslim literary traditions regarding the genesis of the Quran, the first command (and which would mark the beginning of revelations) to Muhammad was 'iqra!' or 'read!' Only a few verses later, he is told that God '*taught (humanity by way) of the*

<sup>482</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith- 1.3, Narrated by Aisha

<sup>483</sup> Chrisomalis 2010, p. 163

<sup>484</sup> Chrisomalis 2010, p. 162

<sup>485</sup> Chrisomalis 2010, pp. 73-74

pen', thus cementing the role of literacy in the life of the new (and soon to be doctrinal) religion.

Considered the very first verses of the Quran, the ninety-sixth chapter<sup>486</sup> also known as *Surah al-Alaq* reads:

﴿١﴾	أَقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ	Read! In the name of your lord who created you.
﴿٢﴾	خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ	Created humankind from a clinging substance.
﴿٣﴾	أَقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ	Read! And your lord is the most generous.
﴿٤﴾	الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ	Who taught by the pen.
﴿٥﴾	عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَم	Taught humankind that which he did not know.

The claim that Muhammad had never been taught to read during his life is difficult to substantiate, despite the fact that several of his relatives and close friends were reportedly literate- some of whom were responsible for recording the Quran, writing letters, and engaging in other administrative exercises during Muhammad's life.

In his famous historical work, al-Ya'qubi names several of Muhammad's wordsmiths and copyists, highlighting the rather larger coterie of literate colleagues and scribes at his disposal and in his presence, when he reports that "*The Prophet's scribes, who wrote the revelations (Quran), letters, and agreements are `Ali ibn Abi Talib, `Uthman ibn `Affan, `Amr ibn al-`As, Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan, Shurahbil ibn Hasanah, `Abdullah ibn Sa'd ibn Abi Sarh, Al-Mughirah ibn Shu'bah, Ma'adh ibn Jabal, Zayd ibn Thabit, Hanzalah ibn Al-Rabi`, Ubay ibn Ka'b, Juhaym ibn Al-Salt, Husayn Al-Numayri.*"<sup>487</sup>

Between the aforementioned and esteemed writers whom befriended Muhammad and relatives who spent considerable time with him, it would be unusual for Muhammad to have

<sup>486</sup> The Quran's chapters are not laid out in chronological order, but by length (from longest to shortest), with the exception of the opening chapter of the Quran (Surah al-Fatiha). As such, out of one hundred and fourteen chapters, the first revelations make up part of a shorter chapter (Surah al-Alaq), and is thus the ninety-sixth chapter of the Quran (again, in accordance with its length).

<sup>487</sup> Al-Ya'qubi. *Tarikh al-Ya'qubi*. Volume 2, p 69.



never learned to read and write at all. The Hadiths, themselves, illustrate his abilities in various instances where reports place Muhammad in the midst of various exercises in literacy.<sup>488 489</sup> In several *ahadith*, Muhammad is described as having written letters to world leaders. In the most famous of the Sunni hadith compilations, Bukhari includes the following narration about Muhammad:

*“Anas b. Malik reported that when God's Messenger (may peace be upon him) decided to write letters to the Byzantine (Emperor) they (his Companions) told him that they would not read a letter unless it is sealed. (Then) God's Messenger (may peace be upon him) had a silver ring made (for himself), (its shape is to vivid in my mind) as if I see its brightness in the band of God's Messenger (may peace be upon him) and its engraving was (Muhammad, Messenger of God).”<sup>490</sup>*

Still, debates over his ability to read and write persist. Traditionists often refer to the Quranic description of him as an ‘*ummi*’<sup>491</sup>, which can mean ‘illiterate’ as a main source of textual evidence against his literacy. But the verses in the Quran that use this terminology do not seem to imply anything about this ability to read or write, but instead, appear to be remarks about his alleged lack of scriptural familiarity<sup>492</sup> or they call attention to the fact that the Arabs are ‘gentiles’ (as opposed to people who received scripture, i.e. *ahl al-kitab* such as the Jews and Christians).<sup>493</sup> One verse, for example, speaks of Muhammad as a member of the *Ummiyeen*, in Surah al-Jum’a (62:2):

<sup>488</sup> For example, Saheeh Muslim Book 041, Number 7009 “Anas b. Malik reported that God's Messenger said: “*Dajjal is blind of one eye and there is written between his eyes the word "Kafir."* He then spelled the word as *k. f. r.*, which every Muslim would be able to read.” In this report, Muhammad spells the word ‘*kafir*’ for disbeliever, and spells it out loud (or transcribes it- it is unclear from the narration), thus implying he understand some word formulas.

<sup>489</sup> See Guillaume 1967, p. 649 for the exchange of letters between Muhammad and Musaylima who also claimed prophethood during Muhammad's time and who is referred to in Islamic literature as ‘the liar.’

<sup>490</sup> Saheeh Muslim Book 024, Number 5216

<sup>491</sup> See the Quran, Surat al-A'raaf (7:157 and 158) which refers to him as ‘*al-nabi al-ummi*’

<sup>492</sup> Muhammad was accused of fabricating the Quran in Surah al-Furqan 25, verses 1-6

<sup>493</sup> The Quran, in Surat ‘Al-Imran (3:20) states “*So if they argue with you, say, "I have submitted myself to Allah [in Islam], and [so have] those who follow me."* And say to those who were given the Scripture and [to] the unlearned (*al-Ummiyeen*), “*Have you submitted yourselves?"* And if they submit [in Islam], they are rightly guided; but if they turn away - then upon you is only the [duty of] notification. And Allah is Seeing of [His] servants.” Here, *al-*

*“It is He who has sent among the unlettered a Messenger from themselves reciting to them His verses and purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom - although they were before in clear error.”*

This version of the Quran (Sahih International), translates the term as ‘unlettered’, implying Muhammad was illiterate while simultaneously referencing a community of sorts that Muhammad was from ‘among’ and whom he was sent to in order to recite to them the Quran from a ‘book’ or ‘scripture.’ Some have translated the term *ummi* as ‘unschooled’, meaning he lacked any sort of formal schooling, although it is likely, given the context of the verses, that such a lack of schooling refers to a lack of religious schooling (in any doctrinal religious tradition) so as to blunt the criticism that was leveled against Muhammad about allegedly forging the Quran. It is true that by the late sixth century, during Muhammad’s life, various forms of paganism and polytheism were giving way to doctrinal forms of monotheism, namely Abrahamic religions like Christianity and Judaism- a period that was also not alien to the assertion and notion of ‘active prophecy’ (though it was not as popular as it had been in the preceding centuries).<sup>494</sup>

According to the scripture itself, Muhammad was accused by some of his contemporaries of fabricating the contents of what would become Islam’s holy book, believing that he essentially plagiarized previous religious writings. Thus, in light of the accusations, the Quran says, in *Surah al-Ankabout 29:47-48*:

*“And thus We have sent down to you the Qur’an. And those to whom We [previously] gave the Book (Scripture) believe in it. And among these [people of Makkah] are those who believe in it. And none reject Our verses except the disbelievers. And you did not recite before it any book (scripture), nor did you write one with your right hand. Otherwise the falsifiers would have had [cause for] doubt (Sahih International).”*

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*Ummiyeen* are referenced in contrast to those communities who had received scripture (likely a reference to Jews and Nazarenes)

<sup>494</sup> Donner 2010, pp. 30-31

From this passage, and in an effort to defend against the recrimination of forgery, Muhammad is made to reiterate that he was not familiar with previous scriptures and certainly did not partake in fabricating one (but not necessarily because he was illiterate). As such, the evidence for Muhammad's illiteracy appears to be scant and unconvincing as the Quran and Hadith, as well as biographical sources, through and through, actively portray Muhammad as someone who wrote, who read<sup>495</sup>, who recited<sup>496</sup>, and who taught the Quran (which is often referred to as a '*kitab*' to his community). It is also true that Muhammad valued literacy skills as is attested to in some prophetic narrations attributed to him. In at least two instances, it was reported that he freed literate prisoners of war on account that they teach other Muslims how to read and write.<sup>497</sup> Also, he must have been aware that his newly-found religious community could not compete with Judaism or Christianity on the regional (or world) stage had it not taken on a doctrinal form and so efforts to collate Quranic materials began during his life as the references to his personal scribes strongly suggest.

One hadith even claims that Muhammad, on his deathbed, offered to write some guiding words down for Umar b. Khattab, one of his successors:

*"It was narrated that Ibn 'Abbaas said: When the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was dying, there were men in the house among whom was 'Umar ibn al-Khattaab. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Come, let me write for you a document after which you will not go astray." 'Umar said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) is overcome with pain, and you have the Qur'an; the Book of Allah is sufficient for us. The people in the house disagreed, and they argued. Some of them said: Come close and let the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) write for you a document after which you will not go astray. Others agreed with what 'Umar said. When their debating and argument in the*

<sup>495</sup> See the Quran, Surah Bani Isra'eel 17:105-106 "And with the truth We have sent the Qur'an down, and with the truth it has descended. And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a bringer of good tidings and a warner. And [it is] a Qur'an which We have separated [by intervals] that you might read it to the people over a prolonged period. And We have sent it down progressively."

<sup>496</sup> See the Quran, Surah al-Ankaboot 29:51 "And is it not sufficient for them that We revealed to you the Book which is recited to them? Indeed in that is a mercy and reminder for a people who believe."

<sup>497</sup> See Ibn Sa'd's *Tabaqat al-Kabir* and a single Hadith by Ibn Hanbali

*presence of the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) became too much, the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Get up and leave."*

*'Ubayd-Allah said: Ibn 'Abbaas used to say: What a calamity it was when the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was prevented from writing that document for them because of their disagreement and arguing.'*<sup>498</sup>

Furthermore, the '*kitab*' or scripture that is repeatedly invoked in the Quran seems to suggest that a textual, written form of the revealed chapters existed and it appears that the latest research on early Quranic manuscripts implies, though not without controversy, that the Quran acquired a textual form sometime during the middle of the seventh century and possibly even during the lifetime of Muhammad, himself. Several Muslim literary traditions, of which none are contemporaneous, claim that Muhammad employed a number of scribes to write down revelations he believed he was receiving. They were transcribed onto, mainly perishable materials such as parchment, bone, and palm leaves. One well-known hadith narrated by Zaid bin Thabit, describes the context out of which the Quran, in book, form, emerges:

*"Abu Bakr sent for me owing to the large number of casualties in the battle of Al-Yamama, while 'Umar was sitting with him. Abu Bakr said (to me), 'Umar has come to me and said, 'A great number of Qaris of the Holy Quran were killed on the day of the battle of Al-Yamama, and I am afraid that the casualties among the Qaris of the Quran may increase on other battle-fields whereby a large part of the Quran may be lost. Therefore I consider it advisable that you (Abu Bakr) should have the Koran collected.' I said, 'How dare I do something which Allah's Apostle did not do?' 'Umar said, By Allah, it is something beneficial.' 'Umar kept on pressing me for that till Allah opened my chest for that for which He had opened the chest of 'Umar and I had in that matter, the same opinion as 'Umar had." Abu Bakr then said to me (Zaid), "You are a wise young man and we do not have any suspicion about you, and you used to write the Divine Inspiration for Allah's Apostle. So you should search for the fragmentary scripts of the Quran and collect it (in one Book)." Zaid further said: By Allah, if Abu Bakr had ordered me to shift a mountain among the mountains from one place to another it would not have been heavier for me than this ordering me to collect the Koran. Then I said (to 'Umar and Abu Bakr), "How can you do something which Allah's Apostle did*

<sup>498</sup> Bukhari, Volume 001, Book 003, Hadith Number 114

*not do?" Abu Bakr said, "By Allah, it is something beneficial." Zaid added: So he (Abu Bakr) kept on pressing me for that until Allah opened my chest for that for which He had opened the chests of Abu Bakr and 'Umar, and I had in that matter, the same opinion as theirs.*

*So I started compiling the Quran by collecting it from the leafless stalks of the date-palm tree and from the pieces of leather and hides and from the stones, and from the chests of men (who had memorized the Quran). I found the last verses of Surat-at-Tauba: ("Verily there has come unto you an Apostle (Muhammad) from amongst yourselves- (9:128-129) from Khuzaima or Abi Khuzaima and I added to it the rest of the Sura. The manuscripts of the Quran remained with Abu Bakr till Allah took him unto Him. Then it remained with 'Umar till Allah took him unto Him, and then with Hafsa bint 'Umar."<sup>499</sup>*

While it has long been held in some Muslim scholarly circles that Uthmanic copies of the Quran (*rasm Uthmani*) were sent to the urban centers of the burgeoning Arabian-based caliphate, it is believed that no such copies have survived.<sup>500</sup> This claim is further supported by the fact that the Medina-based scholar Malik b. Anas (founder of the Sunni Maliki School of Jurisprudence) in eighth century Hejaz had claimed, staunchly, that the Caliph Uthman's original copy had perished.<sup>501</sup>

Today, the oldest known Quranic manuscripts, i.e. folios, are believed to be in Yemen and others in the possession of the University of Birmingham and are written in a highly legible, *ma'il* (slanted) script on either goat or sheep skin. They are thought to belong to another group of sixteen Quranic manuscripts at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (known, collectively, as *Arabe 328c*). Inventoried as *Mingana Islamic Arabic 1572a*, researchers at the University of Birmingham claimed that "Radiocarbon analysis has dated the parchment on which the text is written to the period between 568 and 645 CE with 95.4% accuracy. Researchers conclude that

<sup>499</sup> Sahih Bukhari, Volume 9, Book 89, Number 301

<sup>500</sup> Deroche 2014, p. 3

<sup>501</sup> Jahdani 2002, p. 274.

the Qur'an manuscript is among the earliest written textual evidence of the Islamic holy book known to survive."<sup>502</sup>



Fig. 22: Folio 1 verso (right) and folio 2 recto (left) of Mingana Islamic Arabic 1572a (University of Birmingham Quranic manuscripts)

Muhammad died in June of 632 CE at the age of sixty-two or sixty-three and so the earliest Quranic manuscripts, if we are to accept the suggested radiocarbon dates, places the production of these documents either during Muhammad's lifetime or in the decade after his death.

However, the society Muhammad emerged from was primarily oral and the Quran's contents were often memorized by several of his companions and early believers according to Muslim literary traditions. The ability to recite lengthy tracts from memory was prized among the pre-Islamic Arabs too, but the region was undergoing a cultural and religious transformation of sorts, especially in the sixth century, and therefore, with the spread of religious ideas through trade, missions, and conflict, the peninsula's inhabitants also witnessed the spread of spiritual doctrines in their written forms.

<sup>502</sup> The University of Birmingham: The Qur'an Manuscript display

As previously discussed, it is believed that Christian missionaries and/or clergy were likely responsible for the initial dispensation of the Arabic script<sup>503</sup> in Muhammad's Arabia and although literacy in Arabic was almost certainly limited to a scribal class tasked with bureaucratic practices or in functions related to sacred writing, it gradually made its way into a more accessible and popular tool for Arab self-expression, ultimately culminating in what we can regard today as the first major religious scripture to have been written in the Arabic script; the Quran.

In essence, Muhammad, himself, was a champion and facilitator of literate culture in his community as the historical, literary record ascertains and he was adamant about the need for a body of religious literature (the Quranic verses) and of political statements (i.e. his pseudo-diplomatic letters) to exist in order to ensure Islam's ideological triumph and universalization. Thus, the Quran and other texts can be seen as a papertrail leading to Islam's emergence and spread under the religion's founder, and which set the precedence for his successors who were successful in globalizing Arab culture, Islamic practice, and Arabic writing.

This script, as the famous tenth century bibliographer and scholar, al-Nadim noted, has its origins in the Hejaz, claiming that "*the first Arabic scripts were the Meccan and after that the Medinan, then the Basran, then the Kufan. As regards the Mekkan and Medinan, there is in its alifs a turning to the right and an elevation of the vertical strokes; and in its form, there is a slight inclination.*"<sup>504</sup>

The *alif* that al-Nadim referred to is almost certainly the same *alif* used on Umayyad coins and inscriptions (such as the examples of the mosaic inscriptions inside the Dome of the

<sup>503</sup> Angold (ed.) 2014, pp. 389-390 (also see footnote 39)

<sup>504</sup> Al-Nadim, *Kitab al-Fihrist* (Rida Tajaddud, ed.) 1971, p. 9

Rock), which had a slight tail extending from the baseline to the right (i.e. ‘ل’ like the English letter ‘L’) and which I briefly revisit towards the end of chapter five.<sup>505</sup>

As a result, a doctrinal form of Islam made literacy incumbent upon its practitioners (as well as its critics) and played an indispensable role in the spread of the Arabic language and its written form. During Islam’s Classical Period (600-1000 CE), Arabic became the language of government, education, literature, commerce, science, and of course, the state religion- Islam. During the early Abbasid period, between the late 700’s and early 800’s, the first Arabic Bibles began to be produced, attesting to the Arabization of the Near East and, in many ways, impacting the ecclesiastical, cultural orientations of some churches, and by extension, the very Christian communities that frequented them.<sup>506</sup> By contrast, the first Latin translations of the Quran were not produced and published until some three centuries later, in the 1100’s.<sup>507</sup>

For the largely Bedouin societies in western Arabia, most of which were highly oral, and especially where few states and/or large-scale administrative institutions existed (during Muhammad’s time and in the region he lived in), there was likely not a particularly high demand for writing nor is there evidence of a formal education system tasked with teaching it, which may explain, in part, why there is very little in terms of Arabic-inscribed materials from the earliest decades of Islam, especially from Muhammad’s time and from ensuing decades under his political successors (632-661 CE).

The few extant inscriptions that have been discovered and documented thus far are mainly short texts from the Hejaz, several of which mention the second caliph Umar b. al-Khattab (r. 634-644 CE). This includes a short, dated text found in Muthallath, Saudi Arabia

<sup>505</sup> See Deroches’s *Qur’ans of the Umayyads*’ (2014) for a discussion of the early Arabic scripts in the introduction.

<sup>506</sup> Angold (ed.) 2014, pp. 389

<sup>507</sup> Marraci 2008, p. 32



(near the Red Sea coastal town of Yanbu) which reads ‘*Salma wrote (in the year) twenty three (AH)*’ (كتبت سلمى ثلاثة وعشرين) attributed to the year(s) 634-644 or year twenty-three *after hijra*.<sup>508</sup>

Another Rashidun-era inscription also from 644 CE bears the straightforward signature ‘Umar bin al-Khattab’ (عمر بن الخطاب) and was discovered in al-Murakkab during a Saudi-French epigraphic survey in Najran, Saudi Arabia in November, 2012.<sup>509</sup> A slightly longer inscription, consisting of two lines, also found during the 2012 survey, reads ‘*Umar bin al-Khattab/puts his trust in God*’ (عمر بن الخطاب / با لله يتيق) dating, too, from the years before 644 CE (although it is unclear how much earlier).<sup>510</sup> A lengthier public text discovered at Qā‘ al-Mu‘tadil (just southeast of Mada’in Saleh but some 740km north of Mecca) consisting of three lines and dating from the year twenty-four AH (644 CE) reads ‘*In the name of God, I, Zuhayr, wrote [this] at the time ‘Umar died in the year four and twenty*’ (بسم الله / أنا زهير كتبت زمن توفي عمر سنة أربع / وعشرين).<sup>511</sup> An inscription from 650 CE (also found near Najran at Wādī Khushayba) contains three lines of text beginning with a spiritual invocation ‘*May God have mercy on Yazīd ibn ‘Abdallāh al-Salūlī and he wrote (this) in Jumādā of the year nine and twenty*’ (ترحم الله على يزيد بن عبد الله السلولي و / كتب في جمادى من سنة سبع / وعشرين).<sup>512</sup> A tombstone bearing multiple lines of text and dating from 652 CE (31AH) and found in the Cairo Museum (its archaeological provenance is unknown) begins with the popular Quranic phrase ‘*bism allah al-rahman al-raheem*’ (*In the Name of God, The Compassionate, the Merciful*).<sup>513</sup>

More importantly, a politically charged inscription commenting on the assassination of the third Rashidun Caliph Uthman b. Affan was discovered in Tayma (422 km north of Medina,

<sup>508</sup> Imbert 2011, pp. 55-77

<sup>509</sup> Imbert 2013, pp. 757-758

<sup>510</sup> Imbert, 2015, p. 64 and p. 75 (Fig. 2)

<sup>511</sup> Ghabban 2003, pp. 293-342.

<sup>512</sup> Kawatoko, Tokunaga, Iizuka 2005, pp. 51-52, Plate 8.12(A)

<sup>513</sup> Grohmann 1971, p. 71, Plate 10:1

the capital of the first Muslim state until Ali b. Abi Talib moved it to Kufa in 657 CE) and which reads, in six lines, *'I am Qays, the scribe of Abū Kutayr. Curse of God on (those who murdered 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān and (those who) have led to the killing without mercy'*

<sup>514</sup> انا قيس ا لكتب ابو كتير لعن الله من قتل عثمان ابن عفان و من احت قتله تقتلا

These texts are remarkable in that they validate the historicity of at least two early and highly important political leaders of the Muslim world. It is noteworthy, however, that none of the aforementioned inscriptions bear the titular *'amir al-mu'mineen'* in relation to the early Rashidun caliphs, although some of the writers clearly tried linking the notion of piety to them and the bestowing of God's good graces, expressions likely borrowed from Greek invocations that derived from Byzantine, Christian ecclesiastical contexts (see the Greek inscriptions at Deir Dubban, Khilda, and Tamra).

In early Islamic Arabia, the Arabic orthography became the primary script to relay messages to audiences, while outside of Arabia, local scripts were generally employed. Robert Hoyland, through his observations of early Islamic texts, alluded to the fact that many documents and inscriptions (e.g. the Zuhayr inscription and Ahnas papyrus which he refers to specifically) from the Rashidun and Umayyad periods contain stylistic, grammatical, and diacritical features that convey a sense of growing orthographic and linguistic cohesiveness. He argues that letter forms were changing, even during the seventh century, as is exhibited by fluctuations in the ways certain letters were transcribed (e.g. open versus closed *'ta marbuta'* such as in the second Zuhayr inscription<sup>515</sup>). He also notes that many private and personal Arabic texts during the life of Muhammad until the rise of Muawiya tended to incorporate Quranic lexical elements.<sup>516</sup> This,

<sup>514</sup> Imbert 2015, pp. 65-66 and p. 75 (Fig. 3)

<sup>515</sup> Ghabban (*Trans. And remarks by Hoyland*) 2008, p. 232

<sup>516</sup> Hoyland 2006, p 406

as we will see, also extended to administrative material culture, monuments, and other numismatic and paranumismatic materials throughout the Umayyad period.

## **8. THE ARABIC LANGUAGE AND ORTHOGRAPHY: THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW CULTURAL MILIEU**

Studies on writing and literacy must be examined within a broad social cultural framework that takes into account the ebbs and flows of societal interaction. This approach is applicable to contemporary societies, but is as equally applicable, with some creativity and modifications, towards the peoples of antiquity. Goody's alleged 'great divide' (something Street accuses him of promoting even though Goody denies he meant to imply such a thing) between literate and non-literate societies (an idea which advocates that literacy may enhance logical processes and cognitive development when introduced to illiterate societies, thereby impacting the development of the 'state' or 'bureaucracy') may not be a suitable framework for which to examine literacy (and its various forms) in ancient (or even contemporary) societies, especially in ones where multiple languages and scripts are employed.

Research suggests that various forms of literacy exist(ed) around the world since the inception of writing. Citing modern-day examples as a way to better comprehend such diverse literacy practices in the ancient world, one can turn to that of contemporary Egyptian Jewish children, who are oral in the dominant language of Arabic, but are only able to read, and not speak, Hebrew, the language associated with their faith.<sup>517</sup> A similar phenomenon occurs among some Yemeni communities who speak non-Arabic, Semitic languages like *Jibbali* and *Mahri* but who are only fully literate in Arabic.<sup>518</sup> Chaldeans, a Catholic neo-Assyrian group mainly based in Iraq, can be completely fluent in Arabic, while illiterate in Chaldean (while its orthography,

<sup>517</sup> Macdonald 2009, pp. 72-73

<sup>518</sup> Macdonald 2009, p. 98

various interrelated forms of Aramaic and Syriac are more of a historical relic than an operational script).

Collectively, these communities make up an ‘oral enclave’ within the wider ‘literate society’ but embody diverse forms of literacy that exists alongside orality.<sup>519</sup> In fact, in states or nations where more than one writing system and language exists, it is not uncommon to find literacy in one language and illiteracy in the other. This was likely the case in much of Syria-Palestine where Greek was the dominant spoken language and orthography, but where the Arabic language (and various dialects of Aramaic) still persisted in spoken forms, and to a far lesser degree, written form, likely because they served little economic purpose (though this was likely not the case outside of the Levant, in Arabia).

Despite Umayyad domination of the Levant, it was still not completely successful in imposing Arabic in certain remote regions. In the Syrian villages of Ma'lula, Jubb'adin, and al-Sarkha (Bakhah), today, Western Neo-Aramaic is still spoken by its populations alongside Arabic, despite the fact that two of the three villages are predominantly Muslim.<sup>520</sup> The Aramaic dialects spoken in these villages are only vernaculars and have no intelligible written form, today. These language communities were able to retain the Aramaic language, mainly due to their geographic remoteness, situated high up in the Qalamun Mountains, nearly sixty kilometers northeast of the Syrian capital of Damascus and whose inhabitants' ancestors successfully escaped Arab and Umayyad penetration.<sup>521</sup>

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<sup>519</sup> Macdonald 2009, p. 50

<sup>520</sup> Matras and Sakel (eds.) 2007, pp. 185-186.

<sup>521</sup> Matras and Sakel (eds.) 2007, pp. 185

Thus, the icons, phrases (formulas), symbols, and imagery so prevalent on many of the coins and public texts that were commissioned in the region during the Byzantine period were to be supplanted by an orthography that was familiar to some, but did not enjoy extensive usage on either the public or private level in the pre-Islamic societies of Greater Syria, including those who belonged to Arabic-speaking communities, at least, not until the arrival of the Umayyads, and more specifically the Marwanids.

The bureaucratic machinery associated with the Umayyads played a crucial and monumental role in the dispensation and promulgation of Umayyad legitimacy through the persistent use of Arabic as the new language of power. They successfully constructed a number of government offices and ministries over several decades called *diwans* which required literate Arabic scribes, and included the Diwan al-Kharaj (Ministry of Tax Revenues), Diwan al-Jund (Ministry of the Military), Diwan Al-Qudat (Ministry of Justice), Diwan al-Khatam (Ministry of Seals), Diwan al-Rasa'il (Ministry of Correspondence), Diwan al-Barid (Ministry of Posts), Diwan al-Nafaqat (Ministry of Expenditures), Diwan al-Sadaqah (Ministry of Charity), Diwan al-Mustaghallat (Ministry of State non-portable revenues), and the Diwan al-Taraz (Ministry of Industry and Production).<sup>522</sup>

These institutions continued to develop under various Umayyad leaders and represented a serious attempt at organizing the entirety of their vast empire from their capital Damascus. The new polity also adopted Arabic as a major language of government before it was universalized under his successors. It was even documented that the two most famous Umayyad caliphs, Muawiya and Abd al-Malik, both personally and greatly enjoyed poetry, even keeping poets in

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<sup>522</sup> Duri 2011, pp.168-169

close company while Muawiya likely provided his son Yazid with an education in Arabic literature.<sup>523</sup>

Muawiya, who was calculative and cognizant of the fact his regime represented a tiny, statistical minority in the Levant, did not overemphasize Arabic, nor Islam as cultural and political weapons during his reign as governor and caliph in Syria-Palestine. By the time Abd al-Malik took power, the need to control and appropriate Arabic as a technology to expedite matters related to state formation became a necessity during the second *fitnah* which saw rival powers wielding the power of Arabic in the form of religious phrases in contestation and protest of the Umayyads- something Abd al-Malik could not allow to transpire for fear of losing out to his opponents. Arabic, in its written form, became a form of cultural armament and its usage in the public sphere ignited a political firestorm that saw the Umayyads emerge as victors in a hostile environ where various, sometimes militant, ideological and political actors all understood the power of the written word as it was articulated on material culture. In other words, monopolizing the Arabic script was one of the greatest forms of political capital.

## **9. ARABIZING AND ISLAMIZING SYRIA-PALESTINE THROUGH THE IMPOSITION OF ARABIC TEXT**

The religious and political value of ruling Syria-Palestine to the Umayyads, it appears, cannot be overstated. Jerusalem, the prized possession of the Umayyads, became a political, cultural, and religious focal point for the Arabs (and Muslims) of al-Shamm in the seventh and eighth centuries, and is even said to have had, says Robert Hoyland, '*cultic significance.*'<sup>524</sup> Jerusalem, evidently, as Hoyland argues, was even "*initially the capital of Muslim Palestine*"

<sup>523</sup> Elad 2002, pp. 271-272

<sup>524</sup> Hoyland 1997, p. 221

before al-Ramleh was built.<sup>525</sup> When the Arab armies reached Jerusalem, though, it was still a largely Byzantine and Christian city whose inhabitants were overwhelmingly Christian.

The terms of previous agreements between Muhammad and other, subsequent caliphs and generals with Syria-Palestine's Christian populations seems to have had a broad impact on Umayyad policy towards them. For the Umayyads, a framework and political precedence had already been established by the Prophet, Umar b. al-Khattab, and Khalid b. Walid in their treaties with the Christians of the Levant, setting up the basis for future policies in the region- namely, to abstain from interrupting daily life which was managed, in part, through the imposition of the *jizya* alongside the allowance for public cultural and religious expression.

While some scholars, in recent writings, have referred to Muawiya as a 'philo-Christian' because of his seemingly intense affinity towards Syrio-Palestinian Christians as is indicated by some contemporary literary accounts of his visits to Christian religious sites in Jerusalem, it is essential to the understanding of his policies that he was head of a growing political entity that required continuous revenues from its inhabitants in order to keep his administration afloat and so his intentions were politically and economically, rather than religiously, motivated.

Archaeological and documentary evidence (i.e. material findings, architectural remains, written accounts) supports the now widely-held belief that the Umayyads permitted Christians to continue to build monasteries and erect churches throughout the Levant and Mesopotamia, while in some instances, Muslim rulers themselves even commissioned efforts to renovate churches<sup>526</sup> of historical significance. Christians, too, were allowed to repair their religious sanctuaries and places of worship as is exhibited at archaeological sites both Khan al-Ahmar (Palestinian village outside of Jerusalem) and Qasr el-Yahud (on the west bank of the Jordan River and associated

<sup>525</sup> Hoyland 1997, p. 223

<sup>526</sup> Bisheh, Kehrberg, Tohme, and Zayadine 2000, p. 78

with the Baptism site of Jesus Christ) during Muawiya's reign as governor and caliph.<sup>527</sup> Nearly sixty churches in Jordan alone- a territory sandwiched in between the Levant and Arabia, are believed to have been in use well into the eighth century.<sup>528</sup>

At Jerusalem, however, one can witness the cultural transformation it endured through a quick overview of its numismatic history in the seventh and eighth centuries. The Byzantines struck a limited number of *folles* (pl. of *follis* referring to a Byzantine copper or bronze coin) there bearing the name of the city in Greek (ΙΕΡΟΣΟΛΑΙΜΑ), some of which were produced around the start of the Persian occupation (~614 CE). The Arabs, similarly, struck lesser quality, small-module copper *fulus* (lowest coin denomination used) on irregular flans bearing the phrase 'Of the People of Jerusalem' (ΙΕΡΟ-ΣΟΛΑΗ-ΜΩΝ)<sup>529</sup>, also in Greek while bearing the image of an imperial figure (with crosses).

At some point, under the Umayyads, the imperial image type of Jerusalem was replaced by a new coin that shed its Greek and Byzantine pictorial qualities, replacing them with the image of a completely different figure with wavy hair, a beard, a herringbone-patterned *dishdasha* or *thob*, holding a sword (which is hidden in the scabbard/sheath). It is accompanied by the Arabic phrase 'muhammad rasul allah' (Muhammad Messenger of God) which has led to speculation over who it represents. While most often regarded as the earliest 'Standing Caliph' type, there has been growing belief that the figure may represent Muhammad, himself, based on circumstantial evidence; namely that titles almost always coincide with the figure depicted on a given coin.<sup>530</sup> For any literate handler of these coins, there would have likely been no doubt that

<sup>527</sup> Brooks and Chabot 1904, text 71, translation 55

<sup>528</sup> Bisheh, Kehrberg, Tohme, and Zayadine 2000, p. 78

<sup>529</sup> Tom Mallon-McCorgray (Arab-Byzantine Mint Signatures)

<sup>530</sup> For a discussion about the central figure on this new coinage, see Goodwin 2005, Volume IV, pp. 91-93



the text they read coincided with the image of the figure they saw. Thus, it is hard to imagine that this represents Muawiya or Abd al-Malik, like several numismatists have suggested, but likely represented Muhammad, a warrior-statesman, prophet and messenger and thus a powerful icon and assuredly, the prototype for Abd al-Malik's first coin reform (and introduction of the 'standing caliph' types that bore his name).



*Fig. 23: Arab-Byzantine coin of Arab figure in traditional Bedouin regalia with phrase 'Muhammad, Messenger of God' surrounding image, and 'Iliya Filastin' (Jerusalem, Palestine) on reverse (private collection)*

The style of the reverse of the coin still contained a familiar Greek 'm' but all Greek text was removed and replaced by two words 'Iliya' (إيليا), the slightly Arabized term for *Aelia Capitolina* (i.e. Jerusalem) going down or up one side of the 'm' and the *jund* name 'Filastin' (فلسطين) on the other side, as the example above shows. However, comparatively speaking, these copper fulus are much lighter and smaller than the Byzantine *folles* struck in Jerusalem, although the imagery is still stunningly provocative.

Jerusalem's profile as an Arab and Muslim city was elevated and solidified by the construction of a majestic and illustrious complex known as the 'Dome of the Rock.' Shortly before Abd al-Malik began his coin reform in 697 CE, and shortly after he began his reign as caliph, he set out on a campaign to virtually transform Palestine from a Roman-Christian land to

an Arab-Muslim state. It was under his and his sons' reigns that old Byzantine roads were repaired and new ones paved, that Arabic became the official language of government, that the empire was provided a uniform currency, and that the Dome of the Rock (as well as other monuments) was built.<sup>531</sup> The Umayyads were also responsible for rebuilding the breached walls of the *Haram al-Sharif* soon after they took control of Jerusalem as indicated by research that resulted from archaeological excavations three decades ago.<sup>532</sup>

Under Abd al-Malik, the Umayyads began a major campaign aimed at Arabizing Syrio-Palestinian society and the cultural domain it was situated in. As various building projects were underway in the Levant, milestone markers indicating the distances between the region's cities which were of practical utility (providing its readers with an understanding of how far they were from a given place) but, just as importantly, had the effect of embedding Arabic in the physical and visual landscape for all who inhabited or visited the region. These markers were sometimes composed of stone or marble and contained a rather standardized epigraphic formula written in an elegant Kufic, Arabic font.

One such milestone, found on the road linking Jerusalem to *al-Ramla*, the latter often regarded as the first new Arab town constructed in Palestine after the Arab takeover, contains five lines of text (with some corruption) and reads: "*The highway. Servant of God 'Abd al-Malik, Commander of the faithful, God's mercy be upon him. From Jerusalem (Iliya) to this milestone there are 8 miles*" while a similar limestone milestone was found near the church of *Abu Ghosh*, in Palestine, with the inscription "[*Has ordered the repair of*] the road and construction of [*the milestones*]; Servant of God 'Abd [*al-Malik*], Commander of the faithful, [*may God's mercy be on him*]. From Jerusalem (Iliya) to this milestone (there are) seven

<sup>531</sup> Hoyland 1997, p.223

<sup>532</sup> See Mazar (Jerusalem excavations) 1988

[miles].”<sup>533</sup> Other milestone markers, bearing *Abd al-Malik’s* name, include those marking fifty-two and fifty-three mile distances from Damascus, were found in the village of ‘*Fiq*’ (or *Afiq*, in the Golan Heights- home of the former Ghassanid capitals), and date from 704 CE, one year before *Abd al-Malik’s* passing (*Abd al-Malik* died in *al-Sinnabra* near the Sea of Galilee in 705 CE).<sup>534</sup>

Similarly, on one other marble milestone found in a forest next to *Aqua Bella- Ayn Hemed (Khirbet Iqbala)*, on a road between Jerusalem and the Mediterranean coast bears a partial inscription regarding the reconstructing of an important road in Palestine and ends with “*From Jerusalem (Iliya) to this milestone there are five miles.*”<sup>535</sup> This milestone, however, is believed to date from the time after *Abd al-Malik’s* death and possibly from the time of his son *al-Walid*<sup>536</sup>, who apparently continued in the tradition of his father by engaging in major building projects. Apart from the aforementioned public texts, several other milestone markers, indicating the distance to Jerusalem from Damascus and other towns, and also dating from the time of *Abd al-Malik*, include the milestones of *Bab al-Wad*, *Deir al-Qalt*, and *Khān al-Hathrūra*.<sup>537</sup>

The erection of such milestones, neatly etched with ornate, elegant, and regal Arabic inscriptions that now dotted the region, must have had a profound impact on those who encountered them, sparking debate about the issues of transition and cultural identity by today’s scholars. Roman Syria-Palestine was a land where, for centuries, Greek dominated visual culture and while the psycho-social effects this orthographic reorientation had on the region’s peoples is not measurable, the reactions were likely dominated by feelings of intrigue, and for some, fear, triumph and uncertainty.

<sup>533</sup> Van Berchem 1922, No. 4, pp. 19-20 and p. 21

<sup>534</sup> Elad 1999, pp. 33-88, esp. pp. 33-35.

<sup>535</sup> Cytryn-Silverman 2007, pp. 603-610.

<sup>536</sup> Cytryn-Silverman 2007, pp. 609-610

<sup>537</sup> Van Berchem 1922, No. 1, pp. 17-18 and p. 21



Fig. 24: An Umayyad milestone from the reign of Abd al-Malik indicating a distance of one hundred and nine miles between Damascus (found on line six) and the place the stone was erected (Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts).<sup>538</sup>

Other public texts commissioned by the Umayyads in Syria-Palestine include the *Aqabah al-Fīq* inscription, which, like Muawiya's *Hammat Gader* text, regards reconstruction, this time of a difficult pass in northern *Filastin* which dates from Abd al-Malik's reign sometime between 692-693 CE<sup>540</sup> and reads (in nine lines):

*“In the name of God, [the Compassionate] the Merciful. There is no god but God alone; He has no companions. Muhammad is the Messenger of God. He has ordered the leveling of this difficult pass ‘Abdullāh ‘Abd al-Malik, Commander of the Believers and it (i.e., the work) has been fulfilled by the two hands of Yahya b.al-Hakam in the (month) of Muḥarram of the year three [and seventy ....].”*

The world's oldest, still-standing Islamic structure (close to its original form) is inarguably the Dome of the Rock (which will be discussed further in chapter five) built in the

<sup>538</sup> According to the accompanying, museum documentation, this milestone was found amidst the ruins of Khan al-Hatrura in Jericho, Ottoman Palestine in 1884 before it was later relocated to the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts in 1941.

<sup>539</sup> Van Berchem 1922, p.17–18, catalogue no. 1.

<sup>540</sup> Sharon 1966, pp. 367-372

first two years of the last decade of the seventh century, but it was not the only major Islamic building feat in Jerusalem. It was later complimented by the building of the al-Aqsa Mosque complex as well as additional Umayyad palaces attached to the old city walls.<sup>541</sup>

As Mohammad al-Asad, an architectural historian, noted, al-Walid b. Abd al-Malik (r. 705-715), Abd al-Malik's son, undertook a program and policy of expansionism, consolidation of power, and major building activity.<sup>542</sup> It was under al-Walid that the great Masjid al-Aqsa in Jerusalem was built, on the supposed site of the original mosque of Umar and Muawiya near the *haram* in the enclosed old city, in the year 715.<sup>543</sup>

At around the same time, al-Walid also constructed two other major mosques, including those in Damascus and Medina, but it was the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa mosque, which so close to the vicinity of the rock where Muhammad ascended to heaven (the Quran, according to some scholars, refers to this site '*al-masjid al-aqsa*' [the '*furthest mosque*'], explicitly) and the site where, according to Biblical tradition, Abraham went to sacrifice his son, Isaac, per God's command. As such a new architectural dimension was added to the city's formerly Christian skyline.

Al-Walid went on to build a series of administrative complexes near the *haram*, too, which were uncovered in the 1970's by Israeli archaeologists.<sup>544</sup> Six massive structures, including large villas or palatial complexes (i.e. *qusur*), were unearthed near the south and southwestern corners of the Old City, some of which are believed to be part of the "*administrative center of the Umayyad government*" in Palestine.<sup>545</sup> An array of secular buildings, pools, living quarters, *qusur*, and baths were also found amidst the ruins of the

<sup>541</sup> Bisheh, Kehrberg, Tohme, and Zayadine 2000, p. 46

<sup>542</sup> Bisheh, Kehrberg, Tohme, and Zayadine 2000, p. 47

<sup>543</sup> Bisheh, Kehrberg, Tohme, and Zayadine 2000, p. 47

<sup>544</sup> See Mazar and Ben Dov (1971)

<sup>545</sup> See Israel Ministry of Information, Archaeological Sites No. 2 (29 July 1998)

Palestinian site of Khirbet al-Mafjar, in the Jordan Valley near Jericho, likely built during the caliphate of Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik (r. 723-743) who seems to have preferred to spend much of his time in Resafa and not in Palestine or Damascus.<sup>546</sup> A large sculpture was also uncovered in Khirbet al-Mafjar nicknamed ‘The Caliph’, which could very well have represented Hisham.<sup>547</sup> The Umayyads even set out to build a naval fleet while renovating and rebuilding numerous seaports in Palestine including those at the coastal towns of *Akka* (Acre), *Qaysariyya* (Caesarea), and *Asqalan* (Ashkelon).<sup>548</sup> As Moshe Gil points out, the “*Umayyads took pains to reclaim the ruins of the country and persevered in its settlement and development enterprises.*”<sup>549</sup>

This attempt at rejuvenating Syria-Palestine, the backwaters of Byzantium that had fallen into neglect in the lead up to the Arab conquests, extended even to Christian public life. In other words, Islam did not uproot Christianity and Judaism from Syria-Palestine with any rapidity. The archaeological record supports the notion that the early Muslim conquerors and the Umayyads permitted Christians to continue to build monasteries and erect and repair churches throughout the Levant and Mesopotamia, while in some instances, Muslim rulers, themselves, even commissioned efforts to renovate churches of historical significance.

Evidence of church-building activities have been unearthed at a multitude of sites including at Tel Masos, Umm Qais, Rujm Uthman, Deir Ain Abata, Mt. Berenice, El-Quweisma, Ma’in, Umm al-Rasas, Ayn al-Kanisah, Madaba, and other sites in early Islamic Syria-Palestine well into the ninth century.<sup>550</sup> Excavations have revealed majestic mosaics and art work as well as tombstones that are distinctly Christian in areas under Islamic rule after the seventh century CE.<sup>551</sup> At an Umayyad-era

<sup>546</sup> See (Donner, 2012/2016), *The Articulation of Early Islamic State Structures* under 5.2.Hisham

<sup>547</sup> Rosen-Ayalon 2006, p. 50

<sup>548</sup> Gil 1992, p. 107

<sup>549</sup> Gil 1992, p. 107

<sup>550</sup> Schick 1988, pp. 218-221 and pp. 239-240

<sup>551</sup> Schick 1998, pp. 218-221 and pp. 239-240 and Fowden 2004

church in Tamra, there exists a Greek inscription from 725 CE, albeit dated in the *hijra* calendar.<sup>552</sup> Considering that both Hammat Gader and the Tamra inscriptions are separated by more than sixty years, it is certainly plausible that a formal injunction standardized the practice of mandating hijra dates in all public texts regardless of the cultural context. Inclusion of hijra dates in inscriptions that were produced diachronically is a testament to the imposition of the new, Arab, and now Islamic, political reality. This practice, like others instituted under the Umayyads, were likely part of a large mechanized political campaign and broad stratagem to change the facts on the ground.

## 10. MUSLIM APPROPRIATION OF CHRISTIAN EXPRESSIONS

At *Deir Dubban* (Irāq ad-Dayr or ‘The Monastery’), a village that was home to series of caves located halfway between Jerusalem and Ashkelon near Beit Jibrin (also home to a site with similar inscriptions), there exist both Greek and Arabic texts, the latter of which date from the first half of the eighth century.<sup>553</sup> The inscriptions litter the cave walls, and indicate a continued presence from the late Byzantine to Umayyad era, further highlighting the transition from Christianity to Islam and of Greek to Arabic.<sup>554</sup> Included are several crosses etched into the wall<sup>555 556</sup> and in one of the caves, less than a meter from the ground, along one wall, in angular and pristine lettering (and lacking any diacritics or vowel markers) is the short dedicatory text that reads “*There is no god but God, he is alone. God’s blessings upon Habib ibn Suweid.*”<sup>557</sup>

The Islamic usage of the phrases ‘*allahumma irham*’ or ‘*allahuma ighfir*’ (‘*God! Have mercy/bestow forgiveness*’) is the equivalent of the Orthodox Arabic phrase ‘*ya rabb yirham*’ or ‘*kyrie eleison*’ (‘*May the Lord have mercy*’) found in Greek inscriptions in the caves of Deir

<sup>552</sup> Di Segni and Tepper 2004, pp. 343-350

<sup>553</sup> Sharon 2004, p. 20

<sup>554</sup> Sharon 2004, p. 20

<sup>555</sup> Smith 1902, p. 244

<sup>556</sup> Sharon 1997, pp. 360-361

<sup>557</sup> Sharon 2004, p. 25

Dubban that invoke the mercy and forgiveness of God (Κύριε, ἐλέησον).<sup>558</sup> God, in similar Arabic-language contexts is sometimes referred to as ‘rabbi’ (‘ربي’/‘my lord’). The bi-facial lead seal below is an excellent example of the usage of phrases typical of Greek invocations, albeit written in the Arabic script.



Fig. 25: Lead seal bearing blessings in Arabic

Several Arabic inscriptions from the Islamic period also feature phrasing asking God to forgive the sins of individuals (‘allahumma yighfir’/‘astaghfirallah’) or any variant of *ghufr* (forgiveness) a common expression drawn from a rather small repertoire of Arabic phrases employed in short texts by the early Muslims and the Umayyads. Muhammad is alleged to have

<sup>558</sup> Sharon 2004, p. 25

<sup>559</sup> Located in the Jordan National Bank Numismatic Museum (and deciphered by Dr. Hassan al-Zuod)





Mesopotamia<sup>568</sup> as Robert Hoyland has noted in his work *Epigraphy (and the Quran)*.<sup>569</sup> In the Negev, dozens of Arabic texts- many in the form of short, formulaic graffiti, were also identified by Yehuda Nevo, several of which begin with the standard phrase ‘*Forgive my Lord*’ (*ghufr rabbi*), ‘*God! Forgive! [.]*’ (*allahumma ighfir*), ‘*Forgive Lord of [.]*’ (*ighfir rabb*).<sup>570</sup> The Quran, too, is ripe with verses that call for the invoking of forgiveness (with the exception of those dealing with the issue of *mushrikeen*, i.e. idolaters), reinforcing its role in the Arabic lexicon of the Muslims. In Surah al-Nisaa’ (chapter four), verse 106 reads ‘*And seek God’s forgiveness: He is the forgiving, merciful*’ (*Wa istaghfiri allaha inna allaha kana ghafooran raheeman*).

وَأَسْتَغْفِرِ اللَّهَ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا

Additional examples of the equivalents of what were primarily Christian expressions in Islamic contexts can be found in inscriptions discovered during archaeological surveys along the caravan route of Darb Zubeidah, in northeastern Arabia towards Mesopotamia. There exist two inscriptions there, written in Arabic, and utilizing aspects of the aforementioned religious formulas. The older inscription dates from the year 40 AH (~662 CE) and bearing familiar invocations (starting with ‘*rahmat Allah wa baraka*’.): “*God’s mercy and blessings be upon Abd al-Rahman b. Khalid b. al-A’as, written in year forty*” (رحمة الله وبركته على عبد الرحمن بن خالد بن العاص - كتب لسنة أربعين)<sup>571</sup> while the second, also dated to the reign of Muawiya (672 CE), bears the legend (beginning with

<sup>568</sup> See Al-Sanduq 1955, pp. 213–217.

<sup>569</sup> See Encyclopaedia of the Quran Online (Brill, volume 2), ‘Epigraphy’ by Hoyland

<sup>570</sup> See Nevo and Koren 2003, Appendix C (The Inscriptions) pp. 368-425

<sup>571</sup> Sharafaddin 1977, pp. 69-70, Plate 49

‘*Allahumma ighfir*’) “*God! Have mercy for Hadiya b. Ali b. Hunayda, and (this was) written in the year fifty-two*” (اللهم اغفر لهدي بن علي بن هنيذة - وكتب لسنة ٥٦ ست وخمسين)<sup>572</sup>

In late Roman Syria-Palestine and Arabia, Greek was the language of liturgy and in public religious texts and business, though dialects of Aramaic, Syriac, and Arabic were employed as regional vernaculars.<sup>573</sup> As such, the fact that many early Islamic inscriptions bore similar literary arrangements as Christian texts in Greek makes sense, as the content of these inscriptions would have been familiar to Arab Christians in the region, some of who were literate in Greek and, therefore, Arabic and Islamic phraseological emulation of Greek, Christian ecclesiastic and liturgical expressions in textual form seems to be a natural and organic adaptation of an already existing and useful cultural and religious lexicon. In other words, in some cases, the formulaic patterns in dedicatory texts or inscriptional invocations in Greek were often reconstituted by the Muslims, except that they were now in Arabic and with modifications to make them more suited for a Muslim audience that began to view Christianity as theologically imprecise or deficient with the passage of time.

Towards the end of Umayyad rule in the Near East, such public supplications like those at Dar Zubeidah, became the norm in state-sponsored inscriptions (though there is already a record of similar texts in the pre-Islamic epigraphic record and in various orthographies). Beseeking God in the various aforementioned written contexts (including asking him for forgiveness of sins as well as for blessings) became a staple of the written visual culture of the Umayyad state by the eighth century (and was utilized by both the state and the general populace).

<sup>572</sup> Sharafaddin 1977, pp. 69-70, Plate 50

<sup>573</sup> Hoyland 2010, p. 30 (in the edited volume ‘The Development of Arabic as a Written Language’)

More evidence of these standardized supplications can be found in a lengthy text from the late Umayyad period and recovered in Jordan. It contains fourteen lines and opens with ‘*allahuma ghafir al-thanb.*’ (‘*God! Forgive him his sins*’) and includes the common phrase ‘*ghafir allah liman.*’ (‘*God forgives whom he.*’) in line eight.

At Qusayr ‘Amra, an Umayyad desert complex built for al-Walid II, some eighty-five kilometers east of Amman, an Arabic inscription (dating from the reign of the, then, Caliph Hisham b. Abd al-Malik) above a window situated over a large painting of what is believed to be a man (al-Walid II, who was not yet caliph) resting while being attended by servants also contains, what had become a common utterance implored to address God during the Islamic era, the vocative form of ‘*allah*’, ‘*اللهم*’, (‘*allahumma*’), as in ‘*allahumma aslih al-Walid bin Yazîd!..*’ (‘*God! Make al-Walid bin Yazid virtuous!...*’) found in the first line.<sup>574</sup>

While difficult to gauge how quickly Arabic became the *lingua franca* in Syria-Palestine, it certainly became the most visible public script under Abd al-Malik. However, language shift is all too often understood as representing ‘clean breaks’ between two or more language systems that stems from the supplanting of one political order by another. In reality, it is a gradual process that often takes considerable time and energy to implement successfully and widely. The catalysts for language change (i.e. from Greek to Arabic) are many and the transition from one language or script to another often involves an intentional, concerted effort on behalf of the transcriber to maximize the potential for controlling the movement of knowledge.<sup>575</sup>

Arabic was, thus ultimately adopted by the masses in part because the specific social, political, economic and religious networks non-Arabic speakers initially inhabited were absorbed by a new one in which Arabic was more useful. Archaeologist Paul Zimansky noted this in a

<sup>574</sup> Haley (World Monuments Fund), pp. 1-2

<sup>575</sup> Chrisomalis 2010, pp. 406-410

chapter in *Archaeologies of the Middle East: Critical Perspectives*, arguing that there is no evidence of a ‘*linear trend in the spread of literacy*’<sup>576</sup> and the same can be said about the spread of orthography and language.

This is not to say that any form of mass literacy existed in either Greek or Arabic during the Late Byzantine and early Islamic eras and it is likely that literacy, in its fuller forms, was primarily restricted to members of the religious establishment as is evidenced by the nature and location of Greek and Arabic inscriptions and (public) texts in the pre-Islamic, Ghassanid *Oriens*. For the Muslim rulers, Arabic texts, alongside the construction and display of visual culture, reinforced the power of a new hierarchy that painted the Caliph, Islam, and Arabic (both spoken and written) as a political, spiritual, and cultural triumvirate. Thus, such decorum became an abutment to the kind of social order they imposed on the territories and peoples they ruled over.

In many ways, the Dome of the Rock, an impressive octagonal structure, adorned in mosaics and Arabic inscriptions, with a golden dome that sits atop the ancient, highly contested *haram* in Jerusalem’s walled, old city and, easily, Abd al-Malik’s grandest architectural, monumental, and epigraphic creation, perfectly illustrates the core concepts of Baines’s notion of decorum as a reminder of institutional authority and Bierman’s concept of public text as a ‘sign’ of political hegemony. Now, in regards to its original purpose, the structure remains an enigmatic landmark and has been the center of numerous studies. Completed in the year seventy-two AH (691-692 CE), during Abd al-Malik’s caliphate, and later restored by the Abbasid caliph al-Ma’mun and renovated by the Ottomans under Suleiman the Magnificent, the Dome of the Rock is considered to be the “*earliest Islamic building that survives to our day in something close to*

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<sup>576</sup> Pollock and Bernbeck 2005, p. 317

*its original, seventh century form.*"<sup>577</sup> The style of script employed in both monumental inscriptions and other public texts, including those found at the Dome of the Rock, is a rather distinct, angular and prestigious type and differs from the slanted, italicized *ma'il* script associated with several of the earliest Qurans.

There has been some speculation regarding Abd al-Malik's intention in building this opulent structure, however. During the time of its construction, the Muslim 'world' was in a state of civil war; a war fought mainly between the Marwanid Umayyads (those descendants of Marwan) and headed by Abd al-Malik and the Zubayrids whose leader was the Hejaz-based rival caliph Abdallah Ibn al-Zubayr.<sup>578</sup> Since al-Zubayr was in firm control of the Hejaz, including the holy cities of Mecca and Medina during the first half of his rival's tenure, it became difficult, if not impossible for Muslims in Syria-Palestine to perform the ritualistic hajj to Mecca.<sup>579</sup> Thus, according to this particular interpretation, Abd al-Malik was forced to build the Dome of the Rock as an alternative site for conducting the mandatory pilgrimage, which is supported by at least one account written by the ninth century historian *al-Waqidi*.<sup>580</sup>

However, Hawting believes this to be mere speculation, fueled mainly by anti-Umayyad writings and biased Muslim historians. The temporary loss of power in the peripheries of the Umayyad state however, was documented by near contemporary writers in Syria-Palestine apparently supported the Umayyad family's claim to the throne amidst the chaos of the Muslim civil war.<sup>581</sup> An eighth century bishop records that:

*"Yazid bin Muawiya died. Mukhtar the deceiver had already appeared at Kufa, claiming he was a prophet. Since Yazid had no adult son to succeed him, the Arabs were in turmoil. Those in Medina and the East proclaimed Abdullah Ibn al-*

<sup>577</sup> Robinson 2007, p. 3

<sup>578</sup> Robinson 2007, p. 60

<sup>579</sup> Robinson 2007, p. 6

<sup>580</sup> Robinson 2007, p. 6

<sup>581</sup> Robinson 2007, pp. 22-23

*Zubayr; those in Damascus and Palestine remained loyal to the family of Muawiya (the Umayyads)."*<sup>582</sup>

One other theory, regarding reasons for the Dome of the Rock's construction, revolves around the fact that Abd al-Malik chose Judaism's holiest and most sacred geographic spot, the 'haram al-sharif' (also referred to as the 'Temple Mount' in Judaism), as the site of the new Arab and Islamic monument and was, thus, made to reflect Arab and Muslim political, cultural, and religious dominance at the behest of Christianity and Judaism.<sup>583</sup> Chase Robinson, a scholar of Islamic historiography, asks whether Abd al-Malik was attempting to imitate King Solomon and his temple.<sup>584</sup> He adds that Solomon is mentioned in the Quran more than a dozen times and that Abd al-Malik even named one of his son's Solomon.<sup>585</sup> It is also important to note that, though Abd al-Malik, as well as his earlier predecessor Muawiya were documented to have spent much of their time in Damascus, their capital, Abd al-Malik chose Jerusalem as the site of this grand architectural masterpiece.<sup>586</sup> Moreover, even though nearly all sources claim that Abd al-Malik took his inaugural oath of allegiance to the caliphate in Damascus, another, singular tradition places his inauguration in Jerusalem.<sup>587</sup>

The ornate structure, derivative of Byzantine churches, but also infused with architectural details from the Persians, is also laced with a band of religious polemics in Arabic, often and popularly described by scholars as 'fiercely' anti-Christian in tone and substance. The geographic location of the Dome of the Rock, the anti-Christian messages surrounding its exterior which include phrases such as "*The messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was only a Messenger of God*", and "*Do not say three; refrain, it is better for you*", and its iconography, which depicts

<sup>582</sup> Robinson 2007, pp. 22-23

<sup>583</sup> Hawting 2000, p. 60

<sup>584</sup> Robinson 2007, p. 7

<sup>585</sup> Robinson 2007, p. 7

<sup>586</sup> Robinson 2007, p. 7

<sup>587</sup> See Robinson 2007, p. 26

crowns which may be symbolizing Islam's imperial triumph over the Byzantine Christian rulers, are all important factors in attempting to understand the basis for its construction and for its overall significance.

Thus, what is most significant to any archaeolinguistic or epigraphic analysis of the Dome of the Rock is that the outer Arabic inscriptions are regarded to be, with some minor variations, the earliest surviving passages of the Quran known today.<sup>588</sup> The text encouraging its readers to refute the trinity derive from the following verse of the Quran in Surah al-Nisaa', verse 141 and which reads:

يٰٓاَهْلَ الْكِتٰبِ لَا تَغْلُوْا فِىْ دِيْنِكُمْ وَلَا تَقُوْلُوْا عَلٰى اللّٰهِ اِلَّا الْحَقَّ اِنَّمَا  
 الْمَسِيْحُ عِيسٰى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ رَسُوْلًا لِّلّٰهِ وَكَلِمَتُهُ اَلْقِيْلَةُ اِلَى مَرْيَمَ وَرُوْحٌ مِّنْهُ  
 فَتٰمَنُوْا بِاللّٰهِ وَرَسُوْلِهِ ۗ وَلَا تَقُوْلُوْا ثَلٰثَةٌ اِنَّهُمْ اَخِيْرًا لَّكُمْ اِنَّمَا اللّٰهُ اِلٰهٌ وَّاحِدٌ  
 سُبْحٰنَهُ اَنْ يَّكُوْنَ لَهٗ وَلَدٌ لَّهٗ مَا فِى السَّمٰوٰتِ وَمَا فِى الْاَرْضِ وَكَفٰى بِاللّٰهِ  
 وَكِىْلًا

*“Oh People of the Scripture, do not commit excess in your religion or say about God except the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, was but a messenger of God and His word which He directed to Mary and a soul [created at a command] from Him. So believe in God and His messengers. And do not say, "Three"; desist - it is better for you. Indeed, God is but one God. Exalted is He above having a son. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. And sufficient is God as Disposer of affairs.”*<sup>589</sup>

At the eastern entrance of the building is also a lengthy inscription of which five are of Quranic origin, which reads, in nine lines (the last two lines having been added later by the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun):

<sup>588</sup> Hawting 2000, p. 61

<sup>589</sup> Quran 4:141, Sahih International translation



1. *In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Praise be to God other than Whom there is no god but He, the Living, the Eternal, the Originator of the heavens and the earth and the Light of the heavens*
2. *and the earth and the Pillar of the heavens and the earth, the One, the eternally Besought of all; He begotteth not nor was begotten and there is none comparable unto Him, Owner of Sovereignty!*
3. *Thou givest sovereignty unto whom Thou wilt, and Thou withdrawest sovereignty from whom Thou wilt, all sovereignty belongs to You and is from You, and its fate is (determined) by You, Lord of glory*
4. *the Merciful, the Compassionate. He hath prescribed for Himself mercy, and His mercy embraceth all things; May He be glorified and exalted. As for what the polytheists associate (with You), we ask You, oh God by*
5. *Your mercy and by Your beautiful names and by Your noble face and Your awesome power and Your perfect word, on which are based the heavens and the earth and*
6. *through which we are preserved by Your mercy from Satan and are saved from Your punishment (on) the Day of Judgment and by Your abundant favour and by Your great grace and forbearance and omnipotence*
7. *and forgiveness and liberality, that You bless Muḥammad, Your servant, Your prophet, and that You accept his intercession for his people, the blessing of God be upon him and peace be upon him and the mercy of God and ....*
8. *From the servant of Allah 'Abdullah al-Ma'mun al-Imam, Commander of the Faithful, may Allah prolongs its duration! In the rule of the brother of Commander of the Faithful Abu Ishaq, son of Commander of the Faithful*
9. *al-Rashid, that Allah makes it last. And (this work) had place by the hands of Salih b. Yahya, the mawali of Commander of the Faithful, in the month of Rabi' al-Akhir of year 216.*

Both this inscription and another, shorter, one at the Dome's northern portal contain verses closely mimicking Surah al-Ikhlās (Chapter 112, verses 1-4) proclaiming God's *tawhid* or absolute oneness, in what some Arabs viewed, as sharply contrasting the conception of the trinity in some Christian circles at the time. Like the standardized Umayyad coinage and other elements of Umayyad-period material culture, the verses of Surah al-Ikhlās appeared to be of great utility to the Umayyads. By invoking the Quran in doctrinal form on public monuments for all to see, especially verses that promoted a monotheistic creed that highlighted God's utter uniqueness, the Umayyads could distance themselves from Christianity and assert their Arab and Muslim cultural, political, and religious identity. Both the physical writing and its placement on the

Dome of the Rock (and essentially all publicly viewable texts) served as “*a visual index of both the official language of rule, and, by extension, of the language of the belief system of the ruling group.*”<sup>590</sup>

The Umayyads, “*imperial patrons of a range of religious and secular buildings in Greater Syria*”<sup>591</sup> continued to bolster and in some cases, manufacture, their Arab and Islamic credentials by articulating its official religious position, embedding Quranic literary elements into their grandest architecture. The Dome of the Rock, in many ways, is an expositional, elucidatory monument that captures the essence of Abd al-Malik’s Umayyad polity, hypostatizing the state’s attempt at Arabizing and Islamizing the cultural and material world that they and their constituents inhabited.

Although Baines was referring to the integration of writing, figural art, and government in his 2007 work noting that “*administration, writing and representational art were three central, interlinked creations of a society that evolved rapidly into a state*”, the Dome of the Rock is emblematic of this interrelated arrangement of architecture, symbolism, and text (albeit without figural art)<sup>592</sup> For example, the structure is ripe with text in its lineament, the writing is religiously charged, the location of the structure was likely the result of strategic decision-making, the architectural and artistic details were meant to stun its audiences, while the sheer magnitude of the structure is a testament to the power of centralized, and advanced political infrastructure only seven decades removed from the founding of Muhammad’s own rudimentary polity in Medina in 622 CE. Between Muhammad’s death in 632 and Muawiya’s circumventing of the protocols used in the selection of his predecessors, the Rashidun, only thirty years had passed, and in no time, the Arabs and Muslims had catapulted themselves onto the world stage.

<sup>590</sup> Bierman 1998, p. 31

<sup>591</sup> Galor and Bloedhorn 2013, p. 161

<sup>592</sup> Baines 2007, p. 117

## CHAPTER 5 THE EMERGENCE OF ARABIC-INSCRIBED COINAGE AND THE CRYSTALLIZATION OF AN ISLAMIC STATE

*Chapter Five illustrates with the role of numismatics in the study of states, while focusing on the power of text as proliferator and reinforcer of the issuing authority's political and cultural character. The role of Arabic text on coins marks a new chapter in the history of Arab polities and was instrumental in both the universalization of the Arabic language and script as well as Islam in its doctrinal form, while also used as a form of political currency in an attempt to legitimize and validate Umayyad power over the decades. The chapter is most concerned with coins as historical documents (i.e. texts) and provides an overview of the various types that were produced and circulated in Syria-Palestine from the Arab takeover in the 630's until Umayyad collapse in 750 CE.*

### 1. THE BIRTH OF ARABIC-INSCRIBED COINAGE: STATE CURRENCY AND THE ADOPTION OF THE ARABIC SCRIPT AS A MARKER OF POLITICAL MATURITY AND AUTHORITY

In the reaches of northern, eastern, and southern Arabia there were a number of pre-Islamic Arab states, polities, and/or authorities that were known to have issued coins. These include, but are not limited to, the Himyarites, the Nabataeans, the Arabs of Mleiha (in southeast Arabia) and the Lakhmids of Hira. In South Arabia, a number of Arab polities struck their own coinage including the Kingdom of Hadramawt and that of the Himyarites which bore indigenous South Arabian scripts.<sup>593</sup> In Southeastern Arabia, local mint-workers at Mleiha struck coins that bore imitative depictions of Alexander the Great but lacked Greek legends, choosing to use Aramaic instead.<sup>594</sup> This site, located some fifty kilometers south of the city of Sharjah (UAE), saw the creeping influence of South Arabian as epigraphic evidence there proves. Several other coins recovered during archaeological excavations at Ed-Dur (between Qatar and Straits of Hormuz) were based on the Athenian owl type, Alexander types, and Seleucid types which

<sup>593</sup> Chiarantini and Benvenuti 2014, pp. 625–650

<sup>594</sup> Haerinck 2008, p. 66

utilized the borrowed Greek script, instead.<sup>595</sup> The Nabataeans produced an array of coins in bronze (as well as silver and gold to lesser extents) and which usually portrayed its imperial leaders' profiles and Nabataean Aramaic inscriptions as well as a variety of icons and symbols.<sup>596</sup> The Lakhmids' monetary output has still not been assessed but, as previously discussed, they were likely the first Arab polity to issue coins bearing the Arabic script as a single lead coin find (from northeastern Arabia) implies.

While the various authorities in Arabia mainly struck coins that were imitative of the region's popular currencies (Greek imitations were especially popular), in some instances, they used their own, indigenous scripts. Why they chose these specific orthographies is difficult to say, and political, cultural and economic considerations certainly all played various roles in their decisions. The coins below were all struck by Arab polities and contain local Semitic orthographies, not European) ones although some of the iconographies sometimes derived from extra-regional cultural forces and models.

			
<i>Reverse of Himyarite silver coin of South Arabia, 1st cen. BCE struck in Raidan, bearing Sabaeen inscription naming 'Amdan Bayyin' (SNG ANS -; cf Sear 6121)<sup>597</sup></i>	<i>Reverse of Nabataean bronze coin of Aretas IV Philopatrius struck between 9 BCE-40 CE with Nabataean Aramaic legend reading "Harithat/Shuqailat"<sup>598</sup></i>	<i>Reverse of SE Arabian coin (Late 3rd-early 2nd c. BCE) imitative tetradrachm from Mleiha (in Sharja, U.A.E.) with Aramaic legend "Abi'el, daughter of Baglan"<sup>599</sup></i>	<i>Obverse of 6<sup>th</sup> century Byzantine-type coin with Arabic inscription reading 'Bil-Hira' ([Struck] in al-Hira)<sup>600</sup></i>

Fig. 26: Four pre-Islamic coins struck by Arab polities in the Near East

<sup>595</sup> Potts 1991, p. 119

<sup>596</sup> See Ya'kov Meshorer's *Nabataean Coins* (1975)

<sup>597</sup> Munze, Himyarite Double Bust, South Arabia 1st cen. BC

<sup>598</sup> Forum Ancient Coins 'Nabatean Kingdom, Aretas IV & Shuqailat I, Meshorer 114'

<sup>599</sup> Classical Numismatic Group 'Extremely Rare 'Abi'el Tetradrachm'

<sup>600</sup> Ilisch 2007, p. 22 (JONS supplement)

The Nabataeans, whose coins were entirely inscribed in Aramaic, as Jane Taylor argued, could not rely on “*their spoken, but unwritten, form of Arabic*”, or else “*they would have been cut off from the vast majority of peoples of the Middle East.*”<sup>601</sup> Thus, Nabataean leaders made a strategic orthographic (and by extension, economic) decision to, instead, embrace and utilize the already “*universal Aramaic language, together with its script*” so that “*they could communicate freely with officials from Asia Minor in the north to Egypt and northern Arabia in the south, and from Palestine in the west to Mesopotamia and Persia, and as far east as Afghanistan.*”<sup>602</sup>

In western Arabia, in the Hejaz, though, no indigenous coinage appears to have been produced during Muhammad’s life or under his immediate successors. Foreign coins, though, have been recovered including surface finds, as well as from controlled archaeological excavations. Some of the reported finds include examples of Late Roman and Byzantine types.<sup>603</sup>

The neighboring Kingdom of Axum in Ethiopia/Abyssinia, which had adopted Christianity as its state creed during nearly halfway through the fourth century CE, struck their own independent coinage in copper, silver, and gold before its collapse shortly before Muhammad’s death.<sup>604</sup> The last Aksumite bronze issues are believed to be loose copies of contemporaneous and popular Byzantine coins (and contained Greek inscriptions, crosses, and an imperial bust of the Axumite King)<sup>605</sup> - a practice similarly instituted by the early Arab-Muslim rulers in Syria-Palestine in the mid-seventh century.

While the copper and silver issues tended to have more local archaeological proveniences, some gold coins struck under the Christian ruler Ezana, and which were intended for larger transactions and regional trade, have been recovered across the Red Sea in South

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<sup>601</sup> Taylor 2012, p. 151

<sup>602</sup> Taylor, p. 151

<sup>603</sup> Potts 2010, pp. 74-75

<sup>604</sup> Iliffe 2017, p. 42

<sup>605</sup> Markowitz 2014 (Axum coinage under ‘decline and downfall’)

Arabia (modern-day Yemen).<sup>606</sup> Whether or not they were utilized further north in the Hejaz is uncertain, but given the proximity of Mecca to Axum (820km), it is likely (and hopefully excavation reports in the Hejaz can furnish such findings). Remember too, towards the end of Axumite rule, Muslim fugitives sought refuge in Abyssinia from hostile members of the Quraish and were protected by their King (either King Armah or his father Ella-Tsaham) in 615<sup>607</sup>, thus establishing somewhat of a short-lived diplomatic channel between the early Hejaz-based Muslim community and the Axumites in East Africa.

During the period of the Rashidun, an era that coincided with the major conquests, the center of political gravity began to shift away from Arabia and into Mesopotamia and Syria-Palestine where larger populations and more lucrative economic opportunities existed. The lack of major urban centers in the Hejaz, north of Arabia and south of the Levant, may explain, in part, why foreign coins circulated in the Hejaz as opposed to indigenous coinage.

In the period preceding (and even during) the first few decades of Arab rule in the Near East, both the Byzantine gold solidus in the eastern Mediterranean (especially the coins of Heraclius from 610-641 CE), and the Sasanian silver drachm even further east in Iraq and Iran were widely accepted and preferred due to their quality and level of metallic purity.

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<sup>606</sup> Phillipson 2012/2014, p. 192

<sup>607</sup> Hbrek (ed.) 1992, p. 272



Fig. 27: Gold Byzantine solidus and Sasanian Persian silver drachm

Excavations conducted under Whitcomb's supervision, in the eastern section of ancient Ayla (located in modern-day Aqaba in southwestern Jordan on the Red Sea) yielded such a gold solidus<sup>610</sup> which is believed to have been struck between 638 and 640 CE- several years after Muslim armies captured the town during the caliphate of Umar b. al-Khattab. The solidus bore the image of Heraclius and his two sons with a 'cross-on-steps reverse.' The Byzantine gold solidus appears to have served as a prototype for some experimental issues produced by the Arabs sometime during the latter half of the seventh century. The Nessana papyri that date to Muawiya's reign not only attest to the circulation of coinage in the region under the Muslim rulers but reveals that "taxes were still calculated in Byzantine gold nomismata."<sup>611</sup> Both the Byzantine solidi and Sasanid drachm continued to be used in economic exchange decades after the Arabs established political control over west Asia, or their styles were adopted and subtly modified (in order to preserve an already functioning regional economy). These two famous coins (Persian *drachma* and Byzantine *solidi*) became the basis for precious metal coinage under the new Arab rulers except that the Greek text on the solidus and the Middle Persian/Pahlavi on

<sup>608</sup> Ancient Resource 'Gold solidus of Heraclius, Constantinople mint, 9th officina. Dated IY 11 (637-638 AD).'

<sup>609</sup> Sina's Antiques and Fine Arts. Sasanian Kings, Ardashir III # 1336720

<sup>610</sup> Whitcomb 1994, p. 15

<sup>611</sup> Foss (in Haldon) 2010, p. 85

the silver drachm would either be completely replaced by Arabic or Arabic legends would gradually accompany the existing inscriptions.

It is not clear under whose individual authority the first coins were struck immediately after the collapse of Byzantine power in Syria-Palestine, but the fact that Arab-Sasanian coins, many of which are dated, some from the early 650's, circulated in Mesopotamia and Persia implies that a coin system operated during the period of the early Arab rulers (Muhammad's immediate successors) existed, which places some of the issues from the reigns of the Rashidun Caliphs Umar and Ali.

Many of the Byzantine imitative types that have been documented and published are of excellent quality and craftsmanship and may represent examples (probably experimental issues) that were rejected by Byzantium as the Maronite Chronicle, believed to date from around the last year of Muawiya's life, because they were 'de-Christianized'- that is, all of the crosses that appeared on the original Byzantine versions were removed on those produced by the Arabs. Examples of de-Christianized gold coinage are highlighted below. They almost always bear legible Greek and, later, Arabic inscriptions, but tend to contain rather subtle, yet ideologically explosive changes to the imagery (i.e. the replacement of the cross with a crossbar or an orb at the very top of the pole-on-steps).



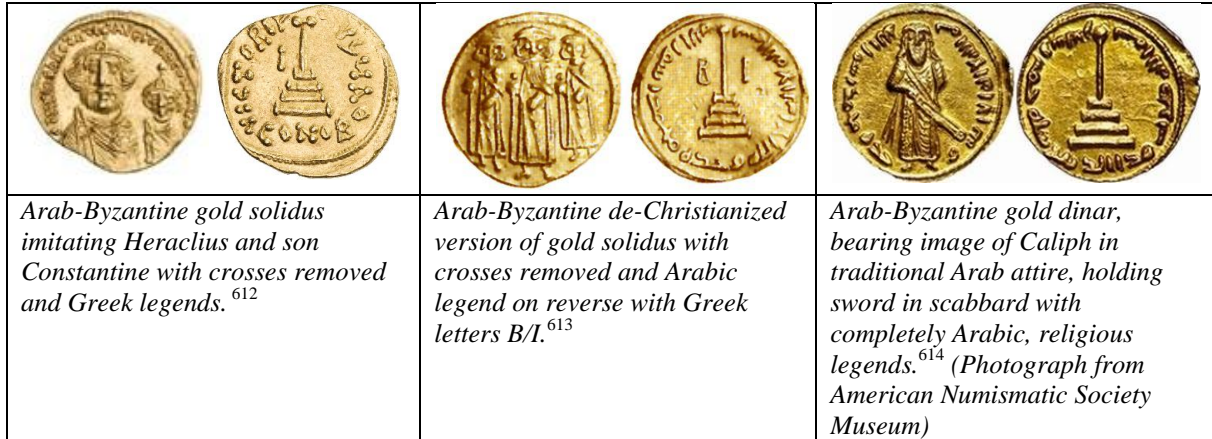


Fig. 28: Three Arab-Byzantine gold dinar coins

On the gold dinar (above, far right), the triumphant Arabic inscription on the obverse reads ‘*allah la ilaha illa allah wahdah muhammad rasul allah (God, there is no god but He alone, Muhammad is the Messenger of God)*’ while the reverse reads ‘*[bism] allah duriba hadha’l-dinar sana khamas wa-sab`in (In the name of God, this dinar was struck in the year five and seventy)*’ or 75 AH/697 CE).

Displays of Umayyad power were certainly elevated by the construction of monumental architecture (i.e. the *qusur*, palatial complexes, administrative quarters, mosques, shrines, etc.) but the written visual culture speaks to a more profound and widespread sense of prestige and strength as the words represent both a physical marker of political permanence as well as a cultural superstructure for which to situate their polity in (and which reaches a wider audience). Because the *qusur*, of which more than twenty have been identified throughout the Levant, were

<sup>612</sup> See Steven Album, Lot 68 “ARAB-BYZANTINE: AV solidus (4.27g), NM, ND. A-3548.2. Miles (1967), Plate XLV: 4, Bernardi-2. Large & small facing busts, short beards / horizontal bar on steps, degenerate Greek text, officina letters AΘ after AYTT on reverse, with Greek letter I left of the steps on reverse (for the number 10, perhaps an indiction year or the caliphal year of Mu’awiya), choice EF, RRRR.”

<sup>613</sup> Foss 2015, pp. 20-23 (coin no.5)

<sup>614</sup> American Numismatic Society Museum (Also, see Album 3350).

often located away from major urban centers, in semi-arid desert steppe regions of the region<sup>615</sup>, their visage and influence as proliferators of Arab and Islamic culture was limited.

Despite the Hejaz region being the birthplace of Islam, it took some nine decades before the first (known) Islamic coin was struck in the Arabian Peninsula, in the form of a gold dinar (4.28g) and which bears a date of 105 AH/723-724 CE. It was reportedly struck under either the Caliph Yazid or Hashim, one of whom purchased some land there that contained a gold mine according to a medieval Arab historian/writer. Bearing the standard legends that accompany all gold dinars, this one differs in that the obverse center field reads “*There is no God/ but God alone/ He has no partners/The Mine of the Commander of the Believers*” (*la elaha/ illa Allah wahdahu/la shareekalahu/ma’dan amir al-‘mu’mineen*) while the reverse field reads ‘*God is one/God is eternal/He does not beget/Is not begotten, [struck at] Mine/of the Commander of the Believers/in the Hejaz’* (*allah ahad allah / al-samad lam yalid / wa lam yulad Ma`din /amir al-mu`minin / bi’l-hijaz*). Why there appears to be no evidence of local coin production during Muhammad’s life in Mecca or Medina, Islam’s heartland and holiest places, can likely be explained by the fact that there was likely no need for an independent coinage and that the circulation of regional currencies (i.e. Byzantine, Aksumite or other coins) were adequate, that the technical know-how was absent due to a lack of the necessary administrative tools and equipment required to produce them, or quite possibly an absence of raw materials (or all or some of the above reasons).

## **2. MONETARY AND ADMINISTRATIVE CONTINUITY IN THE SEVENTH CENTURY**

<sup>615</sup> See Foote’ in Levy, Daviau, and Younker (eds.) 2007 ‘*From Residence to Revolutionary Headquarters: The Early Islamic Qasr and Mosque Complex at al-Humayma and its Eighth Century Context.*’

The Arab victory at Yarmouk in 636 CE and the subsequent capture of Damascus and Jerusalem, shortly thereafter, posed an economic problem for the Caliph Umar and his generals. Given that the Byzantines had been ejected from much of the region, the question over how to administer and how to successfully maintain a complex, regional economy must have immediately entered the equation. What is most likely, albeit, undocumented, is that Umar and Uthman allowed for economic continuity by sanctioning the production of copper coinage in the immediate aftermath of the conquest of Syria-Palestine. This likely meant that the Rashidun, who were rather sober and practical in their foreign policy decisions, permitted and likely even encouraged the production of local coinage which translated into payments that helped to keep the military afloat (and satisfied) while also averting a potential economic crisis that may have culminated with the change of the political guard.

What the early Islamic conquests did do, apart from impose a new cultural order on the territories and peoples it annexed, was that it re-drew political boundaries that would alter the networks of economic exchange. Whitcomb noted new borders were demarcated and the empire was divided into *ajnad* (military provinces), and as urbanization spread, evidenced by the increase of pottery production in larger towns and settlements, the existence of more buildings, including residential, secular, religious, and palatial, so too did economic activity in a region that, for some time, sat at the margins of Byzantium and was economically peripheral.<sup>616 617</sup> Thus, a natural outgrowth of urbanization, the rejuvenation of existing towns, and the construction of new ones like al-Ramla in central Palestine during the reign of Suleiman b. Abd al-Malik around 717 CE<sup>618</sup> all certainly impacted the need for substantial quantities of standardized coinage (based on a singular, shared weight) which would have the impact of

<sup>616</sup> Whitcomb 1994, pp. 24-28

<sup>617</sup> King and Cameron 1994, pp. 54-75

<sup>618</sup> See Whitcomb's chapter (in Donner) 2017

facilitating a sense of political cohesion for both internal and external audiences, but also because it was necessary to augment the new economic needs. As a disclaimer, it is outside the scope of this particular project to make determinations about the level of trade and commerce, economic networks, spheres of exchange, patterns of circulation, or political economy, as they relate to the Umayyads, except as to comment briefly on them in instances where that information is relevant to the primary issues this work is concerned with.

Before delving deeper into the issue of Umayyad coins, I must admit that is difficult to say, with certainty, which types of coins, seals, weights, etc. were official products of the Umayyad state considering that before Abd al-Malik, most coins produced in the Levant did not bear the name of the issuing authority (although we know that the Umayyads, since the start of Muawiya's reign, were, in fact, already striking coins in Iran as well as producing seals bearing his name in Mesopotamia). Beyond the few early securely attributable types, what constituted official and/or unofficial issues is still a matter of debate.

Nevertheless, the earliest dated coins from the Islamic period bearing Arabic inscriptions first appear in former Sasanid-held territories (namely Iran) less than two full decades after their capitulation to the Arabs under Umar. The coins that can be securely dated to the Islamic period are popularly known as 'Arab-Sasanian' types bearing a portrait of Yazdigerd III with inscriptions in Pahlavi with the short Arabic phrase '*jayyid*' meaning 'good' or 'valid' and dating to year 20 of the Yazdigerd era, or 652 CE (i.e. 31 AH).<sup>619</sup> This means that such coins were issued during the caliphal reign of Uthman, although neither his name, nor any of the names of the Rashidun caliphs are ever cited on any coinage presently known. The first time a caliph's name appears on any coin is that of Muawiya (from the year 42 AH or 662-663 CE)<sup>620</sup>, but later

<sup>619</sup> Album 2002, pp. 1-41

<sup>620</sup> Foss (in Haldon) 2010, p. 81

Arab-Sasanian issues in silver bore the names of known Arab/Muslim rulers, governors and others who fought for the caliphate including Abdullah b. al-Zubayr and Qatari b. al-Fujaa'a during the turbulent second *fitna*. Both Dimashq and Homs appear to have also minted small quantities of silver Arab-Sasanian dirhams, but they are believed to be short-lived and likely experimental.

Dating to the same year that Arabic text appears on the first dated coins of Muawiya, a tombstone was erected in Egypt for one *Abd al-Rahman ibn Khayr al-Hajiri*, inscribed completely in Arabic and bearing a *hijra* date of Jumada II 31 AH (January-February 652 CE).<sup>621</sup> The text contains the popular opening phrase '*bismallah al-rahman al-raheem*', is ripe with formulaic, religious jargon and spiritual invocations, and bearing a date in the new Islamic calendar. Below is the full text in Arabic and English.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم هذا القبر        | 1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate; this tomb              |
| لعبد الرحمن بن خير الحجري اللهم اغفر له | 2. belongs to 'Abd al-Rahmān Ibn Khair al-Ḥajrī. Oh God forgive him            |
| وادخله في رحمة منك وانا معه             | 3. and make him enter into Thy mercy and make us go with him.                  |
| (sic) استغفر له اذا قرا هذا الكتب       | 4. (passer by) When reading this inscription ask pardon for him (the deceased) |
| و قل امين وكتب هذا ا                    | 5. and say <i>amīn</i> ! This inscription was written                          |
| الكتب (sic) في جمدي (sic) الا           | 6. in Jumada II  |
| خرمن سنت (sic) احدى و                   | 7. of the year one and   |
| ثلثين                                   | 8. thirty.   |

622

The dating scheme, itself, is indication of some form of overarching political culture and standardized system of measures. Its literate audiences could only understand the date as it related to the institutionalization of an Islamic calendar that was implemented by some legitimate political regime. Thus, the state that Muhammad had constructed in Medina and the language,

<sup>621</sup> See Johns 2006 (in Yoffee and Crowell, Chapter 5), p. 165

<sup>622</sup> El-Hawary 1930, p. 327

script, and vocabulary of his community of believers, played meaningful roles in shaping the parameters of the subsequent Rashidun-era polities and the Umayyad state. The nature of the caliphate during the period between Muhammad's death and Muawiya's ascent may seem nebulous in some ways, but as the caliphs acquired more wealth, bureaucratic machinery began to develop, allowing them to gain a stronger, more permanent foothold in the region.

### 3. FROM GREEK TO ARABIC: COINS AS MARKERS AND PROLIFERATORS OF CULTURE CHANGE

As previously-discussed papyri prove, Greek persisted under Arab rule during the Rashidun caliphs. In some instances, documents (related to administrative or unrelated financial issues) were constructed, solely in Greek, but with the passing of time and the strengthening of Arab political culture, both Arabic and Greek appear side by side in texts and on coins. Below For example, there exists a well-known bilingual papyrus bearing both Greek (upper portion) and Arabic (lower portion which uses diacritics for several letters) representing a receipt of payment of sheep to heavily-armed Muslim military forces in Egypt under the *amir* Abdallah b. Jabir and is prefixed with a cross (top left of document, preceding Greek text).<sup>623</sup>

Once Arab leaders acquired a more nuanced reading of the political and economic terrain in Syria-Palestine, they partook in exercises aimed at Arabization and Islamization of the region. For example, they generated Arabized versions of the Greek and Persian terms for the monetary units they used. The Byzantine copper 'follis/ φολλίς' became the Arabic 'fils/ فلس', 'drachm/ δραχμή' became the 'dirham/ درهم' and the 'denarion/ δηνάριον' became the 'dinar/ دينار' under the new Arab leaders.<sup>624</sup> One rare, small-module Arab-Byzantine coin allegedly found in northern Jordan (near Irbid), bears the very Arabic term 'fils' فلس. While incredibly rare in pre-

<sup>623</sup> Grohmann 1932 (Vol. 1), pp. 40-43.

<sup>624</sup> Hawting 2000 (2nd edition), pp. 64-65

reform coinage, the term re-appears as a part of the standard epigraphic formula of one small-module type from Baysan/Scythopolis (the legend reads '*fihs al-haqq bi-Baysan*' or '*true/legal fihs in Baysan*') and later Abbasid copper coins which bear the phrase '*bismallah hadha thuriba al-fihs bi[...]*' (In the name of God, this fihs struck in [.]).

The Umayyads, in other words, did not impose a new monetary system on its newly acquired provinces and population, but their rationale was not unusual. The Romans, similarly, did not always force the adoption of Roman coinage in their very own provinces and political elites under their jurisdiction did not always willingly embrace all things Roman- the coins being a primary example.<sup>625</sup> Under tenuous political circumstances, tolerance and continuity are paramount to both the legitimizing and normalizing of power by a foreign polity.

However foreign the currencies of the day were, the terms '*dinar*' and '*dirham*' did circulate in the early Muslim community in Arabia and do feature in both the Quran and the Hadith, indicating the usage of coins in a money economy. For example, in the Quran, we read: "*And they sold him for a reduced price - a few darahim - and they were, concerning him, of those content with little.*"<sup>626</sup> The plural form of *dirham*, the Arabic rendition of the Persian '*drachm*' (silver coin) is used here, anachronistically, and in relation to the story of Joseph in Egypt despite the fact that no such coins existed in Egypt at the time the story is alleged to have taken place.

In one instance, it was reported that Muhammad, himself, used dinars in an economic transaction as recorded in the hadiths:

*"The Messenger of Allah gave him a dinar to buy a goat, then he bought for the Prophet saw two goats with the money. So it sold for a price of a dinar and*

<sup>625</sup> Howgego, Leuchert, and Burnett 2005, p. 177

<sup>626</sup> The Quran. Surah Yousif (12), verse 20

*brought one lamb and one dinar to the Prophet. Then the Prophet prayed: "He (Urwa), if buying dust will certainly profit also."*<sup>627</sup>

Regardless of the contexts, the literate Arabic-speaking audience who could read the Quran must have been familiar with the monetary terminology used and therefore, the verses and prophetic narrations, if contemporaneous writings, indeed, imply usage of some form of precious metal currency. It is important to recall, too, that Muhammad who was a merchant, most certainly handled the coins of Byzantium through his commercial travels through Syria-Palestine before his ascent to prophethood in 610.

In the previously mentioned 'Maronite Chronicle', one statement alludes to Muawiya having instituted coinage of his own. The historical tract notes that he "*. minted gold and silver, but it was not accepted because it had no cross on it.*"<sup>628</sup> Which particular coins the writer is referring to, precisely, is unclear, considering that the overwhelming majority of Syriopalestinian coins up to the reign of 'Abd al-Malik and his first coin reform, are considered 'anonymous' by numismatists, implying that the specific authority or polity that issued them is not attested to on the coins themselves although they are understood to be mainly Umayyad.

However, in this case, the issuer, as archaeological and literary sources imply, is that it was a new Arab political entity who ordered the minting of nearly all of the coins in Syria-Palestine after the Byzantines were expelled, likely relying on local die-makers and mintworkers to strike them. The only political force with the power to do so was the Rashidun Caliphs backed by the Arab soldiery, followed by the Umayyads, starting with Muawiya and his army. In several instances, the Umayyads produced gold coins bearing Byzantine elements, albeit, completely de-Christianized where crosses had been replaced by an orb or crossbar and dominated by Greek texts with some exceptions.

<sup>627</sup> See Tirmidhi 1/287 and Abu Dawood for this narration

<sup>628</sup> Hoyland 1997, p. 136



Muawiya's rationale to not deviate from the existing monetary system may have been a reflection of a policy rooted in pragmatism. That is, to not overly assert his authority in the region as a way to safeguard his long-term economic and political interests (i.e. state-building). However, we do not know exactly where such resistance to Muawiya's de-Christianized coinage took place and whether this represented a local grievance or a collective denunciation. We also do not know how long such coins circulated or when and if the situation was rectified, but it certainly raises questions about what types of coins circulated in the area the chronicler is describing and where he was writing from (Syria). There was obviously trepidation on the parts of Muawiya and Abd al-Malik in terms of their decisions to introduce any changes to existing coins as even subtle icono-textual alterations could have raised brows (and did).

Now, Muawiya's name does appear on some coins, but not from Syria-Palestine- the location of his power base, and when his name does appear on known coins, it is not in Arabic. Apart from an Arab-Sasanian silver dirham issue from Persian mints that cites Muawiya and refers to him as '*amir al-mu'mineen*' in the Pahlavi script, no coins from the series regarded as 'Arab-Byzantine- the copper and gold coins that were struck in the Levant, Egypt, and North Africa, make any mention of him. De-Christianized coins that the Maronite Chronicle alludes to almost certainly existed, although it is not clear when. Crosses and *globus crucigers* (Latin for a globe adorned with a cross) were typically either removed or replaced by a sphere, topped by an orb, or a crossbar, while nearly all other elements from their Byzantine prototypes remained.

Given what has been derived from the archaeological record about life for Syria-Palestine's population during and after the period of the Arab-Muslim conquests, which has led scholars to believe that there is little evidence of forced conversions, massacres, or the dismantling of existing economic structures or religious institutions in the region, that the

decision to not overhaul the existing monetary system likely played into Muawiya's general policy of appeasement and covert state-building efforts. He also likely had no other choice.

Realizing that the Byzantine presence in Anatolia, as well as the potential influence of the empire over its former population which was still overwhelmingly Christian, may spell trouble, Muawiya did not want to risk infuriating or alienating his constituencies out of fear of mutiny or deposition. The type of political entity that Muawiya crafted, however, has been the subject of debate. Clive Foss, Georgetown historian and numismatist, has argued that Muawiya's polity was advanced and capable given its ability to strike coins and collect taxes on its own (and for other reasons which were discussed in previous chapters).<sup>629</sup> On the opposite end of the spectrum is Michael Bates, who contended that Muawiya did not introduce major administrative reforms and that Abd al-Malik was the chief architect of the Umayyad state. For Jeremy Johns, Muawiya's regime represented an amorphous geo-political entity of sorts, a chiefdom based on Arab kinship and tribal ties, but not a 'hegemonic state' yet.<sup>630</sup>

Measuring the size and extent of Muawiya's polity and his power is challenging, and at first glance (due to a less impressive documentary record associated with his rule), it would be easy to dismiss his political construct or 'state' as rudimentary and unrefined. Muawiya's shortcomings as dominant statesman becomes more pronounced when compared to the accomplishments documented under Abd al-Malik's tenure as caliph but the lack of contemporary texts and monuments securely dated to his rule should not be grounds to negate his role and contributions in the formation of the Umayyad state. Muawiya was an ambitious and still, relatively cautious and calculative statesman who learned the extents of his power through his policies and their reactions in the public arena. During the formative years of Muawiya's

<sup>629</sup> Foss 2002, pp. 353-365

<sup>630</sup> See Johns (Yoffee and Crowell, ch. 5) 2006, p. 166

reign, acquiring financial security was of the utmost significance and paramount to the survival of his regime. This is why there was such a concerted tax-collective apparatus and effort under his rule as well as why recognition of non-Arab conversion to Islam was minimal since free non-Muslim males were subjected to the poll-tax.

Upon acquiring power sometime after his Jerusalem inauguration, Muawiya allegedly tried to strong-arm the Byzantines into capitulating, arguing that “*If the Romans want peace, let them surrender their weapons and pay the tax (gzita).*”<sup>631</sup> However, at home, he sometimes faced push-back for some of his policies which aimed to gradually de-Christianize the physical landscape. There were certainly caps on Muawiya’s power that were linked to the fact that he was a Muslim leader in a Christian world. In one instance, he announced that he wanted to transform St. John’s Church in Damascus into a mosque but was met with resistance and opposition from the city’s Christian inhabitants which forced him to retreat from that position.<sup>632</sup> Towards the end of his reign, after an earthquake struck the Levant in 679, one year before his death, he is said to have funded the reconstruction of a major church in Edessa.<sup>633</sup>

Muawiya’s governance was mitigated by the fact that he was still part of a rather small coterie of Muslim administrators so his policies were generally, whether he liked it or not, formulated and exercised in a palatable way, although his record is also interspersed with episodes of both tolerance and suppression.

It can be argued that more than the façade of an amorphous state existed under Muawiya. Administrative institutions, however unsophisticated they may appear by today’s standards, were in operation during his rule but monumental public expressions of Umayyad hegemony during his reign are lacking. However, that is likely due to a strategy that rejected a radical approach

<sup>631</sup> Hoyland 1997, p. 136

<sup>632</sup> Foss (in Haldon ed.) 2010, p. 93

<sup>633</sup> Humphreys (in Haldon ed.) 2010, p. 53

towards daily politics and which certainly stemmed from demographic, religious considerations. By painting his polity to his Levantine and Christian audience as somewhat of a Byzantine successor state, Muawiya cemented his role as imperial head of the former Roman territories and was likely perceived as a legitimate ruler in the eyes of his Christian constituents; something he needed to do in order to remain on top. He even employed members of local, established families with administrative experience like Sarjun b. Mansour, who served as secretary to the caliph and head of his tax department.<sup>634 635</sup> The notion that Muawiya saw political and cultural continuity as his best chance at success has been supported by contemporary scholars, including historians, archaeologists and numismatists. Stephen Heidemann went so far as to assert that “ *in the first decades after the Islamic conquest until the onset of Umayyad rule, the region of Syria and northern Mesopotamia remained in regard to its monetary organisation mainly a dependent Byzantine province.*”<sup>636</sup>

In fact, Muawiya wasted no time in demonstrating his respect towards Christianity by engaging in a series of public, high-profile commemorations and involvements that likely led to his endorsement and popularity among Christian religious notables, tribal heads, and other segments of the population. Among some of his Christian-friendly acts, Muawiya, upon his formal crowning as Caliph after receiving the Arab ‘*baya’a*’ or oath of loyalty<sup>637</sup>, “*went to Gethsemane and went down to the tomb of the blessed Mary and prayed in it*”<sup>638</sup>, and at some point, arbitrated a dispute over a sacred cloth between Jews and Christians in Jerusalem.<sup>639</sup>

<sup>634</sup> Foss points out that his father also served in an administrative capacity in pre-Islamic Byzantine and Sasanian Damascus.

<sup>635</sup> Al-Tabari, *Tarikh al-Rasul wal-Muluk*, II, 205

<sup>636</sup> Heidemann 1998, p. 107

<sup>637</sup> See Wheatley 2001, p. 41 for a discussion surrounding aspects of the *bay’a*

<sup>638</sup> Hoyland 1997, p. 136

<sup>639</sup> Hoyland 1997, p. 223

His policies, which included diplomatic maneuvers designed to keep peace and order, including tribal negotiations (seeking and securing oaths of loyalty wherever he could find them), maintaining Greek as a language of government, implementing a monetary system familiar to his constituents, producing public texts in the region's *lingua franca* and engaging in building projects including palatial complexes, mosques, dams, and allowing for churches to continue being constructed, were all hallmarks of his long-term strategy to cement Arab-Muslim control in the region. Specific bureaucratic protocols were tailored to particular areas which may explain the monetary situation in areas under his control which appears unorganized at first glance given that the coins of the Levant and the East (Iran and Iraq, namely) were based on various prototypes as models for the first coinage struck under the new rules: some Byzantine, others Sasanian.<sup>640</sup>

Given that Muawiya's name appears in public inscriptions around the Near East, on lead seals, on coins in the Persian Pahlavi script, and in contemporaneous writings in various languages, there is no reason not to believe he also was responsible for directing the minting and issuing of coins in Syria-Palestine where he spent most of his political tenure. The Maronite Chronicle attests to such an effort.

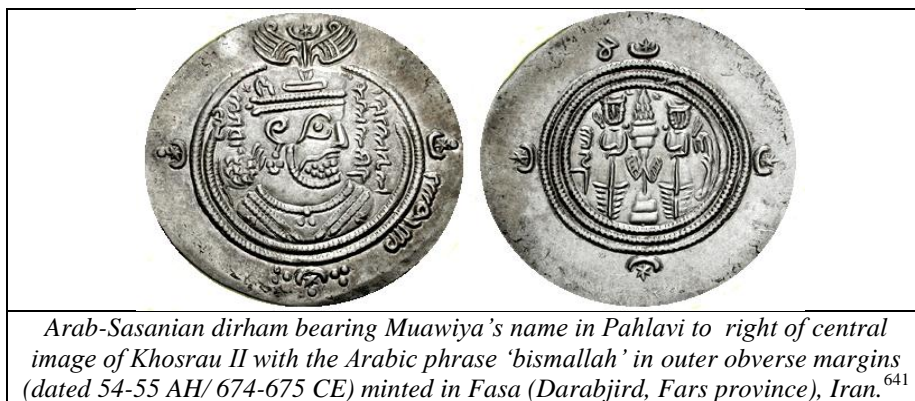


Fig. 29: Arab-Sasanian dirham bearing Muawiya's name in Pahlavi

<sup>640</sup> Heidemann 1998, pp. 95-112

<sup>641</sup> The Classical Economies Collection (See SICA 1, 269 Walker, Arab-Sasanian 35 var. (same); Album 14.

The contemporaneous anecdotal, literary evidence that relates to the monetary situation in Syria-Palestine under Arab rule is scant, thus making it incredibly difficult to construct a coherent, ascertainable chronology of the coins, though. However, that is not the goal of this work. Nonetheless, the seemingly ambivalent coin system illustrates the complexities of state formation, presenting it as a non-linear, oft-obstructed process that is dependent on factors that lie outside of the control of the initiating polity or regime.

In trying to understand the political mechanics and dynamics behind Umayyad state formation, numismatic studies are nothing short of essential. Today, numismatists specializing in early Islamic currency have put forth a number of chronologies and catalysts for the earliest Arab coinage. A common theme amongst many specialists is that for the first few decades of the early Islamic period Umayyad coinage tended to employ imagery closely associated with previous Christian Imperial Byzantine coinage under Byzantium's various emperors. While numismatists Tony Goodwin, Clive Foss, and Shraga Qedar argued for an earlier starting point for Arab-Byzantine coinage (630's), Michael Bates, during a colloquium in honor of numismatist George C. Miles in 1976 argued that the Muslims did not start minting coins until the late 680's or early 690's.<sup>642</sup>

Tony Goodwin recently put forth a new chronology that places the start of Arab coinage in the 640's.<sup>643</sup> This is a rather reasonable assertion on political, economic and circumstantial grounds given new numismatic finds, die-studies, and new interpretations that have resulted from access to more materials, both archaeological and documentary, and which collectively point towards a continuation of monetary policy during and after the conquests had concluded in the Levant.

<sup>642</sup> See Qedar 1988 and Bates 1976

<sup>643</sup> Goodwin and Gyselen, 2015, p. 12

Altogether, several series of Arab/Umayyad/Early Islamic coinage have been documented that vary in their size, style, iconography, text, language, prototype they were modeled on, depictions/imagery, etc. There also exist a large number of ‘transitional’ types that do not easily fit in any of the categories they have devised (i.e. *pseudo-Byzantine*, *pseudo-Damascus*, *pre-reform*, *imperial image*, *standing caliph*, *post-reform*) but will prove useful in commenting on some elements of the political culture that dominated the production of these materials.

What complicates the numismatic and monetary picture, for example, are surviving specimens of coins that clearly depict Christian, Byzantine imperial figures holding or bearing crosses while simultaneously carrying Islamic religious formulae from the Quran, as is the case with some coins from the mint at Tabariyya (Tiberias)<sup>644</sup> or the square-flan coins bearing the name ‘Muhammad’ next to an imperial figure.

It is most likely that the Umayyads chose not to introduce more distinctly ‘Arabic’ or ‘Islamic’ coinage from the outset because they found it impractical to tamper with an already-working and efficient monetary and economic system. The state’s leadership made a conscious decision to retain certain cultural and religious characteristics on the coinage for political reasons or because of economic pressures. The numismatic and literary evidence from the period points to the possibility that both may be independently true and that the early Umayyad state under Muawiya maintained, but modified an existing financial system because it was familiar, working and effective. Given that the Arab polity was still in its infancy by the time Syria-Palestine was integrated into the caliphate, it is difficult to accept that any Arab leader would make brazen or radical changes to the economy in an overt way as a way to avoid the potential for civil disobedience and insurrection.

<sup>644</sup> Phillips 2005, pp. 1631-1638

Concurrently, the Rashidun and early Umayyads chose to continue using existing coin types (with minor modifications), most likely, to placate the majority Christian communities there. Political accommodation and appeasement were integral to the survival of the Arab and Umayyad elites and their state as the Arab-Muslim leadership constituted a tiny minority within their own empire and depended on the loyalty and revenues of the majority Christian population.

Like the subtleties that accompanied changes in pottery and architecture during the first few decades of Muslim rule in Syria-Palestine, the monetary system that existed well into the Umayyad period persevered for reasons that were mainly the result of administrative pragmatism. Continuity was either an inadvertent policy or explicit strategy employed by the upper echelons of the Arab and Islamic political hierarchy. Even for ceramologists and other material culture specialists, it is nearly impossible to discern late Byzantine and early Islamic pottery from one another, as existing modes of production and styles continued after the conquests. Continuity was a staple of the transition during its early stages, in fact. This pattern of, sometimes only, subtle modifications to existing commodities extended to various categories of material culture that also included coins, architecture, and other features of Levantine Late Antiquity.

For archaeologists studying urbanization and settlement patterns in the early Islamic period, Arab/Muslim cities were rarely ever newly constructed but were, rather, “*preexisting urban forms adapted to, and progressively modified by, Muslim occupation.*”<sup>645</sup> Deviations from the existing, and integrated, Hellenistic grid that was the basis of several Near Eastern cities during the Greek, Roman and Byzantine periods ultimately gave way to the ‘Islamic city’ predicated upon new conceptions of the urban landscape. These saw the rearranging of the physical layouts which emphasized the construction of “*economic and religiously autonomous*

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<sup>645</sup> Wheatley 2001, pp. 57-58



*quarters, each with its own mosque, public bath, water supply, bakery, and local market.”*<sup>646</sup>

This, the archaeological evidence implies, was mainly the result of urbanized Arab tribes in both Syria, as well as from the Hejaz and South Arabia (from where most of the sedentary Arab *muhajirun* originated) continuing to develop the region’s ‘classical cities’ and their peripheral areas<sup>647</sup>, thus representing syncretic Arab-Muslim cityscapes.

This, like many other aspects of the transitional period of Late Antiquity, was a gradual process and new forms, be they material or otherwise, fluctuated, often depending on the state’s confidence in its ability to assert itself.

#### **4. COINAGE UNDER THE RASHIDUN AND EARLY UMAYYADS IN SYRIA-PALESTINE**

*“...seeing that the Arabs could not suffer the Roman imprint on their own currency; and in as much as the gold was paid by weight, the Romans did not suffer any loss from the fact that the Arabs were minting new coin.”- The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor (690/691 CE)*

Several different scripts were used on coins during the Rashidun and Umayyad eras including Pahlavi, Epthalite, Latin, Arabic, and Greek, and sometimes a combination of at least two of them in several instances between Syria-Palestine and Iran. All but Arabic began to be phased out with the cementing of a powerful, central administration that was tasked with monetary standardization in the late 690’s. Until the reign of Abd al-Malik, the currency

It is believed that some of the earliest Arab-Byzantine types were ‘imitative’ coins based on Heraclian types and were dominated by Byzantine imperial iconography but also contained Greek texts that lacked any grammatical or lexical cohesion- i.e. the legends were gibberish. These types, generally referred to as ‘pseudo-Byzantine’ are primarily attested to in copper, depict a regal figure (or figures) adorned with crosses and bear either a miniscule ‘m’ or

<sup>646</sup> Wheatley 2001, pp. 57-58

<sup>647</sup> Whitcomb 2009, p. 241

majuscule “M” on the reverse which symbolized the monetary denomination of 40 *nummia* or one ‘*folis*’ (some were of the 20 *nummia* ‘k’ denomination, i.e. half *folis*). Since none of these types carry a mint-name, it is difficult to determine where exactly they were struck although they have often been reportedly been found in northern Jordan.<sup>648</sup> Overall, these seemingly early types may depict a number of different stylistic idiosyncrasies but, in general, they share the aforementioned qualities.

Additionally, these types are undated and craftsmanship varies greatly as some examples are of poor quality and ‘barbarous’ while others exhibit great detail, are well-centered, and represent the work of skilled and experienced mint workers.

It is the ‘blundered’ Greek texts that imply a deviation from previous Byzantine types. It is difficult to confirm why these small-module, sometimes well-crafted coins bear mainly unintelligible (or incorrect) texts<sup>649</sup>, but it is quite possible that the existence of garbled Greek legends attests to the possibility of illiterate die-engravers in the economically declining eastern Mediterranean or the coins represented a hurried issue, although the general quality of them is high in most cases with discernible icons, lettering, and imagery- or both.<sup>650</sup> Whether or not an unofficial, unsanctioned minting facility or facilities were producing imitative forgeries is another potential possibility

It is possible, albeit unlikely, that blundered Greek inscriptions on coins produced under the Arab overlords were a measure of protestation and opposition to Byzantium by the issuing authority which are contrasted by the almost always meaningful Arabic legends that replaced them. The Arab overlords or issuer could have made the inscriptions on pseudo-Byzantine coins intelligible. The fact many were not leads to speculation over minting practices and opens the

<sup>648</sup> See Goodwin and Gyselen 2015

<sup>649</sup> Goodwin 2002, pp. 79-80

<sup>650</sup> Goodwin 2005, p. 15

conversation over literacy habits, which has been an issue long-raised by numismatists. The local Syrio-Palestinian economy was under some duress during this transitional period as hostilities between Byzantium and the Arabs persisted along its borders, and so it is possible that literacy also took a hit in some areas. Thus the garbled legends may represent one of the aforementioned consequences of the limited disruptions that had been ongoing in the first half of the seventh century (between Sasanian occupation, Byzantine re-occupation, and the Arab and Islamic conquests). It is also fathomable that the issuing of such coinage represents a rushed enterprise due to a shortage of copper coins which resulted from a gradual closure of Byzantine regional mints that began with Antioch (in 610)<sup>651</sup> at the start of the Sasanian occupation.<sup>652</sup> Combine these circumstances with new Arab administrators who had no history of minting and you have a recipe for uneven standards of quality and technical, minting know-how. This is likely the case around or after the accession of Muawiya, as it is believed that copper coins were imported into the Levant and northern Mesopotamia from Constantinople until the late 650's (655-658).<sup>653</sup>

What appears to be confirmed by some records is that, economically, Syria-Palestine was not nearly as wealthy as Iraq and Iran which contained more cultivable land, larger populations, and more resources and raw materials. Despite this and with the closure of the Byzantine mints (only the mint at Constantinople remained operative under the latter part of Heraclius's reign), local coin production was a necessity. Due, in part, to a withdrawal of Byzantine subsidies in the previous century, a declining economy, and an imperial policy aimed at restricting the production of gold coins while also regulating their circulation in the eastern provinces, the Arabs, upon assuming control of the region, were instantly faced with financial and economic challenges. Before they reached the Levant, Syria-Palestine no longer had any functioning

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<sup>651</sup> Bone 2000, p. 18

<sup>652</sup> Hendy 1985, p. 418

<sup>653</sup> Heidemann 1998, p. 107

official Byzantine mints as the region had been wracked by intense warfare in previous decades, which, among other things, culminated in a shortage of locally-produced currencies.<sup>654</sup> Goodwin notes that most of the small change that circulated in the Levant in the 640's and 650's was likely the result of the importation of Byzantine copper coinage from the reign of Constans II (and some from the reign of Heraclius).<sup>655</sup> He also posits that this arrangement was tolerated by the Arabs because it allowed for some level of economic stability and implemented by the Byzantines because they either viewed the Arab conquests as a passing or temporary development or that exporting their coinage to newly-acquired Arab territories was a way to attack their political integrity.<sup>656</sup>

One other way to stabilize the monetary situation, especially after 658 CE, when the importation of Byzantine coins was dramatically reduced<sup>657</sup>, was for the Arab conquerors to countermark existing coin types, re-validating them for circulation. Various Byzantine *folli* and pseudo-Byzantine coins, sometimes contained counterstamps of symbols, monograms, or Arabic terms like '*tayyib*' (good), '*jayyid*' (authentic) '*lillah*' ('for God') or a city name such as '*Ludd*' (modern-day Lod).<sup>658</sup> Such types, though almost always without mint name (with the exception of the '*Ludd*' type), have been reported throughout Israel, Palestine, and Jordan particularly in places such as Baysan, in northern Israel, and Jerash in northern Jordan, where the countermark '*tayyib*' appears on the obverse, under the image of Justin II and Sophia- a large-module coin that also typically carries the Greek name for the city ('*Nysa-Scythopolis*' for Baysan and '*Gerasa*' for Jerash).<sup>659</sup> Countermarking coins was an inexpensive way to maintain an economy

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<sup>654</sup> Qedar 1988, p. 27

<sup>655</sup> Goodwin 2005, p. 14

<sup>656</sup> Goodwin 2005, p. 14

<sup>657</sup> Goodwin 2005, p. 30

<sup>658</sup> Qedar 1988, p. 32

<sup>659</sup> Amitai-Preiss, Berman, and Qedar 1994-99, pg. 137

and helped to offset the costs of striking new coins. It could also be a useful tool in the demonstration of a political takeover by a new power.



Fig. 30: Byzantine follis with Greek legends Arabic countermark (“tayyib”) on reverse under ‘m’ (private collection)

What appears to represent another phase of Arab-Byzantine coinage is referred to as the ‘Umayyad Imperial Image’ phase by leading numismatist Tony Goodwin. These types tended to loosely copy regular issues of Byzantine types from the sixth and seventh centuries and depict, like their pseudo-Byzantine predecessors, Byzantine imperial figures alongside legends in either Greek or Arabic, and sometimes both. Some types contain Greek-only legends such as those minted in Jerusalem and Diospolis (Ludd), as well as some from Tabariyya (Tiberias), Dimashq (Damascus), Baysan (Bet Shean), Jerash (Gerasa) and Homs (Emessa).



Fig. 31: Two Arab-Byzantine ‘Imperial Image’ types (one with Greek and the other with Arabic legends)

Other types in this series contain both Arabic and Greek legends and/or places of mint.

The overwhelming majority of Umayyad Imperial Image coins are made of copper and, except

for one half-follis of Baysan which uses a lower-case “k” - they all contain either an ‘m’ or ‘M’ on the reverse. There is no mention of a ruler or minting authority, nor date, but there was a large output of many high-quality coins from certain mints that implies an established centralized political authority from which they emanate. Only two pre-reform types were found in the Jordanian museums during my research, one of which bears the mint-name of *Dimashq* (*‘ja’iz darb Dimashq*’ or ‘legal, struck at Damascus’), seat of the governorship of Muawiya, and later capital of the Umayyad Caliphate. Some types, such as one variety with a likely link to Tabariyya where this type was known to have circulated and whose counterparts bore the name of that mint, is a small-module copper filis with three standing figures (derived from Byzantine coins depicting Heraclius and his two sons, standing) with the Arabic legend on the reverse ‘*Muhammad/rasul/Allah*’ (Muhammad Messenger of God), surrounding the ‘M.’

The proclamation of Muhammad’s status as messenger on a coin that, apart from the Arabic text, derived all of its artistic and iconographic qualities from Byzantine coins of Heraclius’s reign can be seen as representing a subtle exorcism of the Greek language on coins in the Arabizing Levant. Latin, too, made an appearance on some Arab-Byzantine coins struck after the Arab conquests, but they do not seem to have enjoyed much popularity in the region compared to Greek (but were much more utilized in Muslim Spain and North Africa). In a discussion about the epigraphic scenery in pre-Islamic southern Bilad al-Shamm, Christopher Tuttle asserted that “*there is little evidence to suggest that the use of Latin in the area ever achieved the cosmopolitan status of Greek*”<sup>660</sup>, and this remained true during the Islamic takeover of the region (as limited Latin inscriptions, be they numismatic or otherwise, were produced).

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<sup>660</sup> Tuttle 2009, p. 23

Unlike the Umayyad post-reform types, Arab-Byzantine coins are either rarely found or not documented properly since their presence is sorely lacking in excavation reports. On the contrary, post-reform types are well-attested to at dozens of archaeological sites throughout Syria-Palestine and found throughout the associated literature.

## 5. THE FIRST ‘ISLAMIC COINS’: ARAB IMAGERY AND ARABIC TEXT AS PURVEYORS OF A NEW ORDER

Arabized currency bearing what is referred to as a ‘Standing Caliph’ image were struck at nearly twenty mints across Islamic Syria-Palestine, depicting a version of the caliph that appears markedly different from those from Filastin. Outside of Palestine, the caliphal figure is sporting a *kefiyyeh* and bearing a legend that cites ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwan as the caliph. A similar rendition of the ‘Standing Caliph’ was erected at Khirbet al-Mafjar in Jericho that dates from either 724–743 or 743–746 CE and exists in the form of a stucco sculpture at the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem. Below is an image of the sculpture.



Fig. 32: Sculpture of a Standing Caliph from Khirbet al-Mafjar in Jericho, Palestine (The Rockefeller Museum/Israel Antiquities Authority)

The ‘Standing Caliph’ coins contain all-Arabic legends on one side as well as a modified/shortened Islamic declaration of faith and mint-name on the other. The iconography on both sides of the coin is intriguing. The reverse depicts a central and monumental symbol consisting of three or four steps mounted by a vertical pole that cuts through a sphere (sometimes there is an orb-like object at the top instead of a sphere). This imagery was clearly borrowed from previous Byzantine coins which contain three or four steps mounted by a large cross.

In the Islamized version of this coin, the Arab-Muslim caliph supplants the Byzantine-Christian emperor, the Greek legends are completely replaced by Arabic ones (though one type from northern Syria contains a couple of Greek characters and one twin Standing Caliph type attributed to Jerash or Baysan bears all Greek legends), and the cross-on-steps is replaced by a pole-through-sphere on steps. These types (except for those minted in Palestine), are without a doubt, attributable to the fifth Umayyad caliph Abd al-Malik b. Marwan, who took power in 685 CE and whose name appears on the standardized legend on these types.



*Fig. 33: Standing Caliph fils of Amman (Jordan Museum)*

However, like the other series', these types also contain no dates although there is some consensus that they were likely struck during the first half of the 690's. Only sixteen coins



analyzed were of the ‘Standing Caliph’ type at the Jordanian museums, fifteen of which were of ‘Amman.’<sup>661</sup> One bore no mintmark, but has long been believed to be a product of Amman based on style, size, and other physical characteristics. Rather than the typical sphere-through-pole on steps reverse, it instead, carried the Islamic *shahada* around an ‘M.’



Fig. 34: Arab-Byzantine Standing Caliph fils with ‘M’ on reverse and lengthy Arabic text (Jordan Archaeological Museum- Amman Citadel)

The final series represents a completely new and somewhat revolutionary approach to coinage. Abd al-Malik b. Marwan initiated a coin reform in 697 CE that completely expunged Byzantine imperial figures and the monetary designations (of ‘M/m’ and ‘k’) and replaced all previous models with an all-Arabic, largely ‘epigraphic’ (text-heavy), coinage that was dominated by Islamic religious formulae. In cases where there were depictions of animate objects (which appear after the turn of the seventh century on the post-reform coins), they were typically non-figural with a few documented exceptions. Apart from the copper *fils* (most basic denomination of coinage), Abd al-Malik also introduced a silver ‘*dirham*’ and a gold ‘*dinar*’ which represented a major monetary and numismatic overhaul of a system dominated by Byzantine copper coinage and almost no silver (except in the eastern provinces).

<sup>661</sup> Fifteen ‘Standing Caliph’ types (including with the alternative ‘M’ reverse) were documented at the Jordan Archaeological Museum (at the Amman Citadel), while the sixteenth was found at the Jordan Museum.

Ninety-five of the coins examined for part of this study were of the post-reform type and include examples from all three denominations (*fil*s, *dirham*, *dinar*) and metals (copper, silver, gold).<sup>662</sup> Nineteen were copper (20% of the total post-reform types studied), and included coins struck at *al-Ramla*, *Dimashq*, *Iliya*, and other Syrian and Palestinian mints. The silver dirhams, which made up sixty-seven of the ninety-five post-reform types (70.5% of the total of post-reform coinage studied), bore the mint-names of Homs (Syria), Wasit (Iraq), Merv (Turkmenistan), Dimashq (Syria), and Basra (Iraq) and were struck under several Umayyad caliphs including Abd al-Malik b. Marwan, Suleiman b. Abd al-Malik, Hisham b. Abd al-Malik, Umar b. Abd al-Aziz, Yazid II, Yazid III, Marwan b. Muhammad (Marwan II). Eight gold dinars were examined as well, constituting a total of 8.4% of the total post-reform types analyzed and recorded.

Most of the coins that circulated in the Levant, however, were not composed of precious metals. The copper coins were by far, the most abundant, and the earliest examples of post-Byzantine types were likely struck for local, or sometimes regional usage. What some numismatists and historians suspect is that local, unofficial mints struck copper coins to maintain their local economies even leading into the period of Muslim rule and this may explain the great variety of styles, sizes, weights, and iconographies associated with them.<sup>663</sup> This is a very plausible theory especially when considering the political and economic conditions that existed at the time. There is little evidence that the Rashidun caliphs had implemented any sort monetary system of their own in the Hejaz and the Arab merchants in and around Arabia almost certainly used the precious metal coins of the day; the gold solidus of Byzantium and silver drachm of

<sup>662</sup> These represent only the coins that were studied at the Jordanian museums alongside the Kelsey Museum, and not from private collections or elsewhere.

<sup>663</sup> Qedar 1988, p. 27

Sasanid Persia in major commercial contexts. For the Arabs to adopt Byzantine and Sasanian coin types as their own was not a precedent set by them, nor unique in history.

In several instances, later Christian states and/or rulers (e.g. King Offa of Mercia in the eighth century)<sup>664</sup> appropriated Arabic legends and adopted Islamic designs for their own coins in an effort to expedite trade ties with the Islamic world during the Middle Period.<sup>665</sup> Thus, the administrative and monetary policy adopted by the Rashidun administrators and their Umayyad successors represented a certain political pragmatism motivated by economic incentives more than anything.

Umayyad visual and administrative material culture developed and changed over the course of several decades, and much of both become highly epigraphic after Abd al-Malik took over the reins of power and ambitiously sought to re-orient his polity. What began as an exercise in monarchical emulation by Muawiya grew into a burgeoning empire under Abd al-Malik where the Arabic script and language became universalized and where control of its usage and the scale of its administrative implementation had never been seen before.

A decade after Abd al-Malik assumed power, Greek inscriptions gave way to Arabic ones as the language of administration- exhibited not just by coins but also by numerous papyri documenting transactions and economic exchange between peoples in the Umayyad realm, although these are mainly the products of Egypt.<sup>666</sup> The imposition of Arabic as the lingua franca of the Umayyad bureaucracy was of great utility since its adoption helped to maximize the potential for controlling the movement of knowledge, to convey authority (as new rulers), but also because the region's social and economic networks and arrangements were absorbed by a

<sup>664</sup> Whitehouse and Hodges 1983, p. 120

<sup>665</sup> Haldon 2010, p. 115

<sup>666</sup> See Khan's work on Arabic papyri (1992)

new one in which Arabic became more useful.<sup>667</sup> While we do not know how rampant literacy was in the seventh and eighth centuries, Arabic did ultimately become the primary language of literature, government, science, medicine, philosophy, and religion throughout large swaths of the Muslim world. Even in Iran and Mesopotamia, at urban Persian centers of learning where various orthographic forms of Persian enjoyed millennia of prestige and use, Persian philosophers and scientists who, while continuing to speak Persian among themselves, produced their written works, i.e. their *'scholarly output'*, overwhelmingly in the Arabic script and in the Arabic language.<sup>668</sup>

Nevertheless, for the Umayyads, acquisition of such an orthographic monopoly was no simple feat. Realizing the power that lay in the proclamation of both their grievances and assertions through written materials, opposition figures like Abdallah b. al-Zubayr and Qatari b. Fuja'a began to produce coins with Arabic legends, bearing their names along with Arabic and Islamic titles, in the late seventh century in Persia and Mesopotamia. This was a dangerous and very real threat to Umayyad power.



*Fig. 35: Two Arab-Sasanian coins of Kharijite leader al-Qatari b. Fuja'a and rival Caliph Abdallah b. al-Zubayr*

<sup>667</sup> See Chrisomalis 2010, pp. 406, 410 for a discussion on the catalysts for language change.

<sup>668</sup> Hanaway 2012, p.83

<sup>669</sup> Baldwin Auction 93 and 94, Lot 1508 Arab-Sasanian Coins al-Qatari b. al-Fuja'a (type published in Walker p.113: 219)

<sup>670</sup> Stephen Album Rare Coins Auction 15, 18-19 January 2013, Lot 89

Iraq and Iran proved difficult for the Umayyads to control and even Muawiya provided Iraq's governor, Ziyad b. Abihi, the green light to punish opposition there while al-Hajjaj b. Yousif, an Umayyad loyalist and governor of Iraq beginning in 694 CE, and possibly the person behind vowelizing the Quran<sup>671</sup>, whose name is attested to in the numismatic and paranumismatic records, similarly engaged in major political reprisals against dissenters during Abd al-Malik's reign.<sup>672</sup>

A uniface lead seal (16.78g) bearing al-Hajjaj's name has surfaced, within an impressed square in three lines read '*al-amr a/l-hajjaj bin yousif*' ('order [of] al-Hajjaj bin Yousif')<sup>673</sup> and almost certainly produced in Iraq sometime in the 690's or first decade and-a-half of the eighth century.<sup>674</sup> Al-Hajjaj was known for his brutality and severity, but remained a close confidant of Abd al-Malik and his son al-Walid (al-Hajjaj's daughter married al-Walid's son) and is best known for crucifying and killing Abd al-Malik's main rival, Abdallah ibn al-Zubayr, in Mecca. The nascent Umayyad polity, under both Muawiya and Abd al-Malik both certainly endured growing pains, and like most other governments in antiquity, the Umayyad state (under both leaders) "*employed a mixture of bureaucratic and delegated administrative structures*" where both Caliphs "*sought to control officials, regions, kin groups, and institutions, while these groups sought to retain or establish their own full or partial autonomy.*"<sup>675</sup>

Usage of the phrase '*amir al-mu'mineen*' on silver dirhams struck by rival caliphs al-Zubayr and al-Qatari of the Kharijite movement, tells us that various movements like the Zubayrids and the Kharijites competed for control of the Muslim political realm and invoked the

<sup>671</sup> Bloom and Blair 2009, p. 371

<sup>672</sup> Saeed 2004 (see Chapter One: The Context of the Debate on Apostasy- Freedom of Religion in the Modern Period)

<sup>673</sup> Wilkes & Curtis Auction 2, Lot 19 (15 September 2014)

<sup>674</sup> Lead and glass bullae have been attributed to several Umayyad caliphs, governors, amirs (and lesser known, private merchants), often citing them by name and include Muawiya, Abd al-Malik, Hisham, Yazid, al-Walid and others.

<sup>675</sup> Trigger 2003, p. 219

qualities of the written word (namely powerful religious phrases in Arabic) in their efforts to secure constituencies at various moments in history.

Contesting the primacy of Abd al-Malik's regime, al-Qatari invoked God's authority on silver drachms produced in the mid-690's (75 AH), claiming that "*Judgment belongs to God, only*" (*la hukm illa lillah*), which could be viewed as a contestation of Abd al-Malik's caliphate and the statements he imposed on his coinage regarding his title as caliph and commander of the faithful. Abd al-Malik attempted to merge political and religious authority in his brazenly new, Arab-Muslim polity with him (an Umayyad) at its helm. An earlier version of this type of coin from 688-689 (69 AH) under Qatari was preceded with the term '*bismallah*', followed by '*la hukm ila lillah*' and refers to Qatari as '*commander of the believers*' in Persian.<sup>676</sup> This was most certainly a deliberate provocation and example of the way in which the written word was wielded as a weapon in the quest for hegemony, especially in the hotly contested areas east of Syria-Palestine where the Umayyads often struggled to secure. The Arabic phrase '*la hukm ila lillah*' closely mirrors a phrase found in three separate Quranic verses which reads (in 12:40, 12:67 and 6:57) '*ini'l hukmu illā lillāh*' as Treadwell pointed out.<sup>677</sup>

Sometime during the first decade or so of his rule, Abd al-Malik introduced rather radical imagery to a new series of coins that have come to be known as 'Standing Caliph' types which I have already discussed. The mainly small-module coins depicted Abd al-Malik, in Arabic garb wearing traditional Bedouin Arab headdress and holding a sword in its scabbard, with all-Arabic inscriptions and which included the radical title '*khalifat allah*' (Deputy of God),- a title that no other caliph (neither Rashidun nor Umayyad) utilized during their time in office.<sup>678 679</sup> It almost

<sup>676</sup> Walker 1941, pp. 112-113

<sup>677</sup> Treadwell 2012, p. 49

<sup>678</sup> Ghabban (and Hoyland,trans.) 2008, p. 234

appears as if Abd al-Malik crafted and/or adopted an Islamic version of *Caesaropapism*<sup>680</sup> (the Late Roman, Byzantine concept that the head of state was also head of the church) through the agglomeration and commixing of both secular, civil power while simultaneously positioning himself as earthly representative of God to the Muslim *umma* (the term used to refer to the collective, global community of Muslim believers) in his version of the still, rather nebulous, office of the Caliphate. His coins, titles, monuments, public inscriptions, and proliferation of Islam were all demonstrations of his authority, serving as the overseer of both the religious and the secular domains of public life in Syria-Palestine (and abroad) much like some of his Roman, Byzantine predecessors. There has been some recent discussion, much initiated by Donner's 2010 work, over usage of the phrase '*khalifah*' and '*amir al-mu'mineen*', the latter being a title employed by various individuals seeking leadership of the region's religious communities during Islam's first century. Donner argues that the early Muslim community was really a fluid, loose coalition of various monotheistic communities whom Muawiya (and others, later) saw himself head of.

On the coin below, Abd al-Malik presents himself as preeminent and sole ruler of the Near East, ossifying his depiction in the visual culture of the region and in the material record forever. Muhammad, himself, as prophet, social reformer, and statesman<sup>681</sup> was likely one of Abd al-Malik's role models. The other may have been the archetypical Byzantine emperor, who, "*as defender of the Church, he was the enemy of heresies and the propagator of the religion.*"<sup>682</sup>

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<sup>679</sup> See Donner's 'Muhammad and the Believers' for a discussion over the nature of early Islamic community and usage of the phrase '*amir al-mu'mineen*' which was later replaced by '*caliph*' to refer to the head of the Muslim *umma*.

<sup>680</sup> Geanakoplos 1965, p. 381

<sup>681</sup> Duri 2011, p. 7

<sup>682</sup> Duri 2011, p. 6



Fig. 36: Standing Caliph coin citing Abd al-Malik b. Marwan and 'Amman' mint next to central reverse motif of four steps with a sphere-through pole (Jordan Archaeological Museum)

The general Arabic inscriptions that accompanied these coins were ripe with exultation of both Abd al-Malik and his religion and, include any of the following obverse legends (though variations of both text and imagery exist across the nearly twenty known mints):

1. *Li'abd allah 'abd al-malik amir al-mu'mineen* ('For the servant of God, Abd al-Malik, commander of the believers.')
2. *Khalifat allah, amir allah* ('Caliph/Deputy of God, God's Commander')
3. *Bismallah la ilaha illa allah wahdahu Muhammad rasul allah* ('In the name of God, alone, Muhammad, Messenger of God')
4. *Muhammad rasul Allah* ('Muhammad, Messenger of God')<sup>683</sup>

Abd al-Malik's aggressive campaign and robust program to Arabize and Islamize the his polity and the territories and populations under his belt culminated in the reforms of 697 CE<sup>684</sup> that led to a standardized form of highly epigraphic coinage that was both Arab in character and Islamic in content, sometimes drawing short phrases and potent asseverations of monotheism from the Quran and what some would call ripe expressions of anti-Christian polemics.

<sup>683</sup> Goodwin 2002, p. 94

<sup>684</sup> Johns 2003, pp. 430-431 and Haldon 2010, pp. 130-143



The obverse of the silver dirham and gold dinars produced during his reign usually bore completely Arabic inscriptions that contained a shortened version of the Muslim testimony of faith as well as a portion of the Quran's Surah al-Ikhlās on the reverse ("God is One, He is eternal. Not begotten, and does not beget, and there is nothing like Him"). Similarly, a tombstone from Cyprus, dating from May of 650 CE (Ramadan 29 AH), records the following religious text also citing the Quran's *Surah al-Ikhlās*- including some of the same verses he used on his uniform coinage:

*"In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Say: God the one, God the eternal, He did not beget and was not begotten. And there is none like unto Him. This is the grave of 'Urwa Ibn Thābit. He died in the month of Ramaḍan 29 after hijra."*<sup>685 686</sup>

Numismatic usage of this phrase (in a condensed form, most assuredly due to lack of space on the coin's flan) can be traced back to an undated, small-module copper coin of Tabariya bearing an imitation of Heraclius and his two sons. Phillips documented several Tabariyya coins bearing Islamic inscriptions including those containing the phrases '*Muhammad rasul allah*', '*la elaha illa Allah*', as well as the type with the reverse that contains a majuscule 'M' surrounded by the phrase "*allahu ahd/ al-samad/lam yalid*" (الله احد / الصمد / لم يلد), Arabic for "*God is One, The Eternal, He does not beget.*"



Fig. 37: An example of a Tabariyya type bearing the Islamic expression derived from Surah al-Ikhlās<sup>687</sup> (Phillips)

<sup>685</sup> Schefer 1881, pp. 587-592

<sup>686</sup> Elad 2002, pp. 281-287.

<sup>687</sup> Phillips '*Islamic Legends on Pre-reform coins of Tabariyya*' undated, pp. 1631-1638

After a little more than a decade as caliph, Abd al-Malik instituted a completely new type of coinage in three denominations (although the gold coins were broken down into quarter and half dinars too) which were, except for the copper types, entirely aniconic and fully epigraphic. Below are examples of each type. Four metals were generally used including gold (for the dinar), silver (for the dirham), and bronze (for the fils). Occasionally small lead coins were also struck, which numismatist Nikolaus Schindel refers to having been used as “*petty currency in the Gulf region in the Late Umayyad and Early Abbasid periods*” and elsewhere as “*small change, a kind of emergency coinage*” (arguing that they were cheaper to produce and could be quickly used to address local coin shortage issues).<sup>688</sup>



<sup>688</sup> Schindel 2012, p. 270-271

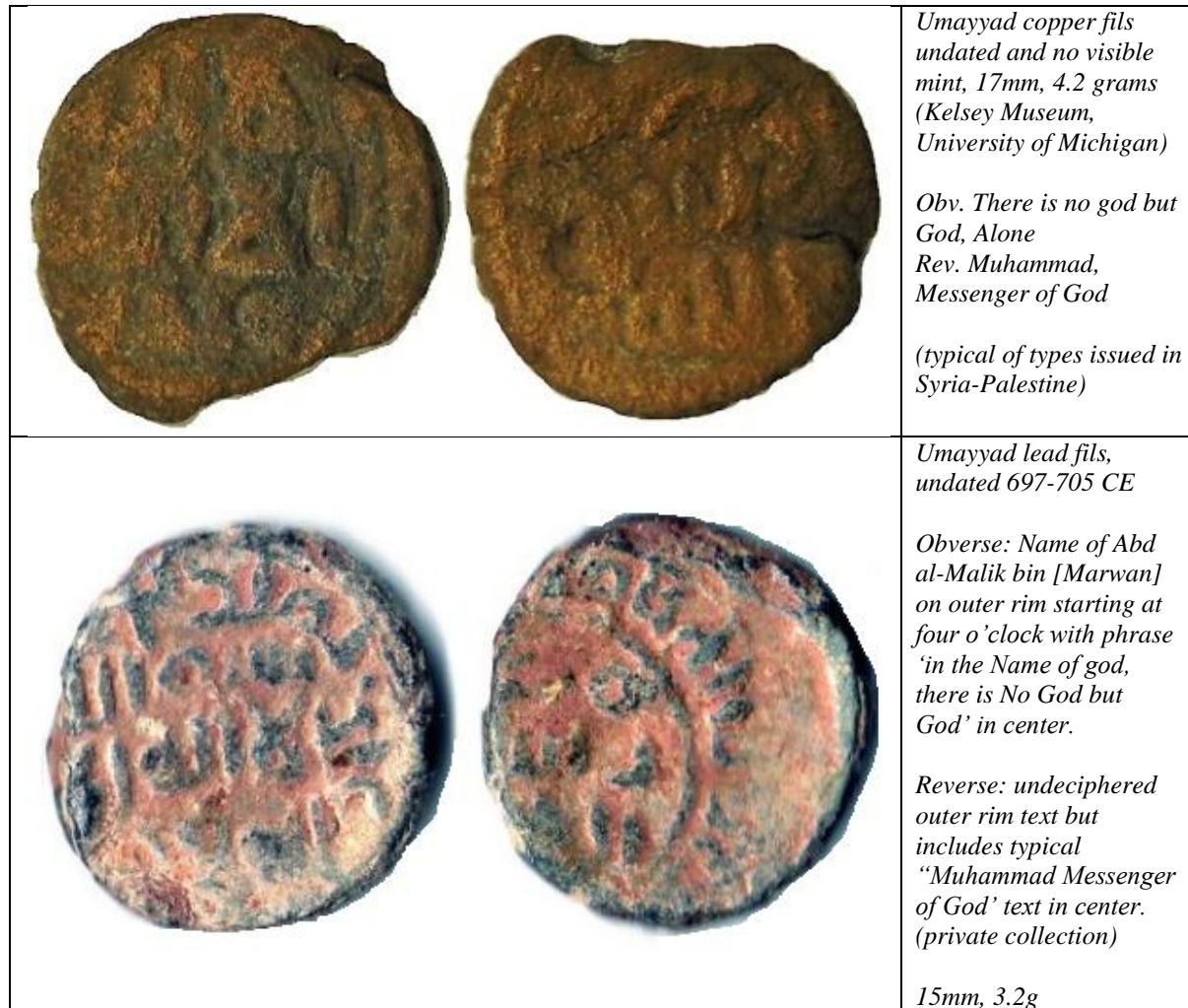


Fig. 38: Four examples of Umayyad post-reform coins in gold, silver, copper and lead

The obverse and reverse legends on the silver dirhams are the lengthiest and include profound, even aggressive religious proclamations as well as the date and place of mint. The gold dinars have a variant of these legends, but due to their smaller size, the inscriptions are shorter. The earliest phase of copper coins contains the shortest inscriptions, generally, and in many instances, include symbols, icons, images, and depictions. Below are the full Arabic inscriptions found on the most text-heavy Umayyad coins, the post-reform silver dirham:

لا اله الا الله وحده لا شريك له	الله احد الله الصمد لم يلد و لم يولد ولم يكن له كفوا احد	بسم الله ضرب هذا [الدرهم] [ ] في سنة [ ]	محمد رسول الله ارسله بالهدى و دين الحق ليظهره على الدين كله ولو كره المشركون
Obverse (center): There is no god but God. He is one [He has] no partners/associates	Reverse (center): God is One God is eternal. Not begotten, and does not beget, and there is nothing like Him.	Obverse (outer margin): In the name of God, this [name of the denomination (was)] struck in [place of mint] in the year [..]	Reverse (outer margin): Muhammad is the Messenger of God. He sent with him guidance and the true religion to reveal it to all religions even if the polytheists despise it.

Fig. 39 Chart of standard Arabic texts found on Umayyad post-reform silver dirhams

The earliest post-reform copper coins contained less text, namely the shortened shahada, and later mint-names and sometimes even dates began to be included. In other instances, images of both flora and fauna, as well as other imagery (and in rare instances human figures such as the helmeted soldier type struck in North Africa). Why Abd al-Malik decided on replacing previous regal images, completely, from his coinage, is uncertain, but given the tense religious and political climate at the time, his decision may have been rooted in the fact that a growing class of pious Muslims and Arab ulama' spooked his regime and therefore he sought ways to neutralize their growing clerical clout.<sup>689</sup> It may also indicate that doctrinal Islam was developing and therefore, the idea of religious law began to become an issue.

However, even when his aniconic, reformed coinage went into circulation, it was met by some opposition too, despite being dominated by Quranic text- but maybe precisely for that reason. Jere Bacharach states that the "*appearance of Qur'anic verses on all-epigraphic coinage was opposed by some members of the ulama', particularly one Muhammad bin Sirin and his*

<sup>689</sup> Judd 2013, pp. 142-146.

*supporters in Medina*” out of concern that ‘unclean’ “*people were handling God’s word.*”<sup>690</sup> Thus, by this time, the written word of the Quran was clearly exalted and deemed sacred by Muslims.

By the mid-690s and after Abd al-Malik’s victory over al-Zubayr, Islam, as a creed, doctrinal religious system, and as a cultural institution began to assume a more pronounced presence in the public sphere. The fifth Umayyad caliph saw an opportunity to bank on the inherent value that written and visual culture had in the articulation of both the state, as a legitimate political configuration, the Arabic language and script as the preferred vessel of official communication and therefore the new language of prestige, and of Islam as a permanent feature of Near Eastern social, political and religious life. Abd al-Malik, unlike Muawiya, had to contend more and more with Muslim grievances and opposition and no longer needed to placate Syria-Palestine’s Christian constituents as the power of his state, military, and institutions grew.

Despite Abd al-Malik’s rise to prominence and his defeat of his fellow Arab enemies, he still had to deal with other regional powers. Despite their ejection from Syria-Palestine, the Byzantines, for example, still had an effect on the orientation of the Umayyad political economy in the Levant as is exhibited in the monetary situation there. Tensions continued throughout their rule and by 692/693 CE, at the end of the second fitna, the Umayyads and Byzantium came to blows at the Battle of Sebastopolis, a major confrontation between the Byzantine forces of Justinian II and the Arab forces of Abd al-Malik (at the southern coast of Anatolia, in a frontier zone). The battle also became home to a major propaganda war that included the heavy use of symbols, icons, and ideologies as mechanisms for the attainment of both political goals and regional recognition.<sup>691</sup>

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<sup>690</sup> Bacharach 2010, p. 25

<sup>691</sup> Sarris, Dal Santo, Booth 2011, p. 159

A peace treaty had been in effect since 680, during the last year of Muawiya's life, but had been broken by the Byzantines. This led to an angry Umayyad response that culminated in a war that saw a large part of the Byzantine's forces defect to the Arab side which ensured a Byzantine defeat. The battle highlighted the political instability that dominated the final decade of the seventh century and revealed the vulnerability, but also threat, that Byzantium still posed to Umayyad aspirations for regional and/or global hegemony.

Such an incitement must have put Abd al-Malik and his commanders on guard, and like the Byzantines, who embarked on a program of constructing a new and rejuvenated sense of civic pride and religious and political identity under their leader, Justinian II, in the years leading up to the war, the Umayyads too, similarly began to manufacture a new cultural ideology and political character that emphasized both Islamic doctrine and the Arabic script as purveyors of a new regional and global order. It has even reported that Justinian rejected an agreed upon sum of tribute money from Abd al-Malik because it bore Arabic script in the form of Islamic religious legends which prompted the Umayyad soldiery, led by Muhammad b. Marwan, to hoist an example of the nullified treaty, rather than a flag, into battle.<sup>692</sup> Completion of the construction of the Dome of the Rock in 691CE under Abd al-Malik, his victory over the Byzantines in 692 CE, and his Arab/Islamic coin reform in 697 CE can all be read as components of a broad 'anti-Byzantine' campaign<sup>693</sup> and a state-sanctioned strategy emanating from the caliph himself, aimed at reducing the public visibility of Byzantine (and by extension, Christian) visual culture and decorum, thereby erasing its imperial profile from the social and physical landscape.

The written word (on both the coins and the aforementioned treaty) expresses, in unabashed terms, the type of psycho-social power wielded by the proliferation of text which

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<sup>692</sup> Brooks 1957, p. 407

<sup>693</sup> Tamari 1996, pp. 24-25

intensified a simmering escalation in the war over words between a declining (Byzantine) and rising (Arab) power. In many ways, the Umayyad victory at Sebastopolis in 692 led to an apotheosis and ennoblement of the Arabic script as a language of victory and triumph while Byzantine capitulation, to some extent, signified an endgame for Greek in the Umayyad realm. Five years later, Abd al-Malik made Arabic the official language of the state.

With the passage of time, Greek risked becoming relegated to the status of historical relic in the administration of Near East of Late Antiquity, although it is true that Greek letters sometimes accompanied Arabic text on coins and seals during and after Abd al-Malik's reign<sup>694</sup>, and remained, to varying degrees, an ecclesiastical and liturgical tongue in the Levant.<sup>695</sup> Thus, the obsolescence of Greek was still a gradual process in Syria-Palestine that did not disappear via imperial decree and the Umayyads continued to appropriate linguistic and artistic features of Byzantine culture. Below are two images: On the left is the reverse side of a Heraclian gold solidus bearing Greek legends with a "cross potent on three steps".<sup>696</sup> On the right is an image of the reverse side of a 'de-Christianized' Arab-Byzantine Umayyad copper fils struck in Amman under Abd al-Malik bearing the phrase 'There is no god but God, Muhammad is the Messenger of God' around the coin's perimeter. It is devoid of the cross, which has been replaced by a sphere and while lacking innovative artistry (i.e. it is clearly derivative of the gold solidus), the subtle change in imagery was, undoubtedly, radical.

<sup>694</sup> See Tareq Ramadan's *A Brief Note on a "Skinny" Standing Caliph Arab-Byzantine Coin Presumably from Amman* 2011, pp. 13-14. The coin is a 'Standing Caliph' type from the reign of Abd al-Malik, but bears the Greek letter φ (*Phi*) between the reverse legends.

<sup>695</sup> See Nitzan Amitai-Preiss and Ariel Berman's *An Unpublished, Dated Umayyad Lead Weight* 2011, pp. 224-228. The weight contains the Greek letters " Γ Β " and dates from the reign of Yazid II.

<sup>696</sup> Australian Coin Auctions, Auction 314, Lot 2119



*Fig. 40: Reverse of Gold solidus of Heraclius (r. 610-641 CE) and of copper fil of Abd al-Malik (r. 685-705 CE)*

The adoption of explicitly Byzantine symbols, re-imagined and re-constituted in the case of the ‘Standing Caliph’ coins was likely more about projecting authority and cultural dominion over the territories and peoples once held by the late Roman, Christian state than about anything else.

It is impossible to measure the psychosocial impact of language change in the ancient world, but it must have been profound. To relate the transition from one language to another in a twentieth century political context, I liken the changeover from Greek and Latin to Arabic on early Islamic and Umayyad coins of the Levant to the changeover from Ottoman Palestine to Mandatory Palestine to the State of Israel during the twentieth century and the orthographic and linguistic forms that followed.

There were essentially three primary phases of orthographic transition in Palestine between 1517 and 1948. The first is that the dominant script on coinage in *Arz-i-Filastin*

<sup>697</sup> Australian Coin Auctions, Auction 314, Lot 2119



(Ottoman phrase used for ‘Land of Palestine’<sup>698</sup>) was Ottoman Turkish which was written using a modified Arabic script adapted for the Turkish language that literate Arabs (and others) could, at minimum, read (though they may have not all understood what they were reading).

The second phase of coinage was introduced by the British in 1927 containing legends in three different languages: English, Arabic, and Hebrew. The coins also contained imagery in the form of either an olive wreath or an olive tree sprig<sup>699</sup>, the latter of which was likely derived from ancient Jewish prototypes, although the Umayyads used similar iconography on their post-reform *fulus* as well. The coins of Mandatory Palestine included, in parenthesis, the Hebrew letters ‘א"י’ (*alef-yod*), a short acronym for ‘ארץ ישראל’, or ‘*Eretz Ysrael*’ (The Land of Israel), thus adding another political dimension to the coins. Most of Palestine’s Arabs were not literate in Hebrew, but again, that did not matter, because the inclusion of two alien scripts (English and Hebrew) was telling of a major transition.

The third phase of coinage coincided with the creation of the State of Israel, which saw a gradual decline in the profile and usage of Arabic (among some categories of material culture) and the complete removal of English as it relates to the nation’s first coins from 1948 (although coins struck after that point have sometimes been unilingual, bilingual, and sometimes trilingual). The first coins of Israel, struck at Holon and made overwhelmingly of aluminum during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, contained the Arabic word ‘*Isra’eel*’ (for Israel) which was situated below the Hebrew text (‘*Ysrael*’). Additionally, the first modern Israeli coin, a twenty-five mils piece, contained a cluster of grapes that had originally been used on bronze Jewish

<sup>698</sup> This term is believed to be the one used on official Ottoman communications, and a variant of this phrase *ارض فلسطين* (*Ardth Filastan*) is attested to in the Ottoman *Cedid Atlas* of 1803 (*Cedid Atlas Tercümesi* by Müderris Abdurrahman Efendi)

<sup>699</sup> Berlin 2001, p. 32

*prutah* coins around 4 BCE under the reign of Herod Archelaus<sup>700</sup> thus invoking a specifically Jewish historical memory.



*Fig. 41: Three coins (Ottoman Palestine, British Palestine Mandate, and State of Israel)*

By virtue of their visual divergence from previous types, coins introduced with new scripts are able to culturally inform their handlers. Regardless of who used the currencies, one could infer something about the nature of the polity, whether gleaned from the script presented, the icons, symbols, and other imagery if present. Anyone who lived in Palestine through the Ottoman era, the Mandate period, and in the State of Israel was certainly cognizant of the rapidity that these changes took place in. Between the last issues of Ottoman coins and the start of Israeli coinage, only three decades had elapsed. The leaders of the newly established State of Israel clearly contended with demographic considerations that impacted their orthographic decisions, thereby retaining Arabic and reflecting the cultural hybridity exhibited by aspects of the visual and material culture of the early state (all of which can be seen as politicized decisions).

## **6. ISLAM IN WRITING: SHAPING MUSLIM POLITICAL CULTURE**

A large swath of literature produced, primarily by the revisionist camps discussed in chapter two, over the past few decades has aimed to usurp a belief by a group of scholars and skeptics, that Islam, at least in some popular form consisting of established rituals, lexicons and

<sup>700</sup> Meshorer 2001, pl. 48, no. 73a

phrases, symbols, etc. did not exist during the first century or two after *hijra*. As newly discovered materials have become more accessible, though, our understanding of the religion, in its material form, is changing.

Recent discoveries have begun to paint a picture that situates Islam at the forefront of a neoteric political and cultural vision that revolved around the newly-constructed magisterial Arab office known as the *khilafa*. In fact, the Umayyads spent considerable effort in producing stately material culture bearing, what would be understood as symptoms of an emerging religio-political power, aimed at the propagation of a new faith with the caliph at its helm. They also rebuilt cities (often in their own style and arrangement) and built mosques across their vast empire, effectively transforming both the figurative and physical landscapes.

Apart from a loyal coterie of Syro-Palestinian soldiers and tribal support in the Levant, their control over a literate class of Arab scribes allowed them to dictate the course of Islamic thought as well establish normative practice as they controlled the levers of power and a bureaucracy filled with *kuttab* (writers). Engineering a public and doctrinal Islam was a major component of the Marwanid consolidation of religious and political power and a testament to their dynamism and predilection for leadership and opportunism in a transitional period of major and historical change. Part of their strategy was to paint themselves as legitimate successors to Muhammad and as divinely appointed (certainly the titles the Umayyad leaders applied to themselves demonstrated a relationship with the transcendent), and, who, in reality were in competition with the region's former masters and neighboring powers in all areas of life- i.e. in politics, religion, culture, architecture, and art. The Umayyads gradually, and in some ways, fashioned Islamic literate culture and marketed Islam as a replacement for Christianity.

As such, Umayyad caliphs invested in the production of ornate Qurans designed to ‘challenge the luxury Bibles by its appearance.’<sup>701</sup> This is evidenced by the existence of several pages of an artistic and highly decorative Qur’an dating from the time of al-Walid, the sometime between 710 and 715 CE.



Fig. 42: Two photographs of the ornate ‘Great Umayyad Quran’ of Sana’a<sup>702</sup>

Deroche argues that “non-canonical copies were still produced around 700 AD”, but that Abd al-Malik and his governor al-Hajjaj (and his ‘*masahif* project’ a few years later) implies that during that phase of Umayyad rule, its leaders aimed to create a uniform, standard Quran and that their involvement in such an undertaking would “support the prestige of the dynasty.”<sup>703</sup> The features of Abd al-Malik’s script, employed in public texts in Syria-Palestine (and elsewhere) and the formalizing and standardizing of the Quranic script tell of a “direct involvement of the ruling elite”<sup>704</sup> in the propagation of Islam.

<sup>701</sup> Déroche 2014, p. 101

<sup>702</sup> Photographs were included in the UNESCO ‘Memory of the World: Şan‘a Manuscripts’ CD-ROM Presentation.

<sup>703</sup> Déroche 2014, p. 139

<sup>704</sup> Déroche 2014, p. 139

The instrumentalization of the new faith as a political tool was paramount to continued success against various political and religious factions throughout the entire life of the Umayyad state. The existence of written manifestations of Islamic practices were produced in the seventh and early eighth centuries pointing to a fuller articulation of Islam than was previously believed by those in the revisionist camp of Islamic historiography, particularly students and supporters of Crone's early work.

A recent article by Sijpesteijn also brought attention to another important dimension of Islamic orthodoxy by examining an Egyptian letter composed of an invitation by an Umayyad caliph to 'Uqba bin Muslim through Sahl bin 'Abd al-'Aziz dating sometime between 705 and 717 CE and written on papyrus.<sup>705</sup> What is the earliest known reference to the annual Muslim pilgrimage, which appears in the sixth line of text, the document is certainly supportive of the existence of ritual culture and tradition in the Muslim-controlled lands by the first quarter of the eighth century. The letter, like nearly all other texts that reference the caliph, cites him as '*amir al-mumineen*', and although it does not name the caliph himself, the chronology points to a few possible candidates including al-Walid I, Suleiman b. Abd al-Malik, or possibly Umar b. Abd al-Aziz.

In line with the Umayyad attempt at trying to monopolize the conventions of Islam as they existed at the time, according to some traditions, by the mid 680's, the Umayyad Caliph Marwan I (r. 684-685), as well as Abd al-Aziz b. Marwan (Umayyad governor of Egypt from 685-705)<sup>706</sup> were also mulling the idea that the prophetic narrations attributed to Muhammad (i.e. the hadiths) should be put into writing, motivated by the fact that many of Muhammad's companions who remembered the things he said, were rapidly perishing. The hadith began to

<sup>705</sup> Sijpesteijn 2014, pp. 179-190.

<sup>706</sup> Motzki 2016, section III

take on a written form, according to some accounts, under the Umayyad Caliph Umar b. Abd al-Aziz (the son of the aforementioned governor of Egypt), better known as Umar II (r. 717-720) who allegedly ordered their compiling.<sup>707</sup> The transcribing of the hadiths into textual form ultimately comes to fruition at the hands of al-Zuhri<sup>708</sup> which, in many ways, represented another major measure towards the construction of a doctrinal form of the religion that ultimately culminated in the six Sunni canonical hadith compilations. The role that the Umayyads and Umar II, in particular, played in the crafting of the *sunna* is the subject of intense debate but it is plausible that the caliphs and their Muslim constituents were motivated by a concern that if they did not collate the materials, Muhammad's legacy of wisdom (and details of his life and piety) would be lost or corrupted making it more difficult to control their narrative and the trajectory of the faith.

The Umayyads likely did not spend much time vacillating between having the hadiths, which circulated as oral narratives up to that point, officially compiled and transcribed or not. They almost certainly felt pressed to capture Muhammad's essence on both religious principles but also because the perception of piety was conducive to the type of public character they wanted to emphasize to their increasingly Muslim and piety-minded constituents. Thus, one way to present their spiritual and ideological credentials was to control and manage the materials (oral or written) associated with the religion's key components: the Quranic revelations and Muhammad's sayings and deeds.

Given the collective evidence of a distinct religious enterprise, the trajectory of the development of mainstream Islamic thought was undoubtedly influenced by the state that had control over the public articulation of the religion especially when it could serve its political

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<sup>707</sup> Berg 2000, p. 7

<sup>708</sup> Berg 2000, pp. 19-20

objectives. Islam was a lexicon for the Umayyads- a repertoire of political and ideological symbols and sentiments which the caliphs of Bani Umayya sometimes, themselves, developed, reinterpreted or reconstructed, and in other ways, invented as a means to maintain legitimacy- often on several fronts. Islam became a major social and political driving force during and during Abd al-Malik's reign. The Umayyads, who governed as a monarchical hereditary polity since Muawiya chose his son Yazid to succeed him in 680, aimed to craft a more culturally distinct polity under the Marwanid branch of the tribe led by Abd al-Malik's programs and policies of Arabo-Islamization.

By the beginning of the eighth century, the power to invoke the written word was now firmly in the hands of Abd al-Malik and his successors who championed and vaunted their credentials as the architects of the Arab state and the cementing of the Arab religion- Islam. Whether the Umayyads were aware or not, this was likely the first instance in history where the Arabic language and its accompanying, graphic representation was not just an ecclesiastical instrument for the spread of Christianity in Arabia and Syria-Palestine, but was instead used to counter Christianity- to dilute the Christian character of the region, altogether. Abd al-Malik, realizing the power that writing and, simultaneously, control over the tremendous administrative machinery at his disposal could have on guaranteeing his state's survival and success, wasted little time in reconfiguring the region's cultural and political scenery through a series of measures including the employment of loyal bureaucrats, governors, and soldiers, constructing large-scale religious monuments, buildings, and spaces, imposing new coinage that bore a singular script that was uniquely Arab in style and visage- all of which culminated in the acquisition of cultural hegemony, rooted in Arab and now Islamic tradition, that saw incremental advances during the first part of the state under Muawiya.

Chrisomalis argued that writing itself is not an organic repercussion of state formation, but the technology can be used to resolve certain dilemmas encountered in complex societies.<sup>709</sup> Among the many dilemmas the Umayyad state faced, was how could its leaders successfully assert themselves in an environment and in a time where their particular form of writing had been marginal, sparsely utilized in the public sphere, and to transform it into a language and script of prestige, of government, and of empire.



*Fig. 43: Umayyad post-reform fils bearing Islamic legends (Kelsey Museum, University of Michigan)*

His drastic and monumental coin reform saw the inclusion of sacred Quranic texts emblazoned on gold, silver, copper, and lead coins but may have drawn the ire of fellow Muslim constituents, some of whom viewed him and his successors as engaging in a form of ‘Marwanid absolutism’,<sup>710</sup> especially as it related to Islamic praxis.

While pre-reform coins before the Standing Caliph types were adorned with Christian icons and short Greek texts, the reformed coinage was of a different nature. However, the

<sup>709</sup> Chrisomalis 2009, p. 71

<sup>710</sup> Bacharach 2010, p. 25



administrative value embedded in the written content was immense and the replacement of Greek with Arabic may have reflected several strategies, including:

1. Making a political statement that asserted the triumph of Abd al-Malik, Islam, the Arabic language, script, and Arab culture over a community with long-standing Christian, Byzantine and Greek ties.
2. An attempt at countering hostile anti-Umayyad sentiments on account of their alleged lack of piety and religiosity by religio-political movements that sought their usurpation on both political and religious grounds.

Cultural and icono-textual appropriation was an oft-used strategy for the Umayyads as well, either to curry favor with certain groups, as a goodwill overture, or as an overt political statement about dominance. By the first few decades of the eighth century, the Umayyads began to strike and circulate coins bearing imagery once found on Jewish coins several centuries earlier. For example, the Umayyads produced a ‘menorah’ coin, as numismatists refer to it, which had apparently been struck as a seven-branch candelabra and later, a five-branch (where a flat horizontal line connected the tops of each individual candlestick) version. The coins, in general, are popularly viewed as a pseudo-imitation of the coinage of the last Hasmonean Jewish King Mattathias Antigonus who, between 40-37 BCE, struck bronze *prutahs* bearing a menorah with seven branches.<sup>711</sup> It is unlikely that, at this historical juncture (720’s-740’s), the Umayyads saw any need to mollify the small Jewish community in the Levant and the coins could therefore be seen as a declaration of cultural dominion over the region, its traditions, cultural systems, and religious communities. According to one Muslim source, under Abd al-Malik, a Jew from Tayma was involved in the process of instituting the caliph’s coin reform.<sup>712</sup> Whether or not the Jewish

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<sup>711</sup> Haklîfî 2001, p. 41

<sup>712</sup> Tamari 1996, p. 24

iconography found on the coin discussed below was an outgrowth of his participation in that project is unknown.



*Fig. 44: Two 'menorah' coins (Jewish and Islamic) and a relief depicting a menorah*

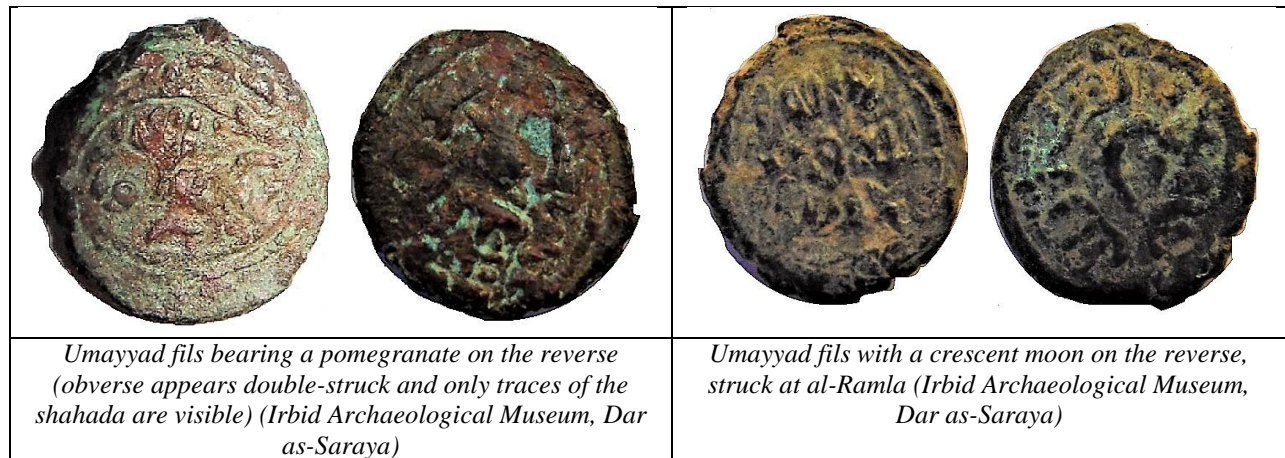
The Umayyad menorah coin, in particular, shares some stylistic commonalities with depictions of menorahs in architectural, numismatic, and paranumismatic materials from pre-Islamic history. This coin, however, was still highly epigraphic, and the menorah was accompanied by the shortened version (and a slight variant) of the Muslim declaration of faith (*la elaha illa allah, wahdahu/Muhammad rasul allah*). The Jewish populations in Syria-Palestine were not very considerable, thus the need to appease them was likely not of serious concern to the caliph and his government. So, inclusion of Jewish symbols could, quite plausibly, represent a declarative measure of Islam's dominance over Judaism (not in military terms but in ideological ones) by coupling popular Jewish numismatic and cultural icons with Arabic proclamations of Islam- a new social, cultural, and political force to be reckoned with.

Unlike their Semitic, numismatic predecessors, graven images- whatever those constituted to the early Muslims, still persisted throughout the Umayyad period, but appeared to be a governing aspect of coin production under ancient Jewish regimes, adhering to the Biblical injunction in Exodus

<sup>713</sup> Evans and Ratliff (eds.) 2012, p. 108-109

<sup>714</sup> A similar example of a five-branched Menorah candlestick exists, etched into a large stone and found at Afek, Golan Heights

20:4-5 against depicting or producing images of living things.<sup>715</sup> The Umayyads depicted a wide range of human, floral, and faunal imagery on their coins, though throughout their rule. Below are two examples of Umayyad post-reform coins from Jordanian museums that contain non-human imagery.



*Fig. 45: Two Umayyad copper coins bearing symbols (pomegranate and crescent moon)*

Some post-reform types contain the name of governors, local provincial authorities, and some of the formulaic texts are not religious at all. Some dated types from Damascus, for example, contain no Islamic phrases, whatsoever, such as the type shown below which was recovered in or near the ancient Roman city of Pella (*Tabaqat Fahl*) in northern Jordan.



*Fig. 46: Umayyad fils struck in Damascus and bearing a date of 126AH/744 CE<sup>716</sup>*

<sup>715</sup> Hendin 2011, p. 23.

<sup>716</sup> This coin is reported to have been found at Pella/Tabaqat Fahl, Jordan during excavations in 1994 and is currently part of the Irbid Archaeological/Dar as-Saraya Museum (Irbid, Jordan)

The crude coin, depicted above, is an Umayyad fils (measuring 15mm, weighing 2.4g) bearing the legends “*sita wa ishreen wa mi’a*” or “[year] one hundred and twenty-six [AH]” on the reverse, while the obverse reads “*duriba bi-Dimashq sana*” or “*struck in Damascus, year..*”

Since the year 744 CE (the year this coin was minted), saw four caliphs come and go, it is impossible to know whether it was struck under al-Walid II, Yazid III, Ibrahim b. al-Walid, or Marwan II- all of whom were caliph for parts of that year. The coin is purely epigraphic and textually areligious in substance (there is no citing of the issuer, and no floral, figural, or faunal imagery at all). Umayyad coins, like those strike by the states, polities, and empires before them were also artistic and were meant to be aesthetically pleasing, their contents appealing to an emotional regime of sorts and competing with the currencies of other states in terms of flair, adroitness, and in their role as a form of diffusive, ambulatory and itinerant visual culture and decorum. The seals they produced, as we will see and by contrast, are almost entirely devoid of such representations.



Fig. 47: Table outlining visual and stylistic evolution and development of coinage in Syria-Palestine from the late Byzantine to Umayyad periods (640's-750's CE)

## CHAPTER 6 Umayyad SEALS: INSTRUMENTS OF AUTHORITY

*Chapter Six offers an interpretation of the data acquired from the reading of lead bullae which, I argue, served as major instruments of political authority. The inscriptions yield valuable information about the inner-workings of the Umayyad bureaucracy and can be linked to administrative practices in Syria-Palestine such as tax-collecting, securing official documents, maintaining a system of weights and measures, and other functions of the state. Recurring expressions on several bullae also suggest standardization and the coalescing of an Umayyad politico-religious lexicon.*

*“The Messenger of God had a ring made of silver and its (inlaid) gem was also of silver. When the Prophet wanted to write to the leaders of foreign states, he ordered a seal-ring to be made. The Messenger of God therefore had a ring made, the whiteness of which is still before my eyes. The inscription engraved on the ring of God’s Messenger was ‘Muhammad Rasul Allah,’ of which in the first line was engraved ‘Muhammad,’ in the second line ‘Rasul,’ and in the third line ‘Allah.’” - Anas b. Malik*

### 1. INTRODUCTION TO SEALING PRACTICES

Seals, also known as *bullae*, have an extensive history that chronologically dwarfs that of coinage. Ancient administrations over the course of thousands of years utilized such objects for an array of purposes, most of which are linked to bureaucratic mechanisms of the state (fiscal policy, taxation, administrative measures) or by private citizens within the state for socio-economic, commercial reasons.

Additionally, as state-sanctioned objects, seals often and generally contained symbols, markings, legends, and iconography of the regimes and/or individuals responsible for issuing them and can, therefore, be loaded with important linguistic, political, and cultural data. The written contents of the seals discussed in this section reflect particular political, religious, cultural, linguistic, and economic messages, symbols and affiliations that the state is trying to convey at a precise historical moment. In essence, the inscribed objects being studied are historical, and sometimes chronological, markers of specific bureaucratic actions in response to or as a result of changing political, demographic, and economic conditions.

Writing, as discussed previously, was not a neutral, benign phenomenon but an arbitrary one adopted and utilized by those in charge of elite culture, a tool of the nobility, to impose a system more concerned with “*appropriating privileged matter than in disseminating them.*”<sup>717</sup> Unlike coins, government seals were not produced in mass quantities nor were they meant to circulate among the general populace, but they were multi-functional, composed of a number of materials and were used for a wide range of bureaucratic, economic, and other administrative and political exercises. Thus, they served far more diverse purposes than their numismatic counterparts, albeit for a much smaller audience. Sealing practices and materials, however, differed from region to region and from state to state, so that no universal, common ‘type’ exists. For example, in China, during the Han Dynasty period (206 BCE-220 CE), seals (mainly stamp seals) were mainly made of “*hard and precious metals such as jade, gold, silver, iron, crystal, and agate*” that often underwent a “*special acid treatment*”<sup>718</sup> and, therefore, required advanced artistic skill, time, and patience and embodied meticulous craftsmanship.

Archaeology furnishes the discourse on the subject of ancient political economy and exchange by grappling with both written materials and materials that could have either accompanied writing or served a similar symbolic function before writing such as numerically-inscribed lead bulla and tokens which represented a distinct social and civic order where institutional authority was embedded in its material culture, iconography, and symbolism.<sup>719</sup> The changing functions of certain media used in administrative capacities are often indicative of alterations to social organization, bearing in mind that artifacts often can embody several different or sometimes multiple meanings.<sup>720 721</sup>

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<sup>717</sup> Baines 2007, p. 9

<sup>718</sup> Tseng 1993, p. 107

<sup>719</sup> Postgate 1992, p. 51

<sup>720</sup> Wengrow 1992, pp. 783-795

Seals, imprinted with details relating to its issuer, start off as metal disks of varying compositions and sizes that are first cast into a mold and used to create a blank fitted with a narrow groove down the center and whose face was then impressed with a design, pattern, image, depiction, name/title, monogram, text, or other symbol to reflect or identify its owner or issuing body.<sup>722</sup> A cord would run through the middle which was tied to an object or document implying ownership, and by extension, cited jurisdiction over the object, ensuring its authenticity and probity, and therefore, could speak, to some degree about the prominence of its issuer. Stamp seals, another category of sealings, were typically made of stone and used to impress their image or inscription into a clay object (e.g. pottery) and therefore fulfilled a different kind of function.

Nonetheless, the content of each administrative seal was a reification of the power wielded by the structures that produced it, and all of its features, particularly its textual qualities, were, as Baines notes, designed for “*intra-elite purposes more than it instituted any wider communication.*”<sup>723</sup> Alicia Walker, in her work on Byzantine lead seals, noted that most seals were linked to members of the establishment, the elite class that included “*aristocrats, church officials or civil servants*” and that far fewer seals have been linked to individuals at the bottom of the socioeconomic strata.<sup>724</sup> Byzantine seals, which were known to have been produced in gold, silver, wax, and clay, but mostly lead, bore a wide range of imagery including Greek monograms, imperial or religious titles and figures, royal emblems, floral motifs, depictions of crosses and other religious imagery such as Christ or the Virgin Mary.<sup>725</sup> By contrast, seals

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<sup>721</sup> Lyons and Papadopoulos 2002, p. 242

<sup>722</sup> Walker 2012, pp. 385-386

<sup>723</sup> Baines 2007, p. 9

<sup>724</sup> Walker 2012, pp. 385-386

<sup>725</sup> See Seibt 2016 and Walker 2012, pp. 385-413

produced under the Umayyads tended to be highly epigraphic, dominated by text, lacking imagery, depictions, or other cultural symbols (although some documented exceptions do exist).

In early Islamic Syria-Palestine, Umayyad seals were used as government stamps of approval, authenticity and verification for official state documents, as markers of ownership in commercial contexts, as well as by tax collectors assigned to specific regions, districts, and provinces to collect revenues from Muslims and non-Muslim communities<sup>726</sup>, known as '*ahl al-dhimma*', who were protected by the state through the payment of tribute.<sup>727</sup>

Umayyad seals virtually always bore inscriptions and have allowed us to identify ideological themes (e.g. political, religious, geographic), find evidence of formulaic standardization (usage of common phrases and expressions), and grasp the extent that such seals were used both geographically and administratively-speaking.

Unlike the coins, seals were not created for mass, public use and were often encrypted with administrative and institutional codes. Evidence of where, by whom, and how they were used in the various capacities by bureaucrats has been relatively elusive but the seals, in many ways, provide us with a general, albeit still vague, blueprint of the institutional structures of the inner mechanics of Umayyad administration.

The many bullae examined and presented in this section vary in craftsmanship, overall quality, and content. Many of the seals documented during the course of research bore legends that were dominated by religious texts; often formulaic short phrases. In some instances the owner, governor, general, amir, or caliph's name is cited and in other instances, specific place-names are affixed to the face of the seal and represent tangible, physical clues about how such instruments of power were used in dictating the direction of state policies as well as in what

<sup>726</sup> See Amitai-Preiss 2007 and 2010; Gil 1992

<sup>727</sup> Duri 2011, p. 103



areas. Many of the Umayyad seals featured in this work are uniface, some are bi-facial, but essentially all contain a fathom channel or a small, cast rivet-like object protruding outward.

Constructing a chronology for such bullae, the vast and overwhelming majority of which bear no date or other chronological mark that could imply year or era, is exceptionally difficult. A typology based primarily on content (i.e. names, titles, and other expressions) is attainable and offered, provisionally, in this work. Letter-forms can also be a clue, although it can be difficult to distinguish from what decade each seal was likely produced based solely on that. The letter-forms on Abbasid seals are quite similar to Umayyad ones early on during their rule, but in general, Abbasid seals employ a slightly more square script on their inscribed material culture while the texts, themselves, become more complex and lengthier with the passing of time.

## 2. THE EARLIEST ISLAMIC SEALS

The first ‘Islamic’ seal was likely the ring seal associated with Muhammad during his reign as regional statesman based in Medina. It is here that he and his companions crafted the document that would come to be known as the Constitution of Medina- a tract that laid out the basic tenets used to frame and organize his new state there. While some believe the constitution may have simply been an oral agreement, others have asserted that it was likely a unilateral decree issued by Muhammad as he became the sole power in Medina and that usage of the term ‘*sahifa*’ (book), within the text, proves it had a written form.<sup>728</sup> The ‘constitution’ or treaty (known in Arabic as ‘*Sahifat al-Medina*’ *صحيفة المدينة*), produced in 622 CE, shortly after Muhammad and his followers made the *hijra* to Medina, was recorded in works by both the famous Ibn Ishaq and Abu Ubayd and has been interpreted by modern scholars in various ways. Some have regarded it as a public law decree, a social/tribal organizational outline, religious

<sup>728</sup> Gil 2004, pp. 21-22

pact, or a political-military doctrine.<sup>729</sup> It created an aura of communal cohesiveness and signified the genesis and birth of a new community along religious, cultural, linguistic and political lines with Muhammad at its helm.

Only a few years later, when the Medinese polity grew in strength, it was reported that Muhammad issued letters to world powers and used a personal seal, which read ‘*Muhammad, Messenger of God*’ in three lines. It was a ring seal made of red carnelian and attached to a silver band that was reportedly used to stamp, mainly diplomatic documents and letters in wax which was attached to the face of the document.<sup>730</sup> An alleged example, one of two supposedly created and believed by some to be the Prophet’s own, measures one centimeter and was allegedly produced by Uthman b. Affan after it was passed down to his political successors; the Rashidun Caliphs.<sup>731</sup> One example is believed to be housed in the Topkapi Museum in Istanbul (although it is believed by many to be a replacement of the original). Below are images of the seal and an antique drawing of one of the letters attributed to Muhammad:



Fig. 48: Photo of one of Muhammad’s letters bearing his seal on the bottom right (Konya Camileri Temizleme Derneği)

<sup>729</sup> Lecker 2014

<sup>730</sup> Aydın 2010, p. 101

<sup>731</sup> Aydın 2010, p. 101



Fig. 49: Close-up of Muhammad's ring seal impression (Originally published in *Al-Hilal*, Egypt 1904)

One of the letters Muhammad is reported to have sent, and which bore his seal impression, is an Arabic document made out to the Byzantine Emperor, Heraclius, referred to in the text as 'Leader of the Romans' and which reads:

من محمد بن عبد الله إلى هرقل عظيم الروم: سلام على من اتبع الهدى، أما بعد فإنني أدعوك بدعوة  
ن، فإن توليت فإن عليك إثم الأريسيين الإسلام . أسلم تسلم ويؤتك الله أجرًا مرتي

رك به شيئًا ولا يتخذ بعضنا بعضًا أربابًا من دون قل يا أهل الكتاب تعالوا إلى كلمة سواء بيننا وبينكم ألا نعبد إلا الله ولا نشد  
64 . سورة آل عمران {تولوا فقولوا أشهدوا بأننا مسلمون الله فإن

The English rendition is as follows:

*"In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful,*

*From Muhammad, son of Abdullah to Heraclius the Leader of the Romans.*

*Peace be upon he who follows the guidance.*

*Furthermore, I invite you with the invitation to Islam. If you accept Islam- you will find peace, God will give your reward in double. If you turn away, you will bear the sin of the Arians.*

*"Say, 'Oh People of Scripture, come to a word that is equitable between us and you, that we will not worship except God and not associate anything with Him and not take one another as lords instead of God.' But if they turn away, then say, 'Bear witness that we are Muslims [submitting to Him]'" (Quran 3:64)."*

Feng and Branner asserted that “*writing is the foundation of literacy, because essentially everything that is written is intended to be read*”<sup>732</sup> and so, to leaders outside of Arabia, the decision to choose Arabic as the medium to deliver a highly-charged pronouncement to a major world leader is telling. While there was and is speculation over the authenticity of these letters by some Western critics such as Bernard Lewis<sup>733</sup>, experts in epigraphy and Arabic language from both the West and the Middle East have challenged and seemingly debunked the notion of literary fraud. Thus, the documents are rather astounding, especially in relation to the message being conveyed by Muhammad and his Arab administration. It is ironic to note that Crone, one of Lewis’s students noted that “*On the Islamic side, sources dating from the mid-8th century onwards preserve a document drawn up between Mohammed and the inhabitants of Yathrib, which there are good reasons to accept as broadly authentic;*”<sup>734</sup>, implying that some scholarly consensus has grown to favor the belief that Muhammad was party to terms, treaties, and/or agreements, in textual forms during his life.

The dismissal of the aforementioned letters bearing Muhammad’s personal seal as forgeries is refuted by Saad D. Abulhab who argues that this is a manifestation of Orientalist scholarship, claiming that the very specific orthograph conventions used in all of the letters, (e.g. usage of the letter ‘*ha*’ is employed using the Musnad script in every single known letter), he notes, “*many centuries before the modern debate about the origin of the Arabic script had started*”<sup>735</sup>, grammatical nuances, and consistent and identical sealing practices that implicate and confirm their genuineness as contemporaneous, historical texts and not early, nor late forgeries.

<sup>732</sup> Feng and Branner 2013, p. 5

<sup>733</sup> Abulhab 2012, p. 227

<sup>734</sup> Patricia Crone (What do we know about Muhammad?), 2008

<sup>735</sup> Abulhab 2012, p. 227

Nevertheless, for Muhammad, the choice to use Arabic was either deliberate or he only had access to monolingual scribes. The latter is possible (i.e. a lack of bilingual or multilingual scribes literate in Greek and other regional tongues), but the power associated with proclaiming political preeminence in one's own script could be understood as a warning and a measure of political intimidation and in hindsight, a foreshadowing of the ultimate reconstitution of the region's civic and cultural character. After all, texts are, in some form, a communicative liaison between writer and audience (i.e. the involved parties) and, therefore, as Scribner and Cole posited, "*written language has an appropriate syntax for the expression of analytic relationships.*"<sup>736</sup> The responses to these documents by its recipients, as recorded in the Arabic records, and if we are to accept their historical veracity, were overwhelmingly negative, as few, if any regional and global leaders saw any parity in terms of political status between Muhammad and themselves (Heraclius's response was recorded as being the most cordial).<sup>737</sup>

These quasi-diplomatic letters are reported by early Muslim scholars like al-Tabari and Ibn Ishaq to have also been sent to Khusrau II of Persia, the Negus of Abyssinia, and Muqawqis of Egypt.<sup>738</sup>

Other, similar letters were made out to Arab statesmen and potentates including the King of Damascus al-Harith b. Shimr al-Ghassanid, governor of Bahrain, Mundhir b. Sawa, as well as to Haudha b. Ali, King of Yamama, and King Jaifer and his brother 'Abd al-Jalandi of Oman.<sup>739</sup> The letters tended to include the name of the messenger who delivered it, as in the case of the letter to the ruler of Bahrain, brought to him by 'al-'Ala' b. al-Hadhrami.<sup>740</sup> These letters are believed to have been dispatched, along with their accompanying delegations, towards the end of

<sup>736</sup> Scribner 1981, p. 16

<sup>737</sup> DeGifis (chapter in Cobb) 2012, p. 300

<sup>738</sup> Homoud 1994, p. 261

<sup>739</sup> Mubārakfūrī 1995

<sup>740</sup> Al-Ṭabarī (trans. by Poonwala) 1990, p. 95

the Muhammad's life, beginning in 628.<sup>741</sup> They are likely among the oldest surviving documents from the era of Muhammad and the early Islamic community (along with the Constitution of Medina, which does not exist in its original form, today) and are representative of the first measures towards Arab state formation in the pre-Umayyad period as well as early examples of the role of the Arabic script in the challenging of political supremacy in a multi-polar seventh century Near East. Muhammad's personal three-line seal accompanies these letters and it is almost certain that the sealing practice and technology, itself, was likely borrowed from the Byzantines whom he had commercial contacts with as a merchant in Syria-Palestine.

Letter-writing was of great diplomatic and social utility among the tribes of Arabia if al-Tabari's history is any indication (though his multiple references to writing may have been a late exaggeration of the level of literate culture in western Arabia at the time of Muhammad). In volume thirty-nine of his work, whose focus is on Muhammad and his companions, there are several accounts of letters being exchanged between tribal heads and clans, some of which emanated from Muhammad, himself.<sup>742</sup>

The conquests took the Arab-Muslim soldiers outside of Arabia and into Roman territory (early Arabic writings tend to refer to the Byzantines as '*Rum*' or Romans), so that in official (and sometimes unofficial) correspondences during the early Islamic period, there is continued usage of Greek as a language of business and communication exhibited in a letter from the Muslim general Amr b. al-As to an Egyptian administrative official dating from January 6, 643 CE (22 AH), a decade after Muhammad's death. Its mention of the *solidi* implies that economic transactions were still conducted using Byzantine currency and that there was likely no new Arab equivalent at the time.

<sup>741</sup> Al-Tabari (trans. by Fishbein) 1997, p. 98

<sup>742</sup> Al-Tabari (trans. By Landau-Tasserion) 1998, p. 151 One 'Abu Umarah '*reported that a letter from the Prophet had reached [his clan] and that he remembered it.*' The letter regarded the abstaining from eating carrion. [2420]

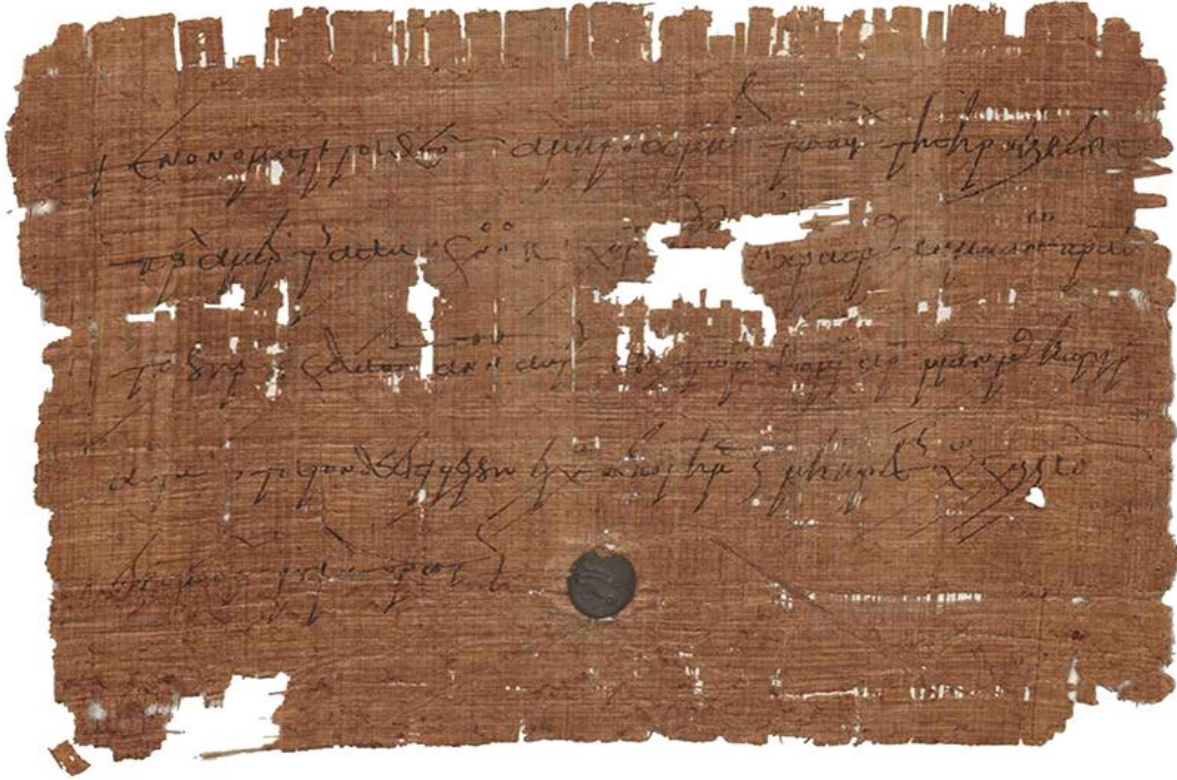


Fig. 50: Greek papyrus bearing seal of Amr b. al-As from 643 CE (The Austrian National Museum, Vienna.)

The whole of the text (known as PERF no. 556), as has been translated by Grohmann, reads:

1. *In the name of God! Ambros, Governor, to the pagarch of Herakleopolis.*
2. *Hand over to Amir son of Asla four bundles of fodder for two solidi, taking from him*
3. *a receipt, and for maintenance of his men one artaba of barley-groats per head. Jot it down*
4. *and send this man to a reserved place, and do not trouble this place by (billetting) others (but Amir).*
5. *Written on the 13th of the month of Tybi, in the first indiction.*<sup>743</sup>

Apart from the main body of the text, in the lower center, are the clear remnants of a seal impression attributed to Amr, himself.<sup>744</sup> Even more surprisingly, given that current attitudes about figural imagery in much of the Sunni Muslim world are rather anachronistic (in that they often presuppose that attitudes about depicting living things are as old as Islam itself), is that the seal depicts a charging bull (possibly symbolic of the muscle behind the Arab conquests).

<sup>743</sup> Grohmann 1952, pp. 115-116.

<sup>744</sup> Soucek 2002, pp. 237-259 and pp. 247-248 (for the description of seal of 'Amr ibn al-'Ās)



Fig. 51: Seal of Amr b. al-As bearing the image of a charging bull (The Austrian National Museum, Vienna)

A stylistically similar glass vessel stamp has also been attested to from the early Islamic period, from Afamiya, northwest of Homs in modern-day Syria, and which bears the image of a Pegasus (or the winged horse known as the ‘*Buraq*’ associated with Muhammad’s night- journey as referenced in the Quran).<sup>745</sup> Not all seals bore the names of the caliphs, obviously, and many countless individuals from the annals of early Islamic history apparently had seals made for them<sup>746</sup>, however it is difficult to imagine that such seals meant anything without the sanctioning of an economic or political structure that governed their meaning and value. Thus, while many seals bore the names of individuals, they represented manifestations of a larger, and likely, centralized administrative order.

### 3. A LEXICON OF Umayyad ADMINISTRATION

Generally speaking, Umayyad government apparatuses often represented an amalgam of institutional structures and administrative practices- some their own, while others deriving from both neighboring, as well as local political cultures, borrowing bureaucratic practices from outside of their native Hejaz as they became increasingly familiar with the indigenous political

<sup>745</sup> Goodwin (Arabic glasses) 2017, p. 183

<sup>746</sup> Sijpesteijn 2012, p.175



cultures that awaited them in the territories outside of Arabia. What resulted were political syncretisms most sharply demonstrated in the Rashidun's and early Umayyad state's epigraphic and icono-textual materials during the course of their rule. It is unsurprising then, that state policies fluctuated with the changing political currents. Early Umayyad administration (661-680's) often adhered to a policy predicated on the politics of appeasement and accommodation considering Umayyad authority was being challenged on a number of levels and by an array of political actors, parties and religio-political movements. This also included major regional actors like Byzantium who, though weakened, was still in a position to encroach on Arab territories (especially along Syria's northern borders) and sometimes did.

The use of Arabic text as an artistic mode of expression was of great utility. As literacy likely improved with the growth of the Arab polity, at an administrative and institutional level, the regimes of the day would have required more literate people to assist in matters of governance.

Umayyad seals and related bullae are tangible, physical clues about how such instruments of power and administration were used in defining the nature of the state and the geographic parameters of the polity's reach. In early Islamic Syria-Palestine, where bullae were overwhelmingly crafted out of lead (and to lesser extents, glass, bronze, and other materials), they were used as stamps of authenticity, to physically secure documents (e.g. containers or vessels bearing goods), impressed on vessels to signify their legality (or used privately to denote a maker's name or mark), and were carried and used by tax collectors assigned to specific geographic zones or areas to collect revenues from both Muslim and non-Muslim communities.<sup>747</sup>

<sup>747</sup> See Gil 1992; Amitai-Preiss 2007, 2010

Unfortunately, the mainly lead bullae produced under Umayyad rule have been incredibly understudied but clearly hold vital information about how political and economic institutions and policies were maintained since they often contain anything from the names of governors, commanders, and viceroys to geographic and provincial place-names to religious formulae and represent tangible, physical clues about how such instruments of power and administration were used in directing bureaucratic practices. Also, their functions were not simply for practical, utilitarian measure, but they could also be seen as objects of prestige and could convey a myriad of information about its owner to whoever handled or saw them.

Personal seals bearing the names of their issuers have also been documented, and while not a product of the state, they still often embrace popular religious lexicons similar to those produced by the authorities such as the example below which cites one ‘*Yousif Mukhlis, a believer in God.*’



*Fig. 52: Lead seal with three lines of text of Yousif Mukhlis*

While Umayyad administrators adopted the already existing Byzantine monetary system and so many of the existing structures and designs that accompanied it, we have not yet identified its artistic corollary among the administrative seals used by the Umayyads. While there are examples of lead seals bearing crosses, we do not find monograms, imperial imagery or other religious iconography linked to the Arab-Muslim overlords. Like their Byzantine counterparts, though, civil servants in the Umayyad administration also included honorifics (e.g. *amir*), denoting their position within the political hierarchy of the state.

While the term '*amir al-mumineen*' was likely not in heavy circulation amongst Arabic-speakers until after Muawiya began laying claim to the title during the earliest years of his rule, the lone term '*amir*' (i.e. '*commander*' or '*prince*', depending on the historical context), was already found in written form in the decades prior to his consolidation of power.

For example, '*amir*' (but not *amir al-'mumineen*) appears to have been used in a Greek papyrus twenty years before Muawiya's assertion as Arab potentate, produced in 642 CE, during the conquest of Egypt. In Greek texts, the term '*amir*' generally referred to Arab political elites<sup>748</sup> (both civilian and military) who partook of in the Arab-Muslim takeover of the Near East. The Arab foray into Egypt began in 639 and concluded in 644.<sup>749</sup>

<sup>748</sup> This Greek papyrus is located in the Austrian National Museum and is part of the Archduke Rainer Collection

<sup>749</sup> Schimmel 1992, p. 20

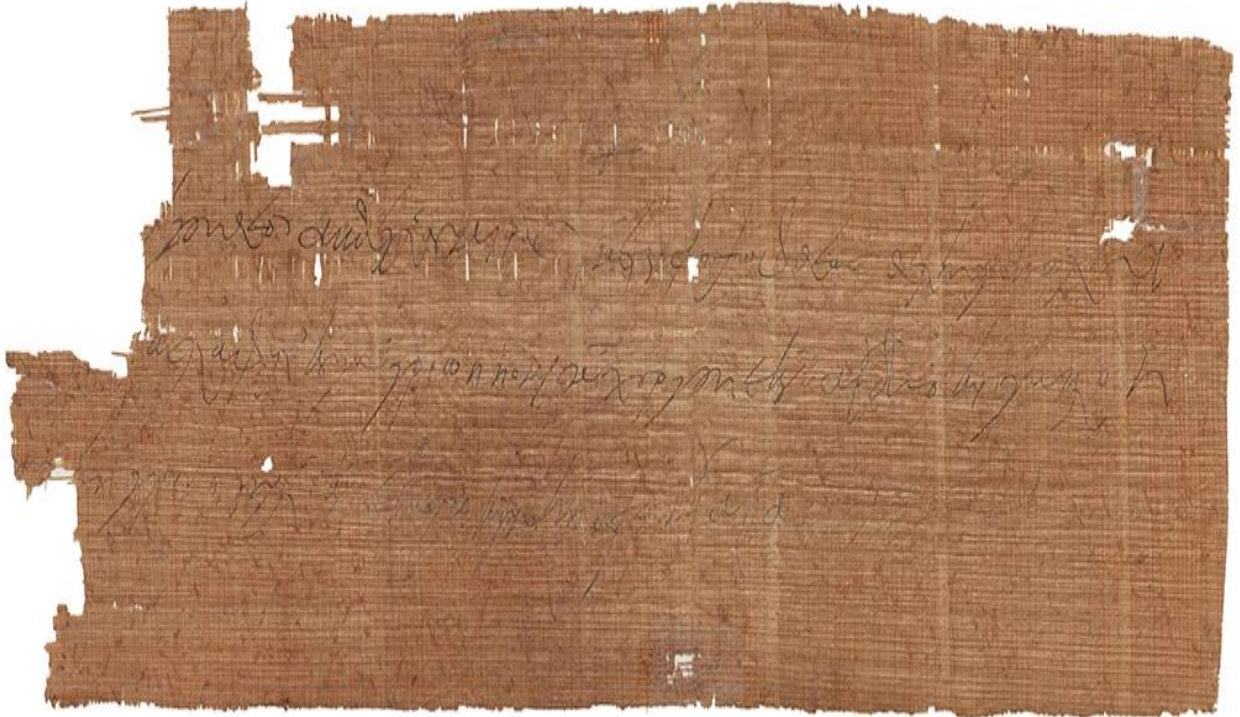


Fig. 53: Greek papyrus decree written by an Arab 'amir' after the Islamic conquest of Egypt (dated to late 642 CE) (Austrian National Museum, PERF no. 555).

The papyrus above known as PERF no. 555 and bearing entirely Greek texts and a cross on both sides<sup>750</sup> uses the Greek equivalent of 'bismallah' (Στο ὄνομα του Θεού) and also mentions an 'amir.' The document reads:

1. [In the na]me of God! I, Amir 'Abdallāh, to provosts of Psophthis. Please sell
2. [to 'Āmir, son of] Asla', for Kouta troop for three gold pieces fodder of two arourai to each soldier and
3. to each (soldiers) a three-course meal per month. In the month of Choiak, 30 of the first indiction (i.e., 26th December 642 CE).<sup>751 752</sup>

What this Greek text illustrates is the insertion of Arab identity through its imposition of the Arabic and developing Islamic lexicon as a feature of distinction and culture change. Still, the Arabic title of 'khalifa' (political successor or 'deputy') does not appear to have enjoyed a presence in the early repertoire of Arab-Muslim phrases and is only first attested to likely

<sup>750</sup> Trombley 2013, pp. 5-38

<sup>751</sup> Grohmann 1932, pp. 45-46.

<sup>752</sup> Grohmann 1957, pp. 5-40

sometime in the 680's or 690's under Abd al-Malik<sup>753</sup> on his 'Standing Caliph' coins. With time too, the phrase '*amir al-mumineen*' (first used, as you recall, by Muawiya on silver dirhams in the early 660's) became a staple on seals, texts, public inscriptions associated commissioned under the caliphs. Below is an example of a lead seal proclaiming Hisham b. Abd al-Malik (r. 724-743) as '*amir almu'mineen*.'



*Fig. 54: Uniface lead seal bearing the phrase 'Hisham Amir al-Mu'mineen' in lines two and three (private collection)*

Clearly, these textual and/or inscribed materials are the best evidence of the ushering in of a new political era as they explicitly and directly tell of the transition towards an Arab state which saw an Arabic, Islamic vocabulary creep into the region, setting up the later systematic Arabizing of the Islamic, Umayyad polity.

<sup>753</sup> Sijpesteijn 2014, p. 182

#### 4. SEALS AND TAXES IN THE EARLY ISLAMIC ERA: A BRIEF SYNOPSIS

Prior to the rise of the Arab caliphate, the two imperial giants who had fought exhausting battles for decades began to disengage from some of their frontier territories, creating the conditions for a quick military takeover of the Near East. For the new Arab caliphs, though, it was clear from the outset that economic and political viability depended on a steady stream of income. In an attempt to stave off economic collapse, fiscal measures were taken to facilitate an unpredictable economic climate and coordination between the powers of the day and local elites were thus, likely. Muawiya, who was governor of al-Shamm before his ‘crowning’ as king/caliph in 661, was the chief administrator of Syria-Palestine under the Rashidun, beginning under the reign of Umar b. Khattab, and therefore oversaw matters of government at the regional level for twenty-two years.

Part of the solution to the financial issues early Arab rulers faced was rooted in taxing the new state’s non-Muslim populations. Under the Umayyads, non-Muslims were actively discouraged from converting to Islam since the Umayyads had imposed a tribute tax on free non-Muslim males known as the *‘jizya’* and on everyone else, the *‘kharaj’* or ‘land tax’ which, together provided the state’s treasury with much-needed funds.<sup>754</sup>

However, our knowledge of the Umayyad system of taxation mainly comes down to us from few contemporary and several late literary sources and is alluded to in both Arab and non-Arab, non-Muslim materials. In looking for the materialization of tax-collecting procedures, we must turn to the archaeological record in which lead seals are an important, but often overlooked, but to frame any discussion about their significance in the political realm of the early Islamic polity, we must turn to the historical literature.

<sup>754</sup> Parsons 2010, p.79 and Ochsenwald and Fisher 2004, p. 53

In the Islamic sources, for example, we read about the legal injunctions that governed the implementation of the *jizya* tax under the Rashidun in Imam Malik's eighth century work, part of which has been repeated here, from al-Muwatta:

*"Yahya related to me from Malik that he had heard that Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz wrote to his governors telling them to relieve any people who paid the jizya from paying the jizya if they became Muslims and that the "jizya is imposed on the people of the Book to humble them. As long as they are in the country they have agreed to live in, they do not have to pay anything on their property except the jizya. If, however, they trade in Muslim countries, coming and going in them, a tenth is taken from what they invest in such trade. This is because jizya is only imposed on them on conditions, which they have agreed on, namely that they will remain in their own countries..."<sup>755</sup>*

Evidence of where, by whom, and how tax-collection (in general) may have been carried out by Umayyad administrators has been relatively elusive but the seals/bullae, in many ways, provide us with a general blueprint of the institutional structures of the inner mechanics of Umayyad administration over time and space.

In looking for the material evidence of tax-collecting procedures, we must turn to the archaeological record of which seals are an important component of. Several types of lead seals were produced in Umayyad Syria-Palestine and several epigraphic patterns have emerged. Excavations have sparsely yielded lead bullae, although some have been reportedly found in Nahal Shahaq and which bear the name 'Yazid' (likely attributable to an Umayyad governor of Egypt) and found along a group of several coins which included five from the Umayyad period.<sup>756</sup>

While it is true early caliphs were quite tolerant of the existing religious communities (as long as they did not assert themselves in the political arena) and allowed for continuity, the inhabitants of Syria-Palestine, as a whole, were still subjected to the *jizya* (poll tax- *jizya*

<sup>755</sup> Imam Malik's Muwatta Chapter No: 17, Zakat, Hadith no: 46 (Imam Malik's compilation is often regarded as among the earliest Hadith collections, particularly as they relate to Islamic jurisprudence).

<sup>756</sup> Magness 2003, p. 170

*musammah alal' qarya*).<sup>757</sup> Initially, conversion was discouraged by the Umayyad caliphs who viewed the tribute tax as a major source of state revenue.<sup>758</sup> By the end of Umayyad rule in Syria-Palestine in 750 CE, it is possible that up to ninety percent of the inhabitants were still non-Muslim and therefore, a significant portion of that population was subjected to individual taxation.<sup>759</sup>

Furthermore, land taxes (*kharaj*) were also implemented there as is evidenced by the various forms of documentation as well as the lead seals that have survived.<sup>760</sup> Some seals, encoded with specific geographical phrases, were likely used by Umayyad administrators for official documents relating to the implementation of taxes in a certain municipality or metropolis (*kura*) or towns ('*aqalim*/ Greek κληματατος), satellite settlements surrounding the urban centers, based on their religious demographics and were issued by the Office of the Seal (Diwan al-Khatim).<sup>761</sup>

One example of this 'poll/ tax seal' bore the obverse legend of خاتم كورة ايليا (Seal of the Metropolis of [Iliya] Jerusalem), in three lines, with a *fleur-de-lis*<sup>762</sup> situated below it while the reverse reads اقليم بيت لحم بيت ساحور (towns of [Bethlehem] Bayt Lahm, Bayt Sahur).

<sup>757</sup> Ochsenswald and Fisher 2004, p. 53

<sup>758</sup> Ochsenswald and Fisher, 2004 pp. 143-157

<sup>759</sup> Ochsenswald and Fisher 2004, p. 55

<sup>760</sup> Gil 1992, p. 148

<sup>761</sup> Gil 1992, p. 120

<sup>762</sup> The *fleur-de-lis* was also featured on some Umayyad *fulus* of Amman





The seal contains two holes, one on each side, and was likely used by a tax collector assigned to that particular district. However, the inclusion of Jerusalem or 'Iliya' is it was known to the Arabs<sup>763</sup>, on this seal, along with the satellite villages of Bethlehem and Bayt Sahur is further indication of their majority Christian presence which is corroborated by the archaeological record.<sup>764</sup> Tax collection in Jerusalem is attested to in the writings of al-Baladhuri in his historical work on the conquests, as well as in al-Tabari's.<sup>765</sup> Some of the major Near Eastern urban centers at the time of the conquests included Damascus, Jerusalem, Homs, and Antioch which continued to be home to Christian majorities since Muslim armies spent little

<sup>763</sup> 'Iliya' is an Arabized rendition of 'Jerusalem' deriving from the Roman name for a colony constructed there by the Emperor Hadrian called 'Colonia Aeila Capitolina' which was built over the site after the Bar Khochba Revolt of 130 CE.

<sup>764</sup> Shick 2016, p. 299

<sup>765</sup> See al-Baladhuri, p. 164 or al-Tabari, Volume 3, pp. 609-610

effort in subduing them, instead opting to settle in less congested desert suburbs like Tadmur (Palmyra) and al-Rusafa (Sergiopolis in north-central Syria)<sup>766</sup> which were likely easier to defend.

A similar seal in a private collection with the same standardized legend bears the name of ‘(Nabi) Samwal ( صموال ) on the obverse- a town located only a few kilometers north of Jerusalem and named after the Biblical prophet Samuel. Reinforcing the notion that such seals were, in fact, used by tax collectors assigned to non-Muslim areas/communities, comes in the form of another seal whose inscription subtly diverges from the Iliya seal, exemplified by the phrasing خاتم كورة طبرية (Seal of the Metropolis of Tiberias) and on the reverse side, يهود طبرية (Jews of Tiberias).<sup>767 768</sup> Tiberias, during this period, was home to the *Gaonim*, “who constituted the supreme Jewish religious authority in the Holy Land” before transferring their base to Jerusalem.<sup>769</sup>

In all of these cases, Christian and Jewish communities in Syria-Palestine were alluded to by geographic place-names as the historical, literary, architectural and archaeological records implying that these were areas still largely inhabited by non-Muslims. Arabic sources note that taxes (likely both the *jizya*, *kharaj* and possibly other types of taxes) were paid by the people of several Syrio-Palestinian towns and cities including *Damascus*, *Homs*, *Qinnasrin*, *Jund al-Urdunn*, *Busra*, *Adhrua’at*, *Antioch*, *Manbaj*, *Iliya*, *Latakia*.<sup>770</sup> The seal presented below contains a shortened version of the Palestinian seals, containing the concise phrase of ‘*khatim Dimashq*’ or ‘Seal of Damascus’-, a city that saw the levying of taxes for one *dinar* (and a *jarib*

<sup>766</sup> Wheatley 2001, p. 57

<sup>767</sup> Amitai-Preiss (in M. Dothan ed.) 2000, p. 104

<sup>768</sup> Amitai-Preiss (Umayyad Lead Sealings) 2010, pp. 19-20

<sup>769</sup> Galor and Bloedhorn 2013, p. 153

<sup>770</sup> Duri 2011, pp. 201-202

of wheat as well as vinegar and oil as provisions for the Muslims) as recorded by Ibn Asakir.<sup>771</sup> One other seal bears the name of the Transjordanian town of as-Salt (with an unidentified word on the third line), in central Jordan, just northwest of Amman and whose current name derives from *Saltos Hieraticon*- the name used for the area during the Byzantine period.<sup>772</sup>

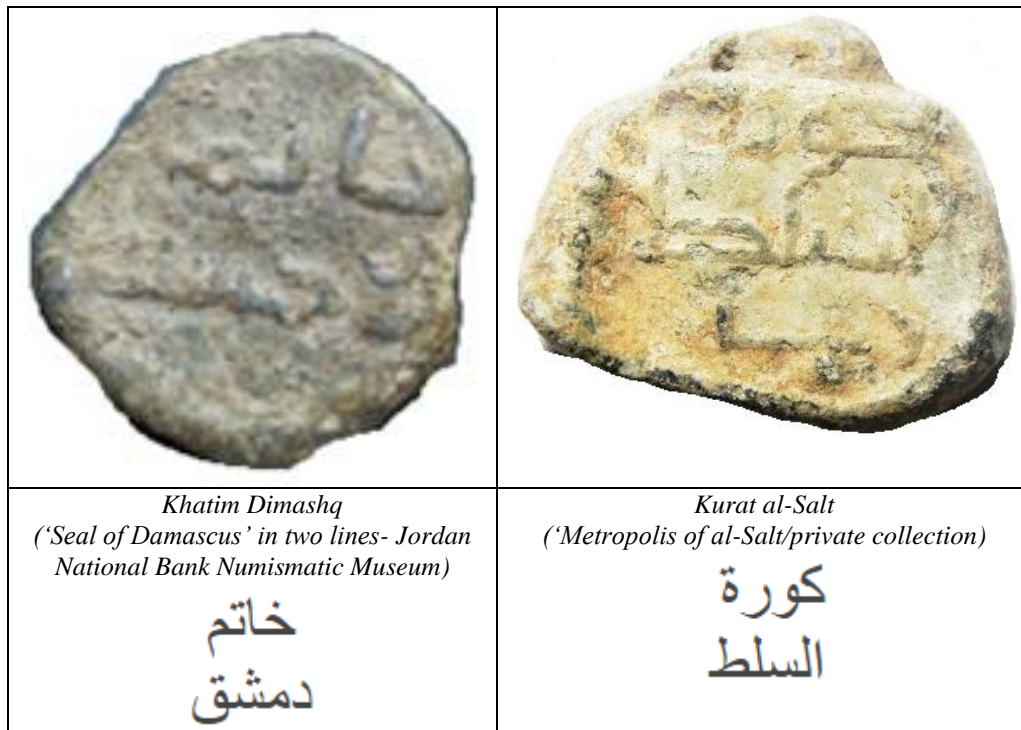


Fig. 56: Two lead seals (one of Damascus and the other of al-Salt)

Interestingly enough, an official bilingual (Arabic and Greek) document from *Nessana*, in southern Palestine, some fifty-nine kilometers south of *Beersheba*, dating from 674 CE (during Muawiya’s reign), serves as ‘direct evidence’ of the land taxes required by the Umayyads.<sup>773</sup> Tax seals, which were usually carried by a fiscal administrator, were also produced for other Palestinian towns and their districts including (*Nabi*) *Samwal*, *Bayt Jibrin*, *Ain Nahas*, and *Bayt Ghor*.<sup>774</sup> A lead tax seal from Ludd<sup>775</sup> has also been reported, as well. Demographically, Syria-

<sup>771</sup> Ibn Asakir, *al-tarikh al-kabir* 1911-193, p. 155

<sup>772</sup> Malt 2005, p. 99

<sup>773</sup> Gil 1992, p.145

<sup>774</sup> Lot 263: ‘Twenty-three Early Islamic Lead Seals from Filastin’ from Christie’s - London - 2001

<sup>775</sup> Amitai-Preiss, *The Administration of Jund al-Urdunn and Jund Filasṭīn*, pf. 145, Nos. 72-73.

Palestine, throughout Umayyad rule, was still predominantly Christian with a small Jewish and pagan population<sup>776</sup> and so, the aforementioned bullae bearing the standardized geographic references were likely used for the specific purpose of tax-collecting in those zones and districts.

What these seals indicate about the geographic significance of these places is certainly open to interpretation. Except for al-Sharah, all of the provincial names listed by al-Maqdisi in his tenth century work appeared on coins and/or seals under the Umayyads. Some seals even used the geographic designations ‘*kura*’ and ‘*iqlim*’ (plural ‘*aqalim*’), from the Greek word ‘*klima*’ meaning ‘province’<sup>777</sup> to refer to geographical fixtures in the Arab-held territories of Syria-Palestine. For example, the municipalities of *Iliya*, *Baalbak*, *Ludd*, *Asqalan*, *Nabi Samwal*, *Bayt Sur*, *Dimashq*, and *al-Salt* are described as referred to as ‘*ardth*’ (land [of]) or ‘*kura*’ and the towns of *Bayt Lahm*, *Bayt Sahur*, *Ramallah*, *Bayt Ghor al-Kubra*, and *Ain Nahas* all appear as *aqalim* of the larger urban settlements when included on administrative bullae. In other cases, the *jund* name is used (sometimes along with the town and village as is the case with a seal of Filastin that also bears the name of the satellite towns of Bayt Sur and the village of Ramallah<sup>778</sup>).

While it is not certain under which caliph the aforementioned seals were issued, their textual content contains proclamations of jurisdiction and political ascendancy, professing the Arab claim over these territories using powerful and assertive language in the Arabic script. Umayyad leaders were almost certainly responsible for issuing these seals as the ninth century historian Ahmad al-Ya’qubi reports that the Umayyads successfully implemented the poll-tax in the latter half of the seventh century in his writing ‘*Tarikh Ya’qubi*’, claiming that Muawiya collected some 450,000 dinars in taxes from the province of Filastin, which seems to have

<sup>776</sup> Gil 1992, p. 169-170

<sup>777</sup> Rāshid and Morelon 1996, p. 803

<sup>778</sup> Amitai-Preiss (Umayyad Lead Sealings) 2010, pp. 19-20

endured a period of relative financial tranquility, around 670 CE, as well as 180,000 dinars from al-Urdun (Jordan).<sup>779</sup> <sup>780</sup> Proving that these two seals date from Muawiya's time is difficult, but the fact that these specific types are only known to bear the names of these two junds, the same two that al-Yaqubi' cites, may lend credence to the notion that they are pre-Marwanid. The lead bullae pictured below is unusual in that it only contains the jund name 'al-Urdun' (the Jordan), broken up into two lines, and not the longer expression on the seal discussed above.



Fig. 57: 'al-Urdun' ('The Jordan' in two lines) (Jordan National Bank Numismatic Museum)

One other possible lead tax seal candidate bears the name of one *al-Muthana b. Ziyad* on one side, while the reverse side contains the short legend 'ahl Homs' (People of Homs).<sup>781</sup> It is not certain as to who, exactly, this al-Muthana was, in history, but reference to the people of the

<sup>779</sup> Ya'qubi, *Tarikh*, II, 288

<sup>780</sup> Gil 1992, p. 146

<sup>781</sup> Located in the Jordan National Bank Numismatic Museum (and deciphered by Dr. Hassan al-Zuod)

city (or jund) of Homs may implicate him as a tax collector or fiscal administrator. If a tax seal, it would have served as his official credentials and would have been attached to documents associated with his duties. One other seal (far right, below), reads simply, what appears to be ‘*tubi’at Homs*’ (‘*stamp of Homs*’), linking its owner to some form of municipal or bureaucratic activity. One seal of Iliya, documented by Amitai-Preiss, also bears the phrase ‘*tubi’a*’ (stamped/stamp of).<sup>782</sup> The seal below is from the Jordan National Bank Numismatic Museum.



Fig. 58: Lead seal with obverse: ‘*al-Muthana b. Ziyad*’

Reverse: ‘*ahl Homs*’ or ‘*People of Homs*’

<sup>782</sup> Amitai-Preiss (dissertation) 2007, pp. 82, 118, seal no. 4, and pp. 123–124, seal no. 19.



Fig. 59: Two lead seals of Homs.

Fortunately, in this instance, there are references to the people of Homs paying 170,000 dinars, annually, in taxes recorded by al-Baladhuri, which describes an episode where Abu Ubaydah and the city's inhabitants struck a peace deal.<sup>783</sup> It is quite possible that any of the bullae above were used by local administrators in Homs in the securing of said taxes. Under Muawiya, the city was prosperous, thus becoming a major support base<sup>784 785</sup> for the sober and practical imperial sheikh.

One side of the following seal<sup>786</sup> bearing two lines of text and confined within a square outline reads the phrase 'ardh Ba'albak' (Land of Ba'albak). Al-Baladhuri tells us that an economic treaty was secured between the Arab-Muslim conquerors and the people of Ba'albak

<sup>783</sup> Al-Baladhuri *Futuh al-Buldan*, pp. 138, 238

<sup>784</sup> Madelung 1986, p. 147

<sup>785</sup> Whitcomb 2009, p. 248

<sup>786</sup> There were six nearly identical 'ardh Ba'albak' seals in the Jordan National Bank Numismatic museum (see catalog at the end)

(located in what is now southeastern Lebanon) that amounted to a “*provision for the merchants of Heliopolis.*”<sup>787</sup>



Fig. 60: Lead seal bearing name of ‘Muhammad b. Ubayda and ‘Ardh Homs’ (Land of Homs)

The opposite side of the bulla also includes the name of one ‘*Muhammad bin Ubayda*’, a man who may have been employed as a tax collector assigned to the Ba’albek district, although this interpretation is speculative and circumstantial. Locating materials that can inscriptions explicitly tied to their purposes has been incredibly challenging, but I am comfortable with the assertions about such types representing tax seals based on their format and content.

Nonetheless, the implication of place-name on seals can be interpreted as representing settlements or population centers that were under Umayyad political jurisdiction or even their imagined jurisdiction as a statement against enemies claiming the same territory, while the find-spots and archaeological provenances have the potential to, in some cases, provide insight into

<sup>787</sup> Kennedy 2006, p. 23 (citing al-Baladhuri)



the locales where they could have been used, although the latter has been shown to be an incredibly difficult task due to a serious lack of documentation.

## 5. ARABIC BULLAE BEARING PROCLAMATIONS OF AUTHORITY

Two types of enigmatic seals bearing standardized Arabic formula include the following uniface types were first brought to the attention of numismatists by Nayef Goussous in his 2004 work.<sup>788</sup>



Fig. 61: Two uniface lead seals (one of Jordan, the other of Palestine)

These lead seals present us with clear confirmation of authority over distinct geographic spaces. Here, the phrase *'Hulahil ardh [...]'*, roughly translating into 'Master (Chief) of the Land of [...]' is situated in three lines of a lead seal that contains two holes on each part of the upper end. It is possible that they were issued by provincial leaders, high-ranking administrators,

<sup>788</sup> Goussous 2004, pp. 230-231

or other officials working under the caliph's authority. Thus far, this phrase has only been found associated with Jund Filastin (Palestine) and Jund al-Urdun (Jordan).

One glass weight (20mm, 2.18g), almost certainly used to validate the physical integrity of post-reform copper coinage can be directly attributed to Abd al-Malik b. Marwan.<sup>789</sup> The coin weight not only names the fifth Umayyad caliph but refers to him as the 'servant of God' (*abd allah*) and 'commander of the believers' (*amir al-mu'mineen*) in the four-line text that reads 'For the servant of God/Abd al-Malik/Commander of the Believers' (لعيد الله / عبد الملك / امير المو / منين). A similar glass weight bearing the name of Abd al-Malik was found during excavations at a farmstead at Nahal Mitnan in southwestern Israel.<sup>790</sup>

Most glass weights, jetons and vessel stamps from the Umayyad period were likely produced in Egypt, but some were produced in Syria as well (as find-spots have shown as well as several examples found in the National Museum in Damascus, Syria). Some of the glass coin weights bore the names of financial officers (e.g. tax collectors, fiscal administrators, etc.) while other glass seals carried the names of caliphs.<sup>791</sup> In Rambach's study, the names of six different Umayyad caliphs appeared emblazoned on glass disks including the name of Abd al-Malik, his sons Yazid and Hisham, and al-Walid II, Abdullah b. Yazid III, as well as Marwan II.<sup>792</sup>

During Abd al-Malik's reign, a new 'Arab colony on Aramaean land'<sup>793</sup> had been constructed in southeastern Iraq during less than halfway through the first decade of the eighth century. In 704 CE/85 AH, Wasit was founded by Abd al-Malik b. Marwan's governor al-Hajjaj

<sup>789</sup> Rambach 2012, p. 304.

<sup>790</sup> Power 2012, p. 109

<sup>791</sup> Rambach 2017, pp. 176-177

<sup>792</sup> Rambach 2017, p. 180

<sup>793</sup> Massignon 1994, p.28

b. Yousif<sup>794</sup>, a settlement that later became a storied, central minting town well known for its silver dirhams. It appears that Wasit became an administrative center shortly after its inception as the following stamp seal implies, dated to November or December of 704CE (year 85 of the lunar month of Dhu'l Qi'da which is the same year Wasit was found). It contains four lines of clear text with the exception of the first word which has been difficult to decipher (albeit not because of a lack of visual clarity) that reads '[ ] in Wasit in [the month of] Dhu'l Qi'da in the year eighty-five.'



Fig. 62: Lead stamp seal of Wasit dated to 85 AH

[ ] بوا  
سط في  
ذو القعدة بسنة  
خمس و ثمنين

(Jordan National Bank Numismatic Museum)

<sup>794</sup> Ibn Katheer The Caliphate of Banu Ummayah: *Al Bidaya - Wan-Nihaya* under 'The Construction of Wasit' (narrated by ibn Jareer)

While administrative equipment (i.e. not the finished products that resulted from the implementation of the technologies employed) has generally been difficult to locate, they do surface occasionally. For example, one object was identified as a ‘lead accounting weight’ issued under Suleiman b. Abd al-Malik’s (Abd al-Malik’s son) regime in the year ninety-nine AH (or 717 CE).

Based on its inscription and weight, it is believed to have been used by a treasurer at the Diwan al-Khazana (or alternatively the *Bayt al-Mal*, i.e. the Treasury Department) and designed to ascertain the weight of gold coins that were received by the office or for monies that were being dispersed to certain individuals or institutions.<sup>795</sup> At 87.5 grams, the object would have been used to verify the weight of up to twenty gold dinars, which would have averaged somewhere near 4.35 grams apiece. Thus, an accountant or other treasury employer would have used this item regularly in procedures that required the validation of what were most likely large amounts of money in the form of Umayyad gold dinars.

The text, most of which is visible, exhibits a rather standardized formula that is found in other numismatic and paranumismatic objects. It names the caliph (as head of state), includes his title as leader of the Islamic community, and bears a date. Within the smallest center circle (there are three, concentric circles on the obverse), the inscription partially reads ‘Muhammad, Messenger of God, year ninety-nine’ (*Muhammad/rasul allah/sana tis’a/wa tisa’/’in*) while a section of the marginal text is believed to bear the phrase ‘*Ordered by Suleiman, Commander of the Believers*’ (*‘amara bihi Suleiman amir al-mu’mineen’*).

The titular ‘*abd allah*’ (servant of God) often prefixed the names of the Caliph starting during the Umayyad period. It was a religious title that aimed to blur the lines between secular and spiritual power held by the caliph, i.e. the work he as Caliph was done in the service of the

<sup>795</sup> See photo and caption at Baldwin's of St. James's Auction 4, 9 May 2017

Lord. One very striking stamp seal, appearing to have been produced towards the end of the Umayyad period (in Syria-Palestine) bears the name of ‘*abd allah Marwan*’ (*the servant of God, Marwan*), likely referring to Marwan II (though undated), who ruled from 744 CE until the expiration and toppling of the Umayyads (with the exception of al-Andalus) in 750 CE. The seal’s text is regal and pronounced and still contains its base attachment and rivet with a generous gap between the both components (front and back) making it likely that it was used to secure important documents.

*Fig. 63: Complete document seal of the Commander of Tabariyya (Tiberias)*

Amara bi-sun’ihi  
Abd allah Marwan  
Amir Tabariya  
LillahWaf  
امر بسنعه  
عبد الله مروان  
امير طبرية  
واف

[The] Servant of God Marwan ordered  
the production of [this seal]  
The Commander of Tiberias  
[ ]For God  
Full value

(Jordan National Bank Numismatic Museum)



Inscribed glass, bronze, and lead weights (disk, ring, cone, and hexagonal-shaped coin weights and other types), whose functions were far more limited than coins or seals, additionally illustrated the ability of the Umayyad issuing authorities to project power and espouse a sense of order. Weights are telling manifestations of Umayyad regulations because they were employed as representations of standardized units of measurement that were instrumental in authenticating and corroborating both the legality and potential worth of, usually, valuable/precious metals or objects intended for circulation, trade, and exchange.

The types of weights and measuring tools that the Umayyad leaders constructed and used also have the potential to provide us with a sense of how quantities were understood and how they could be recorded, stored, and used to maintain administrative. Under the Umayyads, both weights (made of glass, stone, or a number of metals) and a scale would have been pertinent to commercial exchange and merchants and traders in the operating in its territories would have utilized them regularly in their transactions (i.e. measuring quantities, validating authenticity of coins) especially given the fact that the state had a money-based economy. While mainly a product of Umayyad Egypt, glass coin weights of Syrian manufacture have been recovered Jordanian sites such as Tell Hesban (Jordan).<sup>796</sup> Dinar weights, mainly composed of glass and generally inscribed in Arabic were set at 4.25 grams while the dirham weighed 2.97 grams<sup>797</sup>, both of which were standardized by Abd al-Malik.<sup>798</sup>

## **6. CONFLATING RELIGIOSITY AND POLITICAL SOVEREIGNTY: SPIRITUAL INVOCATIONS ON UMAYYAD BULLAE**

It is apparent that at the Umayyad's disposal lay a repertoire of Arabic religious and politically-charged terms that likely were used to demonstrate their control over both the temporal and spiritual realms of their new state amidst internal frictions and tensions that existed. It would be difficult to believe that some words and symbols were not employed to construct or reinforce perceptions some had about the placative nature of the early state, while others, during the later state under Abd al-Malik and his successors, were likely the result of a demonstration of power and prestige. As literacy spread, one can imagine that so did the dispensation and distribution of texts (on an array of media), especially ones with more references to Islam whose

<sup>796</sup> Kritzeck 1976, pp. 157-162

<sup>797</sup> Miles 1960, pp. 212-214

<sup>798</sup> Khamis (in Gutfeld) 2010 , p. 279

popularization was a function of and extension of the power of the Caliph who was responsible for the mechanization of Islam as a doctrinal religion.

As inscriptions became more abundant, so did the employment of a greater diversity in phraseology on material culture which began to integrate Quranic expressions with increased frequency. Many of the early 'Islamic texts' produced during the Rashidun era and the Umayyad period sought to, following in the traditions of the Byzantine and Sasanian rulers, incorporate liturgical language that sought to capitalize on the psycho-social attachment to their constituencies faiths while reinforcing the influence and power of the issuing polity responsible for the production of such texts.

Several bullae that were documented at the Jordan National Bank Numismatic Museum contain overtly religious expressions, often containing simple legends like '*barakat*' (blessings), '*lillah*' (for God), '*bismallah*' (In the name of God), '*allah*' (God), '*muhammad rasul allah*' (Muhammad, Messenger of God), '*allahu akbar*' (God is Great) '*al-wafa lillah*' (loyalty is to God), *la elaha illah Allah* (there is no god but God), and various other spiritual invocations. With the elimination of most of their powerful Arab, Muslim rivals by the end of the seventh century, the Umayyads exercised free reign to implement the types of government provisions they found most conducive to reinforcing the authority held in the relatively newly-constructed Arab and Muslim caliphate- as an indigenous Arab political institution whose presence and power was on par with that of the Byzantine emperors of old.



Above is a small lead bullae bearing a short, but powerful phrase '*nasr allah*' or 'God's victory' and while, completely circumstantial, it may have been issued after a military conflict between the Umayyads and their opponents (possibly after the Battle of Sebastopolis with the Byzantines in 692).<sup>799</sup> Like other phrases found on Umayyad material culture, the phrase '*nasr allah*' is traceable to the Quran's Surah 110:1 which is ironically called 'Chapter: The Victory' (al-Nasr) and consists of only three verses. The very first verse reads "*itha jaa' nasra allah wa al-fateh*" or "*When the victory of God has come and the conquest.*" while the verse immediately thereafter states "*And you see the people entering into the religion of God in multitudes*" (110:2). The third and final verse consists of very familiar phraseology (discussed in previous chapters) and urges the reader to "*Then exalt [Him] with praise of your Lord and seek his forgiveness. He is the acceptor of repentance.*"

<sup>799</sup> It is difficult to determine exactly when the seal was created without the construction of a typology that takes into consideration letter-forms, sizes, weights, and epigraphic content of various Arabic-inscribed lead bullae.



إِذَا جَاءَ نَصْرُ اللَّهِ وَالْفَتْحُ  
 وَرَأَيْتَ النَّاسَ يَدْخُلُونَ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ أَفْوَاجًا  
 فَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ وَأَسْتَغْفِرْهُ إِنَّهُ كَانَ تَوَّابًا

One did not have to be fully literate to recognize and understand a few formulaic expressions on early Islamic inscribed material culture. The letter-shapes and alphabetic arrangements would have been enough for people to decipher them because of their visual familiarity. For example, American coins include the Latin phrase “*E Pluribus Unum*” despite the obvious fact that the overwhelming majority of us having little to no literacy in the Latin language. Despite that, a sizeable portion of the American population understands that term to mean ‘*From many, one.*’ Similarly, Arabs with little to no literacy would have begun to become increasingly familiar with the short phrases they encountered on inscribed objects due to the somewhat limited number of, mainly short texts that could be found on virtually every post-reform coin from the late 690’s until the termination of the Umayyad polity in 750. That provided a reasonable amount of time for the population, especially those living in and around urban and commercial centers, to gain an increased level of literacy skills.

Nevertheless, the political overtones are clear on many of the Umayyad lead seals bearing religious formulae including the aforementioned ‘*nasr allah*’ bulla. The issuing authorities (i.e. the Umayyads) banked on religious sensitivities in a highly charged religious landscape composed of both Christians and a growing Muslim population by utilizing potent and profound spiritual statements aimed at interfusing spiritual proclamations on political mediums to blur the lines between religion and the state.



Fig. 65: Two lead seals bearing religious legends

## 7. 'BISMALLAH': THE CHIEF ADORNER OF ISLAMIC TEXTUAL DECORUM

The term 'bismallah' (*in the name of God*) enjoyed widespread usage during the formative period of Arab and Umayyad rule, in particular in some the earliest Arabic documents procured under Arab rule. Paranumismatic objects bearing the simple phrase 'bismallah' are accounted for, seemingly, throughout the Rashidun (632-661 CE) and Umayyad periods (661-750 CE) periods. As Jeremy Johns notes, "*from as early as 22/643, coins, papyri, building inscriptions, tombstones, travelers' graffiti, and possibly (but probably not) a tiraz silk, were written bism Allah and some were dated according to a new calendar corresponding to the era of the hijra.*"<sup>800</sup>

<sup>800</sup> Johns 2003, p. 41



Fig. 66: A coin, weight, and seal bearing the phrase 'bismallah'

The term '*bismillah*' is regarded as, likely, the earliest consistent Arabic expression in the Near East and is attested to on dated materials from as early as 643 CE.<sup>801</sup> It is an oft-applied formulaic component of some of the earliest, dated Islamic inscriptions including the Zuhayr inscription (24 AH) in northwestern Saudi Arabia, outside of Mada'in Saleh (i.e. al-Hijr).<sup>802</sup> The short phrase also appears on a Christianized bronze weight believed to have originated in Syria, several different lead seals, the pre-reform coins of Homs, Arab-Sasanian coins from a number of Iranian mints and dating as early as 652 CE (31 AH), as well as ultimately being integrated into the standardized Arabic legends on the Standing Caliph coins issued under Abd al-Malik b. Marwan<sup>803</sup> presumably in the 690's, among other objects and in other state-sponsored texts including the Dome of the Rock<sup>804</sup> mosaic inscriptions. The earliest usage of the long form of the expression on dated materials include the bilingual Arabic-Greek papyrus of 643 CE (22 AH),

<sup>801</sup> Johns 2003, Vol. 46, No. 4, p. 414

<sup>802</sup> Ghabban 2008, p. 211

<sup>803</sup> Goodwin 2002, p. 94

<sup>804</sup> Kessler 1970, pp. 2-14.

the Aswan Dam inscription from 652 CE (31 AH) as well as a tombstone from the same year (also from Egypt).



Fig. 67: Two lead seals bearing phrase 'bismallah'

In most texts that bear the phrase, it is usually the opening expression- a preamble of sorts, although in other texts (such as P. Louvre Inv. J. David-Weill 20 papyrus)<sup>805</sup> the long form of the phrase is found situated towards the middle of the text. Its implementation in public texts, in administrative material culture, and in documents related to financial transactions persisted throughout the Umayyad period and was used in both private communications and in religious and secular literary instances for a variety of audiences. Below are examples of its usage in various texts and on various materials. The longer form of the phrase appears to become the norm during the Umayyad period, (although on some occasions, due to reasons related to usable space on some objects), and its articulation on so many materials (and especially in liturgical and eschatological literary contexts) must speak to the state's facilitation

<sup>805</sup> Bruning 2015, pp. 352-374.

of a distinct Arabic vocabulary and religio-political lexicon. Tying notions of piety and imperial authority worked well for Byzantine emperors in that it provided them with dual powers- as temporal political hegemon as well as spiritual head of a community of believers. The Umayyad caliphs employed similar tactics as the epigraphic record implies.

One lead seal in the Jordan National Bank Numismatic museum bears a four-line inscription, produced in Alexandria, but also includes the full form of the phrase as well. The date is unknown but the letter style is typical of other, similar inscribed objects from Umayyad Egypt. Usage of the term transcended old cultural and territorial boundaries, becoming an epigraphic staple of Arabic texts, documents, and inscriptions produced under the Umayyads.

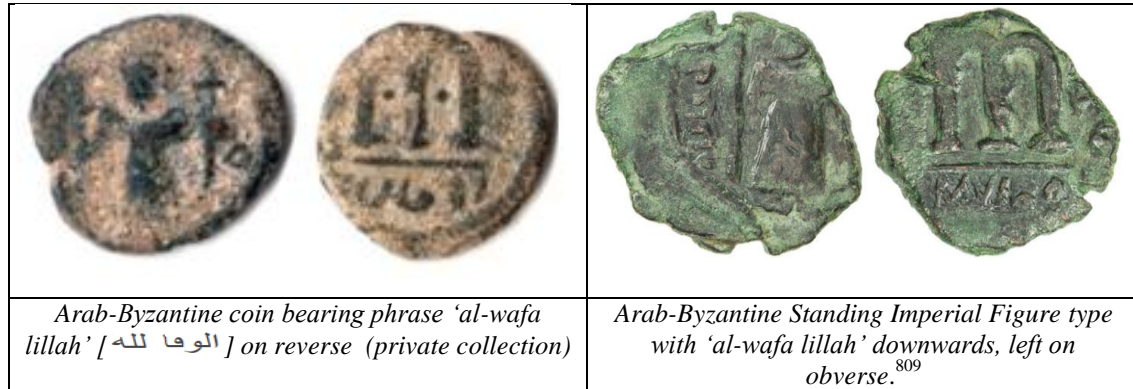


## 8. 'AL-WAFA LILLAH': THE ARABIC EQUIVALENT OF 'IN GOD WE TRUST'

The Arab-Byzantine coins that bear the phrase '*al-wafa lillah*' (الوفا لله) have been well-documented by a number of numismatists over the past several years. Such types were noted to

<sup>806</sup> Located in the Jordan National Bank Numismatic Museum (deciphered by Dr. Hasan al-Zuod)

have been mainly found in the northwestern reaches of Jordan<sup>807</sup> but like some of their Arab-Byzantine counterparts, they bear no mint-name. While certainly not an anomaly in that regard, they are peculiar due to the fact that the minting facility or facilities that produced them seemingly did so in large volumes as the number of surviving specimens (and the multiple dies used) suggests.<sup>808</sup>



*Fig. 69: Two 'Arab-Byzantine' coins bearing phrase 'al-wafa lillah'*

While it is difficult to ascertain out of which specific historical or political context the phrase 'al-wafa lillah', translated as 'loyalty is to God'<sup>810</sup>, emerged from, the term seems to have enjoyed usage on numismatic and paranumismatic materials during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods in the Near East. Apart from the well-studied series of coins bearing this legend, other objects, based on their general stylistic features and epigraphic qualities, are known to bear legends that also included this phrase. For example, the inscription 'bismallah al-wafa lillah' ( بسم الله الوفا لله ) appears on the following stamp seal.

<sup>807</sup> Goodwin 2002, p. 90

<sup>808</sup> Milstein 1991, v. 10, pp. 3-26

<sup>809</sup> Stephen Album Rare Coins Auction 24 14-16 January 2016

<sup>810</sup> It is sometimes translated as 'honesty belongs to God' (See Goodwin 2015, p. 220)



Fig. 70: Seal bearing 'bismillah, al-wafa lillah' (Jordan National Bank Numismatic Museum)

Measuring 15mm and weighing 3.3 g, the fully intact lead stamp seal complete with the rivet still connected to the base attachment, contains the phrase in three lines of text.

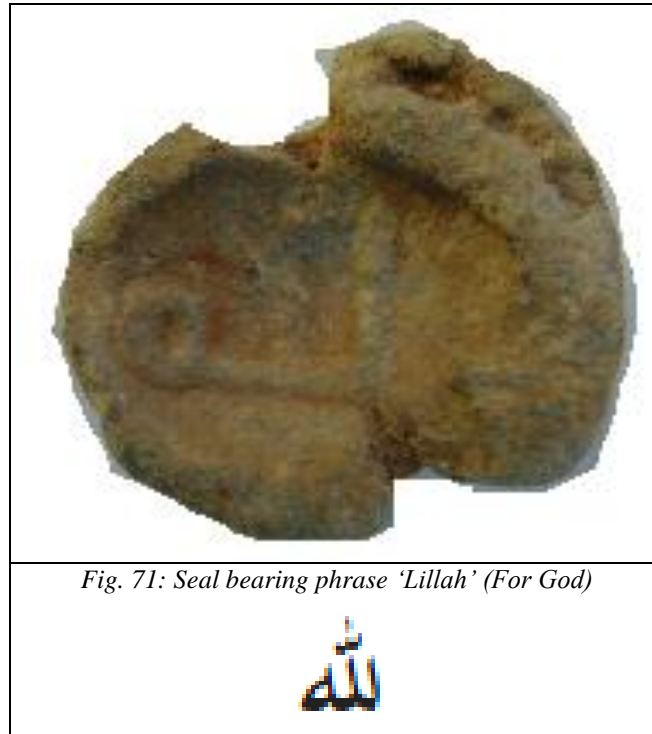
Unfortunately, the archaeological provenience and date of production/ place of circulation cannot be verified, though it is believed to have been recovered in Jordan according to the museum's curators. More importantly, it becomes clear that the phrase '*al-wafa lillah*' likely served multiple functions ranging from the validation of the integrity of a particular object or commodity and possibly an attempt to link the notion of piety to the issuing authority. Whether the same issuing authority was responsible for producing the coins, weights, and seals bearing '*al-wafa lillah*' is unclear, but at least one weight that bears a date from the end of the first quarter of the eighth century implicates the Umayyads as the likeliest candidate.

The latest research calls into question the small, highly standardized small-module '*al-wafa lillah*' coins as potentially being the product of an independent tribe potentially operating out of Jund al-Urdun in the 680s and 690's.<sup>811</sup> The overwhelming majority of the population of the Levant was still Christian during the seventh and eighth centuries and so it is believed that

<sup>811</sup>See Goodwin and Gyselen 2015

until the Umayyads solidified their rule, local economies, currencies, and existing political arrangements and hierarchies persisted with or without Umayyad intervention. However, the evidence is completely circumstantial, and Amitei-Preiss had already recorded an Umayyad lead weight (described as an *'underweight, two wuqiyya'* at 46 x 50mm and 47.70 grams) with the alternative phrase *'lillah al-wafa'* (*'to God, loyalty'*) on one side with the Greek letters 'I' and 'B', along with a lengthier inscription identifying its place of production in *'Asqalan* (Ashkelon) and dated to the year 104 A.H. (or 722-723 CE) on the other.<sup>812</sup> This means that the weight was created during the reign of the Umayyad caliph Yazid II ibn Abd al-Malik who ruled from 720-724. Filastin had come under Umayyad rule by the 630's.

Some seals bear the short, singular *'lillah'* (*'to/for God'*), such as the one below from the Jordan National Bank Numismatic Museum.



<sup>812</sup>Amitei-Preiss and Berman (ed. by Deutsch and Zissu) 2014, p. 224



The seemingly benign religious phrase was certainly not viewed as threatening to the sensitivities of any of Syria's inhabitants nor to the various tribes, religious communities, or political movements vying for control during the second *fitna* (680's) when these coins and seals are believed to have circulated.<sup>813</sup> The practice of linking God and the institutional authority of the caliph was best illustrated by 'Abd al-Malik, who likely saw himself as God's earthly political representative when he took the title '*khalifat Allah*' [*Deputy of God*] which he included on some of the coins struck during his reign.<sup>814 815</sup>

At least one other seal in the Jordan National Bank Numismatic Museum and which is certainly 'Umayyad' (based on its size, epigraphic qualities, and other stylistic characteristics) bears the phrase '*al-wafa lillah*' in two unbroken lines while depicting a small star above the first line of text. The uniface lead bulla is almost perfectly round and measures 15mm and weighs only 3.3 g, and like the aforementioned stamp seal, a find-spot has not been recorded for it.



Fig. 72: Lead bulla with '*al-wafa lillah*' in two lines with star above (Jordan National Bank Numismatic Museum)

<sup>813</sup> Goodwin and Gyselen 2015, p. 220 (Goodwin believes they were a brief issue that began in 684 CE)

<sup>814</sup> Bowering 2015, p. 40

<sup>815</sup> Hoyland 2006, p. 405

The late Shraga Qedar also identified a one *wuqiyya* weight that bore the phrase ‘*al-wafa lillah*’ (which weighed 27.81 g).<sup>816</sup> Apart from these two seals, dozens of Umayyad-era glass disk weights, ring weights, and vessel stamps recorded in Paul Balog’s 1976 work bear similar inscriptions including variants of *al-wafa lillah*. Among Balog’s specimens, several seals and weights bear a standardized formula beginning with ‘*bismallah*’, followed by the phrase ‘*amar Allah bil-wafa. or ‘God commands loyalty...’*<sup>817</sup> Most of the examples covered in Balog’s catalog are purely epigraphic, lacking imagery and iconographic details that may provide us with more definite hints of a historical and/or political context. Similar to some of Balog’s specimens, one uniface Umayyad lead weight reads ‘*amar Allah bil wafa wa al-adl*’ or ‘*God commands loyalty and equity*’ (امر الله بالوفا و العدل)<sup>818</sup> Three other square weights all include the phrase ‘*baraka min Allah al-wafa lillah*’- ‘*Blessings from God, loyalty is to God*’ (بركة من الله الوفا لله).<sup>819 820 821</sup>

Despite the aniconic nature of much of the paranumismatic material culture from this era, several published specimens do deviate from this general ‘epigraphic’ or ‘purely inscriptional’ theme. For example, an Umayyad bronze weight from the time of the caliph al-Walid bears a much lengthier inscription on its reverse side that includes the phrase ‘*bismallah muhammad rasul allah al-wafa lillah hadha wuqiyyatayn allati ahdatha `abd allah Walid*<sup>822</sup> (i.e. In the name of God, Muhammad is the Messenger of God, loyalty is to God, this *wuqiyyatayn* was wrought by ‘Abd Allah Walid [al-Walid]). Like the *al-wafa lillah* coins which bear both religious and imperial Byzantine imagery, this intriguing weight similarly contains Greek characters and a

<sup>816</sup> Qedar 1978, p. 25, no. 117.

<sup>817</sup> Balog 1976, examples from pp.73-107

<sup>818</sup> Album Auction 25, Lot 210

<sup>819</sup> Album 13 lot 473 27.93g. 10 dirhams, ‘*Manbij*’ to left (downwards)

<sup>820</sup> CNG 368 lot 588 17.45g. 6 dirhams

<sup>821</sup> CNG 368 lot 589 10.36g. 4 dirhams

<sup>822</sup> Mantis Copper alloy *wuqiyyatayn*, Syria, 705 - 714. 1940.209.1175

Byzantine cross on its obverse side, with an Arabic-inscribed reverse (described as a ‘*Byzantine weight validated by Walid*’). Various forms of the phrase or usage of *wafa* also appear on several glass weights, seals, and jetons in the Syria National Museum while simultaneously accompanying the names of several Umayyad caliphs and other officials including that of Abd al-Malik, his sons Hisham and Yazid, Abdullah b. Yazid III, al-Walid b. Abd al-Rahman, etc.<sup>823</sup>

Unlike the aforementioned objects, these weights are purely inscriptional.<sup>824</sup> Another lead seal in elegant and linear Arabic script reads, in three lines “*bismallah amar allah al-wafa*” or “*In the name of God, God commands loyalty to God*” and, like other seals bearing any form of this legend, was likely employed in an economic context.<sup>825</sup>



Fig. 73: Lead seal bearing phrase ‘*bismallah amr Allah al-wafa*’

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ  
أَمْرُ اللَّهِ  
الْوَفَا

<sup>823</sup> See Rambach (in T. Goodwin) 2017, pp. 175-195

<sup>824</sup> Robert Bracey, editor at the Journal of the Oriental Numismatic Society, brought these three additional weights to my attention via personal communication.

<sup>825</sup> This seal is from the Jordan National Bank Numismatic Museum coin collection and was initially translated by Dr. Hassan al-Zuod and Dr. Nayef Goussous

Although not an '*al-wafa lillah*' type, one square uniface bronze *wuqqiyya* (ounce) weight attributed to Syria and described as 'pre-Abd al-Malik' and 'Arab-Byzantine', similarly depicts an imperial bust of a Byzantine figure bearing three crosses and employing the lone Arabic term '*bismallah*' to the left of the bust.<sup>826</sup>

Like '*bismallah*', the term '*al-wafa lillah*', may too be reflective of an early attempt at situating the political and religious character of the emerging Arab state in Syria-Palestine. Amitei-Preiss's *Asqalan* seal verifies the phrase's usage during the Umayyad period as do a number of other inscribed numismatic and paranumismatic materials.<sup>827</sup> For some time, Tony Goodwin suggested that the coins bearing *al-wafa lillah* were likely struck 'early', because they bore no mint name and were, therefore, likely produced during the nascent Umayyad state-before a highly organized and cohesive monetary system was implemented.<sup>828</sup> These two short phrases, '*bismallah*' and '*al-wafa lillah*', thus, seem to be most broadly utilized Arabic phrases on administrative and paranumismatic materials during the Umayyad period (as did '*la ilaha illa allah*' and '*muhammad rasul allah*' as well as variants of the former).

While the coins and seals (albeit to a far less degree) from the first several decades of the Islamic era exemplify artistic and epigraphic syncretism, there is no consensus among numismatists, archaeologists, orientalist and other specialists in regards to what examples of cultural hybridism imply. As I have demonstrated and voiced in previous sections, Muawiya especially, saw it necessary to appeal to existing sensitivities of local non-Muslim audiences by endorsing a policy of continuity. So, the decision to emulate existing monetary systems, artistic and architectural forms, and administrative practices were associated with a strategy to preserve

<sup>826</sup> A.H. Baldwin & Sons Ltd. Islamic Coin Auction 16, Item 15, Arab Byzantine. Anon. temp. pre 'Abd al-Malik, Bronze Wuqqiyya/ounce weight,

<sup>827</sup> Johns 2003, Vol. 46, No. 4, p. 414

<sup>828</sup> Goodwin 2002, p. 90

and protect their long-term political interests. The decision to not overturn the traditional political structures, except subtly and gradually, was also driven by financial considerations, pragmatism and practicality. It was much cheaper to staff and operate a government where there was already an established pool of subjects with technical and administrative expertise to choose from than to have to train and educate an entirely new class who would produce completely new categories of material culture. Thus, the syncretic nature of several forms of administrative objects used by the Umayyads during Muawiya's rule, in particular, was an explicit demonstration of Umayyad *realpolitik*.

While much work is left to be done in establishing connections between phraseology employed on coinage and other administrative inscribed objects from the early Islamic period in Syria-Palestine (and the surrounding regions) the political contexts in which they were utilized, the Arabic phrase for '*loyalty to God*', nevertheless, was a popular one widely employed on various types of inscribed administrative and commercial objects. And while it was believed the *al-wafa lillah* coins represented intriguing examples of Arab and Umayyad coinage<sup>829</sup>, the phrase clearly found usage on a host of other materials attached to various civic and fiscal practices and procedures. Because of this, it is likely this was part of a standardized decree which, one could argue, attempted to tie the minting authorities and administrators to notions of religiosity and therefore loyalty to God, for the Umayyads, represented recognition and obedience to the state.

One can liken the phrase to the popular numismatic expression found on our own coins (*and currency*) in the United States: *In God We Trust*. Its story too, is ripe with political fervor as the motto first began to appear on U.S. coins in 1864 in the midst of the American Civil War due to "*increased religious sentiment*" that existed at the time.<sup>830</sup> The process began in November of

<sup>829</sup> Goodwin 2002, p. 90

<sup>830</sup> U.S. Department of the Treasury: History of 'In God We Trust.'

1861 after support began increasing for inclusion of a reference to ‘The Deity’ on American currency as is exemplified by an exchange between Secretary of the Treasury, Director of the Mint at Philadelphia, and a Pennsylvania reverend who wrote a letter to Secretary Chase asking for the “*recognition of the Almighty God in some form on our coins*” which “*would relieve us from the ignominy of heathenism. This would place us openly under the Divine protection we have personally claimed. From my hearth I have felt our national shame in disowning God as not the least of our present national disasters.*”<sup>831</sup> The Secretary then wrote to the Director of the Mint, telling him that “*No nation can be strong except in the strength of God, or safe except in His defense. The trust of our people in God should be declared on our national coins.*”<sup>832</sup>

In 1956, a Joint Resolution was passed by the 84<sup>th</sup> Congress and approved by President Dwight D. Eisenhower (during its military and economic rivalry with the U.S.S.R.) which made the phrase ‘In God We Trust’ the nation’s official, national motto which stemmed, in part from, the belief that “*anxious Americans valued standardization and predictability as ways to cope with the unnerving Cold War years.*”<sup>833</sup> The term first appeared on paper currency in 1957 on one-dollar silver certificate notes<sup>834</sup>, while the phrase ‘under God’ had already been added to the pledge of allegiance after legislation was passed for it three years prior in 1954.<sup>835</sup> These measures constituted a response to the U.S.S.R.’s threatening political demeanor and economic philosophy, and were embedded in a renewed sense of American patriotism and anti-communism.

Returning to the Near East of Late Antiquity, the Umayyads too, had similar considerations in the face of opposition that was both ideological and military in the form of

<sup>831</sup> Norton, Edward, et al. 1901, p. 116

<sup>832</sup> Norton, Edward, et al. 1901, p. 116

<sup>833</sup> Pach (ed.) 2017, p. 202

<sup>834</sup> U.S. Department of the Treasury: History of ‘In God We Trust.’

<sup>835</sup> Pach (ed.) 2017, p. 202

Byzantium, Christianity, and even fellow Muslims with contrasting political and religious leanings. Like the concerns of nineteenth century American ministers and politicians at the height of battle, the Rashidun and Umayyads concerns with the issue of ‘heathenism’ and how they were perceived by some of their constituents may have laid heavily on the minds of early Muslim rulers as well. The contemporary seventh century literary record regarding the Arab conquests refers to the Muslims in rather unflattering terms. For example, one account, recorded by a Palestinian Jewish writer named Jacob, writing in 634, proclaimed that “*a false prophet has appeared among the Saracens*” claiming that “*He is false, for surely the prophets do not come with sword and chariot*”<sup>836</sup>

Other accounts, by Christian writers, have been discussed in chapter two, which characterized the Arabs as violent invaders and describe the defeat of Christian Byzantium in parochial and teleological terms. How much of a role local perceptions like the ones fomented and relayed to us by the literate, ecclesiastical scribal class impacted the political psyche of early Muslim administrators is difficult to assess, but it almost certainly played a role in the political and economic approaches and methods the new Arab rulers employed in the newly conquered provinces. One tract (known as ‘Letter 14C’) written by the East Syrian monk Isho-yahb III around the middle of the seventh century describes the new conquerors as “*Arabs to whom at this time God has given control over the world.*”<sup>837</sup>

## **9. ‘ALLAHU AKBAR’: THE ISLAMIC ‘HALLELUJAH’**

Epigraphic attestations to the phrase from the Umayyad period were believed to be relatively scant and mainly limited to an Arab-Sasanian issue of coins from Marw struck under

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<sup>836</sup> Jones 1964, p. 317

<sup>837</sup> Penn 2015, pp. 29-30

the governorship of Salm b. Ziyad in 65 AH (684-685) in the midst of the second fitna.<sup>838</sup> That coin bears the phrase ‘*bismallah allahu akbar*’ (in the name of God, God is Great), in Arabic, in the outer margins of the obverse. Though difficult to prove, it is quite possible that this lead seal, similarly, was produced during the second *fitna*, i.e. civil disturbance (sometime in the 680s or early 690’s) waged by Abd al-Malik and the popular, rival caliph al-Zubayr. This rivalry played out in the battlefield as well as in the world of symbols- each party vying for legitimacy in the eyes of their constituents through the proliferation of potent religious and political proclamations on their coins and other official materials.



Fig. 74: Lead weight bearing phrase ‘*tabarak Allah*’ (Jordan National Bank Numismatic Museum, Goussous Collection- previously published)

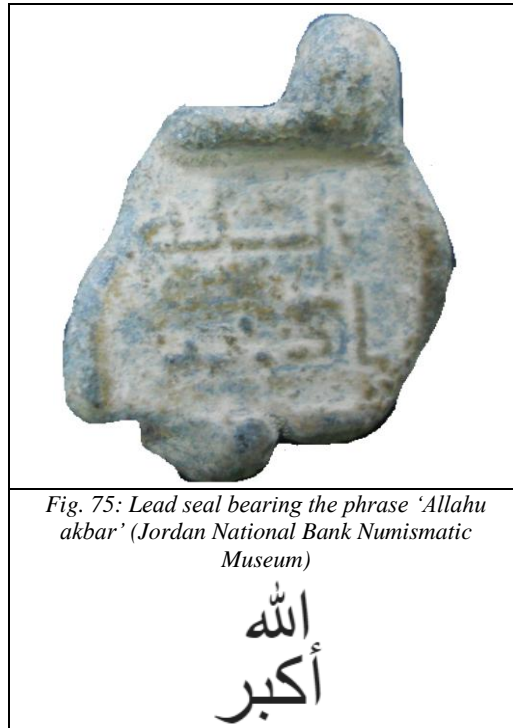
Several phrases related to the declaration of God’s greatness were produced under the Umayyads including the lead weight above which contains the two-line phrase تبرك / الله (*tabarak Allah*), which translates to ‘*proclaim God’s greatness*’ (i.e, the *takbir*). Proclaiming God’s greatness via the takbir is usually the response to a moment of triumph or victory and thus it is quite possible that such objects that carry such an expression, or any variety of it, was likely the product of a context that was rooted in jubilation (in response to a political or military achievement). For example, and while unrelated to the fitna, there is an allusion to the celebratory phrase in a report of Syrian origin believed to date to the Umayyad period regarding

<sup>838</sup> Pomerantz and Shahin 2016, p. 9



the Islamic conquests (specifically relating to Byzantium<sup>839</sup>) which, albeit anachronistically, reads:

*“You will raid Constantinople three times: the first time you will meet with disaster and hardship, the second time there will be a peace between you and them- such that mosques will be built in Constantinople and you will raid behind Constantinople together with them, then they will go back on it [the peace agreement]. The third raid will be when God will conquer it with cries of **allahu akbar** and it will be in three parts: one third will be destroyed, one third will be burned, and one third will be divided up and weighed out [as spoils]”<sup>840</sup>*



*Fig. 75: Lead seal bearing the phrase ‘Allahu akbar’ (Jordan National Bank Numismatic Museum)*

The seal above contains the phrase ‘*allahu akbar*’ in two lines. The font utilized is typical for the Umayyad period and like other seals and coins from this period, certain letter forms were preferred. Below is a comparison of some of those forms from the same general historical era used to spell ‘*Iliya*’ (from a Standing Caliph coin) and the terms ‘*akbar*’ on the Arab-Sasanian silver drachma and lead seal. In all three instances, the initial *alefs* share a horizontal tail that

<sup>839</sup> The Umayyads attempted to capture Constantinople under al-Walid in 715-717 (see Pomerantz and Shahin p. 9). Muawiya had attempted a similar invasion, even earlier, during the 650’s as governor of Syria.

<sup>840</sup> al-Marwazi 1993: 288, Nu’aym 120(a); 130 (a, b); 131(a)

extends to the right. The latter two images clearly spell out the letters *alif-kaf-ba-ra* ر ب ك ا for (Allahu) *akbar* (الله اكبر).

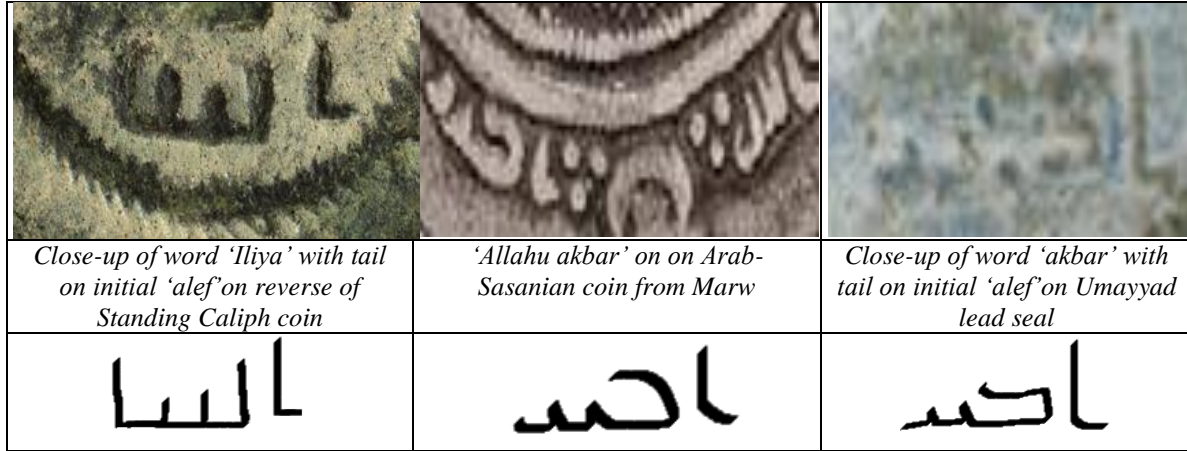


Fig. 76: Letter forms of initial 'alef' in words on three different objects

While the phrase itself represents an early liturgical expression, it enjoys widespread popularity in the Muslim world today and has for more than a millennium, but tracing its precise literary roots has proven somewhat difficult. The Quran, itself, does not make use of the full phrase '*allahu akbar*' ('*allahu*' being the nominative of '*allah*' and '*akbar*', the elative form of '*kabir*', an adjective meaning 'great') but does refer to God as '*al-kabir*' ('the Great'- one of his ninety-nine names/attributes) in six different verses.<sup>841</sup> Highlighting usage of '*al-kabir*' is verse sixty-two of Surah al-Hajj of the Quran which reads "And what they invoke besides Him, it is falsehood. And verily, God, he is the Highest, the Great (*al-Kabir*)."<sup>841</sup> The verse is transcribed in Arabic below, with the final word '*al-kabir*' (الكبير) at the end of the sentence.

ذَلِكَ يَأْتِ اللَّهُ هُوَ الْحَقُّ وَأَنْتَ مَا يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ هُوَ الْبَاطِلُ وَأَنْتَ اللَّهُ هُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْكَبِيرُ ﴿٦٢﴾

<sup>841</sup> See Quran 13:9, 31:30, 22:62, 34:23, 40:12, and 4:34 for usage of the term 'al-Kabir' as an attribute of God.

Additionally, several prophetic narrations in various *hadith* compilations mention the spiritual significance of the ‘*takbir*’<sup>842</sup> (تَكْبِير), the general term referring to vocalization of the phrase ‘*allahu akbar*’, a spiritual expression linked to Prophet Muhammad, himself.<sup>843</sup>

One such narration found in Sahih Muslim, using two forms stemming from the tri-consonantal root *k-b-r*<sup>844</sup>, reports that “*Abdullah ibn Umar narrates that a man came late to Salāh. Upon arriving to the line he started his prayer with the following words, allāhu akbaru kabīran (الله اكبر كبيراً), or ‘God is Greater, Great(est).’*”

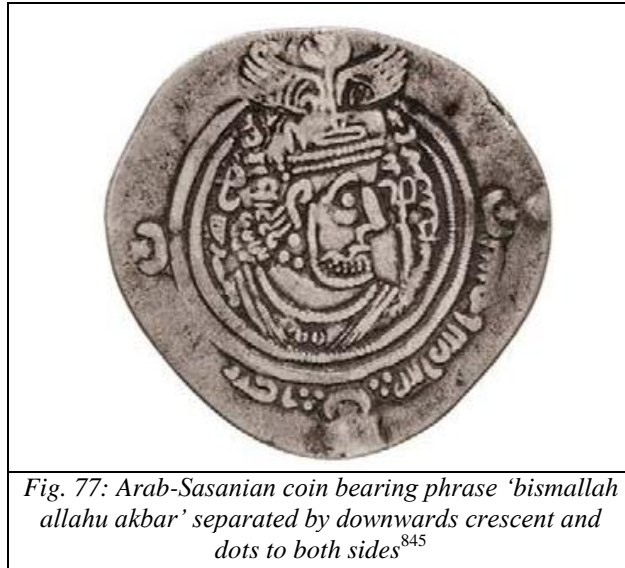


Fig. 77: Arab-Sasanian coin bearing phrase ‘*bismallah allahu akbar*’ separated by downwards crescent and dots to both sides<sup>845</sup>

A variant of *allahu akbar* can also be found in a lengthy Arabic graffito found near the famous battlesite of Karbala in south-central Iraq and dating from the time of either Muawiya II or Marwan I (*Shawwal 64 AH*) in 684 CE.<sup>846</sup>

<sup>842</sup> See Al-Muwatta 15 15.722, Al-Muwatta 49 49.1034, Hadith narrations reported by Imam Ahmad (2/131 and 75) and Abu ‘Awaanah for references to both the ‘*takbir*’ and the phrase ‘*allahu akbar*.’

<sup>843</sup> Sahih Bukhari 4:52:195 Narrated Anas: *The Prophet set out for Khaibar and reached it at night. He used not to attack if he reached the people at night, till the day broke. So, when the day dawned, the Jews came out with their bags and spades. When they saw the Prophet; they said, "Muhammad and his army!" The Prophet said, allahu akbar! (Allah is Greater) and Khaibar is ruined, for whenever we approach a nation (i.e. enemy to fight) then it will be a miserable morning for those who have been warned."*

<sup>844</sup> The term ‘*kabir*’ and its derivatives are based on the consonants *k-b-r* which is the basis for several terms related to greatness, grandiosity, majesty, nobility, age, and rank.

<sup>845</sup> Morton & Eden Ltd., 2015, Catalogue No. 73 (23rd April 2015), Lot 7.



Fig. 78: Photograph of the Kufic inscription found near Karbala, Iraq and dated to 64 AH (al-Sanduq, Sumer 1955)

The opening lines of the text “*bismallah al-rahman al-raheem allah wa kabir kabiran*” ( *بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ اللَّهُ وَكَبِيرٌ كَبِيرًا* or “*In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful, God is the great, the greatest.*” The phrase *الله وكبير كبيرًا* is found in the second line of the text.

Barbara Porter described the role of visual culture (albeit, in ancient Assyria as her reference) as having the capacity to serve as the unspoken definer of political relations between distinct audiences; some internal, others external. She supports the notion, made by Esarhaddon that the representational art found on Assyrian stele reified an imagined social hierarchy embedded in Assyrian society, some of which “*were intended to act as a deterrent, a reminder to contemporary and future enemies that opposition to Assyria would prove costly.*”<sup>847</sup> There is not extensive usage of figural art outside of, primarily, palace complexes and the qusur of the

<sup>846</sup> al-Sanduq 1955, pp. 213-218.

<sup>847</sup> Porter 2003, p. XII

*'umara* in the Umayyad realm (at least not in extant form, though much has yet to be discovered), but the heavy usage of text on both mobile materials (numismatic and par anumismatic) and on features (monuments, buildings, milestones, etc.) accomplished the same task as Assyrian or Egyptian representational art one can argue. The Arabic text undoubtedly appealed a powerful audience consisting of the Umayyad's cultural, linguistic and religious cohorts (internal audience) while concurrently invoking the political disparities between the ruler and the ruled (external audience), regardless of whether or not they understood Arabic or had ever been exposed to it, ever (as many across the region may have not). The public texts in Arabic and any and all other materials bearing it were active social commentators as well as operationalizers and enablers of a particular hierarchy that existed in the Umayyad state. In the words of Baines, "*visual representation not merely integrated into social forms, but is engaged actively to constitute them.*"<sup>848</sup>

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<sup>848</sup> Baines 2007, p. 9

## CONCLUSION

The Umayyads at different points in their short history in Syria-Palestine had to contend with the grievances of several political groups and religious communities- including Christian, Jewish and Muslim ones, which led to a host of measures that reflected various political calculations of the state. Under Muawiya, a policy of public conciliation with his Christian subjects was of the utmost importance to the survival and growth of his regime but under Abd al-Malik, the subjugation of Arab-Muslim opposition was a much greater concern if we are to read into the administrative material culture which exhibits all of the makings of a major political and cultural transition. During the early phase of Muawiya's rule as governor, Islam, and by extension, the Arabic script was of little utility in an environment that, mostly, still viewed the religion in ambiguous terms, and sometimes with outright hostility, if we were to accept the truthfulness of the contemporary written accounts about the new faith by Christian writers at or around the time of the conquests.

It was not necessarily the lack of institutions during Muawiya's time that decelerated the deployment of Arabic-language and Islamic-themed numismatic and paranumismatic objects in Syria-Palestine, but rather part of a more calculated policy aimed at a slow adjuration and gradual imposition of Arab and (a still developing) Muslim culture as a safe-bet towards the ensuring of long-term hegemony in the region. In the Hejaz and other parts of Arabia, the Arabic orthography had already been mobilized as a form of political currency among his Arab kin and demographic counterparts in Arabia. Under Abd al-Malik, implementation and enforcement of written Arabic as a script of prestige and government was a declarative measure; one that implied at minimum, an attempt at redefining the public nature of the Umayyad polity (although internally, its bureaucratic practices were often emulations of previous governments) and was the

end-product of centuries of orthographic development, experimentation, modification, and ultimately, standardization that coincided with the rise of a new faith in Arabia and a new state based out of Syria-Palestine. The acquisition of Arabic writing as the formal orthography of the caliphate led to a reimagining of the very communities that existed within the geographic confines of that state, highlighting Baines's notion that a community's self perception can be altered by the adoption of new forms of writing which, in some instances, can serve as a barometer for social change.<sup>849</sup>

The Umayyads saw great utility in writing in Arabic, understanding that its extensive usage could be used as a major tool in the quest for statehood and supremacy and as they rightly assumed, its imposition played a profound and highly visible role in the cultural re-orientation of the region which was constructed along newly devised political lines (i.e. a new institution known as the 'caliphate' eclipsed old titles and offices). The production of materials such as coins, seals, weights, and related objects that bore such writing could be seen by the region's inhabitants as well as the Umayyad leaders, themselves, a major historical triumph over Byzantium, Sasanid Iran and over other competing Arab and Muslim movements that challenged them throughout their tenure. The inclusion of Arabic writing on plaques and in mosaics adorning buildings, public displays (i.e. faces of structures and city-gates), in the *suq*, on mosque facades, on milestones and in other accessible, public arenas was a "*sign of power marking boundaries; it indicated not that the group within was bound by a common language or common beliefs, but that the group was bound by a common rule*"<sup>850</sup>

While the Bani Umayya's reign out of Syria-Palestine was abruptly cut short, their tenure was marked by a collective hypergraphia that permeated the Umayyad polity, especially during

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<sup>849</sup> Baines 2007, p. 35

<sup>850</sup> Bierman 1998, p. 31

the Marwanid period under Abd al-Malik, and the deliberate choice to universally implement the Arabic orthography as a replacement for Greek (and Persian in Iran) constituted a major cultural *coup* in the region- a region that saw the Arabs before Islam, primarily, as clients to the powers of the day. Those days were no more.

While the Muslim leaders took Arabic writing from its Christian originators and used it for the advancement of their own quasi-religious Arab state, their ability to magnify the script's public profile also bolstered its popularity among its Christian population as we saw from the coins and from a more limited number of seals and weights that bore Christian symbols and/or phrases (or both) for the first time (at least on the popular, regional level). Thus, while Arabic writing was amended to represent the extolment of Islam and glorify the new office of the caliphate under Abd al-Malik, it subsequently became detached from the clutches of the ecclesiastical institutions and leaders of Arab Christianity in Syria-Palestine. In other words, the existing Arabic script was de-Christianized, then repackaged, averted, then reapplied as a powerful political resource in the forging and dispensation of Islamic culture. The Umayyads took advantage of this innovation and were, therefore, benefactors of a technological form (the Arabic script) that had yet to be politically exploited on a major scale by a major regional power until the rise of the Umayyads.

The supplanting of nearly all other writing systems by a singular Arabic orthography that became the universal script for the Arabic language that exists today did not become widespread in Syria-Palestine until the late seventh century. Like Jeremy Johns' proposal, which positioned the Umayyad state as being the vehicle for the dissemination of Islamic material culture,<sup>851</sup> the same can be said about the Arabic orthography, which as a result of the ossification of the Arab state, it becomes the language and script of prestige, liturgy, and empire. Up until that point, and

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<sup>851</sup> Johns 2003, p. 433



especially in the Levant, Greek was still the language of administration and business and among the Eastern churches, dialects of Aramaic as spoken vernaculars were still popular, as the documentary record confirms.

Furthermore, the Umayyads and so many major regional and world powers that preceded them, constructed and maintained bureaucratic institutions that promoted political and religious ideals through the production of stately material culture- much of which bore writing. As such, the policies articulated through these instruments were reflective of the political arrangements, institutions and authorities that governed them.<sup>852</sup> The Umayyads' inscribed administrative materials represented several manifestations of cultural and political autonomy in which the Arabic script was an integral part of. Of course, each inscribed object possessed its own qualities and served its own functions. Some objects bore texts meaningful to very specific audiences (e.g. administrators and their seals), others were emblazoned with profound imagery or symbols (such as the 'Standing Caliph' and post-reform coins), but all of which required contemplation and strategic decision-making on behalf of the regime and their craftspeople. Nicholas P. Carter, in his work on Mesoamerican epigraphy and literacy, expands on the issue of textual and iconographic symbolism, noting that the very physical and visual "*arrangement of signs in an emblematic text can be meaningful*" and that inscriptions can be made up of 'multiple signs' that can convey or relay various types of information about its author.<sup>853</sup>

The coins the Umayyads produced, particularly under Abd al-Malik, were without a doubt, loaded emblematic texts with several layers of symbolism, arranged in specific fashion and meant to convey and relay particular messages about him and his state. Certainly, the decision to use specific words, text, scripts, imagery, and icons was not a simple attempt at

<sup>852</sup> Richards and Van Buren 2000, pp. 64-92

<sup>853</sup> Carter 2017, p. 4

artistry but about maximizing a public profile to reflect the direction of the developing, Arabizing, Islamizing polity.

And while it may seem obvious, the usage of any given language or script, especially in environments where other forms of writing or orthographies were/are available, is often a very telling feature of the party or state that promotes them. The formulation of an indigenous, nativist Arab historical narrative, for example, would be best constructed through the institutionalization of a common language and writing system sanctioned by a polity that had means.

Now, whether or not a significant portion of the population of Syria-Palestine was literate in Arabic before or during Arab and Umayyad rule is irrelevant to the political qualities of the cursive Arabic script, itself, as the new and distinct orthography was ripe with triumph. This phenomenon speaks to Kersel's and Rutz's, as well as Baines's argument that while it is true texts in antiquity served multiple uses such as facilitating or defining social, political, economic relations, they conveyed certain aspects of culture to those who observed or acknowledged them, regardless of their level of literacy.<sup>854</sup> Bierman, too, speaks directly to this issue, arguing that *"the mere presence of the group-based alphabet, and not its content or its placement, that was the definitive territorial marker for the group audience"*<sup>855</sup>

The ability to articulate messages in Arabic on a mass scale, beyond just for consumption among local audiences, was the ultimate projection of power, and one that other Arab polities at the time did not or could not successfully accomplish without the proper political experience and technical expertise or military prowess. The political actor that was best able to control the production of inscribed material culture in Arabic could control perceptions among members of the same language group (as well as non-Arabs who encountered the texts) and were better

<sup>854</sup> Rutz and Kersel (eds.) 2014, p. 1

<sup>855</sup> Bierman 1998, p. 43

equipped to govern the production of knowledge. As Chrisomalis argued, writing is of almost immeasurable utility when implemented by polities, as it is able to “*facilitate ritual, political, and technical practices that arise in states.*”<sup>856</sup>

Muawiya’s polity (there was no hereditary dynasty yet until 680) exhibited a rather linguistically syncretic administrative order where both Greek and Arabic (and other language and scripts) were sometimes simultaneously used but which ultimately gave way to Arabic at the graphic and communicative levels in the decade following his death. He commissioned public texts in Greek in Syria-Palestine (Hammat Gader bath inscription), silver coins that closely copied Sasanian models that named him in Pahlavi, and simultaneously issued lead seals completely in Arabic for Mesopotamia.

During the formative period of Muawiya’s quasi-imperial regime, the decision to utilize two distinct orthographies (Greek and Arabic) was partly a strategic one and partly a necessary one that Muawiya and his bureaucrats found most conducive to maintaining power. Jeremy Black, ’s *The Demise of Cuneiform Writing in Elam in The Disappearance of Writing Systems* posited that the marginalization of one script, which may have resulted from a loss in prestige, a reduction in the number of scribes or literate peoples due to war or natural disaster, or as the consequence of a geo-political or cultural shift may inadvertently lead to a reconsideration of ‘language choice.’<sup>857</sup> The linguistic transition that resulted from the Arab-Muslim conquest of Syria-Palestine during the 630’s had the long-term consequence of supplanting the Greek language and script with Arabic which gradually took place over the course of several decades, culminating in a state that instituted a new form of Arab sovereignty and proliferated a new, non-Christian, non-Jewish faith called ‘Islam’ as the religion of victors. Islam, itself, as a depository

<sup>856</sup> Chrisomalis (in Olson and Torrance) 2009, p. 71

<sup>857</sup> Baines, Bennet, and Houston 2008, pp. 61-65; Chrisomalis 2010, pp. 403-410; Houston, Baines, and Cooper 2003, pp. 430-479

of symbols, ideas, and words, was used to ratify the Umayyad's vision for Arab political unity under their rule.

Under Muawiya, the early Umayyad state's demographics still overwhelmingly favored its Christian population, so, as head of a growing polity, he had to find creative ways to garner their loyalty and did so by placating long-existing religious institutions and communities by allowing Christian religio-political expression on some cultural materials including state coinage while simultaneously diluting Christian power and influence through other financial measures such as taxation (i.e. the jizya as well as acquiring more control over money flowing into non-Muslim institutions). Although the Byzantines had been defeated in Syria-Palestine, their empire, though shrunken, still survived and bordered the new Arab polity. The political and economic policies instituted by this new state must have taken into account its proximity to Byzantium alongside its potential influence on the Umayyad's own Christian constituents (as is evidenced by both Muawiya's assaults on Constantinople and Abd al-Malik's victory at Sebastopolis).

Under Abd al-Malik and his sons and later successors, the primary concern was not how to pacify the region's Christians and other non-Muslim populations, but how to defeat rival Arab, Muslim movements who all harbored anti-Umayyad grievances and who battled with them in various physical and ideological arenas. Abd al-Malik's assertion as religious and political head of a new Arab order was underwritten by a coherent administration and bureaucratic machinery that he directed in the creation of literate, visual and hypergraphic material culture which legitimated his position and furthered his regime's ability to inform its audiences of its presence and its power.

The Umayyads, as the archaeological, numismatic, and epigraphic records attest to, were responsible for the universalization of the Arabic language, its script, and of a doctrinal form of

Islam- all of which were made possible by the appropriation and political mechanization of the Arabic orthography by successfully converting it into bureaucratic capital.

The Quran, which represents the oldest and largest body of literature that the Arabic orthography was adapted for up to that point in history (that is extant), can also be understood as a driving force in the manufacturing of Muslim political and religious identity. Its verses consist of a mix of often rhythmic poetry (which served a mnemonic function for its reader) and prose that made its style appealing and its structure familiar to a poetically-inclined Arab constituency.

The text uses cursive letter-forms and orthographic conventions relatively new to the communities of the Near East outside of Christian institutions and their employees (e.g. church scribes) and were the product of experimentation and standardization that copyists and scribes partook in under the aegis and patronage of the ambitious Umayyad elites. The new scripture, transcribed in a writing system that had once been reserved for ecclesiastical displays and tied to church authorities or missions, now found a powerful voice in a cohesive Arabic-language scripture in a distinct Semitic orthography that introduced some old, but also some new distinctly Arab and Islamic concepts to the world of Abrahamic theology. The Umayyads were deeply involved in the arrangement and standardization of the (early) Quranic script and its textual format, and were determined to rival and/or eclipse the power and prestige associated with Byzantium<sup>858</sup>, Christendom's earthly representative, through the proliferation of their own scripture, in their own language, and using a form of writing that was distinct from those used in any other previous holy text.

The process of linguistic and orthographic appropriation and imposition both sanctioned and buttressed the pillars of state formation under the caliphs. While the state, itself, lasted until 750 CE, collapsing at the hands of the Abbasids and following a devastating earthquake the

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<sup>858</sup> Déroche 2014, pp. 139-141

previous year, the Umayyads left an extensive material legacy that students and scholars are approaching with increased curiosity and vigor. It is certainly true that the Umayyad caliphate persisted in Andalusia until the eleventh century, but the Umayyad caliphate based in the Near East succumbed to destruction after only eighty-nine years, having met a premature demise. Regardless of how short its tenure, “*old empires never entirely die, and some strongly resist fading away. In other words, empires possess a potent afterlife.*”<sup>859</sup> The Umayyad’s material legacy, in the form of inscribed administrative objects and written and visual culture, are a clear indication of this fact.

Emergence of the Arabic script, for the Umayyads, was not a consequence of state formation, but the state, itself, was a benefactor of this existing, albeit sparsely used system (mainly due to the absence of an autonomous or independent pre-Islamic state enterprise that coincided with the founding and usage of that particular orthographic style). In many ways, the Umayyad’s chief legacy was the Arabic writing system which assisted in the launching of an intense campaign of state-building that appropriated, activated, and instrumentalized Arabic writing as a technology in which to demonstrate authority and project power and which cemented both the Arabic language and its alphabet, as well as Islam, in several parts of the world. The inscribed administrative material culture of the Umayyads that includes coins, seals, weights, and other texts documented and presented in this dissertation are direct evidence of the struggle for the leaders of this community of believers to form a new, layered cultural identity for the Arabs and Muslim leaders, and who ultimately succeeded in doing so, changing the course of world history along the way.

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<sup>859</sup> Alcock, et. al (eds.) 2009, p. 370

The written legacy they left behind unevenly affected the generations of the original conquered populations, but without a doubt, their linguistic and orthographic legacy went on to become among the world's most prolific. Today, there are some four-hundred and twenty million Arabic-speakers (native and non-native), it is currently the fifth most spoken language on earth, and has become one of the official languages of the United Nations. Furthermore, the majority of the world's Muslim population (~1.57 billion) has some familiarity with both the language (mainly a liturgical familiarity) and the script (most Muslims are exposed to the Arabic script in order to learn to read the Quran in its sacred, original language).

In addition, over the course of the past fourteen centuries, the Arabic script was adopted (with modifications in nearly every instance) to serve as the graphic representation for languages such as Turkish (until the 1930's), Persian, Pashto, Kurdish, Urdu, Dari, Tajik, Arwi, Bosnian, Azeri, Kazakh, Balti, Hausa, Baluchi, Somali, Kabyle, Malay, Chaghati, Uyghur, Rohingya, Sindhi, Chechen, Shabaki, Comorian, Kashmiri, Sindhi, Uzbek and several others at some time or another.

Today, while spoken versions of Arabic are plentiful, it is its orthographic portrayal that continues to serve as the single, most unifying aspect of the contemporary and global, imagined Muslim community (i.e. *ummah*). It is the seemingly immutable Arabic alphabet and writing system that has persevered, withstanding the test of time, and serving as a testament to the success of the Umayyads nearly fourteen centuries ago. Thousands of Arabic dialects, without analogous written representations to express them in, exist today, with nearly all of its speakers finding common ground in Arabic's written, *not* spoken form(s).

## CATALOG OF Umayyad Lead Seals in the Jordan National Bank Numismatic Museum

The lead bullae/seals presented in the first part of this catalog are all housed in the Jordan National Bank Numismatic Museum. Permission has been granted to me by the museum's curators Dr. Nayef G. Goussous and Dr. Hassan al-Zuod to publish these materials in this dissertation.

In regards to the arrangement of the materials, the lead bullae (each seal will be prefixed with the acronym LB for 'Lead Bulla' followed by a number, beginning with '1') that I examined, documented and photographed have been categorized based on their written content as opposed to any other identifying feature. A general typology is offered below that classifies seals into four primary categories:





- 1) Those bearing religious legends/phrases/terms (e.g. '*bismallah*')
- 2) Those containing place-names, toponyms, geographic identifications (e.g. '*Filastin*')
- 3) Those bearing titles or proper names including the names of governors, administrators, caliphs, and/or other political figures as well as private individuals (e.g. '*abd allah*'/'*Abd al-Malik*')
- 4) Those bearing legends containing any combination of the aforementioned terms.








\*A fifth section bearing undeciphered texts is also included at the end of the catalog.



## SEALS BEARING RELIGIOUS LEGENDS


<p><b>LB1</b> Uniface "Bismallah" in two lines (In the name of God)</p> <p>بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ</p> <p>5.7g, 25mm</p>			
<p><b>LB2</b> Uniface "Bismallah" (In the name of God)</p> <p>بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ</p> <p>29.6g, 25mm</p>			
<p><b>LB3</b> Uniface "Bismallah" (In the name of God)</p> <p>بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ</p> <p>22.3g, 25mm</p>			
<p><b>LB4</b> Uniface: Allahu Akbar (God is great)</p> <p>اللّٰهُ اَكْبَرُ</p> <p>8.7gr, 19mm</p>			

<p><b>LB5</b> Uniface "Lillah" (for God)</p> <p>الله</p> <p>12.9g, 20mm</p>	
<p><b>LB6</b> Uniface "Al-Wafa Lillah" (Loyalty is to God) with star above</p> <p>الوفا لله</p> <p>3.3g, 15mm</p>	
<p><b>LB7</b> Obverse: La elaha illah Allah. Reverse: Muhammad Rasul Allah</p> <p>لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله</p> <p>5.9g, 17mm</p>	
<p><b>LB8</b> Obverse: La elaha illah Allah. Reverse: Muhammad Rasul Allah</p> <p>لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله</p> <p>6.7g, 17mm</p>	

<p><b>LB9</b> Obverse: La elaha illa Allah around edges and Muhammad Rasul Allah in center). Reverse: Unclear (worn/smooth) لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله 5.1g, 15mm</p>				
<p><b>LB10</b> Obverse: Bismallah? Reverse: Ameer al- Mu'mineen? بسم الله أمير المؤمنين 11g, 22x16mm</p>				
<p><b>LB11</b> Obverse: 'Baraka' with cross above بركة 9.3g, 15mm</p>				
<p><b>LB12</b> Uniface: 'baraka' with cross above بركة 10.9g, 17mm</p>				





<p><b>LB13</b> Six lines of text/undeciphered 7.5g, 27mm x 22mm</p>	
<p><b>LB14</b> Uniface: bismillah al rahman al raheem al wafa lillah al-Askandariya  (In the name of God the Compassionate, the Merciful, loyalty is to God- Alexandria) بسم الله الرحمن الر حيم و قوة الله الاسكندرية 16.4g, 16x31mm</p>	
<p><b>LB15</b> Obverse: Amir? (corrupted tail) امير  Reverse: Allah الله  5.4g, 13mm</p>	
<p><b>LB16</b> Obverse: Allahuma Rabna (God, Our Lord)  Reverse: Baraka mina? (Blessings from us?) بركة اللهم منا ربنا 13.3g, 20mm x22mm</p>	

<p><b>LB17</b> Uniface: bismallah amr Allah bil-wafa</p> <p>(In the name of God, God commands loyalty)</p> <p>بِسْمِ اللَّهِ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ الْوَفَا</p> <p>1.8g, 12mm</p>			
<p><b>LB18</b> Uniface: Baraka? (broken up into three lines)</p> <p>(Blessings) cross above</p> <p>بِرْكَة</p> <p>9.3g, 16mm</p>			
<p><b>LB 19</b> Uniface: Baraka? (broken up into three lines)</p> <p>(Blessings) cross above</p> <p>بِرْكَة</p> <p>10.8g, 19mm</p>			
<p><b>LB 20</b> Uniface: Bismallah al-Wafa Lillah</p> <p>(In the name of God, loyalty is for God)</p> <p>بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الْو فَة لِلَّه</p> <p>16.1g, 23mm</p>			


<p><b>LB 21</b> Uniface: Lillah (for God)</p> <p>الله</p> <p>17.0g, 15mm</p>			
<p><b>LB 22</b> Outer margins: La ilaha illa Allah Center: Muhammad rasul Allah</p> <p>لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله</p> <p>5.1g, 17mm</p>			
<p><b>LB23</b> Undeciphered text Obverse: La [ ] Reverse: (wa)hduhu? 2.8g, 15mm</p>			
<p><b>LB24</b> Uniface: Nasr-Allah (God's victory)</p> <p>نصر الله</p> <p>14.6g, 19mm</p>			

## SEALS BEARING PLACE-NAMES (TOWNS, CITIES, REGIONS, TOPONYMS)




<p><b>LB25</b> Uniface Al-Urdun in two lines  (The Jordan) الأردن دن 7.7g, 16mm</p>			
<p><b>LB26</b> Uniface: Hulahl Ardth Filastin  (Master/Chief of the Land of Palestine) حلاهل ارض فلسطين 5.9g, 19mm</p>			
<p><b>LB27</b> Uniface Halahl Ardth Al-Urdun  (Master of the Land of Jordan) حلاهل ارض الأردن 17g, 21mm</p>			

<p><b>LB28</b> Obverse: Bi'Iliya? (In Jerusalem)</p> <p>Reverse: Iliya? (Jerusalem?)</p> <p>بايليا</p> <p>6.9g, 17mm</p>	
<p><b>LB29</b> Obverse: Unclear legends, lower center right 'Al- Shamm" (The Shamm/Greater Syria)</p> <p>Reverse: Unclear legends</p> <p>[ ]</p> <p>الشام</p> <p>4.5g, 20mm</p>	
<p><b>LB30</b> Uniface: Ardh Ba'albek  (Land of Ba'albek)</p> <p>ارض بعلبك</p> <p>6.4g, 18mm</p>	
<p><b>LB31</b> Obverse: Muhammad bin Ubayda (Muhammad, son of Ubayda)</p> <p>Reverse: Ahl Homs? (People of Homs)</p> <p>محمد بن عبدة اهل حمص</p> <p>13.5g, 26mm</p>	










<p><b>LB32</b> Undeciphered Text Obverse: Zar fi [ ]  Reverse: Sit Adra'at (Six Der'aa?)  3.1g, 12mm</p>	
<p><b>LB33</b> Uniface: [ ]bi-Wasit fi Dhu al-Qi'da sana khamasa wa thamanin  ([ ]in Wasit [in the month of] Dhu'l-Qi'da in the year eighty-five.) [ ] بوا سط في ذو القعدة بسنة خمس و ثمانين 27.5g, 30mm</p>	
<p><b>LB34</b> Uniface: Tubi'at Homs  (Stamp of Homs) طبعة حمس</p>	




<p><b>LB35</b> Obverse: Muhammad bin Ubayda (Muhammad son of Ubayda)</p> <p>Reverse: Ardth Ba'albek (Land of Baa'albek)</p> <p>أرض بعلبك محمد بن عبدة</p> <p>9.8g, 15mm</p>	
<p><b>LB36</b> Obverse: Muhammad bin Ubayda (Muhammad son of Ubayda)</p> <p>Reverse: Ardth Ba'albek (Land of Baa'albek)</p> <p>أرض بعلبك محمد بن عبدة</p> <p>8.6g, 18mm</p>	
<p><b>LB37</b> Obverse: Muhammad bin Ubayda (Muhammad son of Ubayda)</p> <p>Reverse: Ardth Ba'albek (Land of Baa'albek)</p> <p>أرض بعلبك محمد بن عبدة</p> <p>6.8g, 18mm</p>	

<p><b>LB38</b> Obverse: Muhammad bin Ubayda (Muhammad son of Ubayda)</p> <p>Reverse: Ardth Ba'albek (Land of Baa'albek)</p> <p>أرض بعليك محمد بن عبدة</p> <p>6.9g, 17mm</p>	
<p><b>LB39</b> Obverse: Muhammad bin Ubayda (Muhammad son of Ubayda)</p> <p>Reverse: Ardth Ba'albek (Land of Baa'albek)</p> <p>أرض بعليك محمد بن عبدة</p> <p>6.6g, 15mm</p>	
<p><b>LB40</b> Obverse: Muhammad bin Ubayda (Muhammad son of Ubayda)</p> <p>Reverse: Ardth Ba'albek (Land of Baa'albek)</p> <p>أرض بعليك محمد بن عبدة</p> <p>8.8g, 20mm</p>	

## SEALS BEARING NAMES AND/OR TITLES

<p><b>LB41</b> Obverse: Son of Ubayd Allah (starting at line three) [ ] [ ] bin 'Ubayd Allah [ ] [ ] بن عبید الله</p> <p>Reverse: [Undeciphered text]</p> <p>2.8g, 13mm</p>	
<p><b>LB42</b> Obverse: '..Li-Abdallah' (retrograde 'For Abdallah) لعبد الله</p> <p>Reverse: 'Al- Ameer..(retrograde 'The Commander'.) الامير</p> <p>9.6g, 17x21mm</p>	
<p><b>LB43</b> Obverse: 'Al-Umum ma'na wa Yazid? (The Nations are with us and Yazid?) الامم معنا و يزيد</p> <p>Reverse: Al-Ameer _____ (The Commander..?) الامير</p> <p>20.8g, 28mm</p>	



<p><b>LB44</b> Uniface 'Amr Al-Amir. in line 1 Line 1: Ubayd Allah?  (The commander has ordered.) امر الامير عبيد الله 8.8g, 25mm</p>	
<p><b>LB45</b> Obverse: 'Abd Allah (Servant of God)  Reverse: Allah or Lillah الله / عبد الله 13.0g, 23x16mm</p>	
<p><b>LB46</b> Uniface seal: Billah yu'min Yousif Mukhlis  (In God believes Yousif Mukhlis) با الله يومن يوسف مخلص 4.1g, 13mm</p>	
<p><b>LB47</b> Uniface seal: Billah yu'min Yousif Mukhlis  (In God believes Yousif Mukhlis) با الله يومن يوسف مخلص 3.4g, 15mm</p>	

<p><b>LB48</b>  Uniface seal: Billah  yu'min Yousif Mukhlis  (In God believes Yousif  Mukhlis)  با الله  يؤمن  يوسف مخلص  5.9g, 20mm</p>			
<p><b>LB49</b>  Uniface seal: Billah  [yu'min] Yousif Mukhlis  (In God believes Yousif  Mukhlis)  با الله  يؤمن  يوسف مخلص  2.5g, 15mm</p>			
<p><b>LB50</b>  Uniface seal: Billah  [yu'min] Yousif Mukhlis  (In God believes Yousif  Mukhlis)  با الله  يؤمن  يوسف مخلص  2.6g, 14mm</p>			

<p><b>LB51</b> Uniface .ala. Lillah abd allah Muhammad.</p> <p>(.for God, the Servant of God, Muhammad..)</p> <p>[ ] للة عبد الله محمد ام [ ] 3.2g, 29mm x 20mm</p>	
<p><b>LB52</b> Obverse: Amara bisun'ih Abd allah Marwan Amir Tabariya LillahWaf</p> <p>[The] Servant of God Marwan ordered the production of [this seal] The Commander of Tiberias For God, Full value</p> <p>[Reverse undeciphered] امر بسنعه عبد الله مروان امير طبرية واف 36g, 40mm x 32mm</p>	
<p><b>LB53</b> Uniface: Al-qadr? (القدر) 'The Power' (?) القدر 8.4g, 16mm</p>	

<p><b>LB54</b>  Obverse: Undeciphered  Reverse: Amir... al-  mu'mineen?    (Commander of the  Believers?)  امير المؤمنين  14.7g, 27mm</p>	
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**SEALS BEARING 'MIXED' LEGENDS (INCLUDING A COMINBATION OF TERMS/GEOGRAPHIC NAMES)**

<p><b>LB55</b>  Obverse: Khatim  Dimashq?  (Seal of Damascus)    Reverse: Umar bin R.  (Umar, son of R..)  خاتم / عمر بن ر / دمشق  6.1g, 16mm</p>	
<p><b>LB56</b>  Obverse: Baraka min  Allah?    (Blessings from God)    Reverse: _____, Al-  Harith?, Ba'albak?  بركة / [ ] / الحريث? / من الله / بعلبك?  13.6g, 17mm</p>	



<p><b>LB57</b>  Uniface: Li Abdallah bin Umar al-Baraka    (for Abdullah, son of Umar, blessings)  لَعْبَدِ اللَّهِ  بْنِ عَمْرِو  الْبَرَكَةِ  8.7g, 25mm</p>	
<p><b>LB58</b>  Obverse: Bismallah?  (In the name of God)    Reverse: Bi-Wasit?  (In Wasit?)  بِسْمِ / بُو  اللَّهِ / سَطِ  7.0g, 17mm</p>	
<p><b>LB59</b>  Obverse: Jawad?    Reverse: Misr? (Egypt)  مِصْرَ / جَوَادِ  10.5g, 18mm</p>	
<p><b>LB60</b>  Bi-facial (unclear legends)    11.5g, 20mm</p>	

<p><b>LB61</b> Obverse: Muthana b. Ziyad</p> <p>Reverse: Ahl Homs (People of Homs)</p> <p>المثني / اهل حمص بن زياد</p> <p>14.4g, 21mm</p>	
<p><b>LB62</b> Uniface: Mima amara bihi al-khalifah (amir al-mu'mineen) 'ala yidee [.amr bin.]</p> <p>The Caliph [..], Commander of the Believers ordered [..] Amr bin [..]</p> <p>21.6g, 30mm (possibly double-struck)</p>	

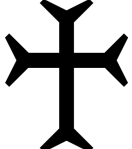




### SEALS BEARING CORRUPTED OR UNCLEAR/UNDECIPHERED LEGENDS





<p><b>LB63</b> 5.0g, 15mm</p>	
<p><b>LB64</b> 5.8g, 15mm</p>	




<p><b>LB65</b> Obverse: Mar-wan? (two lines) مرو ان</p> <p>Reverse: Unclear</p> <p>5.5g, 15mm</p>	
<p><b>LB66</b> Obverse: Unclear</p> <p>Reverse (line three, 'mail/post'): [b]areed? بريد</p> <p>5.0g, 15mm</p>	
<p><b>LB67</b> Obverse: Unclear, single word (three letters)</p> <p>Reverse: Unclear (bin.?)</p> <p>5.7g, 15mm (4mm thick)</p>	
<p><b>LB68</b> Uniface: Unclear legends (lillah?... Allah)</p> <p>4.7g, 23mm</p>	

<p><b>LB69</b>  (al-amir Muhammad bin).. had  yitba' ala yidee/bin  الامير محمد بن  [ ] هد يتبع  [ ] على يدي  [ ] بن  The commander Muhammad,  son of [.] stamps [.] son of [.]</p> <p>18.3g, 31mm</p>	
<p><b>LB70</b>  8.6g, 27mm</p>	
<p><b>LB 71</b>  Undeciphered  No Details</p>	
<p><b>LB72</b>  No Details  Single word  Star below  Uniface: Kaland?  كلند</p>	

CATALOG OF Umayyad LEAD SEALS IN A PRIVATE COLLECTION

<p><b>LB73</b></p> <p>Undeciphered Arabic terms to left and right of central cross</p>  <p>10mm, 1.9g</p>	
<p><b>LB74</b></p> <p>Obverse: Khatim Kurat Samwal (Seal of the Metropolis of Samuel)</p> <p>Reverse: Iqlim Bayt Ghor al-Kubra? (District of Greater Bayt Ghor)</p> <p>خاتم / اقليم كورة / بيت غور? صموال / الكبرة</p> <p>26mm, 11.7g</p>	
<p><b>LB75</b></p> <p>Obverse: Khatim Kurat Iliya (Seal of the Metropolis of Jerusalem)</p> <p>Reverse: Iqlim Bayt Lahm Bayt Sahour (Districts of Bethlehem and Bayt Sahour)</p> <p>خاتم / اقليم كورة / بيت غلحم اييليا / بيت ساحور</p> <p>26mm, 11.7g</p>	
<p><b>LB76</b></p> <p>Uniface: 'La elaha illa Allah' (There is no god but God) within circle</p> <p>لا إله إلا الله</p> <p>25mm, 3.2g</p>	

<p><b>LB77</b> Uniface: Hulahlil Ardth Filastin (Master/Chief of the Land of Palestine)</p> <p>حلال ارض فلسطين</p> <p>15mm, 6.8g</p>		
<p><b>LB78</b> Uniface: Kurat al-Salt (The Metropolis of as-Salt) with undeciphered word on line 3</p> <p>كورة السلط [ ]</p> <p>20mm, 9.2g</p>		
<p><b>LB79</b> Uniface: Undeciphered (Four lines of text)</p> <p>28mm, 18.3g</p>		
<p><b>LB80</b> Uniface: Amar bihad.. Allah Hisham Amir al-Mu'mineen [ ] امر بهد... بسم الله هشام امير المؤمنين [ ] (Ordered in the name of God, Hisham, Commander of the Faithful...)</p>		

24mm, 4.9g		
<p><b>LB81</b> No Details Undeciphered (Four lines of text) Broken at top left</p> <p>26mm 7.3g</p>		
<p><b>LB82</b> No Details Undeciphered (Three lines of Text, Three words)</p> <p>12mm, 6.7g</p>		
<p><b>LB83</b> Obvrerse: Muhammad [bin] U'bayda (Muhammad son of Ubayda)</p> <p>Reverse: [Ardh] Ba'albak</p> <p>أرض بعابك محمد بن عبدة</p> <p>13mm, 9.4g</p>		

<p><b>LB84</b> Undeciphered Bifacial Obverse: Three lines of text Reverse: Two lines of Text with star below</p> <p>1.8g</p>	
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## APPENDIX: SITUATING THE COINS ARCHAEOLOGICALLY

Coins serve as fixed historical markers of a given time period and place and can be useful in the dating of contexts, loci, or other archaeological strata. Of course, using coins to date sites can be problematic as it becomes an increasingly complicated affair if the same coins circulated for a lengthy period of time (or if they contain static dates as in the case of some Arab-Byzantine and Arab-Sasanian types), thus skewing one's ability to successfully infer anything about its date of production or the time in which the coin circulated or was deposited at the site, itself.<sup>860</sup>

However, I felt it necessary to dedicate a small section of this dissertation to the documentation of find-spots associated with early Islamic/Umayyad coinage as a potentially useful tool for the archaeologist and numismatist interested in this period.

Below is a list of archaeological literature that contains documented archaeological proveniences for Umayyad coins from the areas that currently make up historical Syria-Palestine (including Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, and the Palestinian Territories). As a side note, the overwhelming majority of the coins recovered, as the following data makes clear, were post-reform types (issued after Abd al-Malik's major coin reform in 697 CE).

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<sup>860</sup> Akin, Bard, and Akin 2016, p. 211

## DOCUMENTED ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROVENIENCES OF Umayyad

### COINS FOUND IN AREAS CORRESPONDING TO HISTORICAL SYRIA-PALESTINE

#### 1. 2006 Excavations during a field season at Madaba by Laurier archaeologist Debra Foran

-Three copper Umayyad *fulus* from three different, but related contexts inside of a late Byzantine/early Islamic building (mosque) were recovered during excavations in Madaba. I personally attributed the coins in 2015 upon the request of Dr. Debra Foran. Two of the coins were struck in Damascus (bearing the phrase '*dharb Dimashq*') while the third coin's iconography (palm tree) makes al-Ramla the likeliest candidate.

#### 2. May 2015 under the directorship of Professor Jolanta Mlynarczyk (Institute of Archaeology- University of Warsaw)

-One Umayyad post-reform copper *fulus* (that I personally attributed during an interaction at Dar as Saraya Museum in Irbid) was recovered in Bayt Ras during archaeological excavations by a Polish excavation/survey team.

#### 3. May 2015 Dar as-Saraya/Irbid Archaeological Museum records

-Six Umayyad post-reform copper *fulus* were recovered in Quweilba (Abila), 'Ataroz, and Pella (Tabaqat Fahl) during excavations (Dar as-Saraya/Irbid Archaeological Museum).

-One post-reform *fulus* was retrieved by police from an individual in Mafraq in 1975.

#### 4. University of Michigan Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, Ann Arbor

-One Umayyad post-reform copper coin was recovered during excavations at Siloam (Jerusalem).

#### 5. Shdaifat, Younis M.; Ben Badhann, Zakariya N). *Shuqayra Al-Gharbiyya: A New Early Islamic Compound in Central Jordan (2008)*

- A copper Umayyad *fulus* was recovered during an excavation season as well as a kufic-inscribed ostrakon fragment that is believed to have been part of a lengthier letter found at Shuqayra al-Gharbiyya, p. 187.

#### 6. From 'Guard House' to Congregational Mosque: Recent Discoveries on the Urban History of Islamic Jarash, ADAJ 50 (2006).

-Jerash 3 coins, Figure 18, "*Coin #1 is a Justin II and Sofia follis (Constantinople mint), coin #2 is a pseudo-Damascus type with standing emperor, and coin #3 is a post-reform Umayyad *fulus* struck in Tabariyya (the capital of Jund al-Urdun).*"

#### 7. Aida Naghawi's 'Umayyad *Filises* minted at Jerash" in Syria: Tome 66 fascicule 1-4, 1989 pp. 219-222

-"*Three Umayyad post-reform *fulus* were recovered from Jarash*" (situated in the drain of the Cardio Maximus) ("City Planning of Classical Jerash", Amman, 1980 in Arabic by Aida Naghawi M.A. dissertation submission to the University of Jordan).

-“Three pre-reform Byzantine countermarked coins of Jarash/Gerasa were recovered from Jerash” (situated in the drain of the Cardio Maximus) (“City Planning of Classical Jerash”, Amman, 1980 in Arabic by Aida Naghawi M.A . dissertation submission to the University of Jordan).

-Three post-reform Umayyad fulus were recovered during excavations by the Jerash International Project (one in the Market Place M 305, the second in a well in the Zeus Lower Platform and the third inside the Umayyad House, no. 40, 27mm in size).

الحدید دی. عدنان، ف لوس نحاسیة امویة من عمان، حولیة دائرة الاثار الاردنیة، المجلد 02، 5791، ص 8. Al-Hadidi, Adnan, Umayyad Copper Fulus from Amman. Yearbook of the Jordanian Antiquities Department, Volume 20, 1975, pp. 9-14, 7 and 8, No. 11.

Also See Aida Naghawy "Copper coin (fils)" in Discover Islamic Art, Museum With No Frontiers, 2017. [http://www.discoverislamicart.org/database\\_item.php?id=object;ISL;jo;Mus01;1;en](http://www.discoverislamicart.org/database_item.php?id=object;ISL;jo;Mus01;1;en)

-One ‘Standing Caliph’ Umayyad copper coin bearing the mint name of ‘Amman’ which “was recovered during the course of an archaeological excavation carried out by the Department of Antiquities in Amman's Forum in three stages, between 1965–7. The coin was recovered from an archaeological excavation in the Forum of Amman, and the name of the mint (Amman) is inscribed on the coin.”

### 9. Abraham Terian. Hesban 12: Small Finds (E.D. Paul, J. Ray, Jr., Chapter 15

p. 309 The Coins from the Excavations at Hesban. 403 coins recovered in total, 19 are identified as Umayyad (no’s 147-165) but, and the following are my own observations, the image of a coin associated with no. 154 (plate 15.57/coin 118) does not appear to be Umayyad and #149 appears to be Mamluke. The bulk of Umayyad coins recovered are predominantly post-reform fulus (per photos and descriptions). Tell Hesban is located nine kilometers north of Madaba.

### 10. Sheddy, Carson, and Walsmley. PELLA in Jordan 1979-1990: The Coins (2001).

- Twenty-eight early Islamic coins found/twenty-five from Umayyad era and three from Abbasid era (fulus). Umayyad coins include ten gold dinars, one silver dirham, and seven copper fulus (14 Umayyad/3 Abbasid). P. 59 “Nearly all of the Umayyad coins were recovered from the ruins of the extensive domestic quarter in Area III-IV, which was destroyed in the violent earthquake of AD 749.”

### 11. H. Gitler, The Coins, in M. Piccirillo and E. Alliata eds., Mount Nebo, New Archeological Excavations 1967–1997 (1998, pp. 550–567.)

-Forty Umayyad copper fulus were recovered during excavations at Mount Nebo-Siyagha between 1967 and 1996 (among a total of 197 coins that were discovered during that time). These included Standing Caliph and post-reform epigraphic types from the mints of Amman, Tabariyya, Damascus, al-Ramla and Filastin, while the overwhelming bulk (33 coins) were ‘unidentifiable’, in part because several of them (a small hoard of 12 post-reform types) found in

‘Ain al-Kanisah (Gitler, 1996, pp. 326-327) were wrapped in textile, leaving their imprint on the coins. One of these coins bore a Damascus mint-name.

**12. Abraham Terian. COINS FROM THE 1968 EXCAVATIONS AT HESHBON (1971)**

-Three post-reform Umayyad coins, catalogue nos. 23, 24, 25 (images on Plate 11), descriptions/references on page 10.

**13. Rebecca Foote and John Oleson. Humeima Excavation Project, 1995-1996**

-“Also in 1995 a post-reform, silver dirham was unearthed just outside the *qasr* entrance. Struck in Wasit in the year 115H/733-4 C.E. it is a well-known issue of common circulation in the 730s, “The coin not only further supports the early eighth-century date for the *qasr* but also signals the participation of southern Jordan in the contemporary inter-regional economy.”

**14. Samuel Thomas Parker. The Roman Frontier in Central Jordan: Final Report on the Limes Arabicus Project, 1980-1989, Volume 1 (2006), p. 571**

-One Umayyad coin found at El-Lejjun  
-One Umayyad coin found at Qasr Bshir

**15. M. Ben-Dov, The Omayyad Structures near the Temple Mount (1971)**

-One Umayyad post-reform copper coin. Plate XXVIII, coin #25 (locus 3059, level 718.00 Omayyad (mint of Damascus) with three concentric circles on obverse with nearly full legends recovered during second to fourth season.

**16. Oren Gutfeld RAMLA FINAL REPORT ON THE EXCAVATIONS NORTH OF THE WHITE MOSQUE: Coins from the Excavations: The Coins (Chapter 11) Nitzan Amitai-Preiss, pp. 265-266-Present excavation yielded 250 coins total (various periods):**

-Thirty one confirmed Umayyad coins including one Standing Caliph Filastin coin (mint name illegible) as well as four Umayyad or Abbasid copper fulus. Additional Umayyad coins included one silver post-reform coin minted in Basra and twenty-nine other post-reform copper fulus from only a few identified mints (e.g. Tabariyya, Dimashq, Ramla, Chapter 11, no. 25, p. 266, P.1.11.1)

- Twelve Lead coins (Umayyad and Abbasid) found at Ramla, no. 99-112, p. 278.

- One Lead Bulla found (L.82.1032.3, IN 345), 610mm, 3.09g, (Photo 11.1, contains part of a name), p. 267.

**17. Hirschfeld, *Excavations at Tiberias, 1989–1994*, 13–18. On the Abbasid geometric mosaic, see Rina Talgam, “Mosaic Floors,” in Hirschfeld, *Excavations at Tiberias, 1989–1994*, 28–30.**

-Group of sealed Umayyad coins recovered in a floor.

**18. Timothy Power “The Red Sea from Byzantium to the Caliphate: AD 500-1000, Oxford University Press”, 2012, p. 109**

-One Umayyad post-reform coin found at Nahal Mitnan farms, southern Israel.

-One Umayyad a glass weight of Abd al-Malik at Nahal Mitnan farms, southern Israel.

**19. Uzi Avner and Jodi Magness. Early Islamic Settlement in the Southern Negev (1998). pp. 39-57.**

- *“The coins from Ein Yahav are all bronze issues of the eighth century, with the latest coin from Yot- vata dating to 780 C.E. Of the two coins published from Evrona, one (a surface find) is a Byzantine issue of Justinian II (565-78 C.E.), while the other is an Umayyad issue of the first half of the eighth century (Porath 1987: 109, 111, 113). The nature of the numismatic evidence is at least partly responsi- ble for the misdating of early Islamic ceramic types. Abbasid coins seem to be rare or unattested at many sites with Abbasid occupation in Palestine.”* p. 51.

- *“Three buildings are preserved at the Evrona farm. The main one, adjacent to the reservoir, probably served as the residence of the overseer's family and the professional staff. Most of the workers may have lived in tents. The farmhouse originally contained two rooms, but with later additions it eventually covered an area of 26 x 29 m. At some point one of the two original rooms was converted into a mosque by blocking the southern doorway, creating a shal- low rectangular niche in its place.”* Among the finds from the excavations, which are still unfinished, are several Umayyad coins and a few ostraca. The most complete ostracon is inscribed with a list of names and sums of money in dirhams; this apparently rep- resents a list of salaries or debts (fig. 12). The os- traca shed light on the bureaucratic arrangements at the farm.” p. 48

**20. Jodi Magness. The Archaeology of the Early Islamic Settlement in Palestine, 2003.**

- One Umayyad post-reform coin of Ramla found at Rehovot-in-the-Negev), p. 191-192.

- Ein Boqeq (Umayyad coin found), p. 115-119.

- Two Umayyad post-reform coins found at Sde Boqer, p. 139.

- One Arab-Byzantine and one post-reform type found at Nahal La'ana, p. 149.

- Umayyad post-reform coin from Nahal Mitnan, p. 154.

- Umayyad post-reform coin bearing mint of Tabariyya found at Nahal Oded, p. 166.

- Umayyad post reform coin of Ramla found at Nessana, p. 183.

**21. Yehuda Nevo, Pagans and Herders, pp. 36-41**

-Umayyad post-reform coins found at Avdat

**22. Nikolaus Schindel, 2006, The Numismatic Chronicle Offprint, Medieval and Modern Hoards: A Hoard of Umayyad Copper coins from Baysan.**

- Sixty-eight AE copper coins (Disp. Private Collection), pp. 385-393.

**23. David Stacey Excavations at Tiberias, 1973-1974: The Early Islamic Periods. Israel Antiquities Authority, 2004.**

-Umayyad gold dinars found, p. 17

-Umayyad silver dirhams found, p. 17

-Umayyad post-reform coins found, p. 31

**24. John Haldon. Money, Power and Politics in Early Islamic Syria, 2010**

- Umayyad coins found at Hammath Tabariya, Hammat Gader, p. 157-158.

**25. Donald Whitcomb. Khirbet al-Karak identified with Sinnabra, al-Usur al-Wasta (The Bulletin of Middle East Medievalists, 2002,**

-Fifteen Umayyad coins recovered during excavations at Khirbet al-Karak, p. 1

**26. Maisler, B. , M. Stekelis and M. Avi-Yonah. "The Excavations at Beth Yerah (Khirbet el-Kerek) 1944-1946." IEJ, 2, 4 (1952) 218-229**

-Two Umayyad coins found at Khirbet al-Kerak.

**27. Pritchard, James B. 1952-1954. The Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research Vol. 32/33, The Excavation at Herodian Jericho, 1951, pp. i-iii+v+vii+ix-xiii+1-58**

-Several Umayyad coins discovered during excavations at Jericho.

**28. Martin Gussone and Martina Muller-Wiener. RESAFA-RUSAFAT HISHAM, SYRIA. 'LONG-TERM SURVIVAL' OF AN Umayyad RESIDENCE – FIRST RESULTS OF THE EXTENDED SURFACE SURVEY.**

-98 Umayyad-era coins found at Resafa.

**29. Magness, 2003, The Archaeology of the Early Islamic Settlement in Palestine**

-2 Umayyad coins found at Dehes, Syria p. 202.

**30. Hugh N. Kennedy (Ed.) Muslim Military Architecture in Greater Syria: From the Coming of Islam to the Ottoman period. Brill, 2006.**

-Two Umayyad coins recovered at Kharab Sayyar (found in the masonry of a wall) 75km northeast of Raqqa, Syria p. 48.

-Umayyad coins found at (Khirbat) Madinat al-Far, p. 56

**31. Karin Bartl - Abd Al-Razza- Moaz Residences, Castles, Settlements. Transformation Processes from Late Antiquity to Early Islam in Bilad al-Sham Proceedings of the International Conference held at Damascus, 5-9 November 2006 (Orient-Archaeologie Band 24) in Stefan Heidemann Settlement' Patterns, Economic Development and Archaeological Coin Finds in Bilad al-Sham: the Case of the Diyar Mudar - The Process of Transformation from the 6th to the 10th Century A.D (Coin finds on p. 500)**

Also, see initial references in Heidemann 2002, 2003.

-Twenty-four Umayyad coins found at al-Raqqa/Tell al-Bi'a.

-Ten Umayyad counds found at Harran.

-Two Umayyad coins found at al-Jarud.

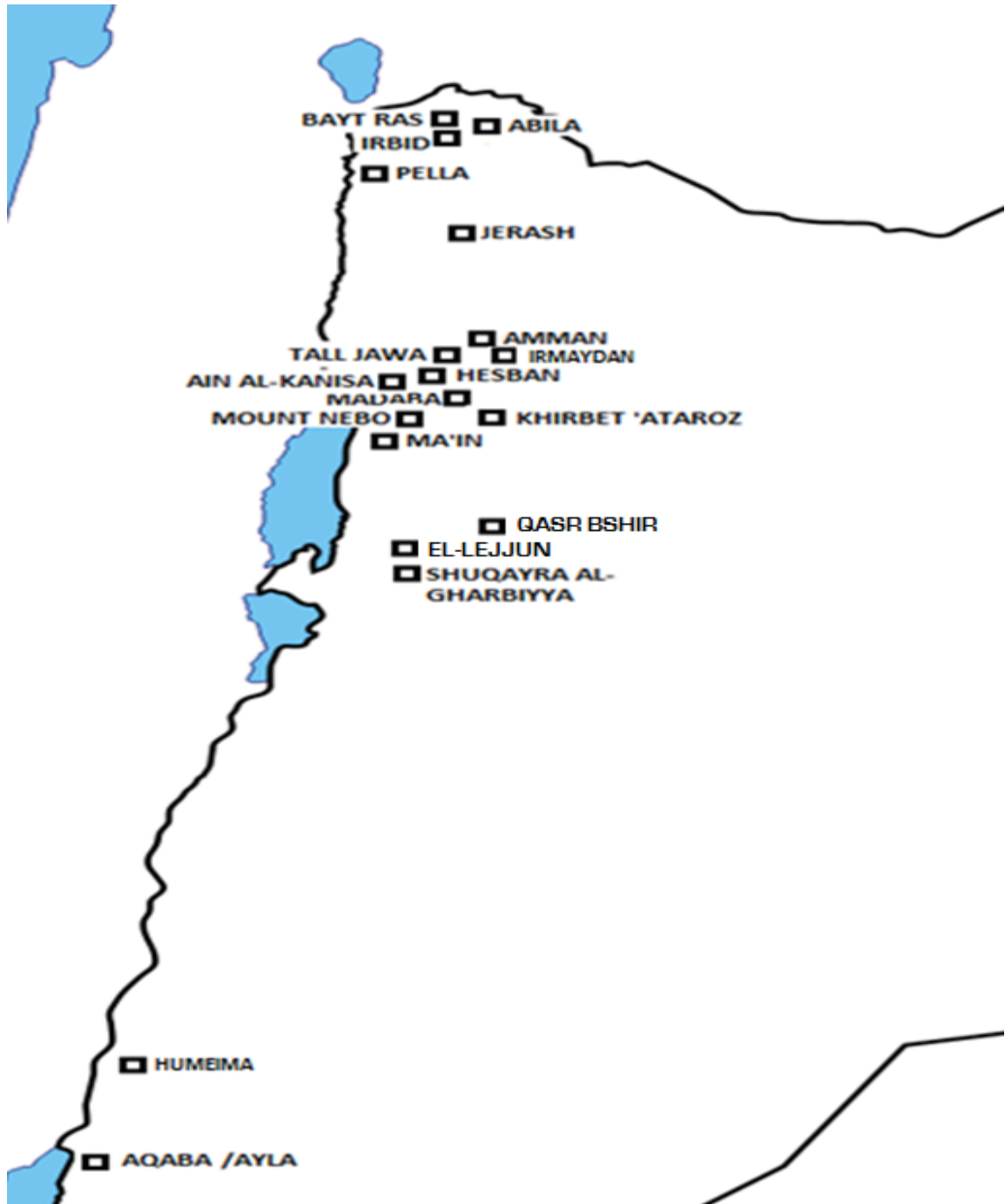
**32. Kay Prag. Excavations by K. M. Kenyon in Jerusalem 1961-1967: Volume V Discoveries in Hellenistic to Ottoman Jerusalem; 2008, p. 118**

--Six Umayyad post-reform types (including at least three struck at al-Ramle)

**TABLE 1: Umayyad coins bearing find-spot data**

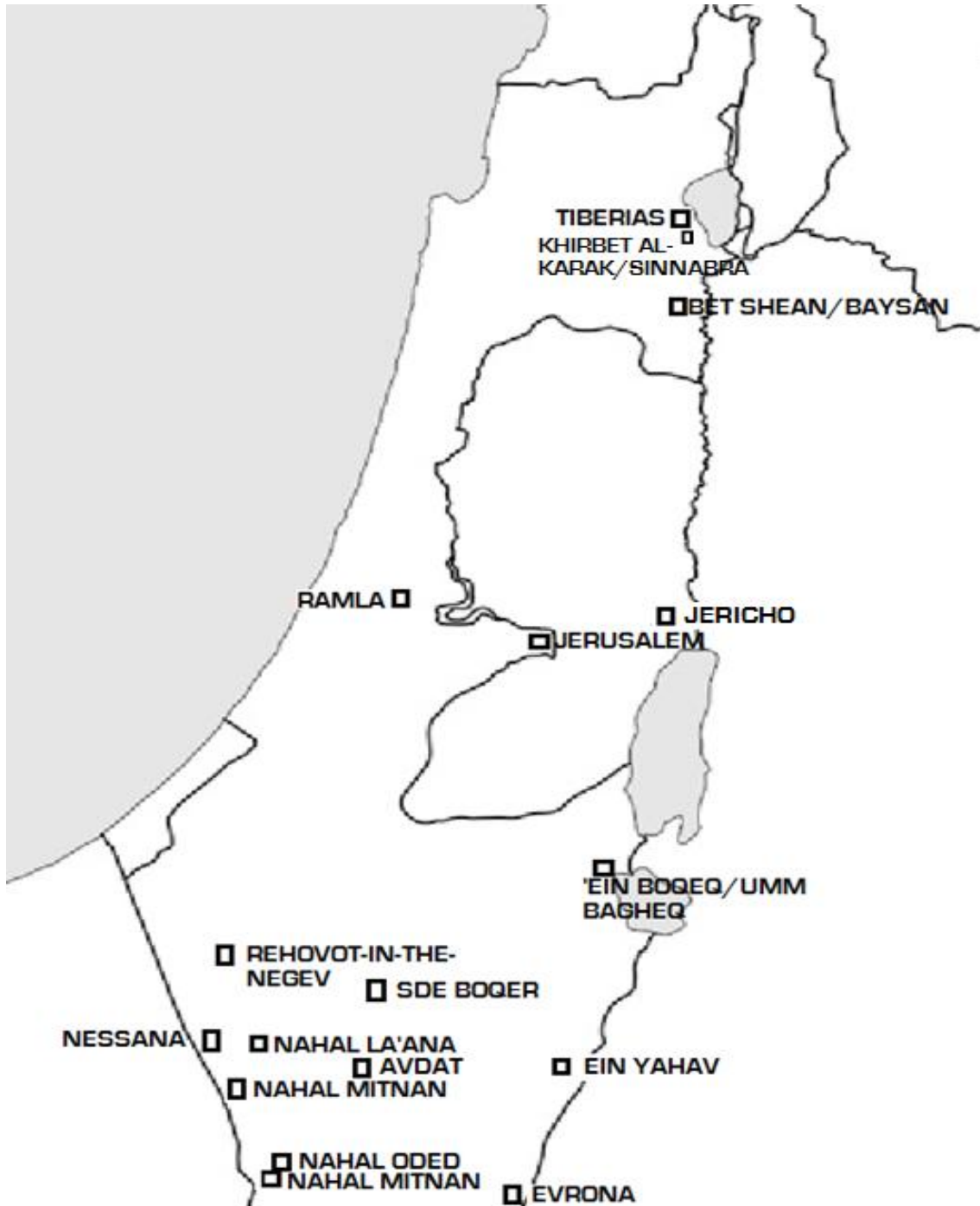
Dimensions	Weight	Mint	Date	Find-spot/year	Type	Museum
		al-Ramla		Madaba (2006)	Post-reform	
		Dimashq		Madaba (2006)	Post-reform	
				Madaba (2006)	Post-reform	
				Bayt Ras/2015	Post-reform	Irbid Archaeological Museum (IAM)
22	5.1	Dimashq		N/A	Pre-reform	Jordan Museum (JM)
19	4.3			N/A	Pre-reform	Irbid Archaeological Museum (IAM)
15	3.3	al-Ramla		Quweilba (Abila), 1992	Post-reform	Irbid Archaeological Museum (IAM)
15	3.6			Quweilba (Abila), 1992	Post-reform	IAM
18	3	Iliya?		Quweilba (Abila), 1992	Post-reform	IAM
21	3.3	Dimashq?		Ataroz (recorded 2006)	Post-reform	IAM
17	1.9			N/A	Post-reform	IAM
15	2.4	Dimashq	120 AH/737 CE	Pella/Tabaqat Fahl, 1994	Post-reform	IAM
18	5.2			Pella/Tabaqat Fahl, 1994	Post-reform	IAM
18	4.7			Al-Mafraq, 1975 RECOVERED	Post-reform	IAM
15	3.15	N/A		Terenouthis, Egypt 1930-1933 UofM	Post-reform	Kelsey
14	3.83	al-Ramleh		Terenouthis, Egypt 1930-1933 UofM	Post-reform	Kelsey
17	6.74			Terenouthis, Egypt 1930-1933 UofM	Post-reform	Kelsey
19	6.99			Terenouthis, Egypt 1930-1933 UofM	Post-reform	Kelsey
14	2.31			Siloam (Silwan, Jerusalem)	Post-reform	Kelsey

**TABLE 2: MAP OF FIND-SPOTS ASSOCIATED WITH UMAYYAD COINS  
RECOVERED IN JORDAN**





**TABLE 3: MAP OF FIND-SPOTS ASSOCIATED WITH Umayyad COINS  
RECOVERED IN ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES**



**TABLE 4: MAP OF FIND-SPOTS ASSOCIATED WITH UMAYYAD SEALS,  
WEIGHTS, AND COINS RECOVERED IN THE AREA CORRESPONDING TO  
HISTORICAL SYRIA-PALESTINE**

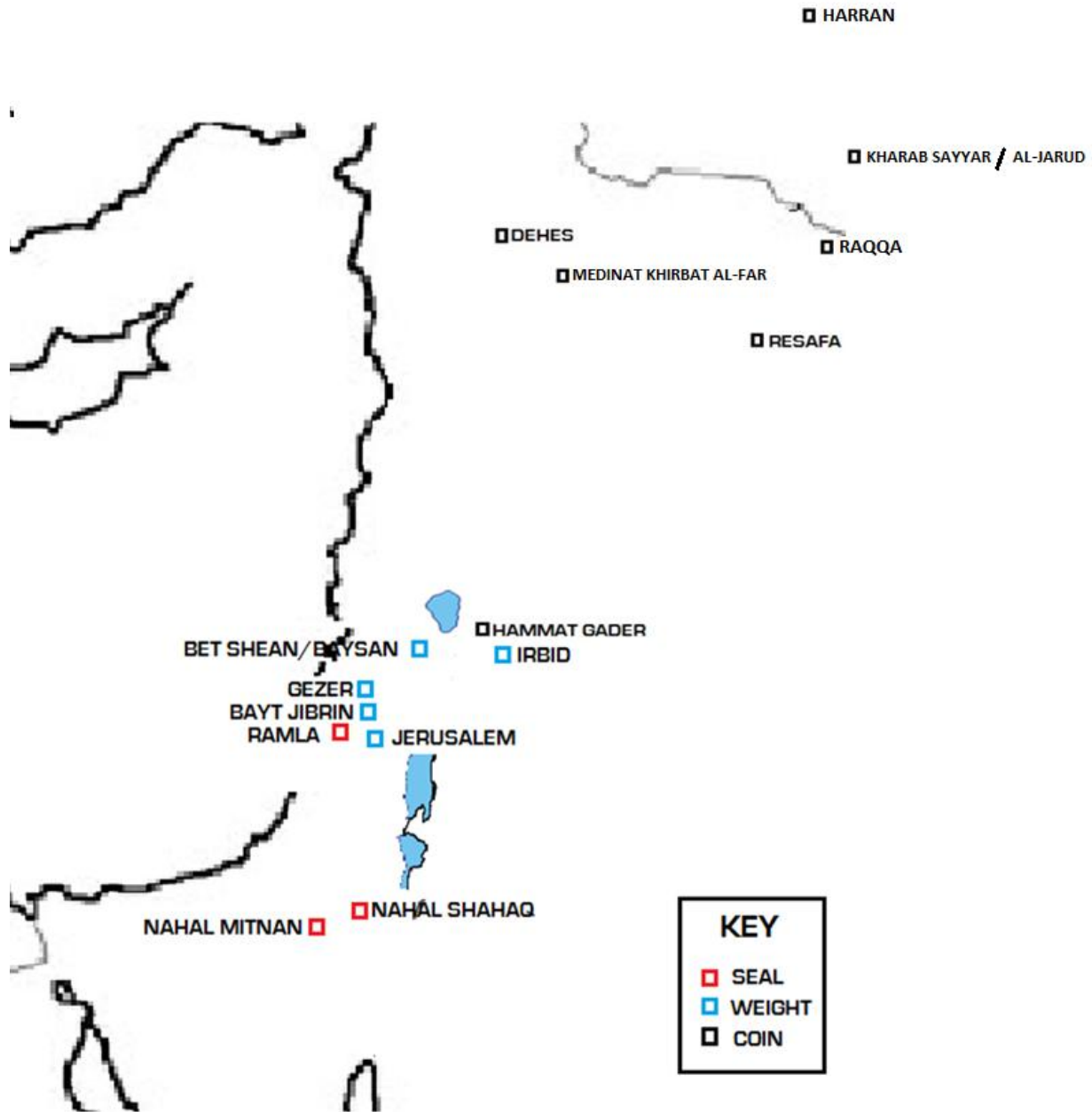
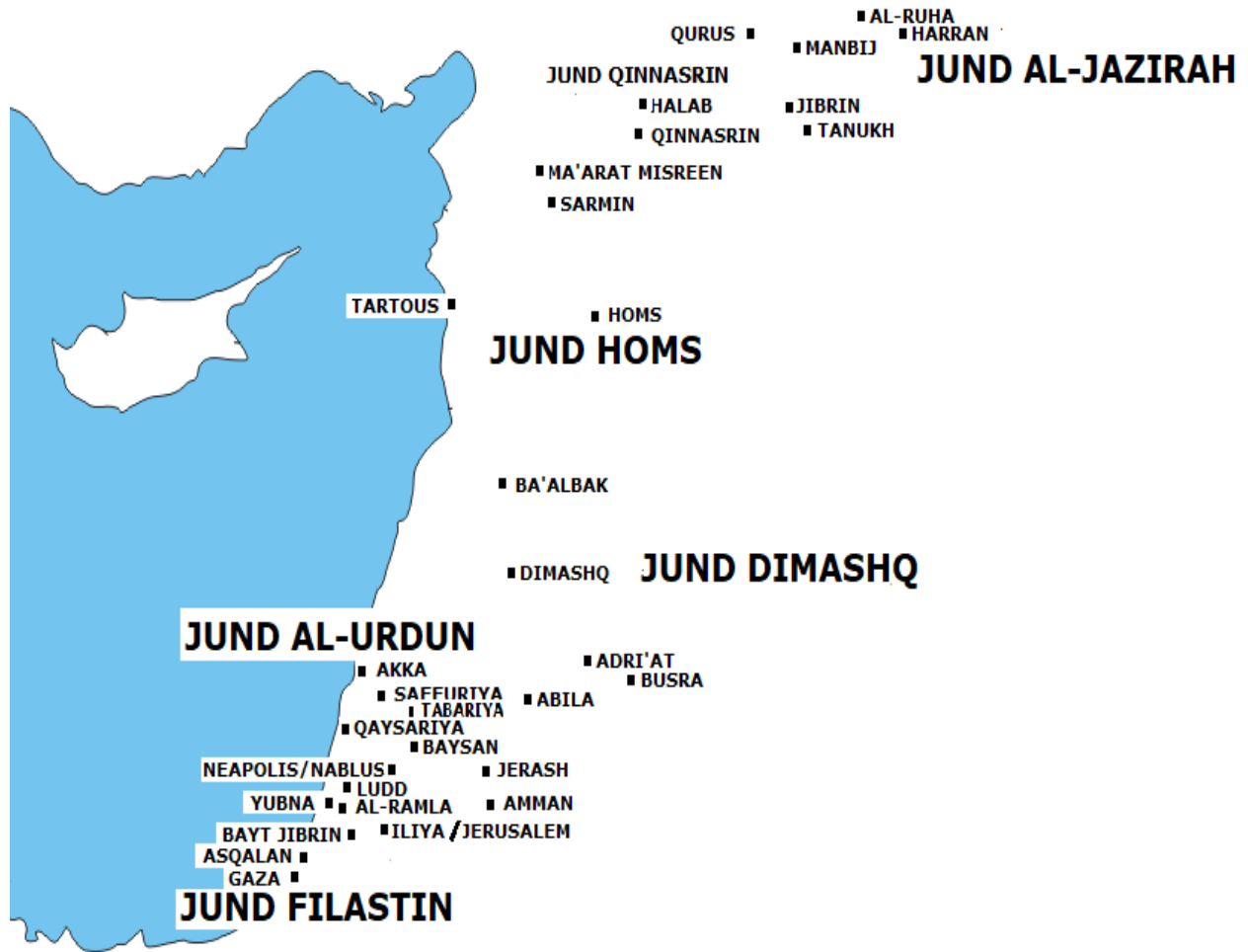


TABLE 5: MAP OF Umayyad-era Mints in Syria-Palestine



MAP OF Umayyad-era Mints in Syria-Palestine

**TABLE 6: MAP OF MODERN NATION-STATES COINCIDING WITH AREA OF  
HISTORICAL SYRIA-PALESTINE**



**TABLE 7: Umayyad-Era Mints of Syria-Palestine according to Coin Type**



**List of 'Imperial Image' Mints in Syria-Palestine**

Jerusalem	Ludd	Baysan	Jerash
Abila	Homs	Tabariyya	Tartous
Amman	Nablus? (Neapolis)		



**List of 'Standing Caliph' Mints in Syria-Palestine**

Al-Ruha	Ayla	Amman	Ba'albak
Dimashq	Halab	Harran	Homs
Iliya	Jibrin	Ludd	Manbij
Ma'arat Misreen	Qinnasrin	Qurus	Sarmin
Tanukh	Yubna		



**List of 'Post-Reform' Mints in Syria-Palestine**

Dimashq	Halab	Baysan	Filastin
Adri'at	Ghazza	Ayla?	al-Ramla
Amman	Qaysariya	Jerash	Asqalan
Ba'albak	Ludd	Baysan	Baniyas
Homs	Yubna	Bayt Jibrin	Safuriyya
Tabariyya	Akka	al-Urdun	Busra

**TABLE 8: KEY**

Weight: grams (g)

Size: millimeters (mm)

PF= Post-reform

SC= Standing Caliph

JM= Jordan Museum

MAM= Madaba Archaeological Museum

IAM= Irbid Archaeological Museum

JAM= Jordan Archaeological Museum

JNBNM= Jordan National Bank Numismatic Museum

Kelsey= Kelsey Museum of Archaeology (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor)

AE= Copper

AR= Silver

AU= Gold

PB= Lead

TABLE 9: PAGE 1 OF COIN, SEALS, WEIGHTS DATABASE SPREADSHEET

	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1	Type	Metal	Size (mm)	Weight	Mint	Date	Ruler	Find-spot/year	Type	Museum
2	Fils	AE			al-Ramla			Madaba (2006)	PF	Madaba Archaeological Museum (MAM)?
3	Fils	AE			Dimashq			Madaba (2006)	PF	Madaba Archaeological Museum (MAM)?
4	Fils	AE						Madaba (2006)	PF	Madaba Archaeological Museum (MAM)?
5	Fils	AE						Bayt Ras/2015	PF	Irbid Archaeological Museum (IAM)
6	Fils	AE	22	5.1	Dimashq			N/A	PF	Jordan Museum (JM)
7	Fils	AE	19	4.3				N/A	PF	Irbid Archaeological Museum (IAM)
8	Fils	AE	19	3.5	Amman		Abd al-Malik bin Marwan	N/A	SC	Jordan Archaeological Museum (JAM)
9	Fils	AE	20	4.5	Amman		Abd al-Malik bin Marwan	N/A	SC	JAM
10	Fils	AE	19	3	Amman		Abd al-Malik bin Marwan	N/A	SC	JAM
11	Fils	AE	17	2.7	Amman		Abd al-Malik bin Marwan	N/A	SC	JAM
12	Fils	AE	18.5	2.9	Amman		Abd al-Malik bin Marwan	N/A	SC	JAM
13	Fils	AE	16	2.7	N/A		Abd al-Malik bin Marwan	N/A	SC	JAM
14	Fils	AE	18	2.8	Amman		Abd al-Malik bin Marwan	N/A	SC	JAM
15	Fils	AE	18	3.1	No Mint		Abd al-Malik bin Marwan	N/A	SC	JAM
16	Fils	AE	17	4	Unclear/Amman		Abd al-Malik bin Marwan	N/A	SC	JAM
17	Fils	AE	17	3.6	Amman		Abd al-Malik bin Marwan	N/A	SC	JAM
18	Fils	AE	18	2.6	Amman		Abd al-Malik bin Marwan	N/A	SC	JAM
19	Fils	AE	19	3.2	Amman		Abd al-Malik bin Marwan	N/A	SC	JAM
20	Fils	AE	18	2.9	Amman		Abd al-Malik bin Marwan	N/A	SC	JAM
21	Fils	AE	16	3.6	Amman		Abd al-Malik bin Marwan	N/A	SC	JAM
22	Fils	AE	16	2.7	Amman		Abd al-Malik bin Marwan	N/A	SC	JAM
23	Fils	AE	25	4	Amman		Abd al-Malik bin Marwan	N/A	SC	Jordan Museum (JM)
24	Fils	AE	15	3.3	al-Ramla			Quweilba (Abila), 1992	PF	Irbid Archaeological Museum (IAM)
25	Fils	AE	15	3.6				Quweilba (Abila), 1992	PF	IAM
26	Fils	AE	18	3	Iliya?			Quweilba (Abila), 1992	PF	IAM
27	Fils	AE	21	3.3	Dimashq?			Ataroz (recorded 2006)	PF	IAM
28	Fils	AE	17	1.9				N/A	PF	IAM
29	Fils	AE	15	2.4	Dimashq	120 AH/737 CE		Pella/Tabaqat Fahl, 1994	PF	IAM
30	Fils	AE	18	5.2				Pella/Tabaqat Fahl, 1994	PF	IAM
31	Fils	AE	18	4.7				Al-Mafraq, 1975 RECOVERED	PF	IAM
32	Fils	AE	15	3.15	N/A			Terenouthis, Egypt 1930-1931	PF	Kelsey
33	Fils	AE	14	3.83	al-Ramleh			Terenouthis, Egypt 1930-1931	PF	Kelsey
34	Fils	AE	17	6.74				Terenouthis, Egypt 1930-1931	PF	Kelsey
35	Fils	AE	19	6.99				Terenouthis, Egypt 1930-1931	PF	Kelsey
36	Fils	AE	14	2.31				Siloam (Silwan, Jerusalem)	PF	Kelsey
37	Fils	AE		1.45	N/A				PF	Kelsey
38	Fils	AE	17	4.2					PF	Kelsey
39	Dirham	AR	27	2.93	Homs	100 AH			PF	Kelsey
40	Dirham	AR	26	2.74					PF	Kelsey
41	Dirham	AR	25	2.32					PF	Kelsey
42	Dirham	AR	22	1.87					PF	Kelsey
43	Dirham	AR	25	2.87	Wasit	126 AH	Yazid III		PF	Kelsey
44	Dirham	AR	24	2.5	Merv	110 AH	Hisham bin 'Abd al-Malik		PF	Kelsey
45	Dirham	AR	25	2.88	Damascus	102 AH	Yazid II		PF	Kelsey
46	Dirham	AR	27	2.7	Damascus	85 AH	Abd al-Malik bin Marwan		PF	Kelsey
47	Dirham	AR	26	2.2	Damascus	105 AH	Hisham bin 'Abd al-Malik		PF	Kelsey
48	Dirham	AR	26	2.6	Damascus	106 AH	Hisham bin 'Abd al-Malik		PF	Kelsey
49	Dirham	AR	27	2.9	Damascus	100 AH	Umar bin 'Abd al-Aziz		PF	Kelsey
50	Dirham	AR	27	2.9	Damascus	100 AH	Umar bin 'Abd al-Aziz		PF	Kelsey
51	Dirham	AR	25	2.7					PF	Kelsey
52	Dirham	AR	27	2.8					PF	Kelsey
53	Dirham	AR	26	2.9					PF	Kelsey
54	Dirham	AR	26	2.6					PF	Kelsey
55	Dirham	AR	22	0.9					PF	Kelsey
56	Dirham	AR	25	2.5					PF	Kelsey
57	Dirham	AR	27	2.9					PF	Kelsey

TABLE 10: PAGE 2 OF COIN, SEALS, WEIGHTS DATABASE SPREADSHEET

58	Dirham	AR	25	2.8						PF	Kelsey
59	Dirham	AR	27	2.9						PF	Kelsey
60	Dirham	AR	26	2.8						PF	Kelsey
61	Dirham	AR	28	2.9						PF	Kelsey
62	Dirham	AR	24	2.9						PF	Kelsey
63	Dirham	AR	27	3						PF	Kelsey
64	Dirham	AR	27	2.9						PF	Kelsey
65	Dirham	AR	25	3						PF	Kelsey
66	Dirham	AR	26	3						PF	Kelsey
67	Dirham	AR	26	2.9						PF	Kelsey
68	Dirham	AR	26	2.8						PF	Kelsey
69	Dirham	AR	28	2.9						PF	Kelsey
70	Dirham	AR	27	2.8						PF	Kelsey
71	Dirham	AR	27	2.7						PF	Kelsey
72	Dirham	AR	26	2.7						PF	Kelsey
73	Dirham	AR	27	2.9						PF	Kelsey
74	Dirham	AR	26	2.9						PF	Kelsey
75	Dirham	AR	27	2.8						PF	Kelsey
76	Dirham	AR	27	2.8						PF	Kelsey
77	Dirham	AR	20	1.5						PF	Kelsey
78	Dirham	AR	26	2.8						PF	Kelsey
79	Dirham	AR	27	2.9	Wasit	91AH			N/A	PF	Jordan Museum (JM)
80	Dirham	AR	27	2.9	Wasit	127 AH	Marwan bin Muhammad		N/A	PF	JM
81	Dirham	AR	26	2.6	Dimashq	91-92 AH			N/A	PF	JM
82	Dirham	AR	27	2.9	Basra	100 AH			N/A	PF	JM
83	Dirham	AR	28	3	Dimashq	97 AH			N/A	PF	JM
84	Dirham	AR	25.5	2.8	Wasit	121AH	Hisham bin 'Abd al-Malik		N/A	PF	JM
85	Dirham	AR	26	2.6	Wasit		Suleiman bin 'Abd al-Malik		N/A	PF	JM
86	Dirham	AR	25	2.6	Basra	81 AH			N/A	PF	JM
87	Dirham	AR	26	2.9	Wasit	123 AH	Hisham bin 'Abd al-Malik		N/A	PF	JM
88	Dirham	AR	26.5	2.9	Wasit	104 AH	Yazid II		N/A	PF	JM
89	Dirham	AR	27	2.9	Wasit	111 AH			N/A	PF	JM
90	Dirham	AR	25	2.9	Wasit	123 AH			Ma'in	PF	Madaba Archaeological Museum (MAM)
91	Dirham	AR	26	2.9					N/A	PF	MAM
92	Dirham	AR	26	2.9					N/A	PF	MAM
93	Dirham	AR	26	2.9		105 AH			N/A	PF	MAM
94	Dirham	AR	35	6.1					N/A	PF	MAM
95	Dirham	AR	25	2.8					N/A	PF	MAM
96	Dirham	AR	26	2.9		86 AH?			N/A	PF	MAM
97	Dirham	AR	26	3		95 AH?			N/A	PF	MAM
98	Dirham	AR	26	3		96 AH?			N/A	PF	MAM
99	Dirham	AR	26	3		86 AH?			N/A	PF	MAM
100	Dirham	AR	27	3		96 AH?			N/A	PF	MAM
101	Dirham	AR	26	3		86 AH			N/A	PF	MAM
102	Dirham	AR	28	2.6		91AH			N/A	PF	MAM
103	Dirham	AR	27	3					N/A	PF	MAM
104	Dirham	AR	27	2.9		97 AH			N/A	PF	MAM
105	Dirham	AR							N/A	PF	MAM
106	Dirham	AR	27	2.9					N/A	PF	MAM
107	Dinar	Au	20	4.2					N/A	PF	JM
108	Dinar	Au	19	4.3					N/A	PF	JM
109	Dinar	Au	19	4.3					N/A	PF	JM
110	Dinar	Au	20	4.3					N/A	PF	JM
111	Dinar	Au	20	4.1					N/A	PF	JM



TABLE 11: PAGE 3 OF COIN, SEALS, WEIGHTS SPREADSHEET

112	Dinar	Au	20	4.2			N/A	PF	JM
113	Dinar	Au	19	4.3			N/A	PF	JM
114	Dinar	Au	19	4.3			N/A	PF	JM
115	Seal	Pb	13	5.6			N/A		Jordan National Bank Numismatic Museum
116	Seal	Pb	15	5			N/A		JNBNM
117	Seal	Pb		3.2			N/A		JNBNM
118	Seal	Pb	12	2.8			N/A		JNBNM
119	Seal	Pb	15	5.7			N/A		JNBNM
120	Seal	Pb		7.5			N/A		JNBNM
121	Seal	Pb	19	6.2			N/A		JNBNM
122	Seal	Pb	27	8.6			N/A		JNBNM
123	Seal	Pb	23	4.7			N/A		JNBNM
124	Seal	Pb	20	11.5			N/A		JNBNM
125	Seal	Pb	30	21.6g			N/A		JNBNM
126	Seal	Pb	31	18.3			N/A		JNBNM
127	Seal	Pb		36			N/A		JNBNM
128	Seal	Pb		16.4			N/A		JNBNM
129	Seal	Pb	21	14.4			N/A		JNBNM
130	Seal	Pb		13.3			N/A		JNBNM
131	Seal	Pb	13	4.1			N/A		JNBNM
132	Seal	Pb	15	3.4			N/A		JNBNM
133	Seal	Pb	20	5.9			N/A		JNBNM
134	Seal	Pb	15	2.5			N/A		JNBNM
135	Seal	Pb	18	10.5			N/A		JNBNM
136	Seal	Pb	12	1.8			N/A		JNBNM
137	Seal	Pb	16	9.3			N/A		JNBNM
138	Seal	Pb	19	10.8			N/A		JNBNM
139	Seal	Pb	23	16.1			N/A		JNBNM
140	Seal	Pb	15	17			N/A		JNBNM
141	Seal	Pb	18	6.4			N/A		JNBNM
142	Seal	Pb	26	13.5			N/A		JNBNM
143	Seal	Pb	17	5.1			N/A		JNBNM
144	Seal	Pb	19	5.9			N/A		JNBNM
145	Seal	Pb	18	6.6	Ba'albak		N/A		JNBNM
146	Seal	Pb	12.5	1.8			N/A		JNBNM
147	Seal	Pb	26	4.6			N/A		JNBNM
148	Seal	Pb	30	27.5			N/A		JNBNM
149	Seal	Pb	27	14.7			N/A		JNBNM
150	Seal	Pb	20	12.9			N/A		JNBNM
151	Seal	Pb	15	2.2			N/A		JNBNM
152	Seal	Pb	19	14.6			N/A		JNBNM
153	Seal	Pb	15	9.8	Ba'albak		N/A		JNBNM
154	Seal	Pb	18	8.6	Ba'albak		N/A		JNBNM
155	Seal	Pb	18	6.8	Ba'albak		N/A		JNBNM
156	Seal	Pb	17	6.9	Ba'albak		N/A		JNBNM
157	Seal	Pb	15	6.6	Ba'albak		N/A		JNBNM
158	Seal	Pb	20	8.8	Ba'albak		N/A		JNBNM
159	Seal	Pb	20	19.8			N/A		JNBNM
160	Seal	Pb	19	5.9	Palestine		N/A		JNBNM
161	Seal	Pb	16	7.7	Jordan		N/A		JNBNM
162	Seal	Pb	25	5.7			N/A		JNBNM
163	Seal	Pb	21	17	Jordan		N/A		JNBNM
164	Seal	Pb	25	29.6			N/A		JNBNM
165	Seal	Pb	25	22.3			N/A		JNBNM
166	Seal	Pb	19	8.7			N/A		JNBNM
167	Seal	Pb	20	12.9			N/A		JNBNM
168	Seal	Pb	15	3.3			N/A		JNBNM

TABLE 12: PAGE 4 OF COIN, SEALS, WEIGHTS SPREADSHEET

169	Seal	Pb		11			N/A	JNBNM
170	Seal	Pb	17	5.9	Ba'albak		N/A	JNBNM
171	Seal	Pb	17	7			N/A	JNBNM
172	Seal	Pb	17	6.7	Ba'albak		N/A	JNBNM
173	Seal	Pb	17	6.9	Iliya? (Jerusalem)		N/A	JNBNM
174	Seal	Pb	17	13.6			N/A	JNBNM
175	Seal	Pb	16	6.1			N/A	JNBNM
176	Seal	Pb	12	3.1			N/A	JNBNM
177	Seal	Pb	25	8.7			N/A	JNBNM
178	Seal	Pb		13			N/A	JNBNM
179	Seal	Pb	16	8.4			N/A	JNBNM
180	Seal	Pb	25	8.8			N/A	JNBNM
181	Seal	Pb	28	20.8			N/A	JNBNM
182	Seal	Pb	13	5.4			N/A	JNBNM
183	Seal	Pb		9.6			N/A	JNBNM
184	Seal	Pb		5.1			N/A	JNBNM
185	Seal	Pb		16.4			N/A	JNBNM
186	Seal	Pb		7.6			N/A	JNBNM
187	Seal	Pb	17	10.9			N/A	JNBNM
188	Seal	Pb	15	2.8			N/A	JNBNM
189	Seal	Pb	13	2.8			N/A	JNBNM
190	Seal	Pb	15	9.3			N/A	JNBNM
191	Seal	Pb	15	5			N/A	JNBNM
192	Seal	Pb	14	2.6			N/A	JNBNM
193	Seal	Pb	20	4.5			N/A	JNBNM
194	Seal	Pb	15	5.8			N/A	JNBNM
195	Seal	Glass	22	2.3			N/A	JNBNM
196	Seal	Glass	25	5.9			N/A	JNBNM
197	Seal	Glass	25	6.2			N/A	JNBNM
198	Seal	Glass	25	4.8			N/A	JNBNM
199	Seal	Glass	15	1.3			N/A	JNBNM
200	Seal	Glass	15	1.3			N/A	JNBNM
201	Seal	Glass	23	4			N/A	JNBNM
202	Seal	Glass	19	3.1			N/A	JNBNM
203	Seal	Glass		5.9			N/A	JNBNM
204	Seal	Glass	20	2.7			N/A	JNBNM
205	Seal	Glass	15	1.6			N/A	JNBNM
206	Vessel Stamp	Glass	34	15.29			N/A	Kelsey
207	Vessel Stamp	Glass	31	12.53			N/A	Kelsey
208	Vessel Stamp	Glass	42	25.32			N/A	Kelsey
209	Vessel Stamp	Glass	38	21.57			N/A	Kelsey
210	Vessel Stamp	Glass	30	11.7			N/A	Kelsey
211	Vessel Stamp	Glass	31	11.42			N/A	Kelsey
212	Vessel Stamp	Glass	25	10.65			N/A	Kelsey
213	Vessel Stamp	Glass		15.88			N/A	Kelsey
214	Vessel Stamp	Glass	33	13.87			N/A	Kelsey
215	Vessel Stamp	Glass	42	20.43			N/A	Kelsey
216	Vessel Stamp	Glass	31	13.46			N/A	Kelsey
217	Vessel Stamp	Glass	36	17.51			N/A	Kelsey
218	Coin Weight	Glass	27	2.68			N/A	Kelsey
219	Coin Weight	Glass	20	1.42			N/A	Kelsey
220	Coin Weight	Glass	21	2.13			N/A	Kelsey
221	Coin Weight	Glass	23	5			N/A	JNBNM

## GLOSSARY

### SELECT ARABIC TERMS AND THEIR CORRESPONDING MEANINGS

Al-Wafa lillah = Loyalty to God

Allahu Akbar = God is Great

Amir al-mu'mineen = Commander of the Believers

Bismallah = In the name of God

Caliphate = Term used to refer to the office held by Muhammad's political successors (Ar. *Khilafa*)

Jahiliyya = Era of Ignorance (associated with the pre-Islamic, pagan period before Islam's ascent).

Jizya = Poll tax (tribute tax imposed on free non-Muslim males under Islamic rule)

Khalifat Allah = God's Deputy/Representative

Kufic = Form of stylized (calligraphic) Arabic script used especially in the early Islamic period

Musnad = Orthographic convention used to write Arabic and other related, regional languages in (origins in South Arabia) primarily during the pre-Islamic period.

Rashidun = Rightly-Guided Caliphs (Muhammad's first four political successors). The era of the Rashidun runs from 632-661 CE.

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**ABSTRACT****INSCRIBED ADMINISTRATIVE MATERIAL CULTURE AND THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF THE Umayyad STATE IN SYRIA-PALESTINE 661-750 CE**

by

**TAREQ RAMADAN****December 2017****Advisor:** Dr. Stephen Chrisomalis**Major:** Anthropology**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

The seventh century CE in the Near East was an era characterized by major political transition and cultural change, representing a historical epoch that witnessed the decline of the region's long-standing major political institutions alongside the emergence of a powerful Arab Caliphate that supplanted both the offices of the Byzantine Emperor and the Persian, Sasanid Shah in most or all of the region. This Arab Caliphate, first based out of the Hejaz, then out of Syria-Palestine with the rise of the Umayyads (r. 661-750 CE), the first hereditary dynasty of the Islamic period, embarked on a campaign of Arab and Muslim hegemony across three continents within the course of a century.

Some of the Umayyad's successes in terms of both the acquisition of and projection of power were not only the result of an organized and determined military and a steady stream of income from its territorial acquisitions, but also due to their ability to construct institutions and bureaucratic machinery that allowed them to create and control narratives through the production of inscribed material culture. Through various administrative and institutional mechanisms, the Umayyad caliphs were able to universalize the Arabic language and script and, by extension, promote a doctrinal form of Islam, both of which were accelerated by the development and

expansion of their state and which played a critical role in the attempt to validate their political claims.

Most importantly, an Umayyad monopoly on the cursive Arabic script, an orthography initially used by Christian missionaries in the Levant and Arabia in the sixth century, led to its appropriation for administrative uses by the Muslims which was then wielded as a source of political capital. The weaponization of the Arabic orthography enabled the Umayyads to decisively institute and enforce a new linguistic, cultural, religious and political order over the Near East in the era of Late Antiquity. The extant inscribed material culture implicates the Umayyads as graphophiles, obsessed with the written word and cognizant of its qualities and abilities in helping them impose their political will on their opponents in a battle for cultural, political and ideological primacy. Thus, this dissertation serves as an archaeolinguistic study of how the Umayyads instrumentalized and exploited the Arabic script on administrative material culture as instruments of authority and as purveyors of a new order in the region.

### **AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT**

Tareq Ramadan earned both his B.A. in Anthropology and his M.A. in Near Eastern Languages at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan before completing his PhD there. In this dissertation work, he examines the role of the Arabic orthography in the creation of categories of inscribed, mainly administrative, material culture which were employed by the Umayyad state in their quest for primacy. He has presented part of his findings at the American Schools of Oriental Research Annual Conference in 2016 and has published several pieces in the area of early Islamic numismatics. Tareq has also taught eight different undergraduate courses in Middle Eastern and Islamic History and Anthropology at Wayne State University over the past ten years.