

Four new Arabic-Islamic inscriptions from the location in the region 'aliat- najd' An analytical descriptive study

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Introduction:

Arabic inscriptions and writings are among the most significant historical resources of the Arabian Peninsula. They stand as records of passers-by, travelers, merchants, pilgrims, and Umrah performers who recorded through them their inner selves and the events of their time by hand and by the tools with which these inscriptions were executed.

These inscriptions are evidences of the literacy of Muslims and Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula, an acquired talent dating back several centuries from distant times. The first indications of literacy in the Arabian Peninsula date back for more than six thousand years ago. As a matter of fact, inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula were not illiterate as suggested by some historians and writers. Scratches and inscriptions on rocks were among forms of written expression. They are distinct from other forms due to a multiplicity of purposes: showing written skills, remembrance, or entertaining oneself with writing Qur'anic verses, supplications, poetic verses, or daily events. Despite the spontaneity of such writings and inscriptions, some of them are of great significance.

Such inscriptions and writings are solid documents which can't be forged or challenged. They also support the study of Arabic fonts and their development, highlighting the different calligraphy schools of the Islamic world.

On the tracks of such roads there is a large number of inscriptions, of which some are in Kofi font, expressing several texts such as supplication, lament, asking for forgiveness, martyrdom, seeking paradise, travel companionship, and many other forms of expression. Arabic calligraphy is one of the most elegant Islamic arts. Calligraphy emerged in the Arabian Peninsula with the advent of Islam, as the prophet Mohammad—peace be upon him—paid a special attention to teaching Muslims reading and writing. Later on, such fonts came to be known as *Makki* and *Madani* fonts, both are considered soft fonts with similar characteristics. Later on, Muslims set out to the Levant, Iraq, and Egypt spreading the *Madani* font. The *Kofi* font was, then, (638 AD/17 H) innovated in Iraq, where it was used in memorial texts and copies of the Holy Quran before the *Thuluth* font made an appearance, along with the Persian font and many others.

Researchers pay attention to monumental inscriptions as a form of beneficial documentation in the study of Islamic history. Those are inscriptions on the facades of rocks suitable for engraving, which are either engraved by the local inhabitants, that's why they are usually nearby cities, or recorded by pilgrims, traders, and travelers, and those are commonly scattered across the main and secondary roads of pilgrimage and commercial caravans.

This study is concerned with four Arabic Islamic inscriptions, located in *Mount Zaidy*, *Mount Alakithal*, *Mount Shateb*, and *Mount Sanafan*, all located in Upper Najd of Saudi Arabia. The study documents such four inscriptions, hand-written in simple *Kofi* font reflecting a fontal

pattern that dates to the second and third Hijri centuries. These inscriptions are discovered by the researcher, relying on visual and textual elements in the aforementioned locations.

Objectives of the study:

The study aims at documenting, describing, and analyzing the four inscriptions discovered in *Mount Zaidy*, *Mount Alakithal*, *Mount Shateb*, and *Mount Sanafan*, all located in Upper Najd of Saudi Arabia. The following characteristics are of concern:

- Studying the font in which inscriptions are engraved, illustrating its types and stages of development.
- Studying the styles implemented in engraving such inscriptions and writings.
- Studying textual contents and literary styles of such inscriptions.
- Dating undated inscriptions relying on the style of writing, font type, and mentioned names.

Material:

The study highlights four Islamic *Kofi* inscriptions that have never been studied before.

Location:

The inscriptions are located in the area of Upper Najd in *Mount Zaidy*, *Mount Alakithal*, *Mount Shateb*, and *Mount Sanafan* of Saudi Arabia.

The early pattern of Islamic inscriptions in the location of the study at Upper Najd is mainly hard *Kofi* font, keeping in consideration that the four inscriptions are not dated.

Notes on the inscriptions:

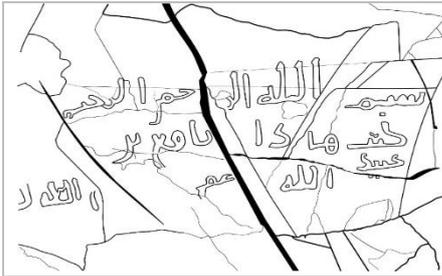
The collection of inscriptions and rock engravings highlighted in this study are located in the area of Najd plateau in four different locations: *Mount Zaidy*, *Mount Alakithal*, *Mount Shateb*, and *Mount Sanafan* (Image 1). Najd plateau is bordered by Al-Nafud desert to the north, Al-Dahna to the east, Al-Rub A-Khali to the south, Hijaz Mountains to the West, and Asir Mountains to the south west (Figure 1).

Najd plateau is locally divided into two parts—as of height: the eastern and the western parts; the latter is the focus of this study and is known as Upper Najd.

Upper Najd is located in the middle of Saudi Arabia and is considered one of the oldest regions inhabited by man in the very ancient times. It is a very interesting region—besides the historical and monumental diversity—as it was home to early Arab major poets such as Imru Al-Qais, Antara ibn Shaddad, and Zuhair ibn Abi Sulma which adds to the cultural and intellectual heritage of the region. More importantly, though, it used to be a major stop on the ancient trading roads, which culturally and geographically connected the different regions of the Arabian Peninsula.

First: The inscription of *Mount Zaidy* (Drawing 7)

Reading first inscription (Figure 8)



In the name of Allah, the Gracious the Merciful
This is written by
Ubaidu Allah
Allah forgive him

Analysis

Font: *Kofi*

Purpose of text: seeking forgiveness.

Number of Lines: Three lines.

Date of inscription: the second Hijri century, towards the end of the Umayyad era.

Location of inscription: the inscription is engraved on the flat surface of the façade of a granite rock at the western side of the mountain.

Coordinates: longitude line N: 23-01 -507 – latitude line E: 043-59-484

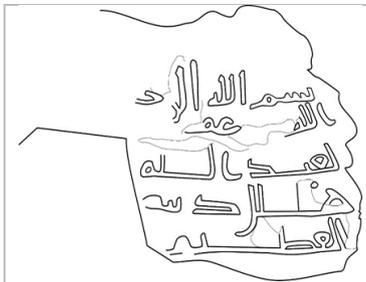
Technical analysis:

The three lines are engraved slightly sloped to the left, probably due to the surface of the rock. The line starts with large letters that tend to get smaller towards the end of the line. The same goes for the height of the first line. The letters of the first line are large and tall, such as the **أ** and **م**. The end of the inscription is corroded **هل**.

Also, the text starts with *basmala* (In the name of Allah the Gracious the Merciful) which is a common cliché when asking for forgiveness in the inscriptions of Najd. It is also noted that the writer includes the long vowel **ا** in the second line in the noun (عنان) (the beneficial), just like in the **ا** letter is extended in the word **نمحرلا** (the Gracious). The same goes for the letter **ب** in the word **بتك** (written): (**ب**)

Second: The *Mount Akethal* inscription (Drawing 9).

Text of the second inscription: (Figure 10).



In the name of Allah the Gracious
O, Allah forgive
Ubaydu Allah (the son of)
Hilala's great
sin

Analysis:

Font type: Simple *Kofi*

Type of engraving: low-depth deep engraving.

Purpose of text: seeking forgiveness.

Number of lines: five lines

Date of inscription: the second Hijri century, towards the end of the Umayyad era.

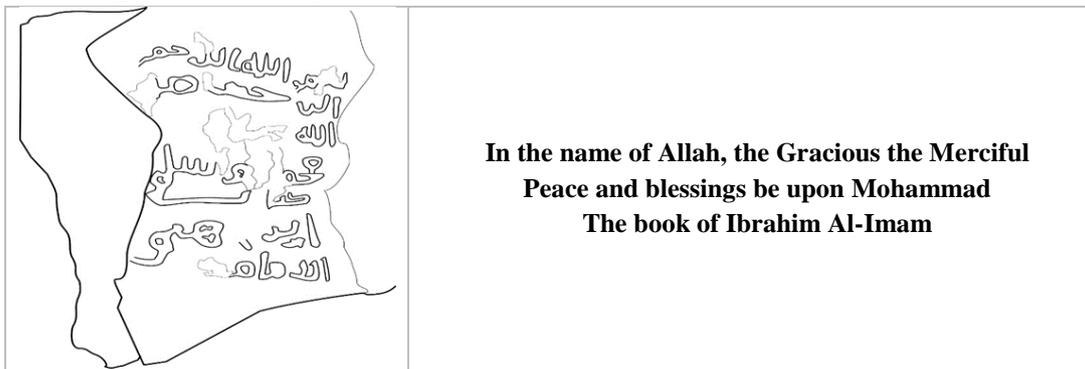
Position of inscription: the inscription is engraved on the flat surface of the façade of a granite rock.

Coordinates: longitude line N:24-30-304, latitude line E:043-04-737

Technical analysis of inscription: the five lines are written in a straight manner, probably due to the flat surface of the rock and the height of letters in the first line. The first line is written in small and short letters, such as in the letters ل, ب, س, ا. Also the end of the first line is corroded in the words (مبحرلا نمحرلا). The text starts with *basmala* (In the name of Allah the Gracious the Merciful), which is common in seeking-forgiveness inscriptions of Najd. It is also noted that some letters are extended such as the letter ح — in the first line in the word نمحرلا (ح), the extended ب letter of the word ديبعل (ب), and the extended ظ in the word ميظعلا (ظ).

Third: *Mount Shateb* inscription (Drawing 11)

Third inscription text: (Figure 12).



Analysis:

Font type: simple *Kofi*

Type of engraving: low-depth deep engraving.

Purpose of text: Blessings upon the prophet (peace be upon him).

Number of lines: seven lines.

Date of inscription: the second or the third Hijri centuries, towards the end of the Umayyad era or the early Abbasid era.

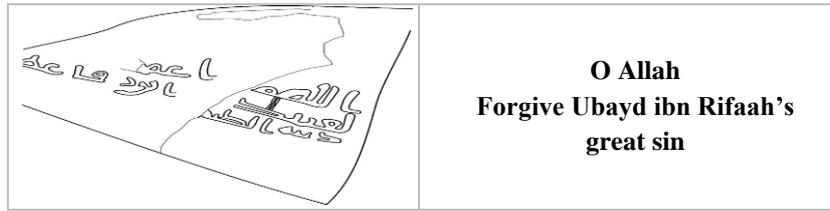
Location of inscription: It is written on the flat surface of a granite rock façade on the eastern side of the mountain.

Coordinates: longitude line N: 24-16 -903, latitude line E: 044-03-035

Technical analysis of inscription: The seven lines are engraved in a style slightly sloped to the right, probably due to the surface of the rock. The three first lines had started with small letters that got larger by the fourth line through the rest of the text. Also the height of the letters in the fourth line through the rest of the text.

The fourth line is engraved in large and long letters such as م, and س. Also the end of the second line is corroded in the word لص. The text starts with *basmala* (In the name of Allah the Gracious the Merciful) in the first line. It is noted that the writer finished the final word of *basmala* نمحرلا in the following line.

The long vowel *ā* is shown in the second line in the noun *باتك*, as well as the extended *ب* letter in the fifth line in the word (*كتاب*).



Analysis

Font type: simple *Kofī*

Type of engraving: simple deep engraving.

Purpose of text: seeking forgiveness

Number of lines: three lines.

Date of inscription: the second or the third Hijri centuries towards the end of the Umayyad era or the early Abbasid era.

Location of inscription: the inscription is written on the flat surface of a granite rock at the southern side of the mountain.

Coordinates: longitude line N 24 30 545, latitude line E 043 04 281

Technical analysis

The text is composed of three lines, deeply engraved by the means of slitting the rocky surface. The lines are written in simple *Kofī* font, which combines soft and hard characteristics, with no dotted letters or ornaments while being flawlessly precise. The lines are straight and balanced, and so are the beginnings and the ends and the height of the letters, with an equal number of two words per line. The three lines are slightly sloped to the left, probably due to the surface of the rock. The first line starts with small letters that get larger in the second line and get again smaller in the third line. It is also noted the letters of the first line are high.

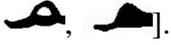
The letters in the first and the second line are large and high like in the *ف*, *ا*, *ل*, *ه*, *ع*, *د*, *ن*. Letters in the third line are also small.

The text begins with the phrase (O Allah, forgive) to seek forgiveness, which is a common supplication in early Islamic inscriptions dated from the first to the third Hijri centuries, or from the seventh to ninth centuries AD, usually followed by phrases seeking forgiveness, mercy, pardon, or cure. The most recurrent form of seeking forgiveness is (O Allah, forgive)

The person's name is mentioned in the second line (Ubayd ibn Rifaah). The *ع* letter is omitted in the third line, maybe due to lack of space. However, the word can be easily guessed since it's a common expression.

The long vowel *ā* is written in the second line in the name *ةعافر* (Rifaah), as well as the extended *ف* (*فاعة*) in the second line in the word (*فاعة*).

- 1- The inscription discovered in *Mount Zaidy*, *Mount Akethal*, *Mound Shateb*, and *Mount Sanafan* and other similar early Islamic inscriptions all share common characteristics of Arabic calligraphy of the time: simple deep engravings, ignoring long vowels, finishing

- letters or parts of words in subsequent lines, and letter sloping to the left. Also some of the shapes of the letters are influenced by similar Nabataean ones.
- 2- Inscriptions of the first three Hijri centuries are free from framing or any ornaments. Writers also were not committed to aligning their liens horizontally.
 - 3- Vertical letters, in the four inscriptions, the ʾ and ʿ are not evenly straight or sloped. The ʾ is straight seven times, while the ʿ letters are sloped to the left (ل). For once it is soft like in name of Allah (هلا), and for another instance it is hard الله.
 - 4- The discovered inscriptions are written in simple *Kofī* font. Some of the letters are hard to read due to erasure, or corrosion like in the third inscriptions.
 - 5- It is also noted that there is a disparity in the number of lines: the shortest line is composed of three line, while the larges is composed of seven lines. The number of words per line varies from one to four words.
 - 6- The inscriptions are free from Nabataean influences, like including the ʾ letter in the names mentioned in the inscriptions such as نبا (son of), عفان (Nafea), and ريفاه (Rifaah).
 - 7- The ʾ letter is clear in the name ميهاربا (Ibrahim) in the third inscription.
 - 8- The م letter is connected in the four inscriptions in the middle or the end of a word []. In the first, the third, and the fourth inscriptions the م letter is curved, while it takes a triangular shape in the second, with a horizontally straight base. Apparently, the curved shape of م is more common, particularly in the inscriptions of the Umayyad and Abbasid eras. It is hereby proper to suggest that these inscriptions belong to either the late Umayyad era or the early Abbasid era.

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