CHAPTER NINE

THE HISTORY OF ARABIC PALEOGRAPHY

The inquisitive reader might wonder why Arabic paleography and orthography, seemingly unrelated to the topic at hand, have found their way into this book, and the answer will make more sense if I first explain these terms. Paleography generally refers to the study of ancient documents, though here I use it in a more confined sense: the study of a language’s script (such as the shape of letters or the use of dots). This differs from orthography, which focuses on spelling conventions. Most of the circulating theories about Arabic paleography, about its origins and development, are biblically rooted; were they of esoteric interest only I would not have given them space in this work. But these theories have a direct bearing on the Qur’an’s integrity, since they allege that Arabic possessed no known alphabet during the Prophet’s lifetime (Mingana), that divergences in the readings of certain verses are due to faults in early Arabic paleography (Goldziher), and that any copy of the Qur’an written in Kufic script belongs to the second or third century A.H., never to the first (Gruendler). Countering these arguments is a prerequisite to proving that the Holy Book is untainted.

1. The Historical Background of Arabic Characters

The ancestry of Arabic characters remains speculative, and it is hardly surprising that Orientalists have chimed in with their own theories in this regard. Sadly, most of these cannot hold up to even cursory scrutiny. B. Gruendler, author of a study on the Arabic script’s development, states that of all the scripts emanating from the Phoenician alphabet, Arabic seems the most remote. The drastic alterations in spatial arrangement suggest that either the Nabataean or Syriac scripts served as an intermediary. T. Nöldeke, in 1865, gave credit to the former for the development of the Arabic Kufic script; numerous others, among them M.A. Levy, M. de Vogüé, J. Karabacek and J. Euting, jumped on the bandwagon soon thereafter. But half a century later this consensus was shattered when J. Starcky theorized that Arabic derived from the Syriac cursive.\(^1\) On the other hand we have

\(^1\) Beatrice Gruendler, *The Development of the Arabic Script*, Scholars Press, Atlanta, Georgia, 1993, p. 1. Starcky’s arguments have been refined in detail [*ibid*, p. 2].
Y. Khalil-an-Nami’s theory that the “Hijar was the home of the birth and evolution of the North Arabic script to the exclusion of all other localities, including Hirah.” As to why Gruendler completely neglects this third premise, I will leave to the reader.

Among the missionary Orientalists there are those who believe that Arab Muslims did not have their own writing system during the Prophet’s lifetime. In the words of Rev. Mingana,

Our ignorance of the Arabic language in the early period of its evolution is such that we can not even know with certainty whether it had any [alphabet] of its own in Mecca and Madina. If a kind of writing existed in these two localities, it must have been something very similar to Estrangolo [i.e. Syriac] or the Hebrew characters.

Nabia Abbott has partially championed this hypothesis.

A study of Christian Arabic manuscripts shows the interesting fact that some of the earliest of these come closest to showing an estrangolo influence, though indirectly through the Nestorian, in the general appearance of the script, which is firm and inclined to squarishness. Others... show the effect of Jacobite scribes. Furthermore, a comparison of several of these Christian manuscripts with largely contemporary Kufic Qurans reveals a decided similarity of scripts.

All is not as it seems, however. According to Abbott, “The earliest dated Christian Arabic manuscript is from 876,” meaning 264 A.H. Awlwad has mentioned an even earlier dated manuscript, written in 253 A.H. 1867 C.E. The earliest dated Christian Arabic manuscripts therefore stem from the second half of the third century A.H. There are literally hundreds if not thousands of Qur’anic manuscripts belonging to this period; comparing these thousands with one or two estrangolo (Syriac) examples and claiming that the latter influenced the former is very poor science indeed, if it can be called scientific at all. On top of this I will add that the Syriac script c. 250 A.H. (angular and forward-slanted) does not correspond at all with the general Arabic of that period, which is inclined to spacious curves and vertical strokes. One wonders why Abbott shied away from using Arabic manuscripts from the first century A.H., which rest on library shelves in relative abundance.

Leaving the Syriac aside, the other culture credited with providing the impetus for Arabic paleography is the Nabataean. According to Dr. Jum’a, extensive research by authoritative scholars has proved that the Arabs derived their writing from them; in this he quotes a multitude of scholars such as Abbott and Williston. Analyzing a set of the earliest Muslim inscriptions, coins and manuscripts, Abbott concludes that the Arabic script in use at the dawn of Islam was a natural development of pre-Islamic Arabic which in turn was a direct development of the Aramaic Nabataean script of the first centuries C.E.

One must not digest these labels in haste however. Instead of acquiescing to Western scholarship without any independent analysis of one’s own, as
unfortunately many Arab writers have done, let us start afresh by inspecting a partial map supplied by Abbott for her relevant inscriptions. Here are the sites of the five inscriptions in Plate I of Abbott's work, which form the basis for her Nabataean conclusion: (1) Nabataean inscription on tombstone of Fhr, Umm al-Jimal, c. A.D. 250; (2) Arabic inscription of Imam' al-Kais, Namarah, A.D. 328; (3) Arabic inscription from Zabad, A.D. 512; (4) Arabic inscription at Harran, A.D. 568; and (5) Arabic inscription at Umm al-Jimal, sixth century C.E.

Here we have only one so-called Nabataean inscription (from Umm al-Jimal) while four are in Arabic, including another one at that same site. Of the Arabic inscriptions one lies in Zabad, very close to Aleppo in northern Syria; another is in Namarah, southeast of Damascus; the third and fourth are from north of Ma'aran, once the Nabataean capital. So Arabic stretched itself from northern Syria down into Arabia in an unbroken line, carving straight through the Nabataean homeland rather than being hedged in by it. What does this reveal about the relationship between the two languages? I contend that there never existed a language known to its speakers as 'Nabataen', as shown next.

2. Studies in Early Arabic Documents and Inscriptions

i. The Blurred Line between Nabataean and Arabic Inscriptions

Among scholars there is a general disagreement concerning what constitutes a Nabataean or Arabic inscription. Some scholars cited a few of the later inscriptions as Nabataean only to see their colleagues revise them subsequently as Arabic, and the following examples will illustrate this.

1. An Aramaic-Arabic inscription at 'En 'Avdat in Negev, discovered in 1979 about five kilometers south of Oboda. It contains the oldest dateable text in Arabic. Of its six lines Bellamy opines that only lines four and five are in Arabic, transcribed in Nabataean script. Antilla, however, argues that line six is just as likely to be in Arabic as Aramaic. The inscription is dated to be between 88 – 150 C.E. 11

Figure 9.2: The oldest dateable Arabic inscription at 'En 'Avdat in Negev, c. prior to 150 C.E. Lines four through six are in Arabic while the remainder is in Aramaic.

2. A bilingual Nabataean-Greek inscription on the tombstone of Fhr, Umm al-Jimal, dated to c. 250 C.E. Cantineau, Abbott and Guendler all subscribe to Littmann's view, who treats it as Nabataean. 13

Figure 9.3: A bilingual Nabataean-Greek inscription on the tombstone of Fhr, Umm al-Jimal, c. 250 C.E. followed by line for line original inscription reading (left) and in classical Arabic (right). 14

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9 Interestingly, on page 4 Abbott calls the same inscription "a Greek-Aramaic inscription on Umm al-Jimal."


11 J. Hâneen-Antilla, "A Note on the 'En 'Avdat Inscription," Studia Orientalia (He- sinki), vol. 67, 1991, pp. 35-36. It is worth noting that line 2 is only partly legible, so it may fall either way.

12 A. Negev dates it between 88 and 125 C.E. but not later than 150 C.E., since afterwards Nabataean-Aramaic inscriptions were no longer written at Oboda ('Avdat) [A. Negev, J. Naveh and S. Shaked, "Obodas the God", Israel Exploration Journal, vol. 36, no. 1-2, 1986, p. 60].


3. The Raqish tombstone in Madī'in Sālih, dated to the year 162 after Bostān (corresponding to 267 C.E.). Both Cantineau and Gruendl describe it as a ‘Nabataean text’, 15 though the latter mentions, “The text is noteworthy for its many Aramaic loans. O’Conner describes it as an eccentric mixture of Nabatean and Arabic… Blau labels it a border dialect and Diem assigns it to a Nabatean-Ḥijāzī sub-group”. 16 In their 1989 paper, Healey and Smith hailed it as the earliest dated Arabic document. 17

Figure 9.4: The recently re-interpreted Raqish tombstone, the second oldest dated Arabic inscription, corresponding to c. 267 C.E., along with al-Murāqṭah reading (line for line). Note that there is a short Thamasic summary written vertically to the right. 18

One of their salient points is that this inscription contains skeletal dots on the letters ḍāl, ṭā’ and shin.

4. The inscription of Imru’-al-Kais’ tombstone at Namārah (one hundred kilometers southwest of Damascus), dated to 233 years after Bostān (c. 328 C.E.). While Gruendl regards it as Nabataean, 19 others including Cantineau and Abbott treat it as Arabic. 20

Figure 9.5: Arabic inscription of Imru’-al-Kais at Namārah, c. 328 C.E., preserved at Musée du Louvre, followed by a line for line reading. 21

From these examples we perceive that the dividing line between Arabic and so-called Nabataean inscriptions is very hazy indeed. The Raqish was reinterpreted as an Arabic text and, a year later, the find at ‘En ‘Avdat was declared to be the earliest datable Arabic inscription. The great resemblance among these four inscriptions is due to their script. It is Nabataean.

ii. What Language Did the Nabataeans Speak?

Growing up in Makkah from his earliest childhood Ismā‘il, eldest son of Ibrāhīm, was raised among the Jūrūmī tribe and married within them twice. This tribe spoke Arabic, 22 and so undoubtedly must have Ismā‘il. The Jūrūmī Arabic probably lacked the sophistication and polish of the Qurānīh

16 Gruendl, op. cit., p. 10.
18 Picture source: *ibid*, vol. xii, Plate 46. The Arabic reading is after M.K. al-Murāqṭah, “Naṣṣ Raqish bil-Ḥijr (Mada’in Sālih) Ṣu‘a‘ah Jaddūdah” (Raqish inscription in al-Ḥijr, Madī’n Sālih, a new reading), *Deliberations of the Scientific Meeting of the Association of History and Archaeology in the Gulf GCC*, Dubai, 1419 (1999). Note that this is a revised reading of the one provided by Healey and Smith (op. cit., p. 105 (Arabic section)).
19 Gruendl, op. cit., pp. 11–12. The author claims that it is “the earliest extant text in the Arabic language, though it still uses Nabataean characters” (ibid, p. 11).
20 Cantineau, op. cit., pp. 49–50 (under the heading ‘Textes Arabes Archéologiques’); Abbott, op. cit., Plate 1 (1–2). Quoting Healey and Smith, “...from the time of its discovery almost, [the Namārah text] has been held up as the earliest dated Arabic inscription” (‘Jausen-Savignac 17 – The Earliest Dated Arabic Document (A.D. 276)’, *al-Ḥijr*, xi,82).
22 See al-Bukhari, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhari*, (auth. no. 3364); see also Ibn Qutayba, *al-Maqirī*, p. 34.
Arabic, preceding it as it did by almost two thousand years, Ibn Ushna records a statement from Ibn 'Abbās that the first person to initiate set rules for the Arabic alphabet and grammar was none other than Ismā'īl.23 Eventually Allah commissioned Ismā'īl as a messenger and prophet,24 to call his people for the worship of the one true God Allah, to establish prayers and to pay alms to the poor.25 Since Allah sends every messenger in the language of his own people,26 Ismā'īl must have preached in Arabic. Genesis credits Ismā'īl with twelve sons,27 among them Nebajoth/Nabat; born and nurtured in these Arabian surroundings they must have adopted Arabic as their mother tongue. These sons may have preserved their father's message by using the prevailing Arabic script; certainly they would not have resorted to whatever script was then current in Palestine (Ibrahim's homeland), since two generations had already lived in Arabia. When Nabat subsequently migrated northwards he must have taken the Arabic language and alphabet with him. His descendants were the founders of the Nabataean Kingdom (600 B.C.E. – 105 C.E.).28

Commenting on the sounds of certain Arabic characters which are not represented in Aramaic, Grunendl declares, "As the writers of Nabataean texts spoke Arabic, and given the close relation between the two languages, these writers could find Nabataean cognates to guide them in the orthography of Arabic words with such unusual sounds."29 Or to put it more directly, that the Nabataean language and script were in fact a form of Arabic.

If this nation spoke Arabic how did its language come to be known as Nabataean? Or does this stem from a classic tendency to mislabel?30 If

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24 Qurʾān 2:135: 3:84.
25 Qurʾān 19:54-55.
26 Qurʾān 14:40.
28 "There are different opinions regarding the origins of the Nabataeans. In Jaužīd 'Ali's view, the Nabataeans are Arabs who are even closer to Qurish and the Hijāriz tribes than are the tribes of Southern Arabia. Both had common deities and their script bore a close resemblance to that which was used by the early scribes for recording the Qurʾān. (The Syrians and Nabataeans were different cultures, the latter residing not in Syria but in present-day Jordan.) According to historians Nebajoth is Naba or Nabat, the eldest son of Ismā'īl. These are the facts which lead Jaužīd 'Ali to his conclusion. [Jaužīd 'Ali, al-Muḥājirīn fi 'Arab Qabl al-Islām, iii:14.]"
30 Of mislabeled terms we certainly have no shortage throughout the history of Oricia translation. The best known of course is the mislabeling of Muslims as 'Mohammedans', a term coined in 1681 and employed thereafter for centuries. The similar 'Mohamete' dates back even further, c. 1529. The earliest form in English for the name of Muhammad was Mahum (c. 1205), originally used confusedly for 'an idol' ['Muhammad', Online Etymology Dictionary, etymonline.com].

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this so-called Nabataean script had been properly named as 'Arabic' or 'Nabataean Arabic' (just as we sometimes speak of 'Egyptian Arabic' or 'American English'), then the whole research may have taken a different turn, and hopefully a more correct one for that. The Arabic language and script, in their primitive forms, gave birth to the Nabataean and most probably predated the Syriac.

iii. The Early Arabic Language Possessed a Distinct Script and Alphabets

Turning our attention to Rev. Mingana's hypothesis that early Arabic lacked its own script and alphabet, we will present a few dated and highly developed inscriptions which clearly show otherwise. There are many Arabic inscriptions from the 6th century C.E. which very nearly approach the Arabic paleography used in the first century A.H./seventh century C.E.; my examples will progress from these into the Islamic era. The list below is not meant to be exhaustive as newer inscriptions are constantly being discovered and with each, history is partially re-written. Two recent finds have been excluded, one of which dates the earliest inscription in Arabic script to 280 C.E., since the details remain unclear.31

1. A pre-Islamic Arabian inscription at Jabal Ramūn, about fifty kilometers east of 'Amma, Jordan. At the time of its discovery in 1931 it was hailed as the oldest Arabic inscription utilizing the Arabic alphabet. It is thought that the grammar and language in this inscription is straightforward classical Arabic. Bellamy in fact maintains that the language here is closer to modern Arabic than the language of Shakespeare is to modern English. Grunendl dates it between 280 C.E.

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31 A new tombstone inscription was discovered in the al-Ull region (northwest of Arabia), of a lady that died on 26 Ayāk (May) in the year 157 after Beka, which corresponds to 280 C.E. [Daily al-Riyāḍ, issue 12.4.1426/20.5.2005]. The other text is the 'Wālī bin al-Jazzār inscription', a commemorative inscription dated 410 C.E. and discovered at Wālī al-Muṣāfah in the al-Ull region. The inscription reads (numbers in brackets refer to the lines of the inscription): "[1] 305 450 477 529 537 541 551 552 553 [M.K. al-Murashki and A. Shubān, "Nafah al-Wālī bin al-Jazzār at-Tīkār al-Muṣāfah bi’l-ma’rūf 410", Deliberations of the third Annual Scientific Meeting of the Association, Muscat, Oman, 1422 (2001)]. Unfortunately no pictural/tracing of either of the inscriptions was provided.

328 and 350 C.E., while Bellamy prefers to date it generally to the fourth century C.E.\textsuperscript{34}

Figure 9.6: An Arabic inscription at Jabal Ramma, c. 4th century C.E.

Note that the inscription has two short ‘Him midad writings. Line by line reading of the Arabic text is after Bellamy.

A salient point of this inscription is that it has skeletal dots for the letters sūn (س), jīm (ج) and yā (야).

2. Another pre-Islamic trilingual inscription in Arabic, Greek and Syriac at Zabad, northern Syria, dated c. 512 C.E.\textsuperscript{35}

Figure 9.7: A trilingual inscription at Zabad, c. 512 C.E. Here only the Arabic is shown along with its transcription. \textit{Source: al-Munaggid, Etudes, p. 21, figure 10.}

3. A pre-Islamic Arabic inscription at Jabal Asī, one hundred and five kilometers southeast of Damascus. The date corresponds to c. 528 C.E.\textsuperscript{36}

Figure 9.8: An Arabic inscription at Jabal Asī, c. 528 C.E. \textit{Source: Hamidullah, Six Originaux, p. 60.}

4. Harrān, a pre-Islamic Arabic inscription c. 568 C.E.\textsuperscript{37}

Figure 9.9: The Harrān inscription, c. 568 C.E. \textit{Source: al-Munaggid, Etudes, p. 21, figure 11.}

5. Islamic inscription on Jabal Sala‘, Madinah. According to Hamidullah it was probably engraved during the Battle of the Ditch, c. 5 A.H./626 C.E.\textsuperscript{38}

Figure 9.10: Early Islamic inscription on Jabal Sala‘, c. 5 A.H. \textit{Source: Hamidullah, Six Originaux, p. 64.}

6. The Prophet’s letter to al-Mundhir bin Sūwā,\textsuperscript{39} governor of al-Abā‘, c. 8-9 A.H.

\textsuperscript{34} A. Gersmann, \textit{Arabische Paläographie. II Teil: Das Schriftwesen. Die Lapidarschriften}, Wien, 1971, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{35} Bellamy, op. cit., p. 372.
\textsuperscript{36} S. al-Munaggid, \textit{Etudes De Paléographie Arabe}, p. 21; see also Gruendler, op. cit., pp. 13-14.
\textsuperscript{38} S. al-Munaggid, op. cit., p. 21.

Topkapı Sarayi, item no. 21/397. See also Hamidullah, op. cit., p. 111. I accept as genuine this letter and the one to Hishāb (Hexalud), along with others authenticated by Hamidullah, from a historical viewpoint. On the other hand B. Gruendler states, “Their authenticity is more than doubtful, as they do not even display the same script” (op. cit., p. 5, footnote 16). This is utter nonsense. The Prophet had more than sixty scribes at his disposal [see p. 72.], so of course the handwritings must differ.
iv. The Emergence of Various Scripts and the Issue of Dating Kufic Muqaddiṣī

Stretching from Azerbaijan and Armenia in the north to Yemen in the south, and from Libya and Egypt in the west to Persia in the east, the territories of the Islamic state received communications from the central government in Madinah in Arabic. A rapid evolution of the Arabic script followed, such that we find angular and cursive (i.e. non-rectilinear) characters developing alongside the Ḥajjājī script at a very early stage. For instance, the tombstone of al-Ḥajrī (Figure 9.14), dated 31 A.H., is classified by some as Kufic41 (angular), and the papyrus dated 22 A.H. (preserved at the Austrian National Library, Figure 10.4) is in cursive.

The term Kufic does not necessarily betoken that its birthplace was Kufa, established during Caliph Umar’s reign. The origins of this script can be traced back to almost a century before that.42 In Abbott’s opinion Kufa, being just a short distance south of Hitra, inherited the script which was prevalent there and developed it to maturity.43 The subject of Arabic scripts is rather large and beyond the scope of this work but, as certain Orientalists have alleged that Kufic Qur’ans can never be dated to the first century A.H., I will present a few select examples of this beautiful script.44

42 Though I use the term ‘Kufic’ here and elsewhere, as employed in academic circles, I personally have reservations about this label. The earliest scholar to write in the field of Muqaddiṣī calligraphy, an-Nadiṣī, lists more than a dozen styles of script (tamīm al-lafq), of which Kufic is but one. Perhaps it is difficult now to define the distinguishing characteristics of each of these calligraphic styles, but it appears that modern academics, by lumping all these styles erroneously under the ‘Kufic’ umbrella, has achieved simplification but lost all accuracy [See A. al-Munīf, Dirāsa Fanniyah li Muqaddiṣī, Riyadh, 1418 (1998), pp. 41-42]. In the opinion of Yūnīf Dhumānīn, the term ‘Kufic’ is currently used to denote (incorrectly) all angular scripts that evolved from the base script al-Jalīf [Ibid, p. 42]. See also N. Abbott, The Rise of the North Arabic Scripts, p. 16.
43 The city of Kufa was founded in 17 A.H./638 C.E. by Sa’īd b. Abī Waqqas.
47 For more examples the interested reader can consult the islamic-awareness.org website.

Figure 9.11: Prophet’s letter to al-Mundhir (note the seal of the Prophet at lower left). Reproduced with kind permission of Akşiyen News Magazine, Turkey.

7. The Prophet’s letter to Heraclius, the Byzantine emperor.

These sufficiently refute Rev. Mingana’s premise regarding the lack of a distinct early Arabic alphabet.

40 M. Hamidullah, op. cit., p. 149. The handwriting in this letter is noticeably different from the previous one, due to the use of a different scribe.
1. The earliest dated Kufic inscription, from Qa’ al-Mu’tadil near al-Ḥijr (Mada’in Sāliḥ). It is dated 24 A.H.48

Figure 9.13: The earliest dated Islamic Inscription, discovered at Qa’ al-Mu’tadil (northwest Arabia).

The Kufic49 inscription reads (numbers within brackets refer to the lines of the inscription): "[1] In the name of Allah [2] I, Zuhayr, wrote [this] at the time ‘Umar died in the year four [3] and twenty [a. h.]." What lends additional credence to this text is that Caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khattāb died on the last night of the month of Dhul Hijjah of the year 23 a.H. and was buried the following day, the first of Muharram of the new year 24 a.H.50

2. Tombstone from Aswān (southern Egypt) with an inscription dated 31 a.H.51

Figure 9.14: Tombstone in southern Egypt, 31 a.H.

Source: Hamidullah, Six Originæs, pp. 69-70.

3. An inscription in Kufic script found on the Darb Zubayda caravans route (near Ta‘if), containing prayer. This one is dated 40 a.H.15

Figure 9.15: Attractive Kufic inscription dated 40 a.H., with a sketch of the original and a line by line reading. Source: Al-Aṣfl, vol. i, Plate 49. Reproduced with their kind permission.

4. A dated Kufic inscription on a tombstone in Ḥalfūl, Palestine, 55 a.H.53

Figure 9.16: A tombstone in Palestine, dated 55 a.H.

5. Dam of Ma‘awiya near Ta‘if, with an inscription in undecorated Kufic,54 dated 58 a.H.55

6. A Qur’ānic verse in Kufic script discovered near Makkah, dated 80 a.H.56

49 I am at odds with Dr. Ghabban in calling it a ‘Kufic inscription’, as it is rather crude compared to the more refined inscriptions that appear later in time, e.g. Figures 9.13 – 9.18.
50 See Daily al-Ḥiyād, issue 10.11.1424/2.1.2004. UNESCO has recently seen fit to include this inscription in its Memory of the World Register of Documentary Collections.
51 N. Abbott, op. cit., p. 69; also S. al-Munayyid, Études De Paléographie Arabe, p. 40.
54 Grunder, op. cit., pp. 15-16.
55 See Figure 10.11 and the accompanying text.
7. An inscription near Makkah based on Qur'anic verses\textsuperscript{57} in Kufic script, dated 84 A.H.\textsuperscript{58}

Figure 9.18: A beautiful Kufic inscription dated 84 A.H.

\textsuperscript{57} This inscription is not a Qur'anic verse but is derived from two different verses (2:21 and 4:1). It could be due to a slip in the writer's memory. Quoting Bruce Metzger, "The memory can play strange tricks when one quotes even the most familiar passages... a remarkable instance of this in no less a person than Jeremy Taylor, who quotes the text 'Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God' nine times, yet only twice in the same form, and never once correctly" [The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration, 3rd enlarged edition, Oxford Univ. Press, 1992, pp. 88-89, footnote 3].

\textsuperscript{58} S. ar-Risālid, op. cit., pp. 26-29.

These images along with many others\textsuperscript{59} confirm that even in the first century A.H., the Kufic script had achieved considerable prominence throughout the Muslim lands (Egypt, Hijāz, Syria, Iraq etc.). These inscriptions argue against Gruendler, who alleges that all Kufic Muḥāfaṣās belong to the second and third century A.H.\textsuperscript{60} Well-known by the middle of the first century, this script came to be used widely throughout the Islamic world, especially in coinage,\textsuperscript{61} and there is no plausible reason why it had to wait a century or more before being adopted for Muḥāfaṣās.

3. Conclusion

Arabia's rocks are adorned with numerous examples of Arabic script beginning from the middle of the 3rd century C.E. Primitive in some respects, early Arabic nevertheless provided the impetus for the Nabataeans' own form of Arabic while its historical roots, anchored in the epoch of Ibrāhīm and Ismā‘īl, predates the Aramaic. Like any other language, Arabic paleography and orthography were in a constant state of flux. The expansion of Muslim territories led to the parallel evolution of different Arabic scripts, e.g., Hijāzī, Kufic and cursive, each with its own characteristics. None of the scripts dominated the others, and none was confined to a specific locale. With multiple examples of Kufic script taken from first century inscriptions, we have negated the theory that Kufic Muḥāfaṣās can only be dated to the second or third century A.H.


\textsuperscript{60} Gruendler, op. cit., pp. 134-35.

\textsuperscript{61} Caliph ‘Abdul Malik unified the coinage throughout the Islamic world in the year 77 A.H./697 C.E. [Stephen Album, A Checklist of Islamic Coins, 2nd edition, 1998, p. 5]. These purely epigraphic coins in gold, silver and copper bore mottos from the Qur‘ān, the year in which they were struck, and in the case of silver and copper coins the name of the mint all in Kufic script. This practice continued even after the fall of the Ummayad caliphate in 132 A.H. ["Islamic Coins – The Turath Collection Part 1", Spink, London, 25 May 1999, Sale No. 133].