

Islamization and social transformation in Transjordan: the study of pre-modern Arabic graffiti in archaeological contexts

by Julia Maczuga

Aims of the project:

- collection of graffiti and rock art from the territory of modern Jordan dated to the Islamic period
- specification of the functions of graffiti in the society under Islamic rule
- study of the development of graffiti and rock art traditions with a backdrop of the Islamization process

Chronology: from the Umayyad to the Mamluk periods

Geographical borders: the territory of modern Jordan

The nature of the studied material:

- Almost all graffiti dated to the Islamic period are addressed to God and contain pleas for forgiveness, mercy, or blessings.
- All the inscriptions are formulaic, however, some degree of individualism is discernible. Some of the graffiti are neatly incised, whereas others are executed in a crude manner, suggesting that the authors had varying degrees of literacy.
- Graffiti were executed by people on journeys: clusters of graffiti were found on pilgrimage routes and in the vicinity of strategic sites, such as watering holes and points of vantage. The walls of early Islamic open-air mosques and *qusur* are also covered with graffiti.
- Christians were still active after the Islamic conquest and left a large number of Arabic-Christian inscriptions, serving as a testimony to their religious practices.



Arabic-Christian inscription from Petra Deir, recorded by Julia Maczuga



Arabic-Christian inscription from Petra Deir, recorded by Julia Maczuga



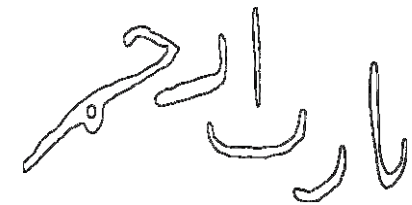
Islamic inscriptions from al-Mafraq Museum, (*Arabian Epigraphic Notes*, Abdul-Qader al.-Housan)



Kufic inscription from Jabal Hauron, (*Arabian archaeology and Epigraphy*, Zeyad al-Salameen, Hani al.-Falihat)

Research Questions:

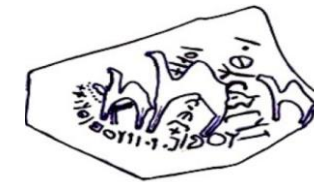
- Are the early Islamic, Arabic-Muslim inscriptions simply evidence of Muslim pilgrims and traders passing by, or are they a sign of the Islamization of inhabitants in Jordanian rural territories? Did the process of Islamization occur simultaneously in rural and urban areas? Was this process more dynamic in rural areas?
- Can the study of writing styles reveal something about the social status of the authors of the graffiti? If so, is there a difference in content of the inscriptions depending on social status, such as the higher class perhaps being more familiar with Qur'ānic verses? During the Islamic period were nomadic people still using the phrases common for Safaitic and Thalmudic graffiti?
- Did nomadic people tend to gather in the same places after the Islamic conquest?
- How did "sacral landscapes" of Jordan change from the Umayyad period until Mamluk times?
- Did the graffiti tradition continue into the Mamluk period? Did the graffiti begin to appear in new cultic places, such as sufi shrines?



Arabic-Christian inscription from Petra Deir, recorded by Julia Maczuga

Methodology:

- newly discovered graffiti will be traced and then digitalized in Corel Draw
- the catalogue of graffiti dated to the the Islamic periods from the territory of Jordan will be created in File Maker Pro; the graffiti will be categorized according to the context in which they appear, such as on the walls of mosques or as rock art
- the spatial distribution of pre-Islamic and Islamic graffiti will be illustrated using Geographic Information System mapping



GERDA HENKEL STIFTUNG

علم الآثار الإسلامية
Islamic Archaeology