

The Umayyad and Early Abbasid Inscriptions in the Prophet's Mosque in Medina*

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Abstract

This article offers a translation and discussion of a chapter of a relatively little known late third/ninth- or early fourth/tenth-century text that contains a transcription of the inscriptions that could be seen around the Prophet's Mosque in Medina after the renovation work undertaken there on the orders of the third Abbasid caliph, Muḥammad al-Mahdī. This text thus adds significantly to our corpus of known inscriptions from early Abbasid imperial monuments. The article discusses the sources of information about these inscriptions in the Prophet's Mosque, the fate of the Umayyad-era inscriptions in the early Abbasid period, and what the new Abbasid-era inscriptions have to tell us about the Abbasids' claims to authority in the decades immediately following their seizure of power.

Introduction

According to the Imāmī historian ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Nawfalī (d. mid- to late third/ninth century), as the era of Umayyad rule was drawing to a close, the Jaʿfarid Talibid Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh Abī al-Karrām had a dream:¹

I had a vision, as dreamers do, near the end of the Umayyads' rule, as if I had entered the mosque of the messenger of God (ṣ). I raised my head and looked at the mosaic

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1. For al-Nawfalī, see Sebastian Günther, "Al-Nawfalī's Lost *History*: The Issue of a Ninth-Century Shiʿite Source Used by al-Ṭabarī and Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 2 (2009): 241–66; for Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh Abī al-Karrām b. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Jaʿfar b. Abī Ṭalīb, a loyal supporter of the Abbasids during the rebellion of the Hasanid Talibid Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh "al-Nafs al-Zakiyya," see Amikam Elad, *The Rebellion of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya in 145/762: Ṭalībīs and Early ʿAbbāsīs in Conflict* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 257–58, 377.

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inscription in the mosque, which includes, “[This is] among that which the commander of the faithful al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik ordered.” All of a sudden someone said, “A man from the Banū Hāshim called Muḥammad is going to efface this inscription and write his own name in its place.” I said, “I’m Muḥammad and I’m from the Banū Hāshim. Son of whom?”

- “Son of ‘Abd Allāh.”
- “I’m the son of ‘Abd Allāh. The son of whom?”
- “Son of Muḥammad.”
- “I’m the son of Muḥammad. The son of whom?”
- “The son of ‘Alī.”
- “I’m the son of ‘Alī. The son of whom?”
- “The son of ‘Abd Allāh.”
- “I’m the son of ‘Abd Allāh. The son of whom?”
- “The son of ‘Abbās.”

And even though I could not reach al-‘Abbās, I had no doubt that this was about me. I told people about this dream at that time, though I did not know about al-Mahdī. But he spoke to people about it, so when he entered the mosque of the messenger of God (ṣ), he raised his head, took a look, and saw the name of al-Walīd. He said, “I see the name of al-Walīd is in the mosque of the messenger of God (ṣ) to this day.” He asked for a chair, and one was brought to him in the courtyard of the mosque. He said, “I’m not going anywhere until it has been effaced and my name has been inscribed in its place.” He had workmen, scaffolding, and all that was necessary summoned and did not leave until it had been altered and his name had been inscribed.²

This anecdote fits well within the genre of reports that display the trope of confused apocalyptic expectations of the role to be played by a member of the family of the prophet (here identified as Banū Hāshim) who carries the prophet’s own name, Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh.³ For the purposes of this article, it highlights the significance of inscriptions in major caliphal, imperial monuments. Just as his grandson and the future caliph al-Maʿmūn (r. 198–218/813–33) was to do with the Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān’s (r. 65–86/685–705) name in the inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, the third Abbasid caliph Muḥammad al-Mahdī (r. 158–69/775–85) here had the name of the Umayyad caliph al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 86–96/705–15) in the foundation inscription of the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina effaced and his own name inscribed in its place.⁴

2. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, ed. M. J. de Goeje et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1879–1901), 3:534–35.

3. See, for example, the discussion in Amikam Elad, “The Struggle for the Legitimacy of Authority as Reflected in the Ḥadīth of al-Mahdī,” in *Abbasid Studies II: Occasional Papers of the School of Abbasid Studies*, ed. John Nawas, 39–96 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010).

4. For al-Maʿmūn and the Dome of the Rock, see, among many discussions, Marcus Milwright, *The Dome of the Rock and Its Umayyad Mosaic Inscriptions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 51, 65. For an introduction to foundation inscriptions across the premodern Islamic world, see Sheila Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*

Al-Mahdī reigned, as this anecdote reminds us, at a time when Umayyad rule was still within living memory and the Abbasids and their supporters were still working to articulate precisely the reasons why they were the legitimate caliphal family in the face of numerous opponents' challenges.⁵ Monumental, commemorative construction projects were one way of articulating the necessary messages of legitimacy, and the Abbasids seem to have jumped at the chance to highlight their victory over their Umayyad predecessors by ostentatiously effacing their names from these imperial monuments.

This suggests, in turn, that the epigraphic programs in such major imperial monuments might have quite a bit to tell us about the nature of Umayyad and early Abbasid rule.⁶ Indeed, such programs, together with other aspects of these monuments' form and decoration, have formed the basis of important studies on Umayyad caliphs' political agendas.⁷ These studies have focused, perfectly understandably, on a fairly small number of monuments, especially the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus; when it comes to the early Abbasids' articulation of political messages through epigraphic programs in explicitly caliphally patronized monuments, there has been less work. This is in large part due to the relative paucity of texts that remain physically extant, although for the Umayyad period the inscriptions from the Dome of the Rock are a particularly important survival.⁸ From the early Abbasid period, there is, for example, a milestone found near

(Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 29–42.

5. Among many studies, see, for example, 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Dūrī, "al-Fikra al-mahdiyya bayn al-da'wa al-'abbāsiyya wa-l-'aṣr al-'abbāsī al-awwal," in *Studia Arabica et Islamica: Festschrift for Iḥsān 'Abbās on His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Wadād al-Qāḍī, 123–32 (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1981); Jacob Lassner, *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory: An Inquiry into the Art of 'Abbāsī Apologetics* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1986); Patricia Crone, "On the Meaning of the 'Abbāsīd Call to *al-Riḍā*," in *The Islamic World: From Classical to Modern Times*, ed. C. Edmund Bosworth et al., 95–111 (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1989); idem, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 87–98; Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Religion and Politics under the Early 'Abbāsīds: The Emergence of the Proto-Sunnī Elite* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); and Deborah G. Tor, "The Parting of Ways between 'Alid Shi'ism and Abbasid Shi'ism: An Analysis of the Missives between the Caliph al-Manṣūr and Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya," *Journal of Abbasid Studies* 6, no. 2 (2019): 209–27.

6. For the purposes of this article, "the early Abbasid period" refers to the reigns of the first three Abbasid caliphs: Abū al-'Abbās al-Saffāḥ (r. 132–36/749–54), Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr (r. 136–58/754–75), and Muḥammad al-Mahdī (r. 158–69/775–85). The Umayyad period is often divided into three periods, and that discussed in this article is almost always the Marwanid era, from 64/684 to 132/749; see further Andrew Marsham, "Introduction: The Umayyad World," in *The Umayyad World*, ed. Andrew Marsham, 1–20 (London: Routledge, 2021), 14–15.

7. A large number of studies on the Dome of the Rock are relevant here, but for use of the inscriptions, see Gülru Necipoğlu, "The Dome of the Rock as Palimpsest: 'Abd al-Malik's Grand Narrative and Sultan Süleyman's Glosses," *Muqarnas* 25 (2008): 17–105, at 45–56; and Milwright, *Dome of the Rock* (which also provides references to important earlier studies). See also Finbarr Barry Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus: Studies on the Makings of an Umayyad Visual Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Alain George, "Paradise or Empire? On a Paradox of Umayyad Art," in *Power, Patronage, and Memory in Early Islam: Perspectives on Umayyad Elites*, ed. Alain George and Andrew Marsham, 39–67 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); idem, *The Umayyad Mosque of Damascus: Art, Faith and Empire in Early Islam* (London: Gingko, 2021).

8. For the lack of extant monumental inscriptions from the early Abbasid period, see, for example, Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*, 59. A good example of the problem can be seen in Sheila Blair, *The Monumental Inscriptions from Early Islamic Iran and Transoxiana* (Leiden: Brill, 1992): of the seventy-nine inscriptions/bunches of

Mafraq in northern Jordan, which mentions that it was constructed at the command of one “al-Mahdī” in the year 135/752–53;⁹ a text from Baysān/Scythopolis commemorating the construction or renovation of an unspecified building during the reign of Abū al-‘Abbās al-Saffāḥ in 135/753;¹⁰ an inscription from the mosque in Sanaa recording work patronized by the caliph in 136/753–54;¹¹ an inscription from the Masjid al-Bay‘a near Mecca dated to 144/761–62;¹² an inscription recording work on a minaret (*miḏhana*) and mosque in Ascalon in 155/771–72;¹³ an inscription from the Masjid al-Ḥarām in Mecca dated to 167/783–84;¹⁴ and one of the milestones discovered so far along the Darb Zubayda, the major route that connected Baghdad/Kufa and Mecca, undated but certainly early Abbasid, that mentions the patronage of a caliph.¹⁵

inscriptions datable to the first five centuries AH included in this work, none dates to the first century, one to the second century, and one small collection of graffiti to the third century. For a quick overview of extant Umayyad-era inscriptions from caliphally patronized monuments, see Beatrice Gruendler, *The Development of the Arabic Scripts: From the Nabatean Era to the First Islamic Century according to Dated Texts* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 15–21 (the relevant texts are E4, E9–10, E12–16); and Ilkka Lindstedt, “Arabic Rock Inscriptions up to 750 CE,” in Marsham, *Umayyad World*, 411–37, at 428. Some of these can be consulted in Étienne Combe et al., eds., *Répertoire chronologique d’épigraphie arabe* (Cairo: Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1931–91) [henceforth *RCEA*], within 1:8–24 (nos. 9–12, 14–17, 25, 27–28).

9. Khaled Al-Jbour, “The Discovery of the First Abbasid Milestone in ‘Bilād ash-Shām,”” *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* 8 (2004): 171–76. Since the text is curtailed, the only word visible in the patron’s title is *al-mahdī*, but as Al-Jbour notes, since the caliph Abū al-‘Abbās al-Saffāḥ is called “al-Mahdī” in other texts (see nn. 10–11), the title here probably refers to that caliph.

10. See Amikam Elad, “The Caliph Abū‘l-‘Abbās al-Saffāḥ, the First ‘Abbāsīd *Mahdī*: Implications of an Unknown Inscription from Bet-Shean (Baysān),” in *Mas‘at Moshe: Studies in Jewish and Islamic Culture Presented to Moshe Gil*, ed. Ezra Fleischer, Mordechai A. Friedman and Joel A. Kramer, 9–55 (Heb.), with Eng. summary at v–vi (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1998), esp. 9 for this text; and Moshe Sharon, *Corpus inscriptionum arabicarum palaestinae* (Leiden: Brill, 1997–) [henceforth *CIAP*], 2:214–19, esp. 215 for the text.

11. This is perhaps the most frequently discussed to date of these early Abbasid caliphal foundation inscriptions. A photograph and transcription were first published by Eugen Mittwoch, “Eine arabische Bauinschrift aus dem Jahre 136 H.,” *Orientalia* 4 (1935): 235–38. Since then, the text has also been provided in al-Dūrī, “al-Fikra al-mahdiyya,” 124; Robert B. Serjeant and Ronald Lewcock, “The Architectural History and Description of Ṣan‘ā’ Mosques: The Great Mosque,” in *Ṣan‘ā’: An Arabian Islamic City*, ed. Ronald Lewcock and Robert B. Serjeant, 323–50 (London: World of Islam Festival Trust, 1983), 345 (photograph) and 348 (edition and translation); and Elad, “Caliph Abū‘l-‘Abbās al-Saffāḥ,” 16 (with further discussion in idem, “Struggle,” 39–40, 42). There is also a brief but misleadingly inaccurate citation of the text in Muḥammad al-Ḥajrī, *Masājid Ṣan‘ā’: ‘Āmiruhā wa-muwaffihā* (Sanaa: Maṭba‘at Wizārat al-Ma‘ārif, 1361/1942), 26.

12. Sa‘d b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Rāshid et al., *Āthār minṭaqaṭ Makka al-mukarrama* (Riyadh: Wizārat al-Ma‘ārif, Wikālat al-Āthār wa-l-Matāḥif, 1423/2003), 122. There is another nearby but undated inscription that may be related to this one; see *ibid.*, 122–25. A new edition and study of the known early Abbasid inscriptions from Mecca is currently being prepared by Mehdy Shaddel. I am very grateful to him for discussing these with me.

13. Another oft-discussed early Abbasid inscription; see *RCEA*, 1:32–33 (no. 42); *CIAP*, 1:144–47; Elad, “Struggle,” 58 (with references to further discussions).

14. Al-Rāshid et al., *Āthār minṭaqaṭ Makka al-mukarrama*, 111–13. There is another inscription nearby that seems closely associated with this text and probably comes from the same period; see *ibid.*, 113–14. Mehdy Shaddel’s forthcoming publication will also include a third text dating to al-Mahdī’s caliphate from the Masjid al-Ḥarām.

15. See Sa‘d b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Rāshid, “Arba‘at aḥjār miliyya min al-‘aṣr al-‘abbāsī: Dirāsa wa-taḥqīq,”

The paucity of physically surviving texts makes the study of those epigraphic programs whose traces are preserved in literary sources all the more important. The study of apparent documentary evidence that is preserved in premodern Arabic literary sources has a long history among scholars interested in the early Islamic period.¹⁶ Such study does not appear to be receding, and ever more studies are published on “documents” that are preserved only in later Arabic texts.¹⁷ As far as epigraphic programs are concerned, that which accompanied al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik’s new mosque in Damascus, relatively well known among modern historians of the Umayyad era, can be studied only on the basis of discussions in Arabic literary sources. It is, for example, the famous Damascene historian Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 571/1176) who tells us that on narrow bands in blue and gold along the *qibla* wall could be found the Throne Verse (Q 2:255) followed by al-Walīd’s foundation inscription as well as *sūras* 1 and 79–81 of the Qur’an.¹⁸

Reports of the inscriptions that could be found in the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina after the building projects of al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik between 88/706–7 and 91/709–10 and of a few Abbasid caliphs, especially that of Muḥammad al-Mahdī between 162/778–79 and 165/781–82, can provide modern historians with some of the most extensive such material.¹⁹ Some aspects of the epigraphic programs known from this mosque over the

al-Uṣūr 5, no. 1 (1990): 123–42, at 124, 130–31; there is also a very brief note on this inscription in idem, “A New ‘Abbāsīd Milestone from al-Rabaḍa in Saudi Arabia,” *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 3, no. 2 (1992): 138–43, at 139. For further discussion of this particular inscription, see the Appendix to this article.

16. A number of the texts included in the early volumes of *RCEA*, for example, are attested only in premodern Arabic literary sources. Another well-studied example is the so-called Constitution of Medina, on which see Michael Lecker, *The “Constitution of Medina”: Muḥammad’s First Legal Document* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 2004). For an example of recent reluctance (though in this case perhaps appropriate) to use texts of inscriptions from the Abbasid period preserved in literary sources, see Hagit Nol, “Dating Early Islamic Sites through Architectural Elements: A Case Study from Central Israel,” *Journal of Islamic Archaeology* 6, no. 1 (2019): 41–80, at 57.

17. For just four examples, see Wadād al-Qādī, “An Umayyad Papyrus in al-Kindī’s *Kitāb al-Quḍāt?*,” *Der Islam* 84, no. 2 (2007): 200–245; Andrew Marsham and Chase F. Robinson, “The Safe-Conduct for the Abbasid ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Alī (d. 764),” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 70, no. 2 (2007): 247–81; Andrew Marsham, “The Pact (*Amāna*) between Mu‘āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān and ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ (656 or 658 CE): ‘Documents’ and the Islamic Historical Tradition,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 57, no. 1 (2012): 69–96; and Milka Levy-Rubin, “The Surrender Agreements: Origins and Authenticity,” in Marsham, *Umayyad World*, 196–215.

18. Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh madīnat Dimashq*, vols. 1 and 2, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid (Damascus: al-Majma‘ al-‘Ilmī al-‘Arabī, 1951–54), 2/i:37. His source for this information is Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb b. Sufyān al-Fasawī (d. 277/890), but it cannot be found in the extant parts of the latter’s *Kitāb al-Ma‘rifa wa-l-ta’rīkh*. The editor of the latter work included it in his edition on the basis of Ibn ‘Asākir’s citation; see al-Fasawī, *Kitāb al-Ma‘rifa wa-l-ta’rīkh*, ed. Akram Ḍiyā’ al-‘Umarī, 3rd ed. (Medina: Maktabat al-Dār, 1410/1989–90), 3:433–34. Other sources provide a text for the foundation inscription as well; see, in general, Barbara Finster, “Die Mosaiken der Umayyadenmoschee von Damaskus,” *Kunst des Orients* 7, no. 2 (1970–71): 83–141, at 119; Flood, *Great Mosque*, 247–54; and George, *Umayyad Mosque*, 76–77, 175–78, 206–7.

19. For studies of these two building programs in Medina (al-Walīd’s is much better studied than al-Mahdī’s), see esp. Jean Sauvaget, *Le mosquée omeyyade de Médine: Étude sur les origines architecturales de la mosquée et de la basilique* (Paris: Vanoest, 1947); K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture: Umayyads, A.D. 622–750*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 142–49; Ghazi Izzeddin Bisheh, “The Mosque of the Prophet at Madīnah Throughout the First-Century A.H. with Special Emphasis on the Umayyad Mosque” (PhD diss.,

second/eighth century have been discussed before, especially the evidence for al-Walīd's inscriptions.²⁰ The Abbasid-era texts have received less attention, although they were subjected to a fairly thorough study by Jean Sauvaget based on a good range of sources that were available to him at the time.²¹ Renewed study of these inscriptions is, however, long overdue. The most significant reason for this is that no detailed study to date has made use of the most important source for research into these inscriptions: a late third/ninth- or early fourth/tenth-century work known as *Kitāb al-Manāsik wa-amākin ṭuruq al-ḥajj wa-ma'ālim al-jazīra*.²² Sauvaget's study, upon which most other historians have relied, was written before the publication of this *Kitāb al-Manāsik* and so was based primarily on the inscriptions discussed by Ibn Rusta, who visited the mosque in 290/903, supplemented by material provided by the later local historian of Medina Ibn al-Najjār (d. 643/1245) and the very brief discussions provided by Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), Ibn 'Abd Rabbih (d. 328/940), and Ibn al-Nadīm (d. before 388/998).²³ Sauvaget also made some use of another local history of Medina, that of al-Samhūdī (d. 911/1506), although he mostly used the briefer of the extant histories by that author; a much more detailed work also survives, and although it does not provide a full survey of the inscriptions, it does offer important supplementary material that is crucial to their interpretation.²⁴

University of Michigan, 1979), 201–48; Marcel Behrens, “*Ein Garten des Paradieses*”: *Die Prophetenmoschee von Medina* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2007), 85–90; and Harry Munt, *The Holy City of Medina: Sacred Space in Early Islamic Arabia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 105–11, 115–17.

20. For discussion of al-Walīd's inscriptions, see Sauvaget, *Mosquée omeyyade*, 78–80; Finster, “Mosaiken,” 132; Bisheh, “Mosque of the Prophet,” 218; Estelle Whelan, “Forgotten Witness: Evidence for the Early Codification of the Qurʾān,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118, no. 1 (1998): 1–14, at 8–13; Flood, *Great Mosque*, 196–97, 204–5; Elias Khamis, “Two Wall Mosaic Inscriptions from the Umayyad Market Place in Bet Shean/Baysān,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 64, no. 2 (2001): 159–76, at 171; and Alain George, “Calligraphy, Colour and Light in the Blue Qurʾan,” *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies* 11, no. 1 (2009): 75–125, at 97.

21. Sauvaget, *Mosquée omeyyade*, 54–68; see also, more recently, George, “Calligraphy, Colour and Light,” 98–101.

22. See *Kitāb al-Manāsik wa-amākin ṭuruq al-ḥajj wa-ma'ālim al-jazīra*, ed. Ḥamad al-Jāsir (Riyadh: Dār al-Yamāma, 1389/1969), 385–95 for the discussion of the inscriptions. The authorship of this work is discussed further below. For some discussion of this source's provision of the text of early Abbasid inscriptions from the Prophet's Mosque, see Elad, “Struggle,” 39, n. 4; Munt, *Holy City of Medina*, 115–16, 167–68; and now Bea Leal, “The Abbasid Mosaic Tradition and the Great Mosque of Damascus,” *Muqarnas* 37 (2020): 29–62, at 31–32.

23. For these sources' discussions of the inscriptions, see Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma'ārif*, ed. Tharwat 'Ukāsha, 4th ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.), 562–63; Ibn Rusta, *al-Mujallad al-sābi' min Kitāb al-A'āq al-nafisa*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1891), 70–71, 73–75; Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *al-'Iqd al-farīd*, ed. Aḥmad Amīn, Aḥmad al-Zayn, and Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī (Cairo: Maṭba'at Lajnat al-Ta'lif wa-l-Tarjama wa-l-Nashr, 1359–72/1940–53), 6:260–63; Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, ed. Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid (London: Mu'assasat al-Furqān li-l-Turāth al-Islāmī, 1430/2009), 1/i:15–16 (future references are to this edition unless otherwise stated); Ibn al-Najjār, *al-Durra al-thamīna fī ta'rīkh al-Madīna*, ed. Muḥammad 'Azab (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, 1416/1995), 176–77, 179. The inscriptions as provided by Ibn Rusta were also included in *RCEA*, 1:29–30, 35–38, 65–66 (nos. 38, 46–47, 83); and 2:265 (no. 786); and that provided by Ibn Qutayba partially (possibly via al-Samhūdī, who also provides it partially in his *Wafā' al-wafā bi-akhbār dār al-muṣṭafā*, ed. Qāsim al-Sāmarrā'ī [London: Mu'assasat al-Furqān li-l-Turāth al-Islāmī, 1422/2001], 2:296) in *RCEA*, 1:98 (no. 122).

24. Sauvaget used al-Samhūdī's *Khulāṣat al-wafā bi-akhbār dār al-muṣṭafā*; for an edition, see ed. 'Alī Muḥammad 'Umar (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, 1427/2006). The more important work is al-Samhūdī's

Ibn Rusta's catalog of inscriptions from the Prophet's Mosque was the most comprehensive to have been published when Sauvaget was at work on his study, but Ibn Rusta noted at the end of his survey of some of the texts, "There are many texts in places around the mosque and its entrances, inside and outside, which I have not transcribed, preferring concision."²⁵ The *Kitāb al-Manāsik* includes also the texts that Ibn Rusta omitted. Several other Mamluk-era local histories of Medina that have been published since Sauvaget's study are also useful, especially that by al-Firūzābādī (d. 817/1414), which also provides the text of a number of the inscriptions contained in the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* but not in other works.²⁶

After a brief survey of what is known about work in general on the Prophet's Mosque over the Marwanid and early Abbasid periods, this article offers a discussion of the *Kitāb al-Manāsik*'s sources for its transcription of the mosque's inscriptions as well as the sources of some of the other relevant premodern authors and a translation of the section of the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* that deals with those inscriptions. This, then, forms the basis for further discussion of what these inscriptions can tell us about several issues relevant to modern research into early Islamic history. I focus more heavily on texts from the early Abbasid period, since it is these that the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* reproduces more fully than any other source does, but I also give some consideration to the Umayyad-era texts. It is my hope that this article can help bring the Prophet's Mosque in Medina more fully into discussions of Umayyad, and especially early Abbasid, imperial building programs to grant it a place in modern scholarship more fitting of its clear importance to caliphs and other Muslims in the second/eighth century.

Construction Work in the Prophet's Mosque in the Marwanid and Early Abbasid Periods

Although various developments in the structure of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina are said to have taken place during the era of the Rāshidūn caliphs, it is really with the work ordered by al-Walīd b. 'Abd al-Malik that the building came to take much of the shape that defined it throughout the premodern period.²⁷ This caliph is known for ordering significant construction work on a number of major mosques around the caliphate, including in Jerusalem (the Aqṣā Mosque), Damascus, Mecca, Sanaa, Homs, and al-Fuṣṭāṭ, as well as in Medina.²⁸ The work he ordered in Medina was carried out by the governor of that town, his

Wafā' al-wafā. For more on this author, see Ḥamad al-Jāsir, "al-Samhūdī: Ashhar mu'arrikhī al-Madīna," *Majallat al-ʿArab* 7 (1392/1972): 161–78; al-Sāmarrāʾī's introduction to his edition of the *Wafā' al-wafā*, at 1:7–47; 2:5–23; and Harry Munt, "Mamluk Historiography outside of Egypt and Syria: 'Alī b. 'Abd Allāh al-Samhūdī and His Histories of Medina," *Der Islam* 92, no. 2 (2015): 413–41.

25. Ibn Rusta, *al-A'īn al-nafīsa*, 75.

26. Al-Firūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba fī ma'ālim Ṭāba*, ed. Ḥabīb Maḥmūd Aḥmad et al. (Medina: Markaz Buḥūth wa-Dirāsāt al-Madīna al-Munawwara, 1423/2002), 1:425–35.

27. Much of this section is summarized from the discussion in Munt, *Holy City of Medina*, 105–11, 115–17, where further references are given. For discussion of the literary accounts of the pre-Marwanid mosque, see Thallein Antun, *The Architectural Form of the Mosque in the Central Arab Lands, from the Hijra to the End of the Umayyad Period, 1/622–133/750* (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 2016), 50–70.

28. For discussion, see Finster, "Mosaiken," 127–39; and Flood, *Great Mosque*, esp. 184–92. See also Rafi Grafman and Myriam Rosen-Ayalon, "The Two Great Syrian Umayyad Mosques: Jerusalem and Damascus,"

cousin and the future caliph ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, and Ṣāliḥ b. Kaysān between 88/706–7 and 91/709–10.²⁹ As part of this project, the mosque was substantially enlarged to the east, north, and west. As Sauvaget noted, it is impossible to provide exact measurements for the size of the new mosque, since the building itself does not, of course, survive and the figures given in literary sources vary.³⁰ One such set of numbers gives 167.5 cubits for the southern wall, 135 cubits for the northern wall, and 200 cubits for the eastern and western walls.³¹ Within these walls, a central courtyard was surrounded by arcades comprising numerous columns. This enlargement work brought the prophet’s grave, now within a dedicated chamber, within the walls of the mosque for the first time (it was located near the southeast corner), and other features classically associated with mosques, including a concave *miḥrāb* and corner towers later identified as minarets, were apparently introduced at the same time.³² The building work was accompanied by a lavish program of decoration, most famously a series of mosaics that, according to a well-known report transmitted by the early Medinan local historian Ibn Zabāla (more on this figure below), depicted “the trees and villas (*quṣūr*) of Paradise.”³³ It has often been suggested that these mosaics perhaps resembled those that can still be seen in the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus.³⁴ Famously, this work was apparently carried out with the assistance of laborers and resources sent by the Byzantine emperor Justinian II (r. 685–95, 705–11 CE).³⁵

After al-Walīd’s work, not much more appears to have been done during the remaining years of Umayyad rule. As we will soon see, however, some inscriptions recorded in the *Kitāb*

Muqarnas 16 (1999): 1–15; and especially now Alain George, “A Builder of Mosques: The Projects of al-Walīd I, from Sanaa to Homs” in *Fruit of Knowledge, Wheel of Learning: Essays in Honour of Robert Hillenbrand*, ed. Melanie Gibson, 16–49 (London: Gingko, 2022).

29. These, at least, are the dates given by the early local historian of Medina Ibn Zabāla (on whom see below), as cited in Ibn Rusta, *al-Aʿlāq al-nafīsa*, 71–72; and al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ al-wafāʾ*, 2:273–74.

30. Sauvaget, *Mosquée omeyyade*, 70; see also Antun, *Architectural Form*, 66–67.

31. Bisheh, “Mosque of the Prophet,” 211. Various lengths for cubit (*dhirāʿ*) were known in the early Islamic centuries; they were usually somewhere around half a meter, give or take, though sometimes varied more considerably. Umayyad-era buildings were apparently built with a cubit equivalent to 0.56m; see Grafman and Rosen-Ayalon, “Two Great Syrian Mosques,” 5–6; George, *Umayyad Mosque*, 136. This equivalence gives us 112 m for the western and eastern walls, 75.6 m for the northern wall, and 93.8 m for the southern wall. Sauvaget (*Mosquée omeyyade*, 91) offers a reconstruction of al-Walīd’s mosque that agrees roughly with these measurements, although it has the northern and southern walls more similar to one another in length.

32. For these features of the mosque, see also Sauvaget, *Mosquée omeyyade*, 69–92; Bisheh, “Mosque of the Prophet,” 201–48; Munt, *Holy City of Medina*, 106–11. For other discussions of their origins, see, for example, Estelle Whelan, “The Origins of the *Miḥrāb Mujawwaf*: A Reinterpretation,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 18, no. 2 (1996): 205–23; Nuha N. N. Khoury, “The Mihrab: From Text to Form,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 20, no. 1 (1998): 1–27; Jonathan M. Bloom, *The Minaret* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013). For two other features closely associated with the mosque in Medina, see Heba Mostafa, “The Early Mosque Revisited: Introduction of the *Minbar* and *Maqṣūra*,” *Muqarnas* 33 (2016): 1–16.

33. For the quotation, see *Kitāb al-Manāsik*, 364–65; Ibn Rusta, *al-Aʿlāq al-nafīsa*, 69; Ibn al-Najjār, *al-Durra al-thamīna*, 176; al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ al-wafāʾ*, 2:270.

34. For a recent note of the link, see George, “Paradise or Empire,” 53.

35. For a discussion of this with reference to earlier scholarship, see Bisheh, “Mosque of the Prophet,” 201–11; George, *Umayyad Mosque*, 87–88.

al-Manāsik and other sources suggest that work was undertaken in the mosque during the reigns of the first two Abbasid caliphs, Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Saffāḥ and Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr.³⁶ It was, however, the construction work ordered by the third Abbasid caliph, Muḥammad al-Mahdī that gave the Prophet's Mosque the general form it would have down to the nineteenth century.³⁷ Between 162/778–79 and 165/781–82, according to some sources, this caliph had the mosque expanded northward by 100 cubits (ca. 56 m) and made several changes to the interior decoration. He also apparently wished to remove the additional steps that an Umayyad caliph had added to the prophet's *minbar* in the mosque to return it to its original form, but eventually decided against doing so out of fear that the necessary work would damage the wood of the original steps. As part of his renovations to the interior decoration of the mosque, al-Mahdī established a program of inscriptions that incorporated some earlier texts around the courtyard and the entrances to the mosque. It is this program of inscriptions about which the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* provides much more information than can be found in almost any other extant source.

Sources for the Texts of the Inscriptions

Although the extant works discussed above preserve the texts of numerous inscriptions from al-Mahdī's epigraphic program in Medina, very few offer eyewitness descriptions by their authors; almost all of the authors relied on earlier witnesses to these inscriptions. (There are no extant sources authored by eyewitnesses to the Umayyad-era texts.) This raises the question of when the inscriptions disappeared. Our most reliable *terminus post quem* for their disappearance is provided by Ibn Rusta, who did apparently see at least some of the texts himself when visiting Medina during the *ḥajj* season of 290/903, a date that falls after the death of the *Kitāb al-Manāsik*'s principal source, Abū al-Ḥusayn Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥasan al-ʿAqīqī, in 277/890 (see further discussion of this figure below).³⁸ After this date, the precise circumstances of their disappearance are hard to pin down. For what it is worth, the Andalusī writer Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, when discussing the Prophet's Mosque, notes within his description of the layers of decoration along the internal *qibla* wall that “above that there is a marble band (*izār*) as well, within which is a sky-blue strip (*ṣanīfa*³⁹ *samāwiyya*) over which are five lines inscribed with gold in a thick script, roughly a finger's width, which contain the short *sūras* at the end of the Qur'an (*qiṣār al-mufaṣṣal*).”⁴⁰ Since, as we will shortly see, the Umayyad-era *qibla* wall inscription is said to have included *sūras* 91 to 114, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih's comment might suggest that this element, at least, could still be seen in the early fourth/tenth century, although there is some debate over the relationship between Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih's description and the actual appearance of the mosque in Medina

36. See also Munt, *Holy City of Medina*, 115–16.

37. *Ibid.*, 116, with further references.

38. Ibn Rusta, *al-Aʿlāq al-naḥīya*, 73. For a brief discussion of Ibn Rusta's trip to the Ḥijāz, see Zayde Antrim, *Routes and Realms: The Power of Place in the Early Islamic World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 69–70.

39. Sauvaget (*Mosquée omeyyade*, 78) reads this as *ṣuffa*.

40. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, 6:261.

in his time.⁴¹ Al-Samhūdī noted that some remnants of mosaic from the time of al-Mahdī’s expansion of the mosque could still be found in his day by the northwest minaret and along the western wall near that minaret, but that these were subsequently destroyed in the devastating fire that broke out in the mosque in Ramaḍān 886/November 1481.⁴² It is unclear whether these surviving mosaic fragments included any epigraphy.

The inscriptions were certainly still visible throughout the third/ninth century, however, and may have been restored in the middle of that century along with other features of the mosque’s decoration: according to al-Balādhurī (d. before 279/892), the caliph Jaʿfar al-Mutawakkil (r. 232–47/847–61) ordered repairs to be undertaken on the Prophet’s Mosque in 246/860–61, for which purpose he sent “plenty of mosaic” there.⁴³ The two best known sources from the late second and third/ninth centuries cited as eyewitnesses to the Abbasid-era inscriptions are Ibn Zabāla (wr. 199/814) and Yaḥyā al-ʿAqīqī. Al-Samhūdī says explicitly that “he [Yaḥyā] and Ibn Zabāla recounted the inscriptions, inside and outside [the mosque], as well as around its entrances. We have left them out because they have not survived.”⁴⁴ When al-Samhūdī does actually provide the text of a handful of these inscriptions, mostly in his chapter discussing the entrances to the mosque, he almost always credits Ibn Zabāla and/or Yaḥyā as his source.⁴⁵ The author of the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* is quite clear that his source was Yaḥyā (both this work and Yaḥyā are discussed below). There is no reason not to accept Ibn Rusta’s claim that he read at least some of these texts himself—the fact that he is the only source to reproduce an inscription recording work ordered by the caliph al-Muʿtaḍid (r. 279–89/892–902) in 282/895–96 seems to confirm this⁴⁶—although it is clear that he otherwise made heavy use of Ibn Zabāla’s *Akhbār al-Madīna* as a source for his account of Medina; it is also clear that Ibn al-Najjār made heavy use of Ibn Zabāla’s work, so the latter may well have been the ultimate source for Ibn al-Najjār’s discussion of the inscriptions.⁴⁷ Qāsim al-Sāmarrāʿī seems convinced that Ibn Zabāla was the source for al-Fīrūzābādī’s discussion of these inscriptions. Although I cannot see that clearly stated in

41. Sauvaget made heavy use of this passage in his reconstruction of the Prophet’s Mosque; see his *Mosquée omeyyade*, 31, 69–92; and Finster, “Mosaiken,” 132. Nuha Khoury, however, has discussed this passage in a particularly interesting way that questions its relationship to a Medinan reality; see her “The Meaning of the Great Mosque of Cordoba in the Tenth Century,” *Muqarnas* 13 (1996): 80–98, esp. 89–94. That said, Flood (*Great Mosque*, 193–94) has argued in favor of taking Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih’s description seriously.

42. Al-Samhūdī, *Khulāṣat al-wafā*, 1:317; idem, *Wafāʾ al-wafā*, 2:296. For this fire and its consequences, see al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ al-wafā*, 2:413–30; Sauvaget, *Mosquée omeyyade*, 46–47; Behrens, “*Garten des Paradieses*,” 93–96.

43. Al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb Futūḥ al-buldān*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1866), 7.

44. Al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ al-wafā*, 2:274.

45. See, for example, *ibid.*, 2:291; 3:8, 14, 23.

46. Ibn Rusta, *al-Aʿlāq al-nafīsa*, 74: “Abū al-ʿAbbās, the imam al-Muʿtaḍid bi-llāh, the commander of the faithful, may God lengthen his remaining time, ordered the building’s restoration in the year 282 [895–96 CE].” See also *RCEA*, 2:265 (no. 786); and discussion in Sauvaget, *Mosquée omeyyade*, 57–58.

47. For these (and other) sources’ reliance on Ibn Zabāla, see Harry Munt, “Writing the History of an Arabian Holy City: Ibn Zabāla and the First Local History of Medina,” *Arabica* 59, no. 1–2 (2012): 1–34, at 2–3, 13, 15, 19, 23–27.

the latter's work, given the considerable overlap between material in al-Firūzābādī's history and that attributed elsewhere to Ibn Zabāla, the claim is certainly plausible.⁴⁸

Ibn Zabāla's *Akhbār al-Madīna* (probably known through at least one later recension) was without doubt the single most important source for the history of Medina's early Islamic topography, population, and monuments for many later authors, especially those active in the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods. This work has, however, been discussed in detail elsewhere.⁴⁹ Here, we will focus on the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* and that work's main source for the inscriptions, Yaḥyā al-ʿAqīqī.

The *Kitāb al-Manāsik* is not a work particularly interested in the rites of the *hajj* and the *ʿumra* but rather a very important source of geographical and topographical information on the Arabian Peninsula. It is particularly concerned, as its full given title suggests, with the routes that pilgrims used to travel from regions across the caliphate to the Hijāz. It survives in a single manuscript held in Mashhad.⁵⁰ That manuscript is missing its introduction, and consequently there has been some debate over the identity of its author. The text's editor, Ḥamad al-Jāsir, argued forcefully that the author was Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Ishāq al-Ḥarbī (d. 285/898–99), and others have often followed this identification when citing the work.⁵¹ The identification has, however, been challenged by Abdullah al-Wohaibi, who has instead argued for the work's attribution to Muḥammad b. Khalaf Wakīʿ (d. 306/918), otherwise well known, especially for his extant history of the judiciary in the early Islamic centuries.⁵² Some aspects of al-Wohaibi's case are convincing, particularly the overlap he points to between the sources used and the manner of their citing in the *Kitāb al-Manāsik*, on the one hand, and in Wakīʿ' s *Akhbār al-quḍāt*, on the other. Al-Wohaibi also notes that Ibn al-Nadīm credits Wakīʿ with a *Kitāb al-Ṭarīq*, which apparently contained "reports about regions and routes," although Ibn al-Nadīm also reports that the work remained unfinished.⁵³

48. Al-Sāmarrāʿī in al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ al-wafā*, 2:274, n. 8.

49. See most recently (with references to further discussions) Ṣalāḥ ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Zayn Salāma, *Akhbār al-Madīna li-Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Zabāla* (Medina: Markaz Buḥūth wa-Dirāsāt al-Madīna al-Munawwara, 1424/2003); Munt, "Writing the History."

50. MS Mashhad, al-Maktaba al-Riḍawiyya, no. 5751. The manuscript is undated, but its most prominent student, Ḥusayn ʿAlī Maḥfūz, suggested that it was copied approximately in the early sixth/twelfth century; it was certainly owned by someone in 899/1493–94. I have been unable to consult Maḥfūz's studies directly, but see the summary in al-Jāsir's lengthy introduction to his edition of the *Kitāb al-Manāsik*, 9–273 (henceforth JāsMuq.), at 271.

51. For al-Jāsir's argument, see JāsMuq., esp. 262–70; and idem, "Makḥṭūṭ ʿan maʿālim jazīrat al-ʿArab li-l-imām al-Ḥarbī (198–285 H)" (part 2), *Majallat al-ʿArab* 3, no. 3 (1388/1968): 193–98.

52. Abdullah al-Wohaibi, *The Northern Hijaz in the Writings of the Arab Geographers, 800–1150* (Beirut: Al-Risalah, 1973), 450–53. Al-Wohaibi refers to the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* by the title *Manāzil ṭarīq Makka*. For discussion of Wakīʿ' s *Akhbār al-quḍāt*, see Mathieu Tillier, *L'invention du *caḍi*: La justice des musulmans, des juifs et des chrétiens aux premiers siècles de l'islam* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2017), esp. 154–55.

53. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 1/ii:353. Wakīʿ was an important source for al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī's (d. 463/1071) topographical discussion of Baghdad, and Jacob Lassner speculated that the latter may have taken material from Wakīʿ' s *Kitāb al-Ṭarīq*, but there is nothing in the extant *Kitāb al-Manāsik* that (if this work were by Wakīʿ) could confirm this; see Jacob Lassner, *The Topography of Baghdad in the Early Middle Ages: Text and Studies* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970), 30–31.

Whatever the author's precise identity, the studies of al-Jāsir and al-Wohaibi have firmly established, largely on the basis of the authorities cited, that the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* is a work of the late third/ninth or early fourth/tenth century.

The *Kitāb al-Manāsik*'s direct source for discussion of the inscriptions in the Prophet's Mosque is cited at least thirty-three times throughout the work as a whole. Abū al-Ḥusayn Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥasan b. Jaʿfar b. ʿUbayd Allāh b. al-Ḥusayn al-Aṣghar b. ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn b. al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, known as al-ʿAqīqī, was, according to al-Samhūdī, one of the first, along with Ibn Zabāla, to compose a history of Medina.⁵⁴ We know a fair amount about his life, his ancestors, and his descendants, mainly thanks to notices in ʿAlid genealogies.⁵⁵ Yaḥyā was born in Medina in 214/829, seven years before the death of his father at the age of thirty-seven in 221/835–36.⁵⁶ His grandfather Jaʿfar is said to have been recognized as an imam by some Zaydīs and was known as al-Ḥujja, “the Proof.”⁵⁷ Jaʿfar was presumably seen as a threat by the Abbasid caliphs, because he was arrested by Hārūn al-Rashīd's last governor of Medina, Abū al-Bakhtarī Wahb b. Wahb, and held for eighteen months.⁵⁸ The family does not seem to have been permanently at odds with the Abbasids, but many of them are reported to have been imprisoned or to have come to otherwise nasty ends.⁵⁹ There is, for example, a suggestion that the Abbasids' revolutionary commander Abū Muslim tried to poison Abū Jaʿfar ʿUbayd Allāh b. al-Ḥusayn al-Aṣghar.⁶⁰ The family also appears to

54. Al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ al-wafāʾ*, 2:65.

55. Abū Naṣr al-Bukhārī, *Sirr al-silsila al-ʿalawiyya*, ed. Muḥammad Ṣādiq Baḥr al-ʿUlūm (Najaf: al-Maktaba al-Ḥaydariyya, 1382/1963), passim; al-Najāshī, *Fihrist asmāʾ muṣannifi al-shiʿa al-mushtahar bi-Rijāl al-Najāshī*, ed. Mūsā al-Shabīrī al-Zanjānī (Qum: Muʿassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī al-Tābiʿa li-Jamāʿat al-Mudarrisīn, 1407/1986), 64 (no. 149), 441–42 (no. 1189); al-Ṭūsī, *al-Fihrist*, ed. Muḥammad Ṣādiq ʿĀl Baḥr al-ʿUlūm, 2nd ed. (Najaf: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Ḥaydariyya, 1380/1961), 208 (no. 801). Extracts from these and several other premodern sources on Yaḥyā's life and works are also usefully collated in the editor's introduction [henceforth KāzMuq] to Yaḥyā al-ʿAqīqī, *Kitāb al-Muʿaqqibīn min wuld al-imām amīr al-muʾminīn*, ed. Muḥammad al-Kāzīm (Qum: Maktabat Āyat Allāh al-ʿUẓmā al-Marʿashī al-Najafī, 1422/2001), 6–9. Modern discussions include Ṣāliḥ Aḥmad al-ʿAlī, “al-Muʿallafāt al-ʿarabiyya ʿan al-Madīna wa-l-Ḥijāz,” *Majallat al-Majmaʿ al-ʿilmī al-ʿirāqī* 11 (1384/1964): 118–57, at 129–30; Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* (Leiden: Brill, 1967–) [henceforth GAS], 1:273; Ḥamad al-Jāsir, “Muʿallafāt fi taʾrīkh al-Madīna,” *Majallat al-ʿArab* 4 (1389–90/1969–70): 97–100, 262–66, 327–34, 385–88, 465–67, at 386; Sebastian Günther, *Quellenuntersuchungen zu den “Maqātil at-Ṭālibiyyīn” des Abū-l-Faraḡ al-Iṣfahānī (gest. 356/967): Ein Beitrag zur Problematik der mündlichen und schriftlichen Überlieferung in der mittelalterlichen arabischen Literatur* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1991), 226–28; Kazuo Morimoto, “The Formation and Development of the Science of Talibid Genealogies in the 10th and 11th Century Middle East,” *Oriente Moderno* 18, no. 2 (1999): 541–70, at 544–45; Teresa Bernheimer, *The ʿAlids: The First Family of Islam, 750–1200* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), esp. 18–19.

56. Ibn al-Ṭīqṭaqā, as cited in KāzMuq., 8; see also KāzMuq., 11.

57. For detailed discussion of the significance of the Shiʿi use of the term *ḥujja* to describe the imam, albeit in Imāmī rather than Zaydī circles, see Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *La preuve de Dieu: La mystique shiʿite à travers l'œuvre de Kulaynī IX^e–X^e siècle* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2018).

58. Abū Naṣr al-Bukhārī, *Sirr al-silsila*, 71–72.

59. See the discussion in Bernheimer, *Alids*, 19.

60. Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil al-ṭālibiyyīn*, ed. Aḥmad Ṣaqr, 4th ed. (Beirut: Muʿassasat al-ʿIlāmī li-l-Maṭbūʿāt, 1427/2006), 159.

have had some problems with other 'Alids; Yaḥyā's brother, 'Ubayd Allāh b. al-Ḥasan b. Ja'far, for example, is said to have been killed by al-Ḥasan b. Zayd in Ṭabaristān.⁶¹

Of Yaḥyā himself we know relatively little. Apart from his birth date, noted above, we know that he died in Mecca in 277/890 and that the Abbasid governor of Mecca at the time, Hārūn b. Muḥammad, prayed over him.⁶² He may have studied with Ibn Zabāla in Medina, since according to al-Samhūdī's citations he is Yaḥyā's most frequently cited direct source.⁶³ However, what we know of Ibn Zabāla's life suggests that this would be highly unlikely for chronological reasons; it is more probable that Yaḥyā simply used Ibn Zabāla's *Akhbār al-Madīna* as a source or studied it with one of the latter's students. This suggestion is supported by four *isnāds* in the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* that have Yaḥyā transmit Ibn Zabāla's material with the latter's best-known transmitter (*rāwī*), al-Zubayr b. Bakkār (d. 256/870), as an intermediary between the two.⁶⁴ Yaḥyā apparently had seven sons, one of whom, Ṭāhir, was allegedly murdered.⁶⁵ As al-Samhūdī mentions, Yaḥyā's descendants came to be the local rulers of Medina for centuries;⁶⁶ the first to have held this position seems to have been Yaḥyā's great-great-grandson Ṭāhir b. Muslim b. 'Ubayd Allāh b. Ṭāhir b. Yaḥyā.⁶⁷

The premodern biobibliographical sources attribute four works to Yaḥyā: *Akhbār al-Madīna*,⁶⁸ *Ansāb āl Abī Ṭālib*,⁶⁹ *Kitāb al-Manāsik* 'an 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn,⁷⁰ and *Kitāb al-Masjid*.⁷¹ Of these four titles, only one, *Ansāb āl Abī Ṭālib*, survives, and that possibly

61. Ibid., 558.

62. Ibn Funduq al-Bayhaqī, al-Marwazī and Ibn al-Ṭiḡṭāqā, as cited in KāzMuq., 7–8.

63. See also al-'Alī, "al-Mu'allafāt al-'arabiyya," 129–30.

64. *Kitāb al-Manāsik*, 365, 367, 369, 379. For al-Zubayr b. Bakkār as a *rāwī* of Ibn Zabāla, see Munt, "Writing the History," 14–18, 24–25.

65. For Yaḥyā's seven sons, see Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, cited in KāzMuq., 7; on Ṭāhir's murder, see Abū al-Faraj, *Maqātil*, 551.

66. Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-wafā*, 1:424.

67. See Richard Mortel, "The Origins and Early History of the Ḥusaynid Amirate of Madīna to the End of the Ayyūbid Period," *Studia Islamica* 74 (1991): 63–78, at 64–66; though cf. the slightly different version of events in Ella Landau-Tasserion, "Arabia," in *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1: *The Formation of the Islamic World, Sixth to Eleventh Centuries*, ed. Chase F. Robinson, 397–447 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 411.

68. Al-Sakhāwī, *al-I'ān bi-l-tawbīkh li-man dhamma al-ta'rīkh*, ed. Franz Rosenthal and Ṣāliḥ Aḥmad al-'Alī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, n.d.), 274; al-Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-wafā*, 1:424; 2:65, 159; 3:141; 5:27, 61, 107; Ḥājji Khalīfa, *Kashf al-zunūn 'an asāmī al-kutub wa-l-funūn*, ed. Şerefettin Yaltkaya and Rifat Bilge (Istanbul: Maarif Matbaası, 1360–62/1941–43), 1:29. Modern discussions include al-'Alī, "al-Mu'allafāt al-'arabiyya," 129–30; Şalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid, *Mu'jam mā ullifa 'an rasūl Allāh (ṣ)* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Jadīd, 1402/1982), 93–94; 'Abd Allāh 'Usaylān, *al-Madīna al-munawwara fī āthār al-mu'allifin wa-l-bāḥithīn qadīmīn wa-ḥadīthīn* (Medina: 'Abd Allāh 'Usaylān, 1418/1997), 32–33.

69. Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 442; al-Ṭūsī, *Fihrist*, 208; also discussed in GAS, 1:273; Morimoto, "Formation and Development," 544–45; KāzMuq.

70. Al-Ṭūsī, *Fihrist*, 208.

71. Al-Najāshī, *Rijāl*, 442; al-Ṭūsī, *Fihrist*, 208; Ibn Shahrāshūb, cited in KāzMuq., 7. The title is said to refer to the Prophet's Mosque. Muḥammad al-Kāzīm also mentions (KāzMuq., 12) four other works by Yaḥyā, but these do not appear in the premodern biobibliographical literature that I consulted: *Akhbār al-fawāṭim*, *Akhbār*

only partially.⁷² As for the other three, there is some evidence to suggest that they should actually be regarded as one and the same work and that the different titles were attached to different recensions of this one work during the long process of transmission. We can be reasonably confident that *Akḥbār al-Madīna* and *Kitāb al-Masjid* refer to the same work. The three extant sources that quote a significant number of traditions from Yaḥyā—the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* (at least thirty-three citations), al-Marāghī’s (d. 816/1414) *Taḥqīq al-nuṣra* (at least thirty-six citations),⁷³ and al-Samhūdī’s *Wafā’ al-wafā* (approximately 280 citations)—use him as a source for the Prophet’s Mosque much more frequently than they do for any other subject: thirty-two citations in the *Kitāb al-Manāsik*, twenty-four in the *Taḥqīq al-nuṣra*, and just over three-quarters of the citations in the *Wafā’ al-wafā*.⁷⁴ Many of the other citations from Yaḥyā in these works concern subjects that might reasonably be included in a discussion of the Prophet’s Mosque, including Medina’s distinctive merits (*faḍā’il*),⁷⁵ the prophet’s *hijra*,⁷⁶ the prophet’s death,⁷⁷ the performance of *ziyāra* (pilgrimage or pious visit) to the prophet’s tomb,⁷⁸ and other mosques in which the prophet was believed to have prayed.⁷⁹ It seems likely, therefore, that Yaḥyā’s *Akḥbār al-Madīna* and *Kitāb al-Masjid* were originally one and the same work that came to be transmitted via different routes under different titles.⁸⁰ Such a conflation would hardly be unique, since many works from the earliest Islamic centuries were transmitted to later periods under multiple titles, most likely because they never originally had a single specific title.

Although the author of the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* appears to be citing Yaḥyā directly, we know from al-Samhūdī that there were several recensions of Yaḥyā’s *Akḥbār al-Madīna*; he had seen at least two, maybe three, and possibly, although less likely, four.⁸¹ He may have had one recension from an unnamed transmitter and certainly had one from Yaḥyā’s grandson Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā, known as Ibn Akḥī Ṭāhir

al-zaynabāt, *Kitāb fī al-khilāfa*, and *al-Makr fī man kunniya bi-Abī Bakr*.

72. Yaḥyā, *Mu’aqqibīn*.

73. Al-Marāghī, *Taḥqīq al-nuṣra bi-talkhīṣ ma’ālim dār al-hijra*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh ‘Usaylān (Medina: ‘Abd Allāh ‘Usaylān, 1422/2002).

74. The editor of al-Marāghī’s *Taḥqīq* assumed that all mentions of a “Yaḥyā” refer to one Yaḥyā b. Sa’īd. However, since most of the relevant passages are either near parallels to material quoted from Yaḥyā al-‘Aqīqī in al-Samhūdī’s *Wafā’ al-wafā* or show a reliance on similar sources, I think that the editor was incorrect, except in the few cases in which al-Marāghī gives the full name Yaḥyā b. Sa’īd for his source.

75. Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā’ al-wafā*, 1:154; 3:320–21, 323.

76. *Ibid.*, 1:414, 424–25, 425–26, 433, 442–44, 447–48, 453, 456.

77. Al-Marāghī, *Taḥqīq al-nuṣra*, 146–47; al-Samhūdī, *Wafā’ al-wafā*, 1:526, 528; 3:390.

78. Al-Marāghī, *Taḥqīq al-nuṣra*, 172, 193–94; al-Samhūdī, *Wafā’ al-wafā*, 5:27, 29, 42–43, 61, 77, 101, 107–8.

79. *Kitāb al-Manāsik*, 425; al-Marāghī, *Taḥqīq al-nuṣra*, 56; al-Samhūdī, *Wafā’ al-wafā*, 3:147, 152, 169, 175, 177, 178, 182, 183, 195–96, 215, 228, 231, 240, 249, 250, 253, 421, 426, 428, 432, 433–34, 440.

80. Since it seems that Sunni sources were more likely to know the work as *Akḥbār al-Madīna* and Shi’i sources as *Kitāb al-Masjid* (see references in nn. 68 and 71), there appears to have been a sectarian divide in the work’s transmission.

81. Al-Jāsir (“Mu’allaḥāt,” 386) and al-Sāmarrā’ī (in the introduction to his edition of al-Samhūdī, *Wafā’ al-wafā*, 1:36) thought he had access to three; al-‘Alī (“al-Mu’allaḥāt al-‘arabiyya,” 129) suggested four.

(d. 358/969).⁸² At least one more recension was available to al-Samhūdī, via Yaḥyā's son Abū al-Qāsim Ṭāhir; al-ʿAlī has suggested that Ṭāhir transmitted two different recensions, but this is probably incorrect.⁸³ We also know that one of the transmitters of Abū al-Qāsim Ṭāhir's recension of his father's work was called Ibn Firās.⁸⁴ Yaḥyā's grandson Ibn Akhī Ṭāhir also appears in some sources as a transmitter of Yaḥyā's *Ansāb āl Abī Ṭālib*.⁸⁵ Abū al-Qāsim Ṭāhir's recension of his father's work appears to have been the most widely used. It is the one that al-Samhūdī mentions most frequently, and when later local historians of Medina such as Ibn al-Najjār and al-Marjānī (d. after 770/1368–69) cite Abū al-Qāsim Ṭāhir b. Yaḥyā, they are presumably referring to his recension of Yaḥyā's work.⁸⁶

There may have been one more recension of Yaḥyā's work on Medina, since al-Sakhāwī notes that one Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-ʿAlawī composed a book on the history of Medina.⁸⁷ Since there is no mention of Yaḥyā's son Muḥammad's writing a work on Medina anywhere else, this probably refers to al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā's (Ibn Akhī Ṭāhir's) recension of Yaḥyā's history, although it could be yet another recension of its own.⁸⁸ As can be said of many other works from the third/ninth century, neither the existence of several recensions of Yaḥyā's work(s) on Medina nor the lack of a uniform title means that Yaḥyā did not compile a work on Medina for dissemination with a relatively fixed form.⁸⁹ Again, however, we have to assume that the nature of the transmission of texts in this period would have left its mark on Yaḥyā's original. For example, al-Samhūdī notes a minor difference between the recensions of Abū al-Qāsim Ṭāhir and Ibn Akhī Ṭāhir and tells us that Ibn Firās added to his recension of Ṭāhir's recension some information that he had received orally from Ṭāhir.⁹⁰

82. Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-wafā*, 1:447; 2:239.

83. Ṭāhir's recension is noted in *ibid.*, 1:155, 424; 2:239, 256, 314, 3:215, 5:29. Al-ʿAlī's argument for a fourth recension stems from the fact that, at one point, al-Samhūdī says (*Wafā' al-wafā*, 2:256), "Such is in the copy that his son transmitted on the authority of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Madāʿinī." Al-ʿAlī suggested ("al-Muʿallafāt al-ʿarabiyya," 129) that this means that Ṭāhir transmitted another copy of Yaḥyā's work, this time not directly from his father but rather on the authority of one Abū al-Ḥasan al-Madāʿinī, who had, in turn, taken it from Yaḥyā. However, this Abū al-Ḥasan al-Madāʿinī is almost certainly the famous Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Madāʿinī (d. between 225/839–40 and 235/849–50), who predeceased Yaḥyā by quite some time. A more likely explanation is that al-Madāʿinī is the source of this particular report in Yaḥyā's work.

84. Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-wafā*, 2:314.

85. For example, in al-Ṭūsī, *Fihrist*, 208; and in the works of al-ʿUmarī and Ibn ʿInaba, as cited in KāẓMuq., 6, 8.

86. See Ibn al-Najjār, *al-Durra al-thamīna*, 63, 205; al-Marjānī, *Bahjat al-nufūs wa-l-asrār fi taʾrīkh dār hijrat al-nabī al-mukhtār*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Wahhāb Faḍl (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2002), 1:209.

87. Al-Sakhāwī, *Iʿlān*, 273; followed by al-Munajjid, *Muʿjam*, 93–94; and ʿUsaylān, *al-Madīna al-munawwara*, 33.

88. Incidentally, yet another confusing title, an *Akhbār al-Madīna* of one Yaḥyā b. Jaʿfar al-Nassāba, is thrown into the mix in al-Munajjid, *Muʿjam*, 93–94. This Yaḥyā, however, is clearly our Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥasan b. Jaʿfar al-ʿAqīqī, the author of a work entitled *Ansāb āl Abī Ṭālib*, hence also al-Nassāba, "the genealogist."

89. For a similar argument concerning Ibn Zabāla's *Akhbār al-Madīna*, see Munt, "Writing the History," 14–18.

90. Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-wafā*, 2:239, 314.

Since we know that Yaḥyā was a descendant of the Husaynid imam ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (d. ca. 95/713–14) and the author of a genealogical work on the descendants of Abū Ṭālib, it is only to be expected that his works display some pro-‘Alid inclinations. His genealogical work shows that Yaḥyā was concerned with the persecution faced by the descendants of Abū Ṭālib. In the surviving manuscript, a list of ‘Alids who came to an unfortunate end as the result of persecution is provided, besides the usual genealogical material. The list covers topics such as descendants of ‘Alī who were poisoned, Hasanids who were killed during the reign of Abū Ja‘far al-Manṣūr, and ‘Alids who died in prison during the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 170–93/786–809).⁹¹ The citations from his work on the history of Medina also show that he was interested in traditions concerning Fāṭima and the ‘Alids. For example, he is the main source of the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* and al-Samhūdī for discussion of Fāṭima’s apartment and tomb chamber in the Prophet’s Mosque, and al-Samhūdī cites a prophetic *ḥadīth* from Yaḥyā to the effect that on the Day of Resurrection, Muḥammad, Fāṭima, ‘Alī, al-Ḥasan, and al-Ḥusayn will be in the same position.⁹² In line with the earlier noted title of Yaḥyā’s own work on pilgrimage rites (*manāsik*), quotations of his guidance about how to perform the pilgrimage to the tomb of the prophet include examples of how prominent ‘Alids, especially ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, acted when visiting the tomb.⁹³ He had a specific interest in how ‘Alids undertook visits to another mosque closely associated with the prophet’s career in Medina, the mosque in Qubā’ to the south of the town.⁹⁴ There are also a number of traditions cited on Yaḥyā’s authority with *isnāds* of prominent ‘Alids, often including the imams ‘Alī al-Riḍā (d. 203/818), Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), and Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 115/733).⁹⁵ However, Yaḥyā by no means restricted his interests to pro-‘Alid material. Reports that either display a clear pro-‘Alid inclination or feature prominent ‘Alids in their *isnāds* are very much in the minority among extant material cited from Yaḥyā; and although he may have been al-Samhūdī’s key source for the tomb of Fāṭima, he was also an important authority on the tombs of the first two caliphs, Abū Bakr and ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb.⁹⁶

Yaḥyā’s work on Medina seems to have received early acceptance as an important source, as he is the *Kitāb al-Manāsik*’s most often cited source for the history of the Prophet’s Mosque. Although he was little used in Medinan local histories over the next several centuries, this changed with al-Marāghī, in whose work he is the second most frequently cited Medinan historian from the first three Islamic centuries, behind Ibn Zabāla. Similarly, he is al-Samhūdī’s most important source for matters concerning the Prophet’s Mosque up to the mid-third/ninth century.

91. Yaḥyā, *Mu‘aqqibīn*, 116–17, 117–23, 125–30.

92. *Kitāb al-Manāsik*, 366–67; al-Samhūdī, *Wafā’ al-wafā*, 2:207–10.

93. Al-Marāghī, *Taḥqīq al-nuṣra*, 146–47; al-Samhūdī, *Wafā’ al-wafā*, 5:61, 77.

94. Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā’ al-wafā*, 3:152.

95. *Kitāb al-Manāsik*, 367; al-Samhūdī, *Wafā’ al-wafā*, 2:44, 337–38; 3:323; 5:27–29, 61.

96. Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā’ al-wafā*, 2:309–18.

Before we move on to look more closely at the *Kitāb al-Manāsik*'s section on the inscriptions, it is worth considering briefly one of Yaḥyā's sources for his material about the Umayyad-era inscriptions, as preserved in the former. The *isnād* given for that material mentions one Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā, almost certainly the figure otherwise known as Abū Ghassān al-Kinānī (d. between 201/816–17 and 210/825–26).⁹⁷ He was the single most important source for the Iraqi 'Umar b. Shabba's (d. 262/876) history of Medina, appearing as the latter's direct source in the *isnāds* of 278 out of 1,065 reports that make up the first part of the extant manuscript of this work.⁹⁸ The vast majority of the discussion of the Prophet's Mosque is missing from this manuscript, but Abū Ghassān is cited in the portion of that discussion that does survive, and he also appears as a source on seventeen occasions (all but one through one or two intermediaries) in the *Kitāb al-Manāsik*.⁹⁹ Some have considered whether, in light of this prolific activity, he may have penned a work of his own on Medina's history. Al-Jāsir, for example, has drawn attention to the fact that Abū Ghassān descended from a long line of administrators (*kuttāb*) and noted that we should not, therefore, be surprised if he had committed his knowledge to writing.¹⁰⁰ Tilman Nagel has also suggested that Abū Ghassān had likely written down the reports on the revolt of Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh "al-Nafs al-Zakiyya" that were then transmitted by Ibn Shabba and cited by al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923).¹⁰¹ Abū Ghassān was a source for a large quantity of written documents, including a letter by 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and the famous correspondence that passed between Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr and al-Nafs al-Zakiyya, and this does indicate that he valued written material and sought to ensure its transmission.¹⁰² Ibn Shabba also stated at least twice that he had found something written on Abū Ghassān's authority that he had not heard from him.¹⁰³ Elsewhere, he cited a piece of writing (*kitāb*) by Abū Ghassān for a report but added that he had read over the report in question with him.¹⁰⁴ Taken together, these pieces of information make it likely that Abū Ghassān possessed at least

97. See, for example, al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl fī asmā' al-rijāl*, ed. Bashshār 'Awwād Ma'rūf (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1402–13/1982–92), 26:636–39; al-Dhahabī, *Ta'rikh al-Islām wa-wafayāt al-mashāhīr wa-l-a'lām*, ed. 'Umar 'Abd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1407–24/1987–2004), 14:379.

98. Ibn Shabba, *Ta'rikh al-Madīna al-munawwara*, ed. 'Alī Muḥammad Dandal and Yāsīn Sa'd al-Dīn Bayān (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1417/1996), 1:7–344.

99. On seven of those occasions, the intermediaries are Hārūn b. Mūsā and Yaḥyā al-'Aqīqī, as in the section translated below; see *Kitāb al-Manāsik*, 359, 363, 369, 381, 383, 385–86, 403.

100. Al-Jāsir, "Mu'allafāt," 328; see also Elad, *Rebellion of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya*, 415–18.

101. Tilman Nagel, "Ein früher Bericht über den Aufstand von Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh im Jahre 145h," *Der Islam* 46 (1970): 227–62, at 236–38; see also the thoughts in Elad, *Rebellion of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya*, 418.

102. For 'Alī's letter, see Ibn Shabba, *Ta'rikh*, 1:139–41; for the letters between al-Manṣūr and al-Nafs al-Zakiyya, see al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, 3:207–15, with discussion in Nagel, "Ein früher Bericht"; Zaman, *Religion and Politics*, 44–45; Elad, *Rebellion of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya*, 171–93; and Tor, "Parting of Ways." For some other documents transmitted by Abū Ghassān, see Ibn Shabba, *Ta'rikh*, 1:96; and Michael Lecker, "The Preservation of Muḥammad's Letters," in his *People, Tribes and Society in Arabia Around the Time of Muḥammad*, no. 10 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 12, n. 60.

103. Ibn Shabba, *Ta'rikh*, 1:72, 80.

104. *Ibid.*, 1:365.

personal notebooks containing traditions and copies of documents dealing with the history of Medina, which were distributed to his students.

The upshot of all this is that, in general terms at least, we have reason to be relatively confident about the transcription of the inscriptions provided in the *Kitāb al-Manāsik*, at least those that were added in the early Abbasid period. Between Ibn Zabāla, Yaḥyā al-‘Aqīqī, the author of the *Kitāb al-Manāsik*, Ibn Rusta, and perhaps (although this is far less certain) Abū Ghassān, we have several avenues of relatively early written testimonies to them (compiled between the late second/early ninth and early fourth/tenth centuries), involving figures of different backgrounds and with different scholarly interests. Of course, as the notes to the translation below show, there are some differences in the readings of some of the inscriptions offered in the various sources, and sometimes those differences are meaningful. This does make it more difficult for us to establish what the actual text of the inscription was, but it does not mean there was no original text. Such discrepancies could easily come down to the nature of the reception of such epigraphic schemes among visitors/readers, a topic that will be taken up again briefly later in this article.

I do not want the arguments of this article to become circular, and since the evidence of the protocols for referring to the caliphs in these texts will be picked up later in the discussion, we should not place too much emphasis on them when verifying the general accuracy of the transcribed texts. It can be pointed out, however, that many aspects of the texts given for these inscriptions, and particularly the protocols for referring to caliphs, are generally in line with what can be expected on the basis of extant inscriptions from the second/eighth century, as well as of similar protocols on other objects, such as coins.¹⁰⁵ Many of the relevant inscriptions offer variations on one of two standard phrases: either

amara ‘abd allāh [ism]
amīr al-mu‘minīn bi- . . .

“The servant of God, [name],
the commander of the faithful, ordered . . .”

Or, slightly less commonly,

mimmā amara bihi
‘abd allāh [ism]
amīr al-mu‘minīn . . .

“[This is] among that which
the servant of God, [name],
the commander of the faithful, ordered . . .”

In other texts, other titles are added to the early Abbasid inscriptions, but this is where things get more interesting; I will pick up this discussion later on.

105. For references to extant inscriptions, see above, nn. 8–15. Some early Abbasid coins with similar rules for providing titles and names for a reigning caliph are discussed in Michael L. Bates, “Khurāsānī Revolutionaries and al-Mahdī’s Title,” in *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: Essays in Honour of Wilferd Madelung*, ed. Farhad Daftary and Josef W. Meri, 279–317 (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003). For the point that *‘abd allāh [ism] amīr al-mu‘minīn* was the standard way of referring to Umayyad caliphs, see Aram Aldo Shahin, “Struggling for Communitas: Arabian Political Thought in the Great Century of Change (ca. 560–ca. 660 AD)” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2009), 410.

The *Kitāb al-Manāsik* on the Inscriptions in the Prophet's Mosque

The following is a translation of the section of the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* that deals with the inscriptions that could be seen in the Prophet's Mosque.¹⁰⁶ This work records texts inscribed between the caliphates of al-Walīd b. ʿAbd al-Malik and Hārūn al-Rashīd. The notes provide references to the same texts in other sources. Those that can also be found in the surviving section of Ibn Rusta's *al-Aʿlāq al-nafisa* have been the basis for almost all existing discussions to date. The one other source that provides almost (but not quite) as complete an account of these inscriptions as the *Kitāb al-Manāsik*'s is al-Firūzābādī's *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba fī maʿālim Ṭāba*. Although some use will be made of the latter work in this article, it is the *Kitāb al-Manāsik*'s account around which my discussion will center.

Translation: *Kitāb al-Manāsik*

[p. 385] *This is an account of the inscriptions (al-kitāb) that run around the mosque*

Yaḥyā b. Ḥasan b. Jaʿfar Abū al-Ḥusayn al-ʿAlawī¹⁰⁷ — Hārūn b. Mūsā¹⁰⁸ — Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā¹⁰⁹ — Ḥusayn b. Muṣʿab:¹¹⁰

ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz had the texts (*kutub*) inscribed in the mosque, and [he is] the one who inscribed the text (*kitāb*) that is along the *qibla* [wall] of the Prophet's (ṣ) Mosque; it starts with the whole of Umm al-Qurʾān, and then “By the sun and its brightness in the forenoon,” down to finishing with “Say, ‘I seek refuge with the Lord of men.’”¹¹¹ It runs from opposite you to the right when you enter the mosque from the entrance next to Dār Marwān along to Bāb ʿAlī.¹¹²

106. *Kitāb al-Manāsik*, 385–95. The page numbers from al-Jāsir's edition are given in square brackets in the translation. I have numbered the inscriptions for ease of cross-referencing.

107. This is Yaḥyā al-ʿAqīqī, discussed above.

108. Hārūn b. Mūsā b. Abī ʿAlqama al-Farwī al-Madīnī (d. in 252/866–67 or 253/867), a student of Abū Ghassān and a teacher of Yaḥyā al-ʿAqīqī; see al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, 26:637; 30:113–15.

109. This is almost certainly Abū Ghassān Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-Kinānī, discussed above.

110. He is listed by al-Mizzī among those from whom Ibn Zabāla narrated (*Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, 25:62), although not among Abū Ghassān's teachers. Ibn Zabāla and Abū Ghassān, however, belonged to the same generation of Medinan scholars, and many topics discussed on the authority of both are very similar, so it makes sense that they shared many sources.

111. I.e., Q 1 and 91–114. All translations of verses from the Qurʾān are slightly adapted from those of Alan Jones, *The Qurʾān* (Cambridge: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2007), unless otherwise specified. (I regularly make alterations to the capitalization of certain words.)

112. Al-Mahdī's mosque seems to have had a large number of entrances, with some twenty-odd regularly listed in the sources; see the overview in al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ al-wafāʾ*, 3:5–31; and also see below, Fig. 1. It is less clear how many there were in the Umayyad period; see Sauvaget, *Mosquée omeyyade*, 75–78. The entrance by Dār Marwān would be that near the southwest corner of the mosque along the western wall, which came to be known as Bāb al-Salām and does seem to have existed in al-Walīd's structure; see al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ al-wafāʾ*, 3:28–30; Sauvaget, *Mosquée omeyyade*, 77. I follow al-Samhūdī (*Wafāʾ al-wafāʾ*, 3:7–8) in identifying Bāb ʿAlī as the southernmost entrance along the eastern wall of the mosque, so probably loosely opposite the entrance by

He said: It was inscribed by a mawlā of ʿĀl Ḥuwayṭib b. ʿAbd al-ʿUzzā, called Saʿd Ḥaṭaba.¹¹³

He said: ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz is the one who put up the lead that runs around the mosque and the waterspouts that are made of lead. Only two waterspouts of those put up by ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz remain; one is in the place where funeral prayers take place (*mawḍiʿ al-janāʿiz*),¹¹⁴ and the other is over the entrance through which [p. 386] the people from the east (*ahl al-mashriq*)¹¹⁵ enter and which is known as Bāb ʿĀtika. The mosque had no merlons (*shurafāt*) before those constructed by ʿAbd al-Wāḥid b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Naṣrī,¹¹⁶ who was the governor of Medina in the year 104 [722–23 CE].

The *ḥarūriyya* destroyed the inscription that was in the mosque’s courtyard, though ʿAbd al-Malik b. Muḥammad b. ʿAṭiyya al-Saʿdī restored it when he was governor of Medina in the year 130 [747–48 CE].¹¹⁷ Then Dāwūd b. ʿAlī destroyed it when he came as governor for Abū al-ʿAbbās in the year 132 [749–50 CE]. Ṣāliḥ b. Kaysān¹¹⁸ helped him restore it, but Dāwūd passed away before he could complete it; Ziyād b. ʿAbd Allāh [*sic*] al-Ḥārithī finished it.¹¹⁹ One of the *mawālī* of the Medinans, who was called Ibn Ghazāla, was summoned to him, and he is the one who altered it and completed it.

Dār Marwān. These two entrances thus corresponded roughly to the Bāb al-Salām and Bāb al-Baqīʿ as identified on the plan of the Prophet’s Mosque following the Saudi work of 1949–55 in ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥusaynī, *al-Kharīṭa al-athariyya li-l-Madīna al-munawwara* (Cairo: Majmūʿat Najjār li-l-Tijāra wa-l-Ṭibāʿa, 2005).

113. An important and renowned early copyist of the Qurʾān. He is the individual also identified as responsible for these inscriptions in Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 1/i:15–16. He was apparently known as “Saʿd ṣāḥib al-maṣāḥif”; see Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Kitāb al-Jarḥ wa-l-taʿdīl* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1371–73/1952–53), 3:550.

114. This was by Bāb ʿAlī; see below and al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ al-wafāʾ*, 3:8.

115. Ibn al-Najjār (*al-Durra al-thamīna*, 176) has “people from the marketplace” (*ahl al-sūq*).

116. Many other sources have al-Naḍrī instead, although al-Naṣrī seems to be correct; see al-Jāsir’s note in *Kitāb al-Manāsik*, 386, n. 1. He was governor of Medina and also, seemingly, of Mecca and Taif from 104/722–23 to 106/724–25; see al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾriḥ*, 2:1449–52, 1471, 1487.

117. The *ḥarūriyya* here are the followers of Abū Ḥamza al-Mukhtār b. ʿAwf, who led an army from South Arabia that briefly occupied Mecca and Medina in 129–30/747; for discussion with further references to their activities in the Ḥijāz, see Harry Munt, “Caliphal Imperialism and Ḥijāzī Elites in the Second/Eighth Century,” *al-Masāq* 28, no. 1 (2016): 6–21, at 6–7, 12–13. Ibn Rusta (*al-Aʿlāq al-naḥīsa*, 70) gives the date of the inscription’s restoration as 128/745–46, but this is clearly a mistake.

118. A well-known figure closely associated with al-Walīd’s and ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz’s work on the Prophet’s Mosque; see Munt, *Holy City of Medina*, 106–7. He died in 140/757–58; see Ibn Saʿd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad ʿUmar (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1421/2001), 7:513.

119. Dāwūd b. ʿAlī died in 133/750. He is famously associated with having taken other, violent measures against members of the Umayyad family in the Ḥijāz during his brief tenure in the region; see Chase F. Robinson, “The Violence of the Abbasid Revolution,” in *Living Islamic History: Studies in Honour of Professor Carole Hillenbrand*, ed. Yasir Suleiman, 226–51 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 239. Ziyād b. ʿUbayd Allāh was governor of Medina (and also at times Mecca, Taif, and al-Yamāma) from 133/750 to 141/758–59; see al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾriḥ*, 3:73, 81, 84, 90–91, 121, 124, 127, 129, 137–38, 161. He apparently oversaw the work that Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr ordered to be undertaken in the Masjid al-Ḥarām in Mecca; see al-Azraqī, *Akḥbār Makka wa-mā jāʾa fihā min al-āthār*, ed. Rushdī al-Ṣāliḥ Malḥas (Mecca: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Mājidiyya, 1352–57/1933–38), 2:58.

We have made a copy of what was inscribed along the *qibla* and what was inscribed after it in its place, letter by letter. When Ibn Ghazāla had finished, he came to Ziyād b. ‘Abd Allāh asking him for his pay. Ziyād said, “Ibn Ghazāla, when you see us act in accordance with what has been written, then come and take your pay.”

Abū al-Ḥusayn said: This is the inscription that Ibn Ghazāla wrote and finished:

[§1] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. There is no god but God, Who is One and has no companion. Muḥammad is His servant and His messenger, whom He sent “with the guidance and the religion of truth, to cause it to prevail over all [other] religion, even though the polytheists dislike that.”¹²⁰ [p. 387] The servant of God, ‘Abd Allāh, the commander of the faithful, has commanded fear of God and obedience to Him as well as action in accordance with the Book of God and obedience to it/Him as well as the *sunna* of His prophet (ṣ). [The caliph commands] doing right by one’s family, the magnification/veneration of God’s ordinances that the tyrants belittled, and the belittling of the falsehoods that they magnified; [he commands] the revival of the rights that they killed off, and the killing off of the enmity and oppression that they revived. [He commands] that God be obeyed and that servants be disobeyed [when necessary] out of obedience to God. Obedience is owed to God and to those who obey God; no obedience is due to anyone acting in disobedience to God. We call for the Book of God and the *sunna* of His prophet (ṣ) and for justice in governing the affairs of the Muslims, the equitable division of the *fay’* among them, and the appropriate expenditure of the “fifths” that God commanded [be distributed] to “kinsmen, orphans, the destitute, [and] travelers.”¹²¹

When Ibn Ghazāla had finished, he came to Ziyād asking for his pay. Ziyād, who was irrationally angry with him, said to him, “Ibn Ghazāla, when you see us act in accordance with what is in it, then come and take your pay.”¹²²

The inscriptions of al-Mahdī
(*May God have mercy upon him*)

Abū al-Ḥusayn said: Immediately after this [i.e., the above inscription] is this inscription, which al-Mahdī had written in the year 162 [778–79 CE]:¹²³

120. Q 9:33.

121. Cf. Q 2:177. For other versions of this story and this inscription, sometimes abbreviated or with a slightly different text, see Ibn Rusta, *al-A‘lāq al-nafīsa*, 70–71; Ibn al-Najjār, *al-Durra al-thamīna*, 176–77 (with a very important variant, discussed further later in this article); al-Fīrūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:436–38; *RCEA*, 1:29–30 (no. 38). For discussion, see Sauvaget, *Mosquée omeyyade*, 54–56. Ibn Rusta also provides a second version of the inscription, with slightly different wording; see Ibn Rusta, *al-A‘lāq al-nafīsa*, 73; *RCEA*, 1:36–38 (no. 47); Sauvaget, *Mosquée omeyyade*, 56–57.

122. It is a bit strange that this anecdote is repeated here, with very slightly different wording. Perhaps there has been a change of source?

123. Given what follows in the inscription, it cannot actually have been written before 165/781–82, although it refers to the period of building work that began in 162/778–79.

[§2] The servant of God, al-Mahdī, the commander of the faithful, may God ennoble him and glorify his victory, ordered the expansion and strengthening of the mosque of the messenger of God (ﷺ) out of desire for God alone and the last abode—may God grant him the greatest recompense—and to make it more spacious for his family and his descendants among all the Muslims who pray there. May God magnify the reward of the commander of the faithful for the pious work he intended [p.388] and make great his recompense.¹²⁴

[§3] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. **Then he had the whole of Umm al-Qurʾān inscribed.**¹²⁵ **Inscribed after that was “The only ones to visit God’s places of worship . . .”, the whole verse.**¹²⁶ **Then he had written:** The expansion of the mosque of the messenger of God (ﷺ) that the servant of God, al-Mahdī Muḥammad, the commander of the faithful—may God ennoble him—ordered was started in the year 162 [778–79 CE]. It was completed in the year 165 [781–82 CE]. The commander of the faithful—may God make him thrive—lavishes praises upon God for permitting him the distinction of (re)constructing the mosque of the messenger of God (ﷺ) and making it more spacious. We praise God, the Lord of the Worlds, at all times.¹²⁷

Next to this inscription is another, written during the reign of Abū al-ʿAbbās, which this inscription [i.e., the one given above] reaches. It is:

[§4] The servant of God, ʿAbd Allāh, the commander of the faithful, ordered that this mosque be decorated, that its adornments be put in order (*tartībīhi*), and that the mosque of the messenger of God (ﷺ) be made more spacious in the year 132 [749–50 CE], desiring God’s pleasure and reward. For with God is “the reward of both this world and the next. God is Hearing and Observing.”¹²⁸

124. See also Ibn Rusta, *al-Aʿlāq al-nafisa*, 73–74; Ibn al-Najjār, *al-Durra al-thamīna*, 179. Ibn Rusta presents this text as a continuation of his repeat of the previous inscription (§1) without any intervening words, so some have considered it part of the previous text; see, for example, *RCEA*, 1:36–38 (no. 47). The *Kitāb al-Manāsik*, however, clearly supports Sauvaget’s earlier argument (*Mosquée omeyyade*, 56–57) that it was originally a separate text.

125. I.e., Q 1. The paired asterisks mark text in which the *Kitāb al-Manāsik*—or its source(s)—is summarizing the content rather than providing it in full transcription.

126. Q 9:18.

127. See also Ibn Rusta, *al-Aʿlāq al-nafisa*, 74; Ibn al-Najjār, *al-Durra al-thamīna*, 179; *RCEA*, 1:35–36 (no. 46); Sauvaget, *Mosquée omeyyade*, 58–59. Between the preceding text and this one, Ibn Rusta inserted an inscription commemorating work undertaken during al-Muʿtaḍid’s caliphate (r. 279–289/892–902) in 282/895–96; see Ibn Rusta, *al-Aʿlāq al-nafisa*, 74; *RCEA*, 2:265 (no. 786); Sauvaget, *Mosquée omeyyade*, 57–58. Both Ibn al-Najjār and the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* omit this inscription, which makes sense since it postdates the deaths of their stated or likely sources (discussed above).

128. A slight rearrangement of the wording of Q 4:134. For alternative versions of the text, see Ibn Rusta, *al-Aʿlāq al-nafisa*, 74 (where the date is given as 162/778–79); al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ al-wafāʾ*, 2:291. This inscription is sometimes discussed as a continuation of the previous one; see *RCEA*, 1:35–36 (no. 46). This text is discussed in more detail later in this article.

[p. 389] Abū [al-]Ḥusayn said: There is a marker (*‘alāma*) of the first mosque of the messenger of God (ṣ) on the ceiling, crescent moons in gold, next to the interior wall opposite the first mosque of the messenger of God (ṣ). [Another] marker of the mosque of the messenger of God (ṣ), next to the courtyard on the western side, is four arches finished with mosaic, all of them dark green/blue (*khudr*). The upper parts of the arches of the mosque of the messenger of God (ṣ) along the *qibla* [side] are blocked with teak, which is twisted (*muḥarrāf*).¹²⁹ There are small openings along the eastern [side] together with arches blocked with teak. Above them are panels with no openings.¹³⁰

In the eastern corner of the inside of the mosque is written:

[§5] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. O God! Your servant and Your caliph (*khalīfataka*), ‘Abd Allāh, (son of)¹³¹ the commander of the faithful, praises You for permitting him to (re)build this mosque and to adorn it. The servant of God, ‘Abd Allāh, the commander of the faithful, commanded the decoration of this mosque, the ordering of its adornments, and making the mosque of the messenger of God (ṣ) more spacious in the year 133 [750–51 CE], desiring God’s pleasure, His reward, and His generosity. For with God is “the reward of both this world and the next. God is Hearing and Observing.”¹³² There is no god but God, Who is one and has no companion. “We serve only God and we associate nothing with Him.”¹³³ God be praised and exalted. Moreover, may God be praised and exalted high above what the unbelievers say.¹³⁴ There is no power or strength save with God the High, the Magnificent.

Between Bāb al-Nabī¹³⁵ and Bāb ‘Uthmān¹³⁶ is inscribed the following on a broad panel (*ṣafḥa*) on the interior wall in mosaic, between it and the marble:

[§6] Among what the servant of God, Hārūn, the commander of the faithful—may God lengthen his remaining time—ordered to be carried out by Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad,¹³⁷

129. Perhaps this should be read as *mujawwaf*, “hollow” or “concave,” instead.

130. This is quite a confusing passage. An abridged version, which removes the more confusing portions, can be found in Ibn Rusta, *al-A‘lāq al-nafīsa*, 74. An alternative, likewise less confusing description of the known spots that mark sections of the original mosque built by the prophet after his arrival in Medina can be found in *Kitāb al-Manāsik*, 360; and al-Samhūdī, *Wafā’ al-wafā*, 2:54 (followed by detailed further discussion).

131. The text has a “bn” here, but it is unclear whether it should be there or not. It does not appear in the list of titles in the following sentence.

132. A slight rearrangement of the wording of Q 4:134.

133. Part of Q 3:64.

134. Cf. Q 17:43.

135. I follow al-Samhūdī (*Wafā’ al-wafā*, 3:7–8) in identifying Bāb al-Nabī as the second entrance along the eastern wall of the mosque heading north from the *qibla* wall.

136. Also known as Bāb Jibrīl; see al-Samhūdī, *Wafā’ al-wafā*, 3:8–12; Sauvaget, *Mosquée omeyyade*, 76.

137. Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad was one of Hārūn al-Rashīd’s governors of Medina, according to al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, 3:739. It is not precisely clear when he served in this position, but al-Ṭabarī lists him as the fifth out of ten governors of Medina during Hārūn’s caliphate.

may God make him thrive. It is the work of people from Jerusalem.¹³⁸

To the left of the arch of Bāb al-Nabī (ṣ):

[§7] This is where the work carried out by the people of Jerusalem ended.

Along the *qibla* [wall] on the outside, at the place where the funeral prayers are held (*mawḍiʿ al-janāʿiz*), where the dead are prayed over [p. 390], by Bāb ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (may God be pleased with him), is inscribed:¹³⁹

[§8] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. “God and His angels bless the prophet. O you who believe, bless him and salute him.”¹⁴⁰ O God, bless Muḥammad (ṣ). The mercy of God and His blessings.

Over Bāb al-Nabī (ṣ) is inscribed on the outside:

[§9] “In the creation of the heavens and the earth,” **the whole verse**.¹⁴¹

Over Bāb ʿUthmān is inscribed:

[§10a] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. “God and His angels,” **the whole verse**.¹⁴² O God, bless Muḥammad the prophet (ṣ), make him blameless, increase his standing, ennoble his structure, honor his lodging places/stations, and reward him with the best reward You could give to a prophet, as he brought us Your message and strove to carry out Your command so that he made Your religion clear and Your authority was manifest, Your words were finished, and he made lawful what You had made lawful and forbade what You had forbidden. That did not deviate from Your oneness;¹⁴³ You have no companion. May peace be upon the prophet, and the mercy of God, and His blessings.

To the right of Bāb ʿUthmān is inscribed:

[§10b] The work of the people of Homs.

And to its left is inscribed:

[§10c] The work of the people of Homs.

138. See also Ibn Rusta, *al-Aʿlāq al-naʿīsa*, 74–75; *RCEA*, 1:65–66 (no. 83); Sauvaget, *Mosquée omeyyade*, 67. Sauvaget assumes, probably correctly, that this inscription commemorates only small restoration work to the decoration on this wall.

139. For Bāb ʿAlī, see above, n. 112.

140. Q 33:56.

141. Q 3:190. Al-Samhūdī (*Wafāʾ al-wafāʾ*, 3:8) has this text by Bāb ʿAlī and not by Bāb al-Nabī.

142. Q 33:56.

143. Al-Jāsir was obviously unsure what to make of this in his edition. I read: *wa-lam yaʿul dhālika waḥdaka*.

On the outside of Bāb ‘Uthmān is inscribed:

[§10d] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. “A messenger has come to you from among yourselves,” **to the end of the *sūra***.¹⁴⁴

On the inside of the entrance facing (Bāb)¹⁴⁵ Dār Rayṭa is inscribed:

[§11a] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. “God, there is no god but Him, the Living, the Eternal,” **up to** “Hearing and Knowing.”¹⁴⁶

On the outside of the entrance facing Dār Rayṭa:

[§11b] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. “The only ones to visit God’s places of worship,” **the whole verse**.¹⁴⁷

On the inside of the entrance facing (Bāb)¹⁴⁸ Asmā’ bt. al-Ḥasan [*sic*] is inscribed:

[§12a] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. “O man, fear your Lord, and be afraid of a day,” **to the end of the *sūra***.¹⁴⁹

[p. 391] On it [the same entrance] on the outside is inscribed:

[§12b] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. “O you who believe, fear God and speak straight speech.”¹⁵⁰

On the inside of the entrance opposite Dār Khālid¹⁵¹ is inscribed:

144. I.e., Q 9:128–29; see also al-Firūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:426; al-Samhūdī, *Wafā’ al-wafā*, 3:12.

145. This second “*bāb*” is clearly written in the edition, but the text would make more sense without it. The text should here be describing Bāb Dār Rayṭa, which, according to al-Samhūdī (for example, *Wafā’ al-wafā*, 3:8), is the next entrance along the eastern wall after Bāb ‘Uthmān. The Rayṭa in question was the daughter of Abū al-‘Abbās al-Saffāḥ and Bāb Rayṭa/Bāb Dār Rayṭa is also known as Bāb al-Nisā’; see al-Samhūdī, *Wafā’ al-wafā*, 3:12–13; Sauvaget, *Mosquée omeyyade*, 76.

146. Q 2:255–56. Q 2:255 is, of course, the famous Throne Verse, which al-Samhūdī (*Wafā’ al-wafā*, 3:13) also noted was inscribed on this entrance (though he has it on the outside) on a mosaic panel before it was destroyed in the second major fire. According to al-Firūzābādī (*al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:426), the verse was inscribed on the outside of this entrance. Two other later Medinan local historians, al-Maṭarī (d. 741/1340) and al-Marjānī (d. after 770/1368–69), both also mention that the verse was inscribed on a mosaic panel over the outside of this entrance: see al-Maṭarī, *al-Ta’rīf bimā ansat al-hujra min ma’ālim dār al-hijra*, ed. Sa’īd ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ (Riyadh: Maktabat Nizār Muṣṭafā al-Bāz, 1417/1997), 89; and al-Marjānī, *Bahjat al-nufūs*, 1:545.

147. Q 9:18. This verse is also included in another inscription cited above (§3). According to al-Firūzābādī (*al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:426), it was inscribed on the inside of this entrance.

148. This seems to be a mistake and should read “*dār*,” since the entrance opposite Dār Asmā’ is the next entrance after Bāb Rayṭa as discussed in al-Samhūdī’s survey of the entrances (see *Wafā’ al-wafā*, 3:13–14), still along the eastern wall. According to him, the Asmā’ in question is Asmā’ bt. al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Ubayd Allāh b. al-‘Abbās b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib.

149. I.e., Q 31:33–34; see also al-Firūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:427.

150. Q 33:70; see also al-Firūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:427.

151. On this entrance, opposite Dār Khālid b. al-Walīd, still in the eastern wall of the mosque, see al-Samhūdī,

[§13a] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. “Your God is One God,”
the two verses.¹⁵²

Immediately following it is:

[§13b] “When My servants question you about Me . . . ,” **the verse**.¹⁵³

On the outside of it [the same entrance] is inscribed:

[§13c] “They say, ‘Praise belongs to God, Who has removed grief from us,’”
the verse.¹⁵⁴

On the border (*ḥāf*)¹⁵⁵ of the entrance, on the inside, is inscribed:

[§13d] O God, bless¹⁵⁶ Muḥammad the prophet (ﷺ). [This is] among [the things] that al-Mahdī Muḥammad, the commander of the faithful, commanded and is among what the Basrans carried out in the year 162 [778–79 CE].¹⁵⁷

It is the place where al-Mahdī’s enlargement of the mosque began.¹⁵⁸

On the inside of the entrance facing Zuqāq al-Manāṣiḥ¹⁵⁹ is inscribed:

[§14a] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. “Your Lord is God Who created the heavens and the earth,” **the two verses**.¹⁶⁰

And on the outside of it is inscribed:

[§14b] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. “Rivalry in worldly gain has distracted you,” **to the end of the *sūra***.¹⁶¹

Wafā’ al-wafā, 3:14.

152. This could be Q 2:163–64 or Q 16:22–23. It is probably the former, since Q 2:163 begins with a *wāw*, which this inscription apparently included. That this text was inscribed here is also noted by al-Firūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:428 (the editor of this text suggests that the verses cited were Q 2:163–64).

153. Q 2:186; see also al-Firūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:428.

154. Q 35:34; see also al-Firūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:428.

155. Al-Samhūdī (*Wafā’ al-wafā*, 3:14) reads “lintel” (*nijāf*), which may make more sense.

156. Reading *ṣalli* instead of *ṣallā*.

157. See also al-Samhūdī, *Wafā’ al-wafā*, 3:14.

158. I have assumed that this is a comment by the *Kitāb al-Manāsik*’s author (or his source), rather than part of the text of inscription §13d.

159. For this entrance, still in the eastern wall, see al-Samhūdī, *Wafā’ al-wafā*, 3:14–15.

160. This could be either Q 7:54–55 or Q 10:3–4. Given the general tenor of the Qur’anic verses used in Umayyad and early Abbasid mosques, the latter is perhaps more likely. That this text was inscribed here is also noted by al-Firūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:428 (this text’s editor suggests that the inscription is Q 7:54–55).

161. Q 102; see also al-Firūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:428.

On the inside of the entrance next to al-Şawāfi is inscribed:¹⁶²

[§15a] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. **From the start of Āl ‘Imrān down to** “as He wishes. There is no god but Him, the Mighty and the Wise.”¹⁶³ O God, bless Muḥammad, Your servant and Your prophet.¹⁶⁴

And on the outside of it is inscribed:

[§15b] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. “There will be a blast on the trumpet, and all who are in the heavens and all who are on earth will swoon,” **the two verses**.¹⁶⁵

At the back of the mosque in the direction of Syria on the inside of the first entrance is inscribed:¹⁶⁶

[§16a] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. “Those who repent and act righteously turn to God in repentance,” **to the end of the *sūra***.¹⁶⁷

And on the outside is inscribed:

[§16b] “God. There is no god but Him. He will indeed gather you to the Day of Resurrection,” **the verse**.¹⁶⁸ O God, bless Muḥammad, Your servant and Your messenger, imam of the God-fearers and seal of the prophets.¹⁶⁹

On the inside of the second entrance is inscribed:

[§17a] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. “In houses [p. 392] that God has allowed to be raised,” **to the end of the three verses**.¹⁷⁰

And inscribed on the outside:

[§17b] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. O God, bless Muḥammad, Your servant and Your messenger, and reward him with the best reward You grant to the prophets and the best of what you give to the messengers. The servant of God,

162. On this entrance, apparently the northernmost along the eastern wall, see al-Samhūdī, *Wafā’ al-wafā*, 3:15–16. Al-Şawāfi were also known as Abyāt Quḥṭum; see Ibn Shabba, *Ta’rīkh*, 1:158; al-Samhūdī, *Wafā’ al-wafā*, 3:59.

163. I.e., Q 3:1–6.

164. See also al-Firūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:429.

165. I.e., Q 39:68–69; see also al-Firūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:429.

166. We have now moved on to the northern wall of the mosque.

167. I.e., Q 25:71–77; see also al-Firūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:429.

168. Q 4:87.

169. See also al-Firūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:429.

170. I.e., Q 24:36–38; see also al-Firūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:429.

al-Mahdī Muḥammad, the commander of the faithful, ordered work to build this mosque and make it more spacious.¹⁷¹

On the inside of the third entrance is inscribed:

[§18a] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. “Prosperous are the believers,” **down to** “Those are the inheritors.”¹⁷²

And inscribed on the outside:

[§18b] There is no god but God. He is the Living, Who cannot die. May God be praised and exalted high above what they associate with Him.¹⁷³ It is He “Who has not taken to Himself a son.”¹⁷⁴ “He is the High and the Great.”¹⁷⁵

On the inside of the fourth entrance¹⁷⁶ is inscribed:

[§19a] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. “The companions of the Garden and the companions of the Fire are not equal. The companions of the Garden are the winners,” **down to** “High above what they associate [with Him]” (*wa-ta‘ālā ‘ammā yushrikūn*).¹⁷⁷

And inscribed on the outside:

[§19b] God is the Mighty and the Wise.¹⁷⁸ He has permitted, with His grace and distinction, the servant of God and His caliph (*khalīfatihī*) al-Mahdī Muḥammad, the commander of the faithful, to enlarge the mosque of the messenger of God (ṣ), to make it more spacious, and to adorn it. May God magnify his reward, perfect for him His grace, let him enjoy His generosity, and glorify his victory.¹⁷⁹

171. See also al-Fīrūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:429, albeit with a slight variant: “The servant of God, al-Mahdī Muḥammad, the commander of the faithful, ordered work to adorn this mosque and make it more spacious.”

172. I.e., Q 23:1–10; see also al-Fīrūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:430.

173. This passage recalls many verses of the Qur’an, but see in particular Q 17:43, also alluded to in an earlier inscription (§5).

174. Cf. Q 17:111 and 25:2 (the inscription is slightly closer in language to the former).

175. See Q 22:62, 31:30, 34:23 and 40:12. That this text was inscribed here is also noted by al-Fīrūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:430, with a slight variant: “He is the Living Who has not taken to Himself a son . . .”

176. Al-Samhūdī mentions four entrances along the northern wall of the mosque; see his *Wafā’ al-wafā*, 3:16–17.

177. This presumably refers to Q 59:20–23, but in the ‘Uthmanic text, the end of Q 59:23 reads “*subḥān Allāh ‘ammā yushrikūn*.” I assume that the text here contains a mistake that has crept in at some stage; its wording does not appear among the variants recorded by Arthur Jeffery in his *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur’an: The Old Codices* (Leiden: Brill, 1937). The wording does appear in several other Qur’anic verses. That this text was inscribed here is also noted by al-Fīrūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:430 (where the more “standard” Qur’anic text for the final verse’s ending is given).

178. These two epithets appear together on twenty-nine occasions in the Qur’an, including Q 62:3.

179. See also al-Fīrūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:430, with a very minor variant: “His servant and His

On the inside of the last of the entrances to the mosque along the western side, near Dār Munīra,¹⁸⁰ is inscribed:

[§20a] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. “In the creation of the heavens and the earth,” **down to** “You will not break the trust.”¹⁸¹

And on the lintel of the entrance, on the inside of the arch, is inscribed:

[§20b] O God, bless Muḥammad, Your servant and Your messenger. [This is] among what the servant of God, al-Mahdī Muḥammad, the commander of the faithful, ordered. It is the work of the people of Basra.¹⁸²

Between there and the next entrance there is a *manjanīq*,¹⁸³ used when necessary to sweep the roof of the mosque;¹⁸⁴ there is another *manjanīq* to the east of the *maqṣūra*. On the outside of this is inscribed:

[§21] “The smiter,” **until the end**.¹⁸⁵

[p. 393] On the inside of the entrance that is also opposite Dār Munīra¹⁸⁶ is inscribed:

[§22a] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. “Muḥammad is the messenger of God,” **to the end of the *sūra***.¹⁸⁷

And on its outside is inscribed:

[§22b] “O my servants, who have been prodigal against yourselves.”¹⁸⁸

caliph” instead of “the servant of God and His caliph.”

180. This is the first of the entrances along the western wall, starting from the north, discussed in al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ al-wafāʾ*, 3:17–18. Al-Samhūdī notes that the Munīra in question was a *mawlā* of Umm Mūsā; Ibn Shabba (*Taʾrīkh*, 1:144) has Munīra as a *mawlā* of the commander of the faithful. Presumably, therefore, she was a *mawlā* of al-Khayzurān, the mother of Mūsā al-Hādī, who along with one of her slaves, called Muʿnisa, was responsible for some work on the Prophet’s tomb enclosure in 170/787; see Munt, *Holy City of Medina*, 117.

181. I.e., Q 3:190–94; see also al-Firūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:430.

182. See also al-Firūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:430 (although he leaves out the caliph’s name Muḥammad). He also notes more specifically that it could be found “on the lintel of the entrance, inside, below/aside from (*dūn*) the arch.”

183. This word usually refers to a device for flinging stones, such as an onager or a mangonel, but here it presumably refers to some form of scaffolding or crane.

184. The existence of this *manjanīq* used for sweeping the roof is noted also by al-Firūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:430, although he does not discuss the text inscribed on it.

185. I.e., Q 101.

186. Al-Samhūdī, following Ibn Zabāla and Yaḥyā (so perhaps on the basis of this same passage), notes that there was a second entrance along the west wall opposite Dār Munīra; see his *Wafāʾ al-wafāʾ*, 3:18.

187. Q 48:29.

188. Part of Q 39:53. The *Kitāb al-Manāsik* does not mention in this instance that the whole verse was inscribed, but perhaps this is an accidental omission. It would certainly make more sense with the rest of the verse.

On the inside of the entrance facing Dār Nuṣayr¹⁸⁹ is inscribed:

[§23a] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. “He will say, ‘How long have you remained on earth, by number of years?’” **down to the end of the *sūra***.¹⁹⁰ O God, bless Muḥammad, Your servant and Your prophet.¹⁹¹

And inscribed on the outside:

[§23b] “Praise belongs to God, Who has been true to us in His promise,” **the two verses**.¹⁹²

On the inside of the entrance opposite Dār Ja‘far b. Yaḥyā¹⁹³ is:

[§24a] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. “Praise belongs to God, Who has not taken to Himself a son,” **the verse**.¹⁹⁴ O God, bless Muḥammad, Your servant and Your messenger, in the best way You have blessed any of Your prophets or Your messengers. O God, send him to the blessed station that You promised him so the ancients and those who followed them can emulate him there, just as he delivered Your message, advised Your servants, and recited Your verses.¹⁹⁵

On the arch underneath this is inscribed:

[§24b] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. “Your Lord [is God] Who,” **down to** “Lord of all beings.”¹⁹⁶ May the blessings of God be upon Muḥammad, and greetings, the mercy of God, and His benedictions.¹⁹⁷

Inscribed on its outside is:

[§24c] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. “Have we not expanded for you your breast,” **down to the end**.¹⁹⁸

189. For this entrance, see al-Samhūdī, *Wafā’ al-wafā*, 3:18. Nuṣayr was a *mawlā* of al-Mahdī and in charge of the prayer ground to the west of the Prophet’s Mosque (*ṣāḥib al-muṣallā*).

190. I.e., Q 23:112–18.

191. See also al-Firūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:430–31.

192. I.e., Q 39:74–75; see also al-Firūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:431.

193. For this entrance, see al-Samhūdī, *Wafā’ al-wafā*, 3:18–19. The onetime owner of the *dār* is Ja‘far b. Yaḥyā b. Khālid b. Barmak.

194. Q 17:111.

195. See also al-Firūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:431.

196. Q 7:54. In the text of the *Kitāb al-Manāsik*, the word “Allāh” is missing from the opening text of this *sūra*: *inna rabbakum Allāh alladhī . . .* The omission of Allāh does not appear as a variant among those noted by Jeffery in his *Materials*, and I assume it is a copyist’s mistake or a typographical error in the edition.

197. See also al-Firūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:431 (although he omits the *basmallah*).

198. I.e., Q 94. The text of the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* here has “*a-lam tashraḥ laka ṣadraka*,” instead of the more “standard” *nashraḥ*. Here, too, I assume the wording to be a typographical or copying error, since this variant makes little sense and does not appear among the variants noted by Jeffery in his *Materials*. That this text (with the “standard” *nashraḥ*) was inscribed here is also noted by al-Firūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:431. The

On the inside of Bāb ʿĀtika¹⁹⁹ is inscribed:

[§25a] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. “The messenger believes,” **to the end of the *sūra***.²⁰⁰

The inscription (*kitāb*) on the arch²⁰¹ comes to an end [with]:

[§25b] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. “A messenger has come to you [p. 394] from among yourselves,” **the two verses**.²⁰² “Say, ‘He is God, One,’” **to the end**.²⁰³ May God bless Muḥammad the prophet and may greetings, the mercy of God, and His benedictions be upon him.²⁰⁴

Inscribed outside it is:

[§25c] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. “God enjoins justice, doing good and giving to kinsfolk,” **the verse**.²⁰⁵ The servant of God, ʿAbd Allāh, the commander of the faithful, ordered building work in this mosque.²⁰⁶

On Bāb Ziyād²⁰⁷ there is a teak plaque nailed up and inscribed on the outside of the mosque and another inscription (*kitāb*) on the inside:²⁰⁸

[§26] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. “God. There is no god but Him,” **the verse**.²⁰⁹ Muḥammad is the messenger of God, whom He sent

editor of al-Firūzābādī’s text assumes the inscription contained only Q 94:1, but the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* makes it clear the whole *sūra* is meant.

199. ʿĀtika bt. ʿAbd Allāh b. Yazīd b. Muʿāwiya. For this entrance, see al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ al-wafāʾ*, 3:19–21; Sauvaget, *Mosquée omeyyade*, 76–77. The entrance has also been known as Bāb al-Sūq and Bāb al-Raḥma and is supposedly one of the entrances given to the mosque in the original building of the prophet himself (although al-Samhūdī offers an interesting investigation of this claim).

200. I.e., Q 2:285–86; see also al-Firūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:431.

201. Al-Firūzābādī simply places this inscription “beneath it [the entrance or the previous text] on the arch”; see his *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:431–32.

202. I.e., Q 9:128–29.

203. I.e., Q 112.

204. See also al-Firūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:431–32.

205. Q 16:90.

206. See also al-Firūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:432.

207. This entrance is named after the aforementioned early Abbasid governor of Medina, Ziyād b. ʿUbayd Allāh. For a discussion of this entrance, see al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ al-wafāʾ*, 3:21–27.

208. It is unclear whether this inscription is found on one side of this entrance, runs between the two sides, or is repeated once on each side. Al-Samhūdī notes only (*Wafāʾ al-wafāʾ*, 3:23), citing Ibn Zabāla and Yaḥyā, that it was inscribed on the outside, and al-Firūzābādī (*al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:432) reports the same. It is quite a lengthy text, especially if it does include the Throne Verse, so perhaps it started on the outside of the entrance and was continued on the inside.

209. There are several verses this could refer to, but the obvious candidate is the Throne Verse, Q 2:255, also used elsewhere in the mosque (§11a). Al-Firūzābādī’s text of this inscription mentions explicitly that it was indeed the Throne Verse; see his *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:432–33.

“with the guidance and the religion of truth.”²¹⁰ The servant of God, ‘Abd Allāh,²¹¹ the commander of the faithful, may God ennoble him, ordered building work on the mosque of the messenger of God (ﷺ) and the construction of this courtyard, to make the mosque of the messenger of God (ﷺ) more spacious and for those Muslims who come to it, in the year 151 [768–69 CE], out of desire for God alone and the last abode. The commander of the faithful, may God ennoble him, is the most worthy of men to oversee that because of his close kinship to the messenger of God (ﷺ) and because of his caliphate (*khilāfatihī*) with which he/He distinguished him.²¹² May God magnify the reward of the commander of the faithful and make great his recompense.²¹³

There is no inscription on the *khawkha*, neither inside nor outside.²¹⁴

On the inside of the entrance that is by Dār Marwān²¹⁵ is inscribed:

[§27a] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. “God and His angels bless the prophet. O you who believe, bless him and salute him.”²¹⁶ O God, bless Muḥammad the prophet (ﷺ) and salute him, make him blameless, increase his standing, ennoble his structure, honor his lodging places/stations, and reward him with the best reward You could give to a prophet to/on behalf of/away from his community (*‘an ummatihī*). For he brought Your message and strove to carry out Your command so that Your religion was mighty and [p 395] Your authority was manifest, Your word was finished, what You had made lawful was made lawful, and what You had forbidden was forbidden. He commanded [in line with] Your justice Your oneness, You have no companion.²¹⁷ May peace be upon him and the mercy of God and His benedictions.²¹⁸ The servant of God, ‘Abd Allāh, the commander of the faithful, ordered work on the mosque of the messenger of God (ﷺ) in the

210. Part of Q 9:33. Al-Firūzābādī’s text gives a slightly fuller quotation from this verse.

211. Al-Firūzābādī omits the second *‘abd allāh*.

212. Al-Firūzābādī has “because of his close kinship to the messenger of God (ﷺ) and because of his caliphate with which God distinguished him.”

213. Al-Samhūdī provides the text of this inscription from “The servant of God” to “the last abode” in his *Wafā’ al-wafā*, 3:23. Al-Firūzābādī offers the whole text in his *al-Maghānīm al-muṭāba*, 1:432–33. There are some other variations between the versions of this inscription offered by the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* and al-Firūzābādī, but I have here noted only those that may alter the meaning. For some discussion of this text, see Munt, *Holy City of Medina*, 167–68; and further below in this article.

214. For this statement and a discussion of this *khawkha*, “small opening,” also known as Khawkhat Abī Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, see also al-Samhūdī, *Wafā’ al-wafā*, 3:27–28 (citing Ibn Zabāla for this statement).

215. See above, n. 112, on this entrance.

216. Q 33:56.

217. Al-Firūzābādī’s text reads alternatively: “With You that enforced Your oneness, You have no companion” (*wa-bika naffadha dhālika waḥdaka lā sharīk laka*).

218. Up to this point the inscription is very similar to that on the loosely opposite entrance, Bāb ‘Uthmān (§10a).

year 160 [776–77 CE],²¹⁹ a [sign of] generosity from God through which He ennobled his caliphate, a treasury that those before him stored away for him, and a gift that He gave to him over those who come after him.²²⁰ Praise be to God, Who brought the commander of the faithful to rule after others²²¹ and whom He ennobled with the [. . .] of his community,²²² the spreading of his customs (*sunan*) and purifying him/it.²²³ May God magnify the reward of the commander of the faithful and multiply his good deeds.²²⁴

And inscribed on the outside:

[§27b] There is no god but God, Who is One and has no companion. Muḥammad is the messenger of God, whom He sent “with the guidance and the religion of truth,” **the verse**.²²⁵ O God, grant forgiveness to your prophets and the caliphs of the believers (*khulafā’ al-mu’minīn*), alive and dead. O God, bless Muḥammad, Your servant and Your prophet, You, Your angels, and all of the believers.²²⁶ The servant of God, ‘Abd Allāh, the commander of the faithful, ordered work on the mosque of the messenger of God, the restoration of what had been brought into disrepair, and its (re)construction in the year 152 [769–70 CE].²²⁷

The inscription that was written for ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz along the *qibla* [wall] of the mosque, the one that Sa‘d Ḥaṭaba inscribed,²²⁸ begins:

[§28] In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. “Praise belongs to God,” **to its end**,²²⁹ and “By the sun and its brightness in the forenoon,” **to its end**.²³⁰

219. There is a potential date/name problem here since the reigning caliph in 160/776–77 was Muḥammad al-Mahdī (r. 158–69/775–85), although this seems not to be an error (see further discussion later in this article). Al-Firūzābādī has the year as 130/747–48, which is equally (and in fact more) problematic.

220. Al-Firūzābādī has “through which God ennobled his caliphate from a treasury that He had stored for him apart from those who came before him and a gift that He gave to him over those who come after him.” In some ways, this makes a little bit more sense.

221. Al-Firūzābādī has “Who put the commander of the faithful in charge of making it more spacious after others.”

222. The edition reads *b*ī*s*r millatīhi*; al-Jāsir suggests reading the first word as *bī-naṣr*, thus giving “with the victory of his community.”

223. This makes little sense. Al-Firūzābādī has the more meaningful “and whom He ennobled with adorning and purifying it.”

224. For this text, see also al-Firūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:433–34. I have noted only the variants that alter the meaning of the inscription.

225. Q 9:33.

226. A clear reference to Q 33:56.

227. See also al-Firūzābādī, *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:434.

228. The edited text here reads Sa‘d Khaṭaba, but the earlier Sa‘d Ḥaṭaba is surely correct.

229. I.e., Q 1.

230. I.e., Q 91. Since we were told at the beginning of this section of the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* that this *qibla* inscription included all the verses from Q 91 to the end of the Qur’an, that is presumably what is meant here as well.

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In total, the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* reports fifty separate inscriptions in the Abbasid mosque after al-Mahdī's renovations, one of which (§28) had survived from the Umayyad period. The *Kitāb al-Manāsik* reproduces the texts of these inscriptions in a fairly straightforward and logical manner. It begins with the courtyard inscriptions, starting with that along the *qibla* side of the courtyard and proceeding all the way around the courtyard in order. Then it reports the texts of the remaining inscriptions, mostly but not exclusively around entrances to the mosque, running from the southeast corner along the eastern, northern, and western sides to the southwest corner and finally ending where it began with the text of the Umayyad inscription that remained along the *qibla* wall of the mosque. See Figure 1 for an approximate plan of the locations of the courtyard inscriptions and the entrances to the Abbasid mosque.

The Umayyad-Era Inscriptions and Their Fate in the Abbasid Period

The *Kitāb al-Manāsik* adds little that is completely new to our understanding of the form and content of the epigraphic program that accompanied al-Walīd b. 'Abd al-Malik's construction of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, although it does help clarify some issues. It is also clear from this source that Marwanid inscriptions ran along the length of the *qibla* wall of the mosque and that they comprised the Qur'anic *sūras* 1 and 91 to 114; there had also been at least one inscription in the mosque's courtyard.²³¹ There was presumably a foundation inscription as well; that would be expected, and the existence of one is necessary to understand al-Nawfalī's anecdote with which this article began. There are no surviving inscriptions from any of al-Walīd's mosques, and they may not all have had any to begin with.²³² Two other mosques that he had constructed, however, are reported to have had inscriptions, and the reported contents of these are loosely in line with those reported for the Prophet's Mosque. We have seen above that Abū Yūsuf al-Fasawī (d. 277/890) observed in the Great Mosque of Damascus inscriptions on narrow bands in blue and gold along the *qibla* wall containing the Throne Verse (Q 2:255) followed by al-Walīd's foundation inscription as well as *sūras* 1 and 79–81 of the Qur'an.²³³ There is also said to have been an inscription in al-Walīd's mosque in al-Fuṣṭāṭ on green plaques ("tables vertes"), although the original has been lost and is known only through a French translation published by Pierre

231. Other sources to note some of these inscriptions include Ibn Rusta, *al-A'īn al-nāfisa*, 70; and Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 1/i:15–16. That at least one (and maybe more) of the early Abbasid inscriptions around the courtyard seems to have replaced an earlier Umayyad-era text is discussed below.

232. One description of al-Walīd's mosque in Sanaa provides some information about the decoration of the *qibla* wall but does not seem to note the existence of inscribed texts; see al-Rāzī, *Ta'rīkh madīnat Ṣan'ā'*, ed. Ḥusayn b. 'Abd Allāh al-'Amrī, 3rd ed. (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1409/1989), 135–37. Cf., however, Serjeant and Lewcock, "Architectural History," 323, 347, where it is noted (citing al-Rāzī) that the *mihrāb* al-Walīd installed in the mosque in Sanaa contained inscriptions. Al-Rāzī states that "*nuqūsh waraqāt*" could be seen as part of the decoration in this *mihrāb*, but this need not mean inscribed texts.

233. Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 2/i:37; see also Finster, "Mosaiken," 119; Flood, *Great Mosque*, 247–54; George, *Umayyad Mosque*, 175–78.

Vattier in 1666.²³⁴ According to that translation, the inscription, dated to 92/711, seems to have contained several verses from the Qurʾan (Q 3:18, 4:172, 9:33, and 57:2) and called for various blessings for the prophet and the caliph. That caliph is recorded as ordering the expansion of the mosque and is addressed as “the servant of God, al-Walīd, the commander of the faithful” (“Gabdolle le valide Commandeur des fidelles”). It also seems that at one point in this text al-Walīd was referred to as “caliph” or deputy (*khalīfa*): “en le faisant vostre Lieutenant.” The work is recorded as having been carried out by al-Walīd’s governor of Egypt from 90/709 to 96/714, Qurra b. Sharīk (“Corras fils de Serique”).

Like the texts from Damascus and al-Fuṣṭāṭ, the Umayyad inscriptions in the Prophet’s Mosque appear to have been set in gold letters against a blue/dark green background. The only source, however, to state this explicitly is Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, whose testimony has been questioned and is in any case relatively late and may refer to the *qibla* wall’s post-Umayyad decoration.²³⁵ Different materials seem to have been used for the Umayyad-era inscriptions: Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih has the *qibla* inscriptions in marble, while other sources describe inscriptions from al-Walīd’s time in mosaic. Al-Nawfalī’s anecdote, for example, is explicit that the foundation inscription it refers to was in mosaic, and it can be inferred from al-Samhūdī’s discussion, as well, that the other texts were inscribed in mosaic: “From the discussion of Ibn Zabāla on the inscriptions (*kitāba*) around the entrances to the mosque in the time of al-Mahdī, it can be ascertained that it had been decorated with mosaic (*bi-l-fusayfisā*), just as al-Walīd had done.”²³⁶ Since gold letters on a dark blue/green background was the setting of choice for other Umayyad caliphal inscriptions in mosaic, including those in the Dome of the Rock and at the marketplace patronized by Hishām b. ‘Abd al-Malik at Baysān/Scythopolis, it does seem reasonable to assume that this scheme was also applied to the epigraphic program in Medina.²³⁷ Others have discussed the imperial connotations of such a color scheme in the late antique Roman and early Islamic empires.²³⁸

One problem concerning the Umayyad inscriptions that the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* does help us clear up is the identity of the figure responsible for the design of the inscriptions: a *mawlā* of Āl Ḥuwayṭib b. ‘Abd al-‘Uzzā called Sa‘d Ḥaṭaba. A figure called Sa‘d has previously been identified as having played a role in the creation of these texts, but often only as the patron of another Qurʾanic copyist, called Ibn Abī al-Hayyāj. The source for this supposed

234. Gaston Wiet, *Matériaux pour un Corpus inscriptionum arabicarum, première partie: Égypte*, vol. 2 (Cairo: Imprimerie de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1930), 6–9; *RCEA*, 1:17–18 (no. 19).

235. See above, nn. 40–41. Ibn al-Nadīm (see below, n. 243) confirms that the letters were in gold but does not mention the color of the background.

236. Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā’ al-wafā*, 2:296.

237. Khamis, “Two Wall Mosaic Inscriptions”; Milwright, *Dome of the Rock*; see also George, “Calligraphy, Colour and Light,” 97.

238. Flood, *Great Mosque*, 102; George, “Calligraphy, Colour and Light,” 95–104; Lawrence Nees, “Blue behind Gold: The Inscription of the Dome of the Rock and Its Relatives,” in *And Diverse Are Their Hues: Color in Islamic Art and Culture*, ed. Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom, 152–73 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011); Milwright, *Dome of the Rock*, 197–99. For a wide-ranging discussion of the use of gold letters in late antique mosaics, see Sean V. Leatherbury, *Inscribing Faith in Late Antiquity: Between Reading and Seeing* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 42–56.

outsourcing of the work is a brief passage in Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist*.²³⁹ However, thanks to the *Kitāb al-Manāsik*'s provision of a crucial piece of information—namely, that this Sa'd was known as Sa'd Ḥaṭaba—we now know that Sa'd himself was responsible for the execution of the texts and that Ibn Abī al-Hayyāj had nothing to do with them. This fact clears up a difficult reading in Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist* and reveals that the common (mis)understanding of the latter passage was caused by a variant that happened to appear in the manuscript that formed the basis of Gustav Flügel's edition of the text.²⁴⁰ The relevant passage can now be read as follows:

The first to write out a *muṣḥaf* at the very beginning and to be known for the beauty of [his] calligraphy was Khālīd b. Abī al-Hayyāj. I have seen a *muṣḥaf* in his hand. Sa'd Ḥaṭaba²⁴¹ used to write out *maṣāḥif*, poetry, and anecdotes (*akhbār*) for al-Walīd b. 'Abd al-Malik; it is he who carried out the inscription (*kitāb*) that is on the *qibla* [wall] of the Prophet's (ṣ) Mosque in gold, from "By the sun and its brightness in the forenoon" to the end of the Qur'an.²⁴² It is said that 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz said to him, "I want you to write a *muṣḥaf* for me along this model." So he wrote for him a *muṣḥaf* with the utmost care. 'Umar came to inspect it and praised it highly, but he set a high price for it, so he refused [to buy] it.²⁴³

This rereading confirms the identity of the figure who executed the epigraphic program in al-Walīd's Prophet's Mosque in Medina. It helpfully clarifies who this otherwise randomly appearing and unidentified Sa'd in Ibn al-Nadīm's text is and explains why Sa'd Ḥaṭaba is elsewhere referred to as a noted copyist of the Qur'an.²⁴⁴ Finally, it removes the problem, first identified by Nabia Abbott, caused by the fact that Ibn Abī al-Hayyāj is elsewhere in the *Fihrist* identified as a companion of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and would, therefore, have had to be either a very young associate of 'Alī or a very old designer of the inscriptions in al-Walīd's mosque and copyist for 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz.²⁴⁵

239. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 1/i:15–16; translations offered in Sauvaget, *Mosquée omeyyade*, 79–80; Alain George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy* (London: Saqi, 2010), 74–75. For discussion, see Nabia Abbott, *The Rise of the North Arabic Script and Its Qur'anic Development, with a Full Description of the Qur'an Manuscripts in the Oriental Institute* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), 54; Khamis, "Two Wall Mosaic Inscriptions," 171; Whelan, "Forgotten Witness," 10–13.

240. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, ed. Gustav Flügel (Leipzig: F. C. W. Vogel, 1871–72), 1:6.

241. This is the word that caused the confusion. Sayyid's edition of Ibn al-Nadīm has Sa'd Ḥuṣṣah, but this must surely be the same person as the Sa'd Ḥaṭaba mentioned in the *Kitāb al-Manāsik*. Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, ed. Riḍā Tajaddud (Tehran: Maktabat al-Ja'fari, 1391/1971), 9, has Sa'd Khuṣṣah. So the text in these editions reads *wa-kāna Sa'd Ḥuṣṣah/Khuṣṣah yaktubu al-maṣāḥif*. Sayyid's edition notes that a variant in a surviving manuscript reads instead *wa-kāna Sa'd naṣabahu li-katb al-maṣāḥif*, "Sa'd had commissioned him to compose *maṣāḥif* . . ." and, as Tajaddud mentions in a note, Flügel's edition has this text as well, which is presumably why previous translations have followed this alternative reading. Sa'd Ḥaṭaba is clearly the correct reading.

242. I.e., Q 91–114.

243. Translation based on Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist* (ed. Sayyid), 1/i:15–16.

244. See above, n. 113.

245. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 1/i:107; Abbott, *Rise of the North Arabic Script*, 54.

Before we turn to the inscriptions added to the mosque in the early Abbasid period, it is worth considering the fate of these Umayyad texts after the fall of that dynasty. Many Umayyad inscriptions from the major imperial monuments founded during ‘Abd al-Malik’s and al-Walīd’s reigns seem to have been either destroyed or appropriated by Abbasid rulers and their representatives, a process that Flood has labeled “epigraphic mutilation.”²⁴⁶ Al-Ma’mūn famously had ‘Abd al-Malik’s name in the Dome of the Rock’s foundation inscription replaced with his own and also had extra inscriptions bearing his name added to the copper panels bearing Umayyad inscriptions by the entrances to that same building.²⁴⁷ In Damascus, it seems to have been the Qur’anic texts that were effaced by al-Ma’mūn, according to al-Fasawī.²⁴⁸ The anecdote with which this article opens depicts al-Mahdī having al-Walīd’s name in the foundation inscription of the Prophet’s Mosque replaced with his own.

Sauvaget thought he had identified in the extant notices about the Abbasid inscriptions in the Prophet’s Mosque evidence of such a replacement of the name of the Umayyad caliph by an Abbasid ruler, and his argument is in some ways persuasive.²⁴⁹ His argument concerns Ibn Rusta’s version of an inscription explicitly credited in the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* to the first Abbasid caliph, Abū al-‘Abbās al-Saffāh (š4). Sauvaget’s interest was raised by the fact that in Ibn Rusta’s account, this inscription is credited to a ruler designated “the servant of God, ‘Abd Allāh, the Commander of the Faithful” but is then dated to 162/778–79. The date would place the text during the construction work of al-Mahdī, but that caliph was called Muḥammad, not ‘Abd Allāh. He also noted the significant overlap in content with the first part of an inscription not reported by most of the sources discussed here—its text is provided by Ibn Qutayba—which credits work on the Prophet’s Mosque to al-Ma’mūn. Ibn Qutayba records the following text:

The servant of God [or: ‘Abd Allāh] ordered work on the mosque of the messenger of God (š) in the year 202 [817–18 CE], desiring recompense from God, reward from God,

246. Flood, *Great Mosque*, 125–26; see also idem, “Signs of Silence: Epigraphic Erasure and the Image of the Word,” in *The Image Debate: Figural Representation in Islam and across the World*, ed. Christiane Gruber, 46–71 (London: Gingko, 2019), esp. 49–56 on the Abbasid era. This is, of course, not a feature unique to the early Abbasid Islamic world; see, for example, the discussion of pre-Islamic Iranian epigraphic practices in Matthew P. Canepa, “Inscriptions, Royal Spaces and Iranian Identity: Epigraphic Practices in Persia and the Ancient Iranian World,” in *Viewing Inscriptions in the Late Antique and Medieval World*, ed. Antony Eastmond, 10–35 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); and, in the same volume, Jonathan M. Bloom, “Erasure and Memory: Aghlabid and Fatimid Inscriptions in North Africa,” 61–75. The months surrounding the Abbasid takeover of power from the Umayyads also witnessed many episodes of revolutionary violence targeted at relatives and supporters of the deposed ruling family; see further Robinson, “Violence.” Later decades saw, alongside “epigraphic mutilation,” extensive efforts to rewrite the memory of the Umayyad era and Umayyad rulers; see esp. Antoine Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir: L’espace syrien sous les derniers Omeyyades et les premiers Abbassides (v. 72–193/692–809)* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

247. For the latter, see Milwright, *Dome of the Rock*, 76.

248. Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 2/i:37; Flood, *Great Mosque*, 126, 253; cf. now in part George, *Umayyad Mosque*, 175–76.

249. Sauvaget, *Mosquée omeyyade*, 58–67.

and God's generosity. For with God is "the reward of both this world and the next. God is Hearing and Observing."²⁵⁰

The servant of God, 'Abd Allāh, has commanded fear of God and awe of Him as well as doing right by one's family and action in accordance with the Book of God and the *sunna* of His messenger (ṣ). [He commands] the magnification/veneration of God's ordinances that the tyrants belittled and the revival of the justice that they killed off; [he commands] the belittling of the enmity and oppression they magnified. [He commands] that God be obeyed and that those who obey God be obeyed and that those who disobey God be disobeyed. No obedience is due to any creature acting in disobedience to God. [He commands] the equitable division of the *ḥay'* among them and the appropriate expenditure of the "fifths."²⁵¹

The second part of this text is clearly a version of the Ibn Ghazāla inscription discussed by the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* (§1) and other sources. The first part does indeed heavily overlap in content with §4, although of course the date is completely different. For inscription §4, then, we do seem to have three different readings of the same text, and it is worth emphasizing that it can be inferred from Ibn Rusta's account of the Abbasid texts, which he places around the courtyard of the Prophet's Mosque, that §4 would have been followed by §1.²⁵² The main difference is the dates: the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* and al-Samhūdī (both citing Yaḥyā al-ʿAqīqī) have 132/749–50; Ibn Rusta has 162/778–79; and Ibn Qutayba has 202/817–18. There has been scepticism about Ibn Qutayba's reading of the text for centuries, and Sauvaget followed al-Samhūdī's precedent in, correctly, rejecting it; Sauvaget astutely assumed that Ibn Qutayba had tried to make the date match a caliph he knew to have been called 'Abd Allāh.²⁵³ Sauvaget ended up arguing that the discrepancy between the name of the caliph and the date—recall that he was basing his discussion on Ibn Rusta's version of the inscription—is the end result of an Abbasid rewriting of an originally Umayyad text: the name al-Walīd was replaced, for reasons of calligraphic fit, with the name 'Abd Allāh and the date was altered.²⁵⁴

Since Sauvaget was working with Ibn Rusta's account of the early Abbasid inscriptions, his argument made some sense of a confusing text. Other texts, however, remove the need for such a convoluted argument. The fact that Yaḥyā al-ʿAqīqī (according to both the

250. A slight rearrangement of the wording of Q 4:134; see also *RCEA*, 1:98 (no. 122).

251. Ibn Qutayba, *Maʿārif*, 562–63.

252. See below, Fig. 1, and the plan in Sauvaget, *Mosquée omeyyade*, 64. (§1 is Sauvaget's "A" and §4 is Sauvaget's "E.") That inscriptions §§1–4 were located "around the courtyard of the mosque" is mentioned in Ibn Rusta, *al-Aʿlāq al-naḥḥīya*, 73.

253. For al-Samhūdī's scepticism, see his *Wafāʾ al-wafāʾ*, 2:296.

254. There is a reconstruction of what the relevant sections of both texts might have looked like in Sauvaget, *Mosquée omeyyade*, 66.

Kitāb al-Manāsik and al-Samhūdī) dated the text to 132/749–50 removes the problem of the discrepancy between the date of the text and the name of the caliph. Alternatively, if Ibn Rusta's reading of the date as 162/778–79 were correct, there are other extant inscriptions (§27a, for example, and see the discussion below) that suggest that the caliph Muḥammad al-Mahdī might have been referred to in inscriptions as *ʿabd allāh* *ʿabd allāh*, “the servant of God, ʿAbd Allāh.” Finally, Sauvaget's argument has always begged the question of why al-Mahdī would have replaced the name al-Walīd with ʿAbd Allāh for reasons of calligraphic fit: after all, al-Maʿmūn's reworking of the inscription in the Dome of the Rock suggests that Abbasid caliphs could be content with fairly crude alterations to Umayyad texts.²⁵⁵

This particular inscription, then, may not turn out to be a case of Abbasid-era “epigraphic mutilation” of an originally Umayyad text. That such mutilation happened, however, seems clear enough. Al-Nawfalī's anecdote suggests that it did happen in the Prophet's Mosque, and there is other evidence, too. Both the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* and Ibn Rusta, in their respective narratives of events leading up to the composition of inscription §1, state that this text was the result of early Abbasid reworking of a text originally put in place by ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz during the construction work in al-Walīd's reign. In another version of inscription §1, provided by Ibn al-Najjār, the name of the caliph in the text is actually given as “the servant of God, the commander of the faithful, al-Walīd.”²⁵⁶ This seems to represent Ibn al-Najjār's attempt to restore an original Umayyad text and it is a logical enough attempt at restoration, even though, as will be discussed below, the language of §1 as a whole is much more aligned with Abbasid than with Umayyad political vocabulary.

Despite the evidence for early Abbasid “epigraphic mutilation” in the Prophet's Mosque, however, it does seem to be the case that the Umayyad-era Qurʾanic texts along the *qibla* wall remained. Ibn Rusta does not explicitly confirm that they were among the inscriptions he read on his visit in 290/903—in fact, he refers (albeit vaguely) to other sources to note their existence²⁵⁷—but Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih's testimony, if accurate, supports their continuing existence. So does the *Kitāb al-Manāsik*'s author's decision to repeat their content at the very end of the survey of inscriptions around the entrances to the mosque (§28). That survey began near the southern corner of the eastern wall and ended near the southern corner of the western wall. The notice of the Umayyad inscriptions along the *qibla* wall, therefore, completes a full circuit and suggests that those texts were still *in situ* after al-Mahdī's work on the mosque.

255. For the crude nature of al-Maʿmūn's replacement of ʿAbd al-Malik's name with his own, see the transcription of the relevant part of the text in Christel Kessler, “ʿAbd al-Malik's Inscription in the Dome of the Rock: A Reconsideration,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1970): 2–14, at 9; there is also an image in Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*, 30. The most important transcription of the Dome of the Rock's mosaic inscriptions can now be found in the foldouts at the front and back of Milwright, *Dome of the Rock*, but in the relevant place he restores ʿAbd al-Malik's name.

256. Ibn al-Najjār, *al-Durra al-thamīna*, 177.

257. Ibn Rusta, *al-Aʿlāq al-nafīsa*, 73: “More than one scholar has reported that . . .”

The Early Abbasid Inscriptions

The *Kitāb al-Manāsik* provides a fair amount of information about the forty-nine texts it describes that were added to the Prophet's Mosque in the early Abbasid period, although some details remain frustratingly obscure. Perhaps the most frustrating such detail is the material used to create the inscriptions. A few texts are explicitly said either by the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* or by another source to have been in mosaic, and one seems to have been written on a teak plaque.²⁵⁸ There is also the aforementioned notice from al-Samhūdī to the effect that according to Ibn Zabāla's account of the inscriptions, al-Mahdī used mosaic in the Prophet's Mosque just as al-Walīd had done.²⁵⁹ The way this comment is phrased suggests, as Alain George has also noted, that many of the early Abbasid inscriptions in the mosque were executed in mosaic, perhaps—although there is no explicit evidence for this—in the caliphal/imperial color scheme of gold on blue.²⁶⁰ We can, therefore, study these texts on the basis of their locations and content alone, since we have so little evidence of other aspects of their nonverbal communication.²⁶¹ We have, for example, no indication of the script(s) used. It would be interesting to compare these texts with those that have survived in Mecca and are dated to the early Abbasid period, although these await a full study. What has been published so far indicates that two texts from the Masjid al-Ḥarām, one dated to 167/783–84 during al-Mahdī's caliphate and the other probably linked to this text, both located close to that mosque's Bāb al-Ṣafā, are in raised Kufic script on marble columns.²⁶² Another inscription from the Masjid al-Bay'a in Mecca, dated to 144/761–62, is in what its editor has labeled a "Ḥijāzī" script on a rectangular granite pane.²⁶³ It is possible that some of the inscriptions around the entrances to the Prophet's Mosque may have been similar, but there is little indication that this was the case. It would also be possible to consider other extant examples of Arabic architectural inscriptions in mosaic, wood, and stone from the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries to gain some indication of what the visual effect of the Prophet's Mosque's inscriptions may have been. Since, however,

258. Mosaic: §6; Ibn Rusta, *al-A'īn al-nafīsa*, 74–75; al-Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-wafā*, 3:13 (which corresponds to §11a). Teak plaque: §26; al-Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-wafā*, 3:23. See also Leal, "Abbasid Mosaic Tradition," 32. Al-Marjānī and al-Maṭarī also note that §11a was on a mosaic panel, although they date it to the caliphate of al-Walīd b. 'Abd al-Malik: see al-Maṭarī, *Ta'rif*, 89; al-Marjānī, *Bahjat al-nufūs*, 1:545. Since, however, they both also, confusingly, seem to attribute all the entrances in al-Mahdī's mosque, including those in the portions added to the structure by al-Mahdī, to al-Walīd, they may well have been wrong about this, too; see below, n. 270, for reference to their confusion over the entrances.

259. See above, n. 236. For further discussion of the use of mosaics to decorate Abbasid monuments over the first Abbasid century or so, see Leal, "Abbasid Mosaic Tradition," esp. 30–34 for the use of mosaic in the Ḥijāz.

260. George, "Calligraphy, Colour and Light," 98. That said, a mosaic inscription added to one of the entrances to the Masjid al-Ḥarām in Mecca by Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr, recording work undertaken between 137/754 and 140/758, was apparently actually in the reverse color scheme, "in black mosaic on gold mosaic"; see al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka*, 2:58–59; also Sheila Blair, "Inscribing the Hajj," in *The Hajj: Collected Essays*, ed. Venetia Porter and Liana Saif, 160–68 (London: British Museum, 2013), 161–62.

261. For the importance of nonverbal, visual evidence in interpreting epigraphic schemes, see the essays collected in Eastmond, *Viewing Inscriptions*.

262. Al-Rāshid et al., *Āthār minṭaqat Makka al-mukarrama*, 111–14.

263. *Ibid.*, 122.

any comparison would have to remain almost entirely conjectural, it seems more appropriate to focus our attention here on what we do know about these texts.

The *Kitāb al-Manāsik* and Ibn Rusta between them allow us to pinpoint quite clearly the locations of most of the early Abbasid inscriptions. According to the latter, several of these texts (§§1–4) were “around the courtyard of the mosque, above the arches and beneath the merlons (*shurafāt*).”²⁶⁴ Sauvaget offered a credible plan of their arrangement around the courtyard, and nothing in the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* suggests his plan is incorrect.²⁶⁵ Of the additional early Abbasid texts discussed by the *Kitāb al-Manāsik*, one was in the “eastern corner of the inside of the mosque” (§5), presumably, given the context, by the southeast corner; one was along the outside of the *qibla* wall by the southeast corner (§8); and one was on the *manjanīq* next to the northern end of the western wall (§21). The remaining inscriptions (§§6–7, 9–20, 22–27) were located around the entrances to the mosque, both inside and outside, and sometimes on connected arches and lintels (see Fig. 1).²⁶⁶

There is some dispute surrounding the number of entrances to the Prophet's Mosque in the second/eighth century. Sauvaget noted that the state of the entrances to al-Walīd's mosque is very difficult to ascertain, although he made a valiant effort.²⁶⁷ Ibn Zabāla mentions four entrances, all in the western wall, that were apparently there in the very early Abbasid period, before al-Mahdī's expansion.²⁶⁸ Most of our sources are more interested in discussing the entrances to the mosque after al-Mahdī's expansion of the building, but they nonetheless disagree over their total number and sometimes over their location. The main dispute surrounds any entrances that may or may not have been found along the *qibla* wall of al-Mahdī's mosque. Ibn Zabāla apparently gave the mosque twenty-four entrances, eight along each of the eastern and western walls and four each along the northern and southern walls.²⁶⁹ Al-Samhūdī, however, disputed that some of these were really entrances and in his own survey discusses only twenty, those along the eastern, northern, and western walls.²⁷⁰ Ibn Rusta says he counted twenty-two entrances when he visited the Prophet's Mosque in 290/903.²⁷¹ The *Kitāb al-Manāsik* mentions twenty entrances in its survey of the

264. Ibn Rusta, *al-A'lāq al-nafisa*, 73.

265. Sauvaget, *Mosquée omeyyade*, 64.

266. The relatively extensive use of inscriptions to decorate the mosque is not particularly surprising in an Abbasid-era context. The (admittedly a century or so later) mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn in Cairo famously had an inscription two kilometers long on wood; see K. A. C. Creswell, *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture*, rev. James W. Allan (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1989), 402.

267. Sauvaget, *Mosquée omeyyade*, 75–78, 91.

268. Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā' al-wafā*, 3:24.

269. *Ibid.*, 3:6–7.

270. *Ibid.*, 3:7–31. Al-Firūzābādī's survey of the entrances (see his *al-Maghānim al-muṭāba*, 1:425–35) differs slightly in places from al-Samhūdī's, but the latter in his own survey argues persuasively for his reconstruction, which agrees fully with the *Kitāb al-Manāsik*'s arrangement. Al-Maṭarī and al-Marjānī both discuss twenty entrances, which they claim were put into the mosque by al-Walīd b. 'Abd al-Malik, but since they include entrances found only in the extension built on the instructions of al-Mahdī, they were clearly confused: see al-Maṭarī, *Ta'rīf*, 88–91; and al-Marjānī *Bahjat al-nufūs*, 1:543–48.

271. Ibn Rusta, *al-A'lāq al-nafisa*, 75.

inscriptions, which starts in the southeast corner (along the eastern wall) before progressing in order along the eastern, northern, and western walls; these are the same twenty discussed by al-Samhūdī, who seems to have based his discussion on Yaḥyā al-‘Aqīqī’s and Ibn Zabāla’s surveys of the inscriptions. Texts are located on or around all of them except one, the small opening (*khawkha*) in the western wall.²⁷² Of the inscriptions around the entrances, those from §§13 or 14 up to §§23 or 24 were in the new section of the mosque added as part of al-Mahdī’s enlargement.²⁷³

The contents of the texts are fairly regular and fall under four main themes (more than one theme can appear in one inscription). First of all, there are texts commemorating building projects commissioned by particular caliphs. Fourteen of the inscriptions mention such work, with three identifying Abū al-‘Abbās as the commissioning caliph (§§1, 4, 5), two al-Manṣūr (§§26, 27b), one Hārūn al-Rashīd (§6), and seven al-Mahdī (§§2, 3, 13d, 17b, 19b, 20b, and almost certainly 27a); one (§25c) names the caliph as “the servant of God, ‘Abd Allāh, the commander of the faithful” but provides no other identifying information or date. These texts are often associated with thanks to God, praise for the prophet, and calls for God’s blessings and rewards for the caliph.²⁷⁴

Second, there are texts that identify the origins of the craftsmen who worked on those sections of the mosque:²⁷⁵ two texts credit craftsmen from Jerusalem (§§6, 7), two workers from Homs (§§10b, 10c), and two Basrans (§§13d, 20b). No craftsmen are named individually—the sole inscription that mentions the agency of an individual other than the caliph (§6) refers to a local official who oversaw the work—but such identification would be uncommon for architectural epigraphy in this period.²⁷⁶ Mention of the geographical origins of groups of craftsmen, however, seems to have been relatively common in the Hījāz around this time. Two extant early Abbasid texts from the Masjid al-Ḥarām in Mecca

272. Although the only text located near Bāb ‘Alī is §8, and it is not entirely clear how close to the entrance it was.

273. The *Kitāb al-Manāsik* is clear that texts §13a–d were around the entrance that marked the place along the eastern wall where al-Mahdī’s expansion began, but it is unclear whether this entrance was at the limit of al-Walīd’s mosque or in a section of the wall that existed only after the early Abbasid expansion. There is no such explicit information about the western wall, but from its relative location Bāb Dār Ja‘far b. Yaḥyā seems likely to mark the corresponding spot there. The next entrance heading south, Bāb ‘Ātika, is one thought to have been in al-Walīd’s mosque.

274. As Blair notes, “in a typical foundation inscription, far more space was given over to the patron than to what he built”; see her *Islamic Inscriptions*, 35.

275. This, at least, is what appears to be meant. It is just about possible that the inscriptions commemorate sections paid for by the communities identified, but it is more likely that they refer to specific craftsmen.

276. For this phenomenon in later periods, see Sheila Blair, “Place, Space and Style: Craftsmen’s Signatures in Medieval Islamic Art,” in Eastmond, *Viewing Inscriptions*, 230–48; idem, *Islamic Inscriptions*, 49–52. For artisans’ individual signatures on portable objects from the first four centuries AH, see Fanny Bessard, *Caliphs and Merchants: Cities and Economies of Power in the Near East (700–950)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 221–26. Some architectural inscriptions from the early Islamic centuries do give the names of their inscribers, but not of those who undertook work on the wider decorative schemes; see, for example, Bilha Moor, “Mosque and Church: Arabic Inscriptions at Shivta in the Early Islamic Period,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 40 (2013): 73–141, at 79, 80, 87, 90.

also identify the geographical origin of those who worked on sections of the mosque, in both cases Kufa.²⁷⁷ Moreover, the mid- to late fourth/tenth-century traveler al-Muqaddasī, who visited Mecca at least twice, in 356/967 and 367/978, noted that the outsides of the walls of the arcades of the Masjid al-Ḥarām were decorated in mosaic, executed by workers from Syria and Egypt whose names could be seen there.²⁷⁸ That caliphal projects in the Marwanid and early Abbasid periods could involve large numbers of craftsmen and laborers moved around the empire and perhaps even brought in from outside the empire has been well established, thanks largely to papyrological evidence from Egypt and some literary evidence for al-Walīd's building projects.²⁷⁹ These Meccan and Medinan inscriptions seem to provide further corroboration of such migrations of laborers to work on major imperial monuments. We also should not be surprised to see different teams of craftsmen at work on different sections of the mosque, since it also seems to have been the case that several teams of mosaicists worked on monuments such as the Dome of the Rock and al-Walīd's mosque in Damascus.²⁸⁰

Third, many of the texts include demands for praises, blessings, and greetings for the prophet from either God, His angels, or the Muslims in general. The mosque in Medina does, of course, contain the prophet's grave, but there is little in these inscriptions in praise of Muḥammad that would be out of place anywhere in the Islamic world. Some texts do call on Muslims to pray for or greet the prophet, which could be related to ideas about pilgrimage to the prophet's grave in the mid-second/eighth century, but discussions in favor of such pilgrimage from that period are relatively difficult to uncover.²⁸¹ In any case, calls of this kind are also frequently found in inscriptions elsewhere in the Islamic world.²⁸²

The fourth theme is, of course, citations from the Qur'an. Clear direct citations from the Qur'an can be identified in forty of the inscriptions, and still more texts contain obvious allusions to the Qur'an or make use of Qur'anic vocabulary, even if they do not quote it directly. Twenty-three of the texts contain only quotations from the Qur'an, often following a *basmallah*.²⁸³ There is a clear preference for extracts of a verse or several verses from a longer *sūra* rather than full citations of short *sūras*. The latter, of course, is what apparently

277. Al-Rāshid et al., *Āthār minṭaqat Makka al-mukarrama*, 111–14.

278. Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī ma'rifat al-aqālīm*, ed. M. J. de Goeje, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1906), 73; see 101 for the dates of his visits to Mecca. It is not clear when these mosaics were first put in place, as noted by Leal, "Abbasid Mosaic Tradition," 31.

279. Recent discussion in George, *Umayyad Mosque*, 77–91.

280. See the discussions in George, *Rise of Islamic Calligraphy*, 60–68; idem, *Umayyad Mosque*, 146; Milwright, *Dome of the Rock*, 111–14.

281. See the discussion in Munt, *Holy City of Medina*, 123–47.

282. Similar calls appear, famously, in the Dome of the Rock's inscriptions, for example. To give just one further example, they can also be seen in one of the texts (probably early Abbasid) from Mecca; see Al-Rāshid et al., *Āthār minṭaqat Makka al-mukarrama*, 113–14.

283. §§9, 10d, 11a, 11b, 12a, 12b, 13a, 13b, 13c, 14a, 14b, 15b, 16a, 17a, 18a, 19a, 20a, 21, 22a, 22b, 23b, 24c, 25a. For some discussion of the use of Qur'anic verses to adorn entrances to mosques throughout the premodern Islamic world, see Erica Cruikshank Dodd and Shereen Khairallah, *The Image of the Word: A Study of Quranic Verses in Islamic Architecture* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1981), 1:73–80.

dominated the Umayyad mosque's epigraphic program, but among the early Abbasid inscriptions only *sūras* 1, 94, 101, 102 and 112 were cited in full. Some verses were cited twice: this was certainly the case for Q 2:255, 3:190, 9:18, 9:33, and 9:128–29, and Q 33:56 was cited directly three times. Q 7:54 was probably cited twice (although one of these may have been another verse instead); Q 17:111 was cited directly once and alluded to on another occasion; and Q 4:134 and 17:43 seem to have been alluded to twice. The citation of or allusion to these particular verses, including those referenced more than once, is not really surprising in this context: many invoke Qur'anic references to the prophet/messenger, to “mosques” (*masājid*), or to the superiority and triumph of Islam over other faiths. As Robert Hillenbrand has noted, “the choice of Quranic inscriptions for use in a mosque was only theoretically wide. In practice it was narrow.”²⁸⁴ It is, therefore, not surprising to see significant overlap between the verses used in al-Mahdī's mosque in Medina and those used in other premodern mosques. Of the *sūras* that Hillenbrand identified as those most commonly drawn upon in architecture—Q 2, 3, 9, 17, 24, 48, 112, and 114—verses from all but the last were used in al-Mahdī's inscriptions in Medina (and, of course, Q 114 may well still have been visible in the Umayyad *qibla* wall inscription).²⁸⁵ And of the verses from *sūra* 9 that were most commonly used in architectural settings—Q 9:18, 21–22, and 33—verses 18 and 33 were both cited twice in Medina.²⁸⁶ That said, it is a point of interest that Q 9:33 is apparently cited frequently on funerary stelae, so its use here, in the mosque that contained the prophet's grave, is possibly notable.²⁸⁷ The appearance twice of the so-called Throne Verse (Q 2:255) also fits that verse's regular use in other monuments associated with caliphal patronage.²⁸⁸ Two of the verses cited or referenced more than once (Q 33:56 and 17:111)

284. Robert Hillenbrand, “Qur'anic Epigraphy in Medieval Islamic Architecture,” *Revue des études islamiques* 54 (1986): 171–87, at 172. That said, sometimes specific verses not commonly used elsewhere were used to fit specific monuments, such as Q 3:96–97, which was used in the mosaic inscription erected above an entrance to the Masjid al-Ḥarām in Mecca by Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr; see al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka*, 2:58–59; Blair, “Inscribing the Hajj,” 160–61.

285. Hillenbrand, “Qur'anic Epigraphy,” 172; Hillenbrand's data is drawn from Dodd and Khairallah, *Image of the Word*. There is also some overlap with the Qur'anic inscriptions, perhaps dating to the early to mid-second/eighth century, in the mosque at Shivta (al-Subayṭā); for these, see Moor, “Mosque and Church.”

286. Q 9:18 is apparently “by far the most common Koranic text used in the decoration of a mosque,” and it is often found in foundation inscriptions, as in §3 here; see Dodd and Khairallah, *Image of the Word*, 1:63.

287. Hillenbrand, “Quranic Epigraphy,” 173. That said, Q 9:33 does appear in another (this time extant) early Abbasid inscription in Sanaa, dated to 136/753–54, which commemorates the restoration/construction of mosques; see Mittwoch, “Eine arabische Bauinschrift,” 235, 237; al-Dūrī, “al-Fikra al-mahdiyya,” 124; Serjeant and Lewcock, “Architectural History,” 348; Elad, “Caliph Abū'l-Abbās al-Saffāḥ,” 16. It also apparently featured in al-Manṣūr's inscription in the Masjid al-Ḥarām in Mecca; see al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka*, 2:58–59; Blair, “Inscribing the Hajj,” 161.

288. See, for example, Flood, *Great Mosque*, 247–48; Milwright, *Dome of the Rock*, 74–79; Milka Levy-Rubin, “Why Was the Dome of the Rock Built? A New Perspective on a Long-Discussed Question,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 80, no. 3 (2017): 441–64, at 462. Gülru Necipoğlu suggests (“Dome of the Rock,” 46) that the Throne Verse was also displayed in the dome of the Umayyad Dome of the Rock, although the earliest witness is from the sixth/twelfth century, after the Fatimids had rebuilt the dome and renovated its decoration. For the verse's use in other mosques across the premodern Islamic world, see Dodd and Khairallah, *Image of the Word*, 1:64–65. In light of the fairly common use of this verse in Umayyad and early Abbasid

also appeared on the outer face of the Umayyad mosaic inscription in the Dome of the Rock, as did Q 112, which was used once in the early Abbasid inscriptions in the Prophet's Mosque (§25b).²⁸⁹ Although many of these Qur'anic citations and blessings for the prophet of course had a specific significance for the message the inscriptions' patrons were attempting to promote, the decoration of a mosque with such texts in and of itself would presumably have contributed to the sanctity of the space.

This article will end with a discussion of what these inscriptions from the Prophet's Mosque can tell us about early Abbasid messages concerning the legitimacy of their rule. Before we get there, however, it is important to consider how visitors to the mosque might have reacted to the texts. They were clearly designed to be visible, although that does not necessarily mean they were designed to be easily legible;²⁹⁰ we cannot say much about how difficult it was to read them without knowing much more about their precise locations (including how they faced the light) and their material. That said, their location around the entrances and the courtyard seems significant. On the one hand, these locations may have ensured that at least some of the texts did receive as much light as possible. And on the other hand, inscribed scriptural passages were often used to decorate (and perhaps to sanctify) entrances to many late antique religious buildings, as well as certain locations in the interior of such buildings, and this significance may have been apparent to visitors to the Prophet's Mosque even if they could not always read the texts of the inscriptions.²⁹¹

The various extant sources reporting the inscriptions' contents do disagree over their wording. Sometimes the divergence is a matter of minor variations, but sometimes significant portions are read differently, notably (as we have seen) the dates of some of the texts. The differences could, of course, simply be a result of errors in transcription or by later copyists of the manuscripts. I have also discussed some cases in which the dates or the names of caliphs may have been altered to make the data fit better with a later scholar's knowledge (Ibn Qutayba) or in an effort to reconstruct a more original text (Ibn al-Najjār). They could also, however, reflect engagement with these texts by visitors and readers who appreciated the general gist of the message and perhaps often recognized specific

imperial monuments, it is interesting that Greek biblical inscriptions displaying comparable messages of divine dominion and God's throne over the Roman triple gate in the southern wall of the temenos in Damascus were left *in situ* in the new mosque there; see George, *Umayyad Mosque*, 95.

289. This may actually account for all of the Qur'anic inscriptions used in the outer-face text in the Dome of the Rock. Others have also identified references there to Q 57:2 and 64:1, which do not appear in the Prophet's Mosque, but Scott Lucas has argued intriguingly that these may have been incorrectly identified and that the inscription in that location is actually citing a prophetic *ḥadīth* instead; see his "An Efficacious Invocation Inscribed on the Dome of the Rock: Literary and Epigraphic Evidence for a First-Century *Ḥadīth*," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 76, no. 2 (2017): 215–30.

290. See, for example, Hillenbrand, "Qur'anic Epigraphy," 178: "Even if inscriptions are visible they do not need to be legible." The ways in which late antique inscriptions in religious buildings were supposed to be read and engaged with features heavily in the recent discussion in Leatherbury, *Inscribing Faith*; see, for example, the comments at 14–18.

291. Leatherbury, *Inscribing Faith*, 262–71. Irene Bierman has made a similar point about the use of inscriptions to adorn entrances in city walls; see her *Writing Signs: The Fatimid Public Text* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 31–32, 35, 73.

Qur'anic verses but were not necessarily familiar with the precise names, dates, and other information the inscriptions may have contained. Those who cared more about precision on such details, including the authors of our surviving sources, tried to make them out, albeit with varying results. But we might assume that many visitors were largely unconcerned with the details of the texts, principally marking (but not, of course, necessarily accepting) their messages of prophetic authority and obedience to God, adherence to which could be demonstrated by recognizing the legitimacy and philanthropic generosity of the reigning “servant of God” and “commander of the faithful.”²⁹²

As modern scholars have long understood “one of the main reasons to erect a monumental inscription was propaganda and advertising, to broadcast a ruler’s good name and works or to mark his sovereignty.”²⁹³ Even if the texts in Medina were not designed to be legible, aspects of their setting may have emphasized their imperial message; this would be the case, for example, with any texts that may have been executed in the gold-on-blue scheme. It is also worth noting that the appearance of inscriptions around all the entrances to the mosque as well as along the *qibla* wall and around the courtyard would have meant that texts encircled large sections of the mosque, and encircling texts have been identified as conveying important messages of imperial rule in late antique and early Islamic contexts.²⁹⁴

What the inscriptions actually said is, of course, still important, and some of the texts provide an indication of how these early Abbasid caliphs expected visitors to the mosque to understand the nature of their sovereignty and the reasons for the legitimacy of their authority. The details of the early Abbasids’ justifications for overthrowing the Umayyads and of their own claims to caliphal authority have long been a matter of debate among historians, who have attempted to track the developments in their claims to rule on the basis of being members, in a more or less particular fashion, of Banū Hāshim, the family of the prophet.²⁹⁵ The early Abbasid inscriptions from the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina provide some examples of already generally well-known strategies and claims, but also evidence of some less-known efforts.

Among the better-known claims found in these inscriptions are those that fit nicely the context of the years that followed the Abbasids’ successful seizure of power from the Umayyads. These come, appropriately, in the text supposedly installed by Ibn Ghazāla to

292. There is an interesting discussion of the necessity of the readability of royal inscriptions in pre-Islamic Iran in Canepa, “Inscriptions,” for example at 13: “Even if their contents were not exactly known, inscriptions’ tangible presence extended the power and presence of the royal patron beyond the palace into the landscape.” See also the discussion in Jeremy Johns, “Arabic Inscriptions in the Cappella Palatina: Performativity, Audience, Legibility and Illegibility,” in Eastmond, *Viewing Inscriptions*, 124–47.

293. Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*, 41.

294. See, for example, Milwright, *Dome of the Rock*, 197, 254; see also the wider discussion of inscriptions that encircled religious buildings in late antiquity in Leatherbury, *Inscribing Faith*, 148–55, and the comments about inscriptions encouraging viewers to move around monuments at 248–53, 259, 286.

295. See above, n. 5, for some relevant studies. That “Hāshimī” was a label used already in the Umayyad period to describe members of the family of the prophet more broadly than was the case with the labels “Talibids” or “Alids” was observed by Wilferd Madelung, “The *Hāshimīyyāt* of al-Kumayt and Hāshimī Shi‘ism,” *Studia Islamica* 70 (1989): 5–26.

replace an earlier Umayyad text (§1). First, we see here calls to action in accordance with the Book of God and the *sunna* of His prophet as well as an emphasis on the necessity of disobeying and overturning the false practices of tyrants. Anti-Umayyad rebels, including those leading the movement that brought the Abbasids to power, apparently made frequent and somewhat generic use of calls for action in accordance with “the Book of God and the *sunna* of His prophet.”²⁹⁶ Other texts (for example, §27a) also emphasize that it is the Abbasid caliph who is the guardian of the *sunna*. The Ibn Ghazāla inscription (§1) also calls for just caliphal oversight of fiscal matters, principally through the “equitable division of the *fay*” and the “appropriate expenditure of the ‘fifths.’” This call, too, fits well in the context of rulers who had recently seized power from the Umayyads, since the latter family’s supposed mismanagement of the empire’s finances was a major complaint of rebels against their rule.²⁹⁷ This inscription thus offers a symbolic rewriting of an Umayyad-era text with many of the key messages proclaimed by the rebels whose actions had eventually brought the Abbasids to power.

The more interesting language revealed in these inscriptions includes the relatively common reference to the Abbasids as “caliphs” or as possessors of “caliphate,” in two cases within a list of titles (see §§5 and 19b) and in three cases in other parts of the text (see §§26, 27a, and 27b). This may seem innocuous enough, since we are well aware that the title “caliph” was applied to all these rulers. The debate about the precise meaning of this title continues, however, and it also remains the case that relatively few caliphs from the Umayyad and early Abbasid periods are known to have made use of this specific title in public media.²⁹⁸ Although the title *al-khalīfa* does appear occasionally on coins during

296. Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God’s Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 58–96. For the existence of various different ideas in the early Abbasid period about the meaning of “the *sunna* of the prophet” and the identity of its most appropriate guardians, see also Zaman, *Religion and Politics*, esp. within 70–118.

297. See, for example, the accusations leveled in the sermon of the anti-Umayyad rebel Abū Ḥamza al-Mukhtār b. ‘Awf in 129–30/747, in Crone and Hinds, *God’s Caliph*, 131–32; more generally, see Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 52; Andrew Marsham, “Fay’,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd ed.

298. The classic study is Crone and Hinds, *God’s Caliph*. In line with trends in scholarship on the early Islamic centuries over the past couple of decades, many more discussions have been published on Umayyad caliphs’ titles and political thought than have appeared on those of the early Abbasids; see, for example, Wadād al-Qāḍī, “The Religious Foundation of Late Umayyad Ideology and Practice,” in *Saber religioso y poder político en el islam: Actas del Simposio Internacional (Granada, 15–18 Octubre 1991)*, 231–73 (Madrid: Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, 1994); Shahin, “Struggling for Communitas”; Luke Treadwell, “The Formation of Religious and Caliphal Identity in the Umayyad Period: The Evidence of the Coinage,” in *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*, ed. Finbarr Barry Flood and Gülru Necipoğlu, 1:89–108 (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2017); Andrew Marsham, “‘God’s Caliph’ Revisited: Umayyad Political Thought in Its Late Antique Context,” in George and Marsham, *Power, Patronage, and Memory*, 3–37; Sean W. Anthony, “Prophetic Dominion, Umayyad Kingship: Varieties of *Mulk* in the Early Islamic Period,” in Marsham, *Umayyad World*, 39–64. Some discussions of early Abbasid titles and political thought are referenced in footnotes throughout this article (esp. but not exclusively in n. 5); in addition, particularly useful among recent studies are the relevant sections of Andrew Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy: Accession and Succession in the First Muslim Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 183–249; and Linda T. Darling, “‘The Viceregent of God, from Him We Expect Rain’: The Incorporation of the Pre-Islamic State in Early Islamic Political Culture,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 134, no. 3 (2014): 407–29.

the reigns of Muḥammad al-Mahdī, Mūsā al-Hādī (r. 169–70/785–86), Hārūn al-Rashīd, and ‘Abd Allāh al-Ma’mūn, often in conjunction with another title or *laqab*, it is hardly known on public media other than coins.²⁹⁹ This fact makes the five apparent uses of the title around one building by the late second/eighth century quite remarkable. It is also important to point out that in the two cases in which the word forms part of the caliph’s titles, it is explicit that he is God’s caliph; this is entirely to be expected given the conclusions of earlier studies on this question.³⁰⁰

One text, in particular, is worth looking at in a bit more detail: the inscription from Bāb Ziyād toward the southern end of the western wall commemorating Abū Ja‘far al-Manṣūr’s work, dated to 151/768–69 (§26).³⁰¹ In this text, the Abbasid caliph makes the explicit point that “the commander of the faithful, may God ennoble him, is the most worthy of men to oversee that because of his close kinship to the messenger of God (ṣ) and because of his caliphate with which he/He distinguished him.” It is the juxtaposition of al-Manṣūr’s caliphate (*khiḷāfa*) with his “close kinship to the messenger of God” that is particularly notable here. It has long been pointed out that the rebellion of the Hasanid ‘Alids Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh “al-Nafs al-Zakiyya” and his brother Ibrāhīm in 145/762, while not necessarily a serious military threat to early Abbasid rule, presented the new ruling family with a major challenge to the claims underpinning their authority from members of a family that felt it had a better claim to rule on the basis of the closeness of its relationship to the prophet.³⁰² This inscription from Medina suggests that in the aftermath of the revolt, al-Manṣūr saw the public patronage of work on the Prophet’s Mosque as a way of countering the claims of rivals within the wider family of the prophet.³⁰³ Quite how successful such claims were in heading off opposition and winning over Muslims who were not members of the family of the prophet is not obvious. Among the interesting surviving letters said to have passed between the Syrian legal scholar ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Awzā‘ī (d. 157/773–74) and Abbasid caliphs or their representatives or family members there is a set of three letters that can be dated to 138–39/755–57 and are addressed to al-Manṣūr, urging him to ransom Muslims captured by the Romans/Byzantines in Qālīqalā (modern Erzurum). In one of these, al-Awzā‘ī urges the caliph to see following the prophet’s *sunna* as more important for appropriate rulership than the closeness of the ruler’s relationship to the prophet.³⁰⁴

299. The title was perhaps also used on coins by ‘Alid rebels of this period; see George C. Miles, “Al-Mahdī al-Ḥaqq, Amīr al-Mu’minīn,” *Revue numismatique*, 6th ser., 7 (1965): 329–41; Michael Bonner, “Al-Khalīfa al-Marḍī: The Accession of Hārūn al-Rashīd,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 108, no. 1 (1988): 79–91.

300. See esp. Crone and Hinds, *God’s Caliph*.

301. Much of this paragraph repeats an argument made originally in Munt, *Holy City of Medina*, 167–68.

302. See especially Elad, *Rebellion of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya*; and Tor, “Parting of Ways.”

303. The undated but probably early Abbasid inscription from the Masjid al-Bay‘a in Mecca also attempts to emphasize the significance of the Abbasids’ eponymous ancestor, al-‘Abbās b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, in the Muslim community’s history by celebrating his role in the oath of allegiance (*bay‘a*) to the prophet that that mosque was built to commemorate; see al-Rāshid et al., *Āthār Miṭṭaqaṭ Makka al-Mukarrama*, 122–25.

304. For the letter, see Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *al-Jarḥ wa-l-ta’dīl*, 1:195–97 (the relevant section is at 195–96); and for discussion, see Rana Mikati, “Missives from the Frontier (130–152/747–769): Al-Awzā‘ī and the Abbasids,”

The final contribution the inscriptions from Medina make to our understanding of the nature of early Abbasid rule concerns the public use of titles by reigning caliphs. There are probably at least six extant inscriptions commemorating caliphally sponsored building work from the early Abbasid period that both mention a reigning caliph and provide a date that can help us to identify him specifically. There are two others that are not dated but that can, thanks to other information provided by the inscriptions, be dated fairly securely to the early Abbasid period, and one more that can perhaps be linked to a nearby dated text. Table 1 provides information about how these nine texts refer to the reigning caliph.³⁰⁵

Table 1

Location	Date (AH)	Titles (Arabic)	Titles (English)
Mafraq ³⁰⁶	135	<i>al-mahdī</i> [. . .] ³⁰⁷	“the <i>mahdī</i> ”
Baysān/Scythopolis ³⁰⁸	135	<i>al-mahdī ‘abd allāh ‘abd allāh amīr al-mu’minīn</i>	“the <i>mahdī</i> , the servant of God, ‘Abd Allāh, the commander of the faithful”
Sanaa ³⁰⁹	136	<i>al-mahdī ‘abd allāh ‘abd allāh amīr al-mu’minīn</i> ³¹⁰	“the <i>mahdī</i> , the servant of God, ‘Abd Allāh, the commander of the faithful”

Journal of Abbasid Studies 7, no. 1 (2020): 1–32, esp. 13–18.

305. I am leaving aside references to reigning caliphs on coins and other media and types of inscriptions, although these can provide interesting parallels; see, for example, Bates, “Khurāsānī Revolutionaries.” There is, however, one interesting item that could be considered here as well. An Arabic inscription on an ivory casket held in the treasury of the Basilica of St Gereon in Cologne notes that it was produced in (or perhaps imported to) Aden (in today’s Yemen) and calls on God’s blessing for “the servant of God, ‘Abd Allāh, the commander of the faithful” (*‘abd allāh ‘abd allāh amīr al-mu’minīn*). Given that the inscription also mentions the governor of Yemen, ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Rabīʿ, the caliph in question would be either Abū al-‘Abbās al-Saffāh or Abū Jaʿfar al-Mansūr. For this text, see J. Gildemeister, “Zwei arabische Inschriften auf Elfenbeinbüchsen,” *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 25, no. 1–2 (1871): 248–50; *RCEA*, 1:32 (no. 41). It is briefly discussed in Elad, “Struggle,” 39–40, n. 5; and in Noelia Silva Santa-Cruz, “The Siculo-Arabic Ivories and Their Spreading to al-Andalus,” *Journal of Transcultural Medieval Studies* 4, no. 1–2 (2017): 147–90, at 153 (with several further references). For the suggestion that this casket was imported to Yemen rather than produced there (as the inscription suggests), see Ralph Pinder-Wilson, “Ivory Working in the Umayyad and Abbasid Periods,” *Journal of the David Collection* 2, no. 1–2 (2005): 13–23, at 15. It has been suggested that the casket could be dated slightly later on the basis of the governor’s name, to sometime in the reign of Muḥammad al-Mahdī, but the reasoning behind this suggestion is flawed; see Avinoam Shalem, *The Oliphant: Islamic Objects in Historical Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 26.

306. Al-Jbour, “Discovery.”

307. The text breaks off at this point.

308. Elad, “Caliph Abūʿl-‘Abbās al-Saffāh,” 9; CIAP, 2:215.

309. Mittwoch, “Eine arabische Bauinschrift”; al-Dūrī, “al-Fikra al-mahdiyya,” 124; Serjeant and Lewcock, “Architectural History,” 348; Elad, “Caliph Abūʿl-‘Abbās al-Saffāh,” 16. Since Abū al-‘Abbās al-Saffāh died midway through the last month (Dhū al-Ḥijja) in the year 136, he is almost certainly the caliph mentioned in

Mecca (Masjid al-Bay‘a) ³¹¹	144	‘ <i>abd allāh</i> (‘ <i>abd allāh</i>) ³¹² <i>amīr</i> <i>al-mu‘minīn</i>	“the servant of God, (‘Abd Allāh), the commander of the faithful”
Mecca (Masjid al-Bay‘a) ³¹³	no date (perhaps connected to the above)	‘ <i>abd allāh</i> (‘ <i>abd</i> <i>allāh</i>) ³¹⁴ <i>amīr</i> <i>al-mu‘minīn</i>	“the servant of God, (‘Abd Allāh), the commander of the faithful”
Ascalon ³¹⁵	155	<i>al-mahdī amīr</i> <i>al-mu‘minīn</i> ³¹⁶	“the <i>mahdī</i> , the commander of the faithful”
Mecca (al-Masjid al-Ḥarām) ³¹⁷	167	‘ <i>abd allāh</i> <i>muḥammad al-mahdī</i> <i>amīr al-mu‘minīn</i>	“the servant of God, Muḥammad, the <i>mahdī</i> , the commander of the faithful”
Mecca (al-Masjid al-Ḥarām) ³¹⁸	undated (but presumably connected to the above)	‘ <i>abd allāh al-mahdī</i> <i>muḥammad amīr</i> <i>al-mu‘minīn</i>	“the servant of God, the <i>mahdī</i> , Muḥammad, the commander of the faithful”
Darb Zubayda milestone (held today in Jedda) ³¹⁹	undated (but perhaps from al-Mahdī’s caliphate)	<i>al-mahdī</i> ‘ <i>abd allāh</i> ‘ <i>abd allāh amīr</i> <i>al-mu‘minīn</i>	“the <i>mahdī</i> , the servant of God, ‘Abd Allāh, the commander of the faithful”

this text; see al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, 3:87. Cf., however, Serjeant and Lewcock, “Architectural History,” 348 (who assume that the caliph in question was al-Manṣūr).

310. Al-Ḥajrī, *Masājid Ṣan‘ā’*, 26, mistakenly reads *amīr al-mu‘minīn ‘abd allāh al-mahdī*, “the commander of the faithful, the servant of God [or ‘Abd Allāh], the *mahdī*.”

311. Al-Rāshid et al., *Āthār Miṭṭaqat Makka al-Mukarrama*, 122.

312. Al-Rāshid’s edition of the text omits one ‘*abd allāh*, but it is clearly there in the photograph he provides.

313. Al-Rāshid et al., *Āthār Miṭṭaqat Makka al-Mukarrama*, 122–25.

314. Al-Rāshid’s edition of the text omits one ‘*abd allāh*, but it is clearly there in the photograph he provides.

315. *RCEA*, 1:32–33 (no. 42); *CIAP*, 1:144.

316. It has been suggested that this should read *al-mahdī [bn] amīr al-mu‘minīn*, “al-Mahdī, [son of] the commander of the faithful”; see Elad, “Struggle,” 58, n. 91; Moshe Gil, *A History of Palestine, 634–1099*, trans. Ethel Broido (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 193. That would certainly overlap with usage on coinage, for which see Jere L. Bacharach, “*Laqab* for a Future Caliph: The Case of the Abbasid al-Mahdī,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113, no. 2 (1993): 271–74; Bates, “Khurāsānī Revolutionaries.” It is not, however, what this inscription actually says, so I am inclined to follow Sharon (*CIAP*, 1:146–47) and read it without the added “bn.”

317. Al-Rāshid et al., *Āthār Miṭṭaqat Makka al-Mukarrama*, 111–13.

318. To be included in Mehdy Shaddel’s forthcoming publication on the extant early Abbasid inscriptions from Mecca.

319. See the Appendix.

The early Abbasid inscriptions from the Prophet's Mosque reported in the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* provide another fourteen texts that contain formal titles for reigning caliphs. Listed in Table 2, these extend the list substantially:³²⁰

Table 2

§§	Caliph	Titles (Arabic)	Titles (English)
§§1, 4, 5	Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Saffāḥ	ʿabd allāh ʿabd allāh amīr al-muʾminīn	“the servant of God, ʿAbd Allāh, the commander of the faithful”
§5	Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Saffāḥ	(inna) ʿabdaka wa-khalīfataka ʿabd allāh (bn) ³²¹ amīr al-muʾminīn	“Your servant and Your caliph, ʿAbd Allāh, (son of) the commander of the faithful”
§§26, 27b	Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr	ʿabd allāh ʿabd allāh amīr al-muʾminīn	“the servant of God, ʿAbd Allāh, the commander of the faithful”
§2	Muḥammad al-Mahdī	ʿabd allāh al-mahdī amīr al-muʾminīn	“the servant of God, the <i>mahdī</i> , the commander of the faithful”
§§3, 17b, 20b	Muḥammad al-Mahdī	ʿabd allāh al-mahdī muḥammad amīr al-muʾminīn	“the servant of God, the <i>mahdī</i> , Muḥammad, the commander of the faithful”
§13d	Muḥammad al-Mahdī	al-mahdī muḥammad amīr al-muʾminīn	“the <i>mahdī</i> , Muḥammad, the commander of the faithful”
§19b	Muḥammad al-Mahdī	(li-)ʿabd allāh wa-khalīfatihī al-mahdī muḥammad amīr al-muʾminīn	“the servant of God and His caliph, the <i>mahdī</i> , Muḥammad, the commander of the faithful”
§27a	Muḥammad al-Mahdī ³²²	ʿabd allāh ʿabd allāh amīr al-muʾminīn	“the servant of God, ʿAbd Allāh, the commander of the faithful”
§6	Hārūn al-Rashīd	ʿabd allāh hārūn amīr al-muʾminīn	“the servant of God, Hārūn, the commander of the faithful”
§25c	not clearly identifiable	ʿabd allāh ʿabd allāh amīr al-muʾminīn	“the servant of God, ʿAbd Allāh, the commander of the faithful”

320. Neither of these lists is comprehensive. There are certainly more extant texts out there, either awaiting discovery or in publications I have not seen; and there are plenty more relevant inscriptions reported in other literary sources for other towns and regions of the caliphate. These two lists, however, suffice for the analysis here.

321. See above, n. 131, for the oddity of the “bn,” “son of,” here.

322. Given the placement of this inscription in the epigraphic program, it is possible that the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* has incorrectly recorded the date of the text and that it could be a text dating to al-Manṣūr's caliphate, just as §§26 and 27b are.

There are three initial observations worth making here. The first is a reiteration of the fact that the word caliph, *khalīfa*, was apparently used within titles in the Prophet's Mosque inscriptions in Medina, although use of that title is not attested on extant building inscriptions that commemorate caliphal patronage from the early Abbasid period. Second, although in every extant text dating to the caliphate of Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Saffāḥ (from Mafraq, Baysān/Scythopolis and Sanaa) he is referred to with the title *al-mahdī*, as seemingly is Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr on one occasion (in Ascalon), the two caliphs are not given this title in the Medinan texts. Only the third caliph, the one most commonly identified as “al-Mahdī,” is called *al-mahdī* here, as he also is in a great many other extant objects and documents.³²³ The Medina texts (specifically §27a) do, however, suggest, especially in combination with an extant inscription (that held currently in Jedda), that the caliph Muḥammad al-Mahdī could be designated, just as his father and uncle had been, as *ʿabd allāh ʿabd allāh*, “the servant of God, ʿAbd Allāh,” despite the latter not being his given name. This, in turn, allows us to consider the possibility that this particular repeated phrase/theophoric name could have been a more broadly used early Abbasid title for a reigning caliph, not only for those who carried the given name ʿAbd Allāh (as the brothers Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Saffāḥ and Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr both apparently did).

Although there are ways in which these titles all seem to fit a somewhat standard pattern, particularly in the regular use of at least one *ʿabd allāh*, “servant of God,” and *amīr al-muʾminīn*, they also display significant variation at times. There appears to have been a set of standard vocabulary for protocols for early Abbasid caliphs in official texts, but it seems that elements of that vocabulary could be selected and arranged in different ways. This suggests that there was some experimentation in the early Abbasid period with how caliphs were given titles, perhaps reflecting some recognition of the necessity to develop the ways in which the Abbasids argued for the legitimacy of their authority. This apparent fluidity contrasted with the situation in the late Umayyad period, when the formula *ʿabd allāh [ism] amīr al-muʾminīn*, “the servant of God, [name], the commander of the faithful,” seems to have been the official standard on building inscriptions.³²⁴ It might also be contrasted with inscriptions commemorating building work by Abbasid caliphs in the third/ninth century, which typically offer only minor variations on the basic formula

323. For discussion of Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Saffāḥ being given the title “al-Mahdī,” see especially al-Dūrī, “al-Fikra al-mahdiyya,” 128; Elad, “Struggle”; Al-Jbour, “Discovery,” 173; and Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir*, 83–84, 369–71. For the use of the title “al-Mahdī” on coins and in documents referring to Muḥammad, the son of Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr, including during his time as heir apparent (*walī al-ʿahd*), see the references above in n. 316; and Geoffrey Khan, *Arabic Documents from Early Islamic Khurasan* (London: Nour Foundation, 2007), 96 (no. 3), 132 (no. 21), and discussion at 35–37. For further discussion of al-Mahdī being designated heir apparent and given this title, see, for example, al-Dūrī, “al-Fikra al-mahdiyya,” 129–32; Muhammad Qasim Zaman, “Routinization of Revolutionary Charisma: Notes on the ʿAbbāsīd Caliphs al-Manṣūr and al-Mahdī,” *Islamic Studies* 29, no. 3 (1990): 251–75; Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy*, 193–202; Elad, “Struggle”; and Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir*, 374–76.

324. See the references with directions to finding extant texts above, n. 8. Foundation inscriptions as reported in literary texts for Marwanid caliphs also offer this fairly standard formula; see, for example, Flood, *Great Mosque*, 252. And see also the discussion above (references in n. 234) of the inscription from the mosque in al-Fuṣṭāṭ known only through Vattier's seventeenth-century French translation.

‘*abd allāh* [*ism*] *al-imām* [*laqab*] *amīr al-mu’minīn*, “the servant of God, [name], the imam, [personal title], the commander of the faithful”; see Table 3 for examples.

Table 3

Location	Date (AH)	Titles (Arabic)	Titles (English)
Jerusalem (Dome of the Rock) ³²⁵	216 ³²⁶	‘ <i>abd allāh</i> ‘ <i>abd allāh</i> <i>al-imām al-ma’mūn</i> <i>amīr al-mu’minīn</i>	“the servant of God, ‘Abd Allāh, the imam, al-Ma’ <i>mūn</i> , the commander of the faithful”
near Mecca (at a resting stop for pilgrims, found near ‘Arafa) ³²⁷	245	‘ <i>abd allāh</i> <i>ja’far</i> <i>al-imām al-mutawakkil</i> ‘ <i>alā allāh</i> <i>amīr</i> <i>al-mu’minīn</i>	“the servant of God, Ja’far, the imam, al-Mutawakkil ‘alā Allāh, the commander of the faithful”
Medina (Prophet’s Mosque) ³²⁸	282	<i>abū al-‘abbās al-imām</i> <i>al-mu’taqid bi-llāh</i> <i>amīr al-mu’minīn</i>	“Abū al-‘Abbās, the imam, al-Mu’taqid bi-llāh, the commander of the faithful”

This form of Abbasid caliphal titles continued to be used in inscriptions in the later third and fourth/tenth centuries.³²⁹

Conclusions

The texts that could be seen around the Prophet’s Mosque by the end of the caliphate of Muḥammad al-Mahdī, preserved most fully in the late third/ninth- or early fourth/tenth-century *Kitāb al-Manāsik*, reveal a significant corpus of architectural inscriptions from the early Abbasid period. Perhaps first and foremost, therefore, the study of this corpus can help narrow down an appropriate methodology for the use of extant literary descriptions of inscriptions, and perhaps of monuments and objects more broadly, that themselves have long since disappeared. Premodern Arabic texts about Mecca and Medina actually offer abundant descriptions of buildings in those two towns’ early Islamic history, a material

325. On the mosaic inscription: Kessler, “‘Abd al-Malik’s Inscription,” 9. On the copper plates: Milwright, *Dome of the Rock*, 53, 76.

326. Since the texts that al-Ma’*mūn* had added to the copper plaques by the entrances were dated to 216/831, the replacement of ‘Abd al-Malik’s name in the mosaic inscription was presumably undertaken at this time as well.

327. Al-Rāshid et al., *Āthār Miṭṭaqat Makka al-Mukarrama*, 125–26.

328. Reported in Ibn Rusta, *al-A’lāq al-nafisa*, 74; *RCEA*, 2:265 (no. 786). The lack of an ‘*abd allāh* at the start is perhaps Ibn Rusta’s (or a later copyists’) accidental omission

329. See, for example, the texts from the caliphates of Abū Muḥammad al-Muktafī (r. 289–95/902–8) and Ja’far al-Muqtadir (r. 295–320/908–32) published in George C. Miles, “‘Ali b. ‘Isā’s Pilgrim Road: An Inscription of the Year 304 H. (916–917 A.D.),” *Bulletin de l’Institut d’Égypte* 36 (1955): 477–87; Solange Ory and Dominique Sourdel, “Une inscription ‘abbaside en Syrie du nord,” *Bulletin d’études orientales* 18 (1963–64): 221–40; and Amikam Elad, “Two Identical Inscriptions from Jund Filasṭīn from the Reign of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliph, al-Muqtadir,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 35, no. 4 (1992): 301–60.

culture of which, as is well known, very little has survived.³³⁰ This article has focused on one small example of such available literary material, but it is an example with potentially wide-ranging implications. Since so few inscriptions in monuments commissioned by early Abbasid caliphs have survived, the testimony of literary sources to the existence of several dozen others is important for modern research into second/eighth-century Arabic epigraphic practices and, especially, the use of inscriptions by caliphs to promote their authority and legitimacy.

We certainly have to be careful when studying inscriptions of the early Islamic centuries that survive only in quotations of their texts in extant literary sources. There is often much that we would like to know about such inscriptions that no sources were interested in telling us. We can rarely use the extant descriptions to gain much of an understanding of the visual impressions these inscriptions would have made on their viewers. Similarly, we cannot often learn much about how these texts' contents may have engaged with other elements in their buildings' decorative schemes. Both these problems apply to the inscriptions analyzed here. For the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, however, we do have relatively early testimonies, with a seemingly good history of written transmission, regarding the contents and locations of a large number of inscriptions. Through a study of this information, we can learn quite a bit about the messages that the early Abbasid caliphs wished to convey to visitors to this imperial monument.

The inscriptions in the Prophet's Mosque in Medina after al-Mahdī's renovation work have much to add to our perspective on early Abbasid claims to legitimacy, their reuse and/or "epigraphic mutilation" of Umayyad-era texts, and the ways in which particular verses and *sūras* from the Qur'an were used in the decoration of mosques in the second/eighth century. Their study is important in part simply because the early Abbasid mosque in Medina is much more poorly understood than its Umayyad predecessor is. In large part, of course, this is thanks to the important work of Sauvaget and his successors in revealing the history of the latter. As this article has demonstrated, however, there is considerably more material available on the early Abbasid mosque and al-Mahdī's work there than is often appreciated. The study of the Prophet's Mosque in the second half of the second/eighth century is important because Medina was a particularly important place for early Abbasid caliphs to articulate the legitimacy of their rule. By this time it held an emerging significance among many Muslims as a *ḥaram* and as a holy city;³³¹ and it had been the site of the major 'Alid revolt against early Abbasid rule during the caliphate of Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr. That the caliph responsible for most of the inscriptions supplied by the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* was al-Mahdī adds a further significance, since his reign is often considered to have been a period in which the precise reasons the Abbasids and their followers were giving to underpin their legitimacy were being altered.³³² Muhammad Qasim Zaman has suggested briefly that the mosques in Mecca and Medina played an important

330. See, for example, the discussions of two local histories of Medina in Munt, "Writing the History"; and idem, "Mamluk Historiography."

331. This, at least, is the argument of Munt, *Holy City of Medina*.

332. See, for example, Zaman, *Religion and Politics*, 45–48; Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, 92–93.

role in al-Mahdī's efforts to emphasize his and his family's connections to the prophet and to contribute to religious discourse.³³³ The inscriptions discussed here provide much more evidence for what, exactly, these efforts entailed and reveal the importance of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina specifically as a site of early Abbasid imperial commemorative efforts and as a place of experimentation as they tried to find the most effective way of expressing the legitimacy of their authority in the face of various opponents, Umayyads and 'Alids among many others.

333. Zaman, *Religion and Politics*, 205–6.

Appendix: An Early Abbasid Milestone from (near) the Darb Zubayda

This milestone discovered near the Darb Zubayda is currently held in Jedda in the King Abdulaziz Center, no. 33. Its inscription is particularly important for understanding the usage of caliphal titles in the early Abbasid period. Since the only current edition of the text known to me is in a publication that is not widely accessible, it seems helpful to provide an edition and brief discussion here.³³⁴ The inscription has been referred to in a handful of other publications, often simply as a milestone dating to the caliphate of al-Mahdī.³³⁵ It consists of eight lines in a clearly legible Kufic script:³³⁶

- ١ – هذا ما امر به ا
- ٢ – لمهدي عبد الله
- ٣ – عبد الله امير ا
- ٤ – لمومنين على يدي
- ٥ – يقطين بن موسى
- ٦ – هذا على اثني
- ٧ – عشر ميلا من بريد
- ٨ – اسود العشاري

This was ordered by al-Mahdī ‘Abd Allāh, the servant of God, the commander of the faithful, to be carried out by Yaqtīn b. Mūsā. This is twelve miles from the post station (*barīd*) at Aswad al-‘Ushāriyy[āt].³³⁷

Despite the lack of a date and the fact that the caliph seems to be given titles that otherwise accord with the designation of the first Abbasid caliph, Abū al-‘Abbās al-Saffāh, in extant inscriptions, Sa‘d al-Rāshid assumed without further discussion that the caliph mentioned in this text is Muḥammad al-Mahdī.³³⁸ It does actually seem at least possible that this is correct, although it is certainly a suggestion that requires further justification.

334. Al-Rāshid, “Arba‘at aḥjār mīliyya,” edition of this inscription at 124.

335. See, for example, al-Rashid, “New ‘Abbāsīd Milestone,” 139; Ahmad bin ‘Umar Al-Zayla‘i, “Les inscriptions arabo-islamiques sur pierre,” in *Routes d’Arabie: Archéologie et histoire du Royaume d’Arabie Saoudite*, ed. Ali Ibrahim Al-Ghabban et al., 486–87 (Paris: Musée du Louvre and Somogy, 2010), 487.

336. This is my reading based on the best photograph known to me, that provided in Al-Zayla‘i, “Inscriptions arabo-islamiques,” 487. My reading agrees entirely with Sa‘d al-Rāshid’s (“Arba‘at aḥjār mīliyya,” 124), whose article also provides a photograph and facsimile of the text (*ibid.*, 137, 139).

337. Aswad al-‘Ushāriyyāt is approximately 200 km southwest of Fayd, on the route between Fayd and Medina. That it was the location of a post station (*barīd*) is also confirmed in *Kitāb al-Manāsik*, 518–19. For further discussion of this location, see al-Rāshid, “Arba‘at aḥjār mīliyya,” 130–31 (and see also its location on the map at 135). The term *barīd* had several usages in the Abbasid period, but for this particular meaning, see Manfred Ullmann, *Zur Geschichte des Wortes Barīd “Post”* (Munich: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997), 43. For discussion of the communications network in the Marwanid and early Abbasid empires, see Adam Silverstein, *Postal Systems in the Pre-Modern Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 59–84.

338. Al-Rāshid, “Arba‘at aḥjār mīliyya,” 123, 130. This assertion of al-Rāshid’s was accepted without comment by Al-Zayla‘i (see above, n. 335).

The main reason for thinking that the caliph in question might be Muḥammad al-Mahdī is the reference to Yaḡṡīn b. Mūsā (d. 186/802) as the overseer of the work. This figure served several Abbasid caliphs and had apparently been around already in Kufa during the Abbasid movement's revolutionary phase;³³⁹ he was, however, particularly well known for his work on behalf of Muḥammad al-Mahdī, by this stage of his career primarily in the Ḥijāz. He was, for example, put in charge of al-Mahdī's work on the expansion of the Masjid al-Ḥarām,³⁴⁰ he was held responsible for problems with the water supply for pilgrims;³⁴¹ and, most significantly, al-Mahdī charged him in 161/777–78 with making significant improvements to various aspects of the infrastructure—including milestones—of the pilgrim route to Mecca, work that he continued until 171/787–88.³⁴² It is possible that al-Mahdī put him in charge of such work because he had previous experience overseeing similar projects for an earlier caliph. We are told, for example, that the first Abbasid caliph, Abū al-ʿAbbās, ordered the placement of milestones (*amyāl*), together with beacons (*manār*), along the route from Kufa to Mecca in 134/751–52.³⁴³ However, another passage indicates that the work ordered by Abū al-ʿAbbās on the route to Mecca—although here the only structures mentioned specifically are *quṣūr* and not milestones—covered only the northeast section of the route from al-Qādisiyya to Zubāla, so it would not have reached anywhere close to the location of this extant milestone.³⁴⁴ It is, of course, possible that the caliph mentioned in this text is nonetheless Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Saffāḥ, but given the fairly sparse state of our extant evidence for early Abbasid caliphs' titles on building inscriptions, together with the potential evidence from the Prophet's Mosque inscriptions that Muḥammad al-Mahdī could be referred to with similar titles (§27a), we should perhaps keep all possibilities open for now. This is an area where we might reasonably hope that future discoveries can provide greater clarity.

339. See, for example, *Akhbār al-dawla al-ʿabbāsiyya wa-fīhi akhbār al-ʿAbbās wa-waladīhi*, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dūrī and ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Muṡṡalībī, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣalīʿa, 1997), 231; al-Dīnawarī, *Kitāb al-Akhbār al-ṡiwāl*, ed. ʿAbd al-Munʿim ʿĀmir and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Shayyāl (Cairo: Wizārat al-Thaqāfa wa-l-Irshād al-Qawmī, 1960), 358, 379; al-Yaʿqūbī, *al-Taʿrīkh*, ed. M. Th. Houtsma (Leiden: Brill, 1883), 2:439–40; al-Ṣabarī, *Taʿrīkh*, 3:103, 390, 567; al-Fasawī, *al-Maʿrifā wa-l-taʿrīkh*, 1:119; al-Rāzī, *Akhbār Fakhkh wa-khabar Yaḡyā b. ʿAbd Allāh wa-akhīhi Idrīs b. ʿAbd Allāh*, ed. Maher Jarrar (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1995), 147, 185.

340. Al-Fasawī, *al-Maʿrifā wa-l-taʿrīkh*, 1:156; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʿrīkh*, 2:476–77; al-Ṣabarī, *Taʿrīkh*, 3:520; see also al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka*, 2:62, 203; and al-Fākihī, *Akhbār Makka fī qadīm al-dahr wa-ḡadīthihi*, ed. ʿAbd al-Malik b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Duhaysh, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār Khidr and Mecca: Maktabat wa-Maṡbaʿat al-Nahḡa wa-l-Ḥadītha, 1414/1994), 2:169. He is also mentioned in one of the extant inscriptions commemorating al-Mahdī's work in the Masjid al-Ḥarām, discussed above; see al-Rāshid et al., *Āthār Minṡaqat Makka al-Mukarrama*, 111–13.

341. Al-Ṣabarī, *Taʿrīkh*, 3:502.

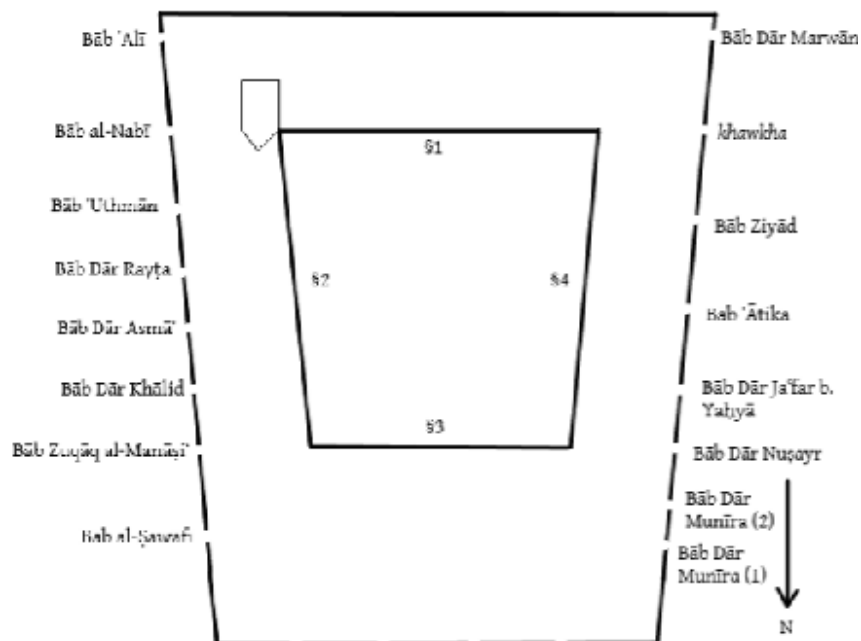
342. *Ibid.*, 3:486.

343. *Ibid.*, 3:81.

344. *Ibid.*, 3:486.

Figure 1

This figure provides a rough outline (not accurately to scale) of the Prophet's Mosque after al-Mahdī's renovation work to offer an indication of the approximate location of the courtyard inscriptions (§§1–4) and the entrances to the mosque discussed in the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* (twenty in total, including four unnamed entrances along the northern wall). Apart from the courtyard inscriptions, almost all of the texts mentioned by the *Kitāb al-Manāsik* can be located loosely in relation to one of these entrances.



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