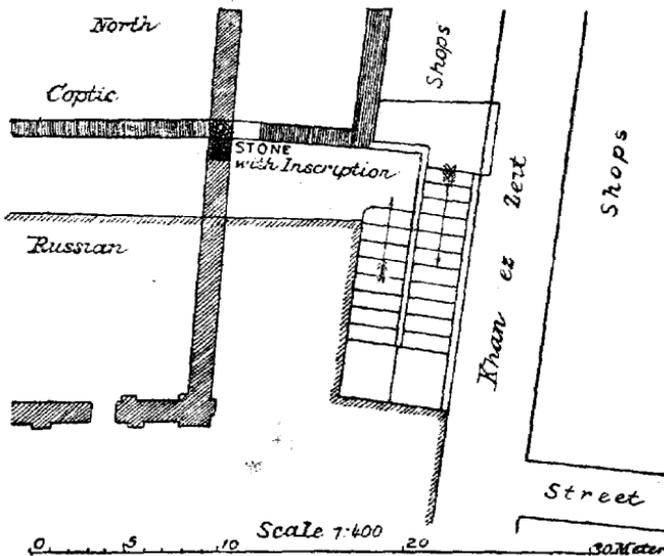


AN ARABIC INSCRIPTION FROM JERUSALEM.

By Dr. MAX VAN BERCHEM.

(Translated, by permission, from the "Mittheilungen und Nachrichten" of the German Palestine Society.)

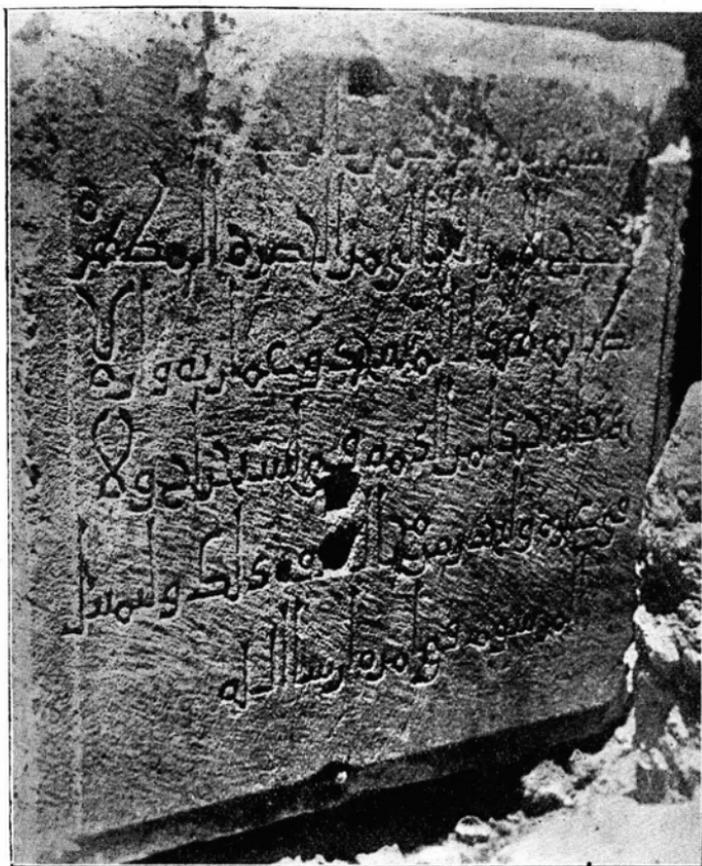
On July 31st, 1897, a large stone with an ancient Arabic inscription was found in Jerusalem, west of the street *Khán ez-Zeit*, in a lane which divides the Coptic and Russian possessions east of the Church of the Sepulchre. The stone, which is of *Maleki*, is 1 metre long by 1 metre in height, and 1.08 metre in breadth; the surface, on which is the inscription, is rough hewn and enclosed by a border 5 centimetres broad and



PLAN OF A DRAWING BY P. PALMER.

1 deep. In this surface there are four square holes, which undoubtedly were designed to receive the fastenings of a marble or metal facing; this, of course, has long disappeared. At the word *سنة* of the fifth line, it may clearly be observed that the doubtless ancient inscription was chiselled later than the holes. This circumstance leads to the conclusion that the stone itself had belonged to an ancient building. [See plan. On August 2nd Architect Palmer saw near this stone another quite similar, of the same height and breadth, but still surrounded with rubbish.—Ed. "Mittheil."]

Immediately after its discovery the stone was taken under the guardianship of the Turkish Government. Afterwards the surface with the inscription was sawn off and brought to Constantinople. Notwithstanding these unfavourable circumstances the *facsimiles* are already numerous. There lie before me at present a squeeze and two photographs by Architect Palmer, of Jerusalem; a better squeeze by Dr.



(From a photograph.)

Sandreczky there; a photograph given to me by P. Lagrange; and, lastly, another by P. Golubowich, of Jerusalem. A third squeeze is in the hands of Professor Clermont-Ganneau in Paris, a fourth at St. Petersburg. This wealth of copies is almost superfluous as the text is palæographically clear. The inscription consists of six lines in elegant, simple, unadorned Kufic, with unpointed letters. It reads:—

- (1) بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ
 (2) خَرَجَ الْأَمْرُ الْعَالِیُّ مِنَ الْحَضْرَةِ الْمُطَهَّرَةِ
 (3) بِصِیَانَةِ هَذَا الْمَسْجِدِ وَعِمَارَتِهِ وَأَنْ لَا
 (4) تُدْخِلَهُ أَحَدًا مِنْ الذِّمَّةِ فِی اسْتِجْرَاحٍ وَلَا
 (5) فِی غَیْرِهِ وَیَحْذَرُ مِنْ مَخَالَفَةِ ذَلِكَ وَیَمْتَثِلُ
 (6) الْمَرْسُومَ فِی أَمْرِهِ إِنْ شَاءَ اللّٰهُ *

“In the name of God, &c. From the exalted Majesty the high command is issued, that this mosque is to be well guarded and maintained in good condition. No one under our protection (*i.e.*, Christians and Jews) shall be allowed to enter either under the pretext of rebutting evidence upon oath (?) or for any other object. Great care is to be taken not to contravene this and to conform to the regulations issued in accordance with this command. May it be God's will.”

First, a few words by way of comment on this undated but important text :—

Line 2 : *hadrah*, properly “presence,” signifies in the administrative and diplomatic language of the middle ages, “Majesty, Highness, Excellency.” Thereby also is indicated the place where the person resides or rules, as the Court or Government buildings, possibly what is now understood in Turkey by the Sublime Porte. Owing to the following epithet the personal sense is here to be preferred, although the word *Kharaja* = “has been issued,” rather speaks for the local sense. The general meaning remains exactly the same.

Who is now thereby intended? To this question an answer is given by an important Arabic work of the fifteenth century, the so-called *Diwān el-inshā'*.¹ This title of honour, he says, was much used in the diplomatic correspondence (*mukdtabāt*) of the Khalifs, and indeed, with one of the two epithets *el-'āliyah* or *es-sāmiyah*, “the high” (majesty). Here, indeed, another epithet occurs, *el-mutahharah*, which will be further explained below; whilst the adjective *el-'ālī* is found with the substantive *el-amr*, “the command.” According to the *Diwān*, it was afterwards among the Ayubites the custom to write with *hadrah* to the great personages of the empire, especially to the viziers; and to this day (as in the fifteenth century) this formula is used in the official correspondence of the Government of the Mameluke kingdom with foreign, mostly non-Moslem, kings, patriarchs, &c. At present this old

¹ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, No. 4439 (anc. fonds 1573), fo. 160vo.

title of honour is come down to be a mere form of politeness; *ḥadrataḥ* is in the East as much as our "sir." As is usually the case, the title has gone down all the steps of the social hierarchy. In order to determine who is here meant, the date of the inscription must be inquired into.

The Franciscans in Jerusalem, who have lately had printed a transcription and translation of this text, ascribe it to the Sultan Saladin¹—on what ground does not appear. To everyone acquainted with inscriptions it will be evident that the text is certainly older. I have shown elsewhere that in the historical monumental inscriptions of Syria the Kufic was already supplanted by the round character under Nūr ed-dīn, in the middle of the twelfth century, and, consequently, that all the inscriptions of Saladin known to us (except decorations from the Koran) are written in the round character.² Our text, therefore, belongs to the time before Nūr ed-dīn, and, consequently, before the Ayubites; from which it follows, according to the above quotation from the Diwān, that by the title *el-ḥadrāh* a Khalif is here meant.

But which Khalif? The epithet *el-muṭahharah*, "the exalted," which is joined to this title, points at first to an Alidite source. To make good this assertion would carry us too far.³ The first Alidite rulers, who possessed Palestine for a long time, were the Fatimites, who conquered the land under the Khalif Mu'izz, about 972.

On the other hand, palæographic grounds are in favour of an older origin. The text belongs to that older and plain sort of Kufic which flourished in inscriptions from the first century of the Hejira to the appearance of the Fatimites. I have shown that the so-called Karmatic variety of the Kufic, with its peculiar ornaments, was brought by the Fatimites from Tunis to Egypt, and probably also to Syria;⁴ but our text is free from such ornaments, and points us to the ninth or the beginning of the tenth century. But let us put that aside. In any case it is certain that our inscription forms by far the oldest example of a Government order in the Arabic epigraphy.

Lines 3-4: The order requires the guarding and general preservation⁵ of a specified mosque, and forbids persons from the so-called protected people (*i.e.*, Christians, Jews, or Magi, who, according to Mohammed's and Omar's decisions, enjoyed, by payment of a capitation tax, the *jizyah*, the protection, the *dhimmah* of the Mohammedan community)

¹ See *Quarterly Statement*, 1897, p. 302.

² See "Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum" (= C.I.A.), i, 85 *seq.*; *Inscriptions arabes de Syrie* (abstract from the "Mémoires de l'Institut Egyptien," III), 34-42.

³ With reference to the Alidite signification of the word *tāhir*, "clean, pure," see (*inter alia*) "C.I.A.," i, 25, obs. 1; *Epigraphie des Assassins de Syrie* (abstract from the "Journal Asiatique"), 43. For the use of the second verbal form *cf.* several places in the Koran.

⁴ Notes d'archéologie arabe (extract from "Journal Asiatique"), i, 115 *seq.*

⁵ Not as it is usually, and in too narrow a sense, translated "the building." For the meaning of *'imārāh*, see "C.I.A.," i, 99; *Epigraphie des Assassins*, 35.

under any pretence to be allowed to enter. For the unpointed استجرا the reading *istikhrāj* first suggests itself. But as that word seems to afford no suitable sense, I would read *istijrāh* = to deny a (false) evidence upon oath; to stand upon one's oath against such. As is known, this procedure before a court of justice was adopted when the evidence was inadequate; an opposing witness swore by some holy place that the first witness had given false evidence. Of course in this sense the second form *tajrīh* is used; the tenth would, therefore, mean to seek to accomplish the occurrence of the *tajrīh* or to petition someone for it, which would suit very well here, only I must confess that this explanation is very doubtful. Should it give the right sense the word would be very interesting, inasmuch as it would show that the mosque in question was regarded as especially holy not only by Moslems, but also by the Christians (or Jews) who, under pretext of a legal procedure, would sneak in, perhaps because they had some particular reason for doing so.

There is the further question: What mosque is here intended? At present the whole place is in the hands of the Christians. The stone was found in an old wall, which without doubt belongs to the remains of the Basilica of Constantine. This wall lies in the vicinity of the *propylæum* described by Eusebius, which probably formed the entrance into the building from the east. If this is really so, there is a very important passage having a bearing upon it in the "Annals of Eutychius" (called Sa'īd ibn el-Batrik), Patriarch of Alexandria, who died about 940, and whose annals reach down to his own time.¹

Eutychius narrates the well-known history of the taking of Jerusalem by Omar, and mentions the treaty of protection for the Christians granted by him to the Patriarch Sophronius. He proceeds (I abridge):—

Omar entered the city and sat down with Sophronius in the innermost part² (in penetrali) of the Church of the Sepulchre. The time of prayer approached, and Omar wished to pray. "Pray here," said Sophronius. "Not here," answered Omar. Sophronius now led him into the Basilica (ad templum) and spread a carpet in the middle of it that Omar might pray.³ As he again refused, the Patriarch led him

¹ To the following quotation, as well as to the historical questions arising out of it, my attention was recently directed in Paris by M. Clermont-Ganneau. That acute scholar allows me to make use of it here, although he has not yet published his own essay (on this subject), for which I owe him most cordial thanks. As Selden's edition of "Eutychius" with the Arabic text is not by me, I must quote from the Latin version in Migne's "Patrologia Græca," cxi, 1099. In Selden's edition ii, 284-290. The parallel passages abridged by el-Makīn, i, 28.

² The Arabic text of el-Makīn has here *ṣaḥn* = court, by which is meant the large open court, which belonged to the Church of the Sepulchre.

³ Templum indicates here the Basilica itself, which lay to the east of the Anastasis. See Schick's plan in the Journal of the German Pal. Soc., viii, Plate XI.

outside to the steps by the entrance of the Church of Constantine looking towards the east (egressus ad gradus qui sunt ad portam ecclesie sancti Constantini qua Oriente respicit). Here Omar prayed alone. Afterwards he asked :—"Do you know why I would not pray inside?" "How could I know that?" said Sophronius. Omar replied :—"If I had prayed inside the Church it would have been lost to you. After my death the Moslems would have taken it from you ; for they would soon have said :—'Here Omar prayed !'" Omar then gave to the Patriarch a written document (syngrapha) by which he decreed that the Moslems might pray only singly on the steps ; further that they should neither assemble there for prayer, nor the voice of the Muezzin over there summon them to it. Then Omar asked of Sophronius another place for the erection of a mosque, respecting which Euty chius narrates the well-known story of the Temple place (i.e., of the Haram). This was to become a mosque on the condition that no other mosque should be erected in the city. This Omar agreed to, and again gave to Sophronius a written promise.

Omar then proceeded to Bethlehem, where the same thing was repeated. At the hour of prayer the Khalif prayed at the southern arch of the Basilica (ad arcum australem), which was covered with variegated mosaic work. Again Omar gave to the Patriarch a document, that here only single Moslems, one after the other, might pray, that they might not assemble there, nor be called together by the Muezzin, *and that nothing in these regulations might be altered.*¹ "Yet in this our time," adds Euty chius, "the Mohammedans have acted contrary to the writing of Omar. For they have torn away the mosaic from the arch, *and written thereon what seemed good to them* ; and they have come together for prayer, called by the voice of the Muezzin. *Also they have done the same at the steps which were before the door of the Church of Constantine.* There they have taken for themselves half of the vestibule of the Church and erected a place of prayer therein which they have called the Mosque of Omar."

This long quotation supplies certain important data, which I can only consider shortly :—

1. The Christian historian obviously has an object. He desires to show by his history—whether rightly or not must remain uncertain—that the Christians in the entire precincts of the Holy Sepulchre, i.e., the Anastasis, the Court, the Basilica, and the Propylæum, possessed indefeasible rights derived from Omar himself. From this it follows clearly, that already before the time of Euty chius the Moslems had disputed these rights. This brings to mind a similar occurrence, namely, the celebrated procedure with regard to the Great Mosque of Damascus under the Khalif Walid. When he wished to destroy the old Church of St. John, the Christians produced letters from Omar, so that the Khalif could only with the greatest difficulty accomplish his object. Naturally,

¹ This expression frequently occurs in inscribed laws.

here as there, the quarrel ended in favour of the Moslems. They convert one part of the entrance into a mosque, which they call Omar's, because Omar had prayed there, and inscribe therein arbitrary précepts which were unfavourable to the Christians.

2. In Omar's conduct one distinguishes two definite moments: in the inner court, as well as in the Basilica, he refuses on any account to pray. On the outer steps he does indeed pray, but testifies that this procedure shall not give occasion for the subsequent erection of a mosque. Moslems may pray there one by one, but they should not assemble there, that is, should not form a congregation (*jamá'ah*) there, and therefore not erect a *jamí'* or mosque. It follows clearly hence that at the time of Euty chius the Moslems made no claims to the rotunda of the Holy Sepulchre itself, or to the Basilica, but only to the eastern entrance where Omar had prayed. This new mosque, with its inscribed précepts, was therefore exactly at this entrance, that is, in the position where our inscription has been discovered, which forbids the entrance of non-Moslems into a certain mosque under any pretext.

3. It seems further to follow from this, that the chief entrance to the Church of the Sepulchre at that time was upon the east side, not on the west side of the Basilica, as many explorers contend. Consequently, the apse of the Basilica would be directed towards the west, that is, towards the rotunda of the Sepulchre itself. This would be of great importance in connection with the question of the orientation of churches in the time of Constantine.

4. When we consider that by this infringement of their rights the Christians were much distressed, and naturally strove against it, and further that the inscription paleographically falls in the time given by Euty chius (beginning of the tenth century), the question arises whether this inscription is not that intended by Euty chius. Certain historical reasons seem to support this. We have seen that the command issued from a Khalif, either an Abbaside or a Fatimite. The expression *el-muṭahharah* seems to support the latter supposition, whilst the paleographical examination points decidedly to a period before the Fatimites. Moreover, we know that the Fatimite rule, at least until the time of the inhuman Hâkim, who altogether destroyed the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, was comparatively mild in reference to the Christians, and that under the two first Fatimites severe regulations against them could hardly have been issued. But on palæographic grounds the inscription cannot absolutely be put back to the time of Hâkim. If we now look further back, who reigned here before the Fatimites? The Abbassides, yet not always directly. About 878 Palestine was conquered by the Turk Aḥmad ibn Ṭâḥîn, who had made himself independent ruler of Egypt; his successors reigned until about 905. About 936 the dynasty of the Ikhshidites arose in Syria, which continued until shortly before the Fatimite dominion, that is to about 970.¹

¹ I give only approximate dates as I am writing in the country without the necessary books.

Although both dynasties acknowledged the suzerainty of the Abasside Khalifs, the contents of the inscription point rather to a time when the latter exercised direct rule in Jerusalem. This was the case in the years 905 to 936, that is, exactly at the period which Euty chius, who died in 940, could distinguish as "this our time." And just at that time an occurrence took place which may readily explain an increase of Islamic influence in Jerusalem: about 929, during the Karmatian war in Arabia, the pilgrimage to Mecca was suspended; in consequence of which the Moslems for about 20 years made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and indeed to the Mosque of Omar. Did the erection of an Omar-Mosque at the Holy Sepulchre stand in any connection with this occurrence? If so, the inscription might have been composed about the year 930 under the Khalif Mukhtadir, who here would be distinguished by the title *el-hadrah*. The epithet, *el-muṭakharah*, which, as already mentioned, points rather to an Alidite origin, may be explained by the Abassides, who had their seat in Bagdad, being surrounded by numerous Persian influences.

5. Euty chius says that the newly-erected mosque at the Holy Sepulchre was called the Mosque of Omar. Does it follow from this that at that period the Hāram was not so called; or did every spot where Omar was said to have prayed become distinguished as a Mosque of Omar? That is a question which requires careful discussion.

6. The claims made by the Moslems to the Church of the Sepulchre were certainly entirely set aside by the Crusades and the grand buildings of the Europeans at the Holy Sepulchre, and since then the spot has remained Christian. Why did not Saladin endeavour to claim back the rights to which this inscription pointed, and to take from the Christians at least a portion of the Sepulchre Church, as indeed all churches, except this one, were then turned into mosques? Here, again, I must content myself with merely putting forth the question.

In conclusion, until something further is discovered, it seems possible that the newly-found inscription is that mentioned by Euty chius; at least it stands in close connection with his narrative. This circumstance imparts to it great importance for the history of the Church of the Sepulchre.

Since these lines were hastily written in the German review, several papers have been issued on the Arabic inscription of Jerusalem, and M. Clermont-Ganneau, in his communication to the Academie des Inscriptions of Paris, has given an exhaustive account of the matter. On my side I have gathered some new information which would modify, in some points of detail, the results of my first researches. But as the general views exposed here have not been changed, I prefer to wait for a new redaction of this memoir till some important fact would lead me to different conclusions.