

THE ARAB MOSQUE IN ATHENS

(PLATE 49)

AGORA I 3837 (Pl. 49, a) consists of four joining fragments of Hymettian marble. The fragments were found together on March 19, 1936, in a modern house wall north of the Church of the Holy Apostles in the southeast corner of the ancient Agora at Athens. The repaired piece measures 0.21 m. in height and 0.29 m. in maximum length. There are irregular fractures at each end and a nearly rectilinear fracture at the top. The lower edge, however, is preserved. Two fragmentary lines of Kufic Arabic inscription, carved in relief, cover the face. The letters range in height from approximately 0.075 to 0.08 m. The lines of inscription are framed by straight bands, also in relief, the lower being about 0.012 m. in height, the upper two about 0.01 m. The back of the stone (Pl. 49, b) is smooth. The base has an irregular profile (Fig. 1): for a distance of approximately 0.022 m. from the face toward the back it is roughly at right angles to the face; it then slants upward for about 0.05 m. Where this slanting surface joins the smooth back there is a low ridge, about 0.01 in height. The stone tapers in thickness from 0.063 m. at the bottom (including the ridge) to 0.035 m. at the broken upper edge.

The two fragmentary lines read as follows:¹

— — له فعسى اولئك — —
— — امير المؤمنين — —

The upper line contains two and a half words—[Al]lah. For perhaps thes[e]— from the Qur'ān, *surah* IX, verse 18, which in its entirety reads:

إِنَّمَا يَعْمُرُ مَسَاجِدَ اللَّهِ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَى الزَّكَاةَ وَلَمْ يَخْشَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ فَعَسَىٰ أُولَٰئِكَ أَنْ يَكُونُوا مِنَ الْمُهْتَدِينَ

“Verily only he shall visit the mosques of Allāh who believes in Allāh and the Day of Judgment and who is constant in prayer and pays the legal alms and fears only Allāh. For perhaps these may be among those who are rightly directed.”

The lower line contains the words *amīr al-mu'minīn*, “Commander of the Believers,” followed by the beginning of another indeterminate letter. These words are

¹ Toward the center of the fractured top of the fragment there are minimal traces of relief which might be the extreme lower portions of one or two letters, but so little is preserved that it is impossible to attempt any reconstruction of this probable first line.

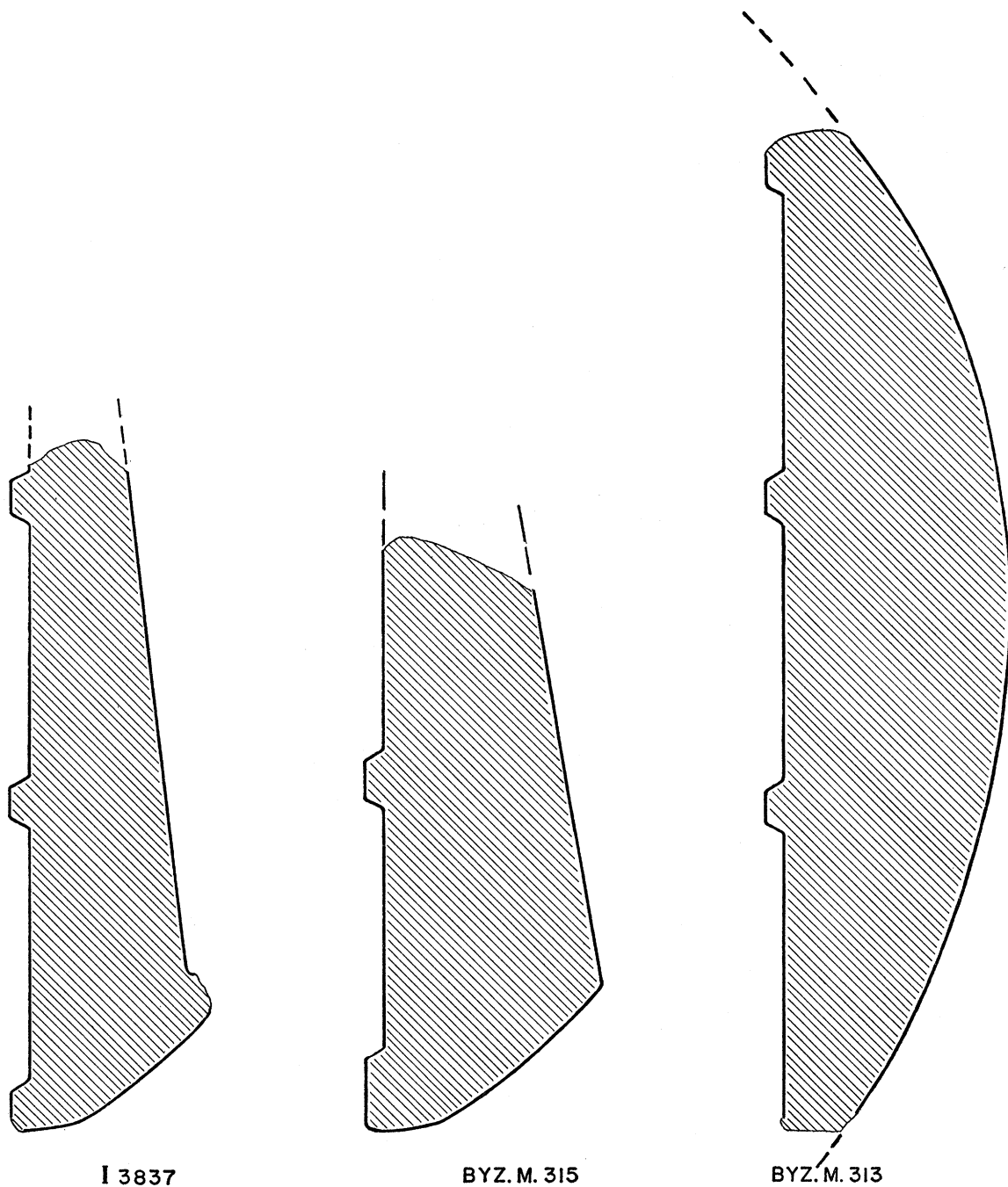


FIG. 1. Profiles of Agora I 3837, Byzantine Museum 315, and Byzantine Museum 313.

not Qur'anic but must be part of a text of historical import, the implications of which will be discussed after the relationship of this fragment with at least two others has been established.

The first of these is now lost, but fortunately a photograph of it is preserved (Pl. 49, d). This fragment, the exact dimensions of which are unrecorded but which can be estimated to be approximately 0.30 m. in maximum length and 0.18 m. in height, is said to have been found during the excavations on the site of the Asklepieion in 1877. In 1916 it was photographed by G. Soteriou, now Director of the Byzantine Museum in Athens, and has twice been reproduced by him.² It is not clear exactly when this piece was lost; Mr. Soteriou believes that it may be somewhere among the many stone fragments scattered about the Acropolis.³ Not only is the style of Kufic on this fragment very evidently the same as that of the Agora stone, but the decipherment of the upper of the two fragmentary lines of text establishes beyond any reasonable doubt that the two pieces are part of the same inscription. The lines, separated as in the case of the Agora piece by a narrow band, read:

--- واليوم ---
 --- نشأ هذا الجا ---

.... [Allā]h and the Day.....
[f]ounded this mos[que ?].....

Thus in the upper line we have another small bit of Qur'an IX, 18,⁴ and it is evident that this fragment precedes (i. e., falls to the right of) the Agora piece and is separated from it by eight and a half words or approximately 0.85 to 0.90 m. As for the lower line, it is, like the lower line of Agora I 3837, part of an historical or com-

² G. Soteriou, 'Αραβικά λείψανα ἐν Ἀθήναις κατὰ τοὺς βυζαντινοὺς χρόνους ('Απόσπασμα ἐκ τῶν Πρακτικῶν τῆς Ἀκαδημίας Ἀθηνῶν, 1929—hereafter abbreviated Soteriou 1929—pp. 266 ff., fig. 1), and 'Αραβικαὶ διακοσμήσεις εἰς τὰ βυζαντινὰ μνημεῖα τῆς Ἑλλάδος ('Απόσπασμα ἐκ τῶν Πρακτικῶν τῆς Χριστιανικῆς Ἀρχαιολογικῆς Ἑταιρείας, 1935—hereafter abbreviated Soteriou 1935—pp. 57-95, fig. 6). This latter article also appears in *Berichte der Christlich-Archäologischen Gesellschaft zu Athen* (in *Byzantinisch-Neugriechische Jahrbücher*), 1935, pp. 233-269. My Plate 49, d is reproduced from the former article. I am indebted to Mr. Soteriou for giving me offprints of these two important articles and also for providing me with a photograph of fragment no. 313 in the Byzantine Museum (see below). I also had the privilege of discussing these Kufic fragments with him during a brief visit at the Byzantine Museum in 1954. In March 1956 he was good enough to permit me to have drawings made of the profiles of the fragments in the Byzantine Museum. May I here express my thanks also to Mr. Richard P. Braden for his generous help in translating Mr. Soteriou's articles.

³ Soteriou 1935, p. 60.

⁴ There are, to be sure, many other instances of واليوم preceded by بالله in the Qur'an; in fact the words occur again in the very next verse, Qur'an IX, 19. But all the evidence taken together (including that of the other fragment about to be discussed) supports the assumption that the present occurrence is from Qur'an IX, 18.

memorative inscription, and contains three words which can without any difficulty be made to fit into the context of the phrase, "Commander of the Believers." The words "founded this mosque" were first read by the distinguished Arabic epigraphist, E. Combe, now of the Swiss Archaeological Institute in Cairo, formerly Director of the Municipal Library in Alexandria.⁵ The present writer concurs. M. Combe did not attempt a reading of the few letters preserved in the upper line; without the clue provided by the upper line of the Agora fragment they would be virtually undecipherable.

The second related piece, also from the Asklepieion area, is a still smaller fragment, now in the Byzantine Museum and registered there as no. 315 (Pl. 49, c).⁶ A photograph of this stone also has been published,⁷ but no serious attempt has previously been made to decipher it.⁸ It is of Hymettian marble, triangular in shape, and measures approximately 0.25 m. in maximum length and 0.18 m. in height. It is fractured at both sides and at the top, but the lower edge (as with the Agora stone) is preserved. The thickness at the bottom is 0.08 m. and tapers to 0.05 m. at the top. There is no ridge on the back, but the base is bevelled, like the Agora piece (Fig. 1). Two fragmentary lines of inscription, separated by a band 0.02 m. in height are preserved; letter height ranges from 0.075 to 0.08 m. Again the style of epigraphy resembles that of Agora I 3837. Only two complete letters and parts of two others are preserved in the upper line, but the lower contains eight letters, of which the first six enable us to identify the fragment as belonging to the same inscription as Agora I 3837 and the lost piece from the Asklepieion. The fragment reads:

— — له م — —
— — مهتدين ام — —

It will be seen that all except the definite article of the word *المهتدين*, *al-muhtadīn*, "those who are rightly directed," is preserved; this word is separated by only three words from those in the Agora piece. The quotation from Qur'an IX clearly ends here, because IX, 18 ends with this word, and IX, 19 begins with *أَجْعَلْنٰمُ*, whereas the two remaining letters in the fragment are distinctly *ام*. The fact that the Qur'anic passage falls on the bottom line here, and not, as in the case of Agora I 3837 and of the lost fragment, on the line above, posed a problem the solution of which came only

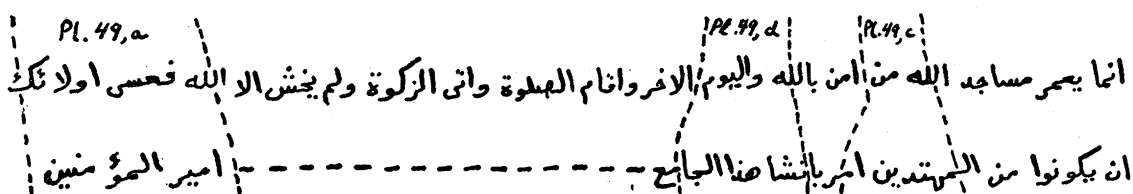
⁵ Soteriou 1929, p. 267: "on lit probablement '... cette mosquée a été construite...'"; Soteriou 1935, p. 60.

⁶ This photograph, together with that of Agora I 3837 and a new one of Byzantine Museum no. 313 (see below) were taken by M. Alison Frantz, who also measured the Byzantine Museum fragments and compared the fabric of those pieces with the Agora stone. I am greatly indebted to Miss Frantz for these chores, and to her and Homer A. Thompson I express my thanks for their encouragement and wise counsel in the preparation of this article.

⁷ Soteriou 1935, fig. 5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

after much frustrating reflection. It finally became apparent that the two complete and two partially preserved letters of the upper line of Byzantine Museum no. 315 are the *lām-hā* of *Allāh* and *mīm-nūn*, that is *man*, four and five words respectively from the beginning of the Qur'ānic passage; that this passage carries over from the upper to the lower line; and that this piece falls not, as one might expect, to the left of the Agora fragment, but to the right. The solution furthermore enables us to reconstruct the word immediately following *al-muhtadīn* as امر, 'amara, "ordered," i. e., the beginning of the historical inscription. Thus the three fragments are to be ranged as follows:



Still another possibly related fragment is preserved in the Byzantine Museum in Athens, registered as no. 313. This piece has twice been illustrated by Mr. Soteriou,⁹ and is here reproduced in a new photograph in Plate 49, e. It is reported to have been found in the excavations of the Roman agora, within the Tower of the Winds, and was perhaps transported there, along with some Turkish gravestones, from the site of the Asklepieion.¹⁰ Mr. Soteriou believes this to be the piece from which J. Strzygowski made an inaccurate and partial sketch in 1888, and which Max van Berchem quite understandably was unable to decipher but which he believed might be assigned on the basis of style to the 11th or 12th century. Strzygowski stated that he found the fragment on the south slope of the Acropolis near the Asklepieion.¹¹ This piece is also of Hymettian marble, and measures approximately 0.30 m. in height, 0.21 m. in width and 0.073 m. in maximum thickness. The letter heights range between 0.075 and 0.085 m.; in other words they are approximately the same height as those of the Agora piece and Byzantine Museum no. 315. Both top and bottom edges appear to be preserved, but the stone is fractured at both sides. There are three fragmentary lines of inscription, separated as in the other pieces by linear bands approximately 0.01 m. in thickness. The Kufic characters closely resemble those of the three other fragments: note especially the *mīm*'s and the detached ornament pendant from

⁹ Soteriou 1929, fig. 2, and Soteriou 1935, fig. 4, where the reproduction is upside down.

¹⁰ Soteriou 1929, p. 267; Soteriou 1935, p. 60.

¹¹ Max van Berchem and Josef Strzygowski, *Amida*, Heidelberg, 1910, p. 372, fig. 324. The sketch bears a general resemblance to Byzantine Museum no. 313, but certainly it is not an exact copy of any part of it.

the band separating the two lower lines, quite similar in style to that which appears in the lower line of Agora I 3837.

The first two lines of Byzantine Museum no. 313 have unfortunately so far eluded all attempts at decipherment.¹² Certainly neither of them seems to contain any part of Qur'ān IX, 18. In the first line one can read للذين, *l'ladhīna*, but while there are frequent occurrences of this combination of preposition and pronoun in the Qur'ān, none seems to be preceded by a combination of letters resembling those in the fragment. The word علم could be read in the center of the second line. The first three letters of the third line appear to read حمد, and one might easily postulate a preceding *mīm* or *alif*, giving us محمد or احمد, *Muḥammad* or *Aḥmad*. Following this word there is a three-letter combination which can be read عمل, *'amala* or *'amal*, "made by" or "work of." Both words suggest that we have here part of an historical inscription.

Not only does the style of epigraphy of this piece point toward a connection with Agora I 3837, the lost piece and Byzantine Museum no. 315, but a study of the profiles of the three available fragments (Fig. 1) demonstrates beyond any reasonable doubt that all three were cut from the same column drum, the radius of which was 0.265 m.¹³ But we must for the time being, pending decipherment of Byzantine Museum no. 313 and the possible discovery of other fragments, leave open the question of its exact relationship with the other pieces.

Turning now to an analysis of the content of the inscription of which Plate 49, a-d, at least, form a part, let us first review briefly the observations made by other writers in connection with the Kufic fragments from Athens available before Agora I 3837 came to light.¹⁴ Strzygowski, commenting on the inscription represented by his sketch (possibly drawn, as stated above, from Byzantine Museum no. 313), suggested the possibility of the presence of Moslems in Athens in the 11th or 12th century,¹⁵ or "um das 11. Jahrhundert."¹⁶ Mr. Soteriou, distinguishing between true Kufic inscriptions in Greece and pseudo or imitated Kufic Byzantine inscriptions and ornamentation (as did Strzygowski), and relying on Combe's reading of the lower

¹² M. Combe also was unable to decipher it (Soteriou 1929, p. 267).

¹³ I wish to thank Mrs. Aliki Bikaki of the Agora staff for drawing these profiles.

¹⁴ A personal note is perhaps not out of place here. The Agora fragment first came to my attention in May 1954, when I was spending two happy weeks at the Agora making a summary report on the Islamic (chiefly Ottoman) coins found in upper levels throughout the excavations. I was asked to look over the inscriptions in Arabic character that had turned up in the Agora and to suggest whether any of them deserved publication. All but this one piece under discussion were Turkish gravestones. The Kufic characters naturally captured my eye, and the significance of the words in the lower line was immediately apparent. The fragments of the Byzantine Museum were then brought to my notice. After the Qur'ānic quotation in the upper line of the Agora piece emerged, and the complementary bits from the same passage in the Byzantine Museum fragment and the lost piece were identified, it became apparent that all three pieces should be discussed together.

¹⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 372.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 375.

line of the lost fragment, assumed the existence of a mosque in the 10th or 11th century in the area of the Asklepieion.¹⁷ He does not entirely reject the thesis advanced by D. Gr. Kampouroglou that there was an attack on Athens by Arabs, followed by an Arab settlement there, in the 10th century.¹⁸ Kampouroglou's argument¹⁹ was based upon a fresh examination and interpretation of a poem commonly referred to as the "Lament of Athens." This poem, preserved in a 16th or early 17th century manuscript in the former Imperial Public Library of St. Petersburg, has usually been interpreted as a "lament" over the capture of Athens by the Ottoman Turks in 1456, but Kampouroglou concluded that it actually relates to a capture of the city by the "Saracens" either between 896 and 902 or else in 943. To support his hypothesis he cited the epigraphical discussions of van Berchem, Strzygowski and Soteriou,²⁰ and reproduced the lost fragment (our Pl. 49, d), Byzantine Museum no. 313, and a simulated Kufic fragment of Pentelic marble, also in the Byzantine Museum.²¹

Whatever the virtues or demerits of Kampouroglou's argument, he unfortunately relied on a certain "Mufti Hamdullah" of Constantinople for readings of the inscriptions and on the latter's advice rejected Combe's decipherment of the lower line of the lost fragment. The Mufti doubtless was both a good man and a good theologian, but patently not an epigraphist or an archaeologist, for in Byzantine Museum no. 313 he read: "O Toi! qui satisfait les nécessités (les besoins)," in the lost fragment, "(Dieu) est celui qui dispose (le dispensateur) des succès," and in the simulated Kufic piece, "O Toi, le Donateur de tous les bienfaits!"²¹ He added that such words as *Allāh*, *Rasūl* and *Muhammad* appear elsewhere in the inscriptions. To the Arabic epigraphist it is of course obvious that these readings are purely imaginary. Furthermore, in rejecting Combe's reading, the Mufti appears to have been responsible for a statement to the effect that Moslems were forbidden to place historical inscriptions on mosques.²³ Nothing could be farther from the truth: there are innumerable foundation inscriptions on mosques of all periods throughout the Islamic world. However, neither the Mufti's readings, allegedly Qur'ānic phrases, nor this latter observation, in his view or in that of Kampouroglou, excluded the possibility that the Kufic fragments adorned a mosque of the 10th or 11th century in Athens.

¹⁷ Soteriou 1929, p. 268; Soteriou 1935, pp. 60, 90-91.

¹⁸ Soteriou 1929, p. 272; Soteriou 1935, p. 88.

¹⁹ Dimitriou Gr. Kampouroglou, *Ἡ Ἀλωσις τῶν Ἀθηνῶν ὑπὸ τῶν Σαρακηνῶν*, Athens, 1934. For Kampouroglou's earlier relevant publications, see Soteriou 1935, pp. 88 and 90, and Setton (see below), p. 315. Cf. *Social Science Abstracts*, II, 1930, no. 273.

²⁰ Kampouroglou, *op. cit.*, pp. 159 ff.

²¹ Soteriou 1929, fig. 3; again illustrated in Soteriou 1935, fig. 7.

²² Kampouroglou, *op. cit.*, p. 186. These readings, in Arabic, modern Turkish transliteration, Greek and French, are reproduced in handwriting in a cut on p. 182. The Arabic phrases are: *يا كافي المهمات* and *ولي التوفيق* and *(يا) قاضي الحاجات* (the translations are not properly paired off).

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

Finally, both the true Kufic fragments under discussion (excluding of course the newly discovered Agora piece) and the pseudo-Kufic or imitation Kufic inscriptions and decorative elements widely scattered throughout Greece have been recently discussed in an admirable article by Kenneth M. Setton entitled, "On the Raids of the Moslems in the Aegean in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries and their Alleged Occupation of Athens."²⁴ His treatment of the inscriptions is largely based on Soteriou's important contributions, but he follows Kampouroglou in discarding the reading "... this mosque was founded . . .," and unfortunately repeats the unfounded assertion that "the religious custom of the Moslems expressly forbids putting upon the walls of a mosque any historical record of its foundation."²⁵ Setton concludes that there was a colony of Moslems (possibly captives) in Athens around the year 1000, that they had a mosque on the site of the Asklepieion, but that the evidence for a Moslem occupation of the city is very slight.²⁶

So much for the previous treatment of these fragments. Let us now turn to a closer examination of the texts. To begin with the religious text, it should be remarked that the passage, Qur'an IX, 18, is one that is entirely suitable for the adornment of a mosque. In fact its use for this purpose is common and widespread. The earliest recorded epigraphical occurrence of the verse appears to be on the mosque of the Prophet at Medina (according to Ibn Rustah), dated 162-165 H. (A.D. 778-782).²⁷ It is present also on the mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn in Cairo, dated 265 H. (A.D. 878/9);²⁸ on a displaced mosque inscription in Cairo, dated 402 H. (A.D. 1011/12);²⁹ in an inscription from Nablus, ca. 411 H. (A.D. 1020);³⁰ on the great mosque at Esneh in Egypt, dated 474 H. (A.D. 1081/2);³¹ and on the minaret of the great mosque in Aleppo, dated 483 H. (A.D. 1090/91).³² In later centuries it occurs frequently, sometimes in abbreviated form.³³

Thus there is good precedent for the epigraphical use of this particular passage

²⁴ *A.J.A.*, LVIII, 1954, pp. 311-319.

²⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 316.

²⁶ On the possibility of the existence of a mosque in the area of the Asklepieion see I. N. Travlos in *Ἀρχαιολογικὴ Ἑφημερίς*, 1939-41, p. 66. Travlos found no trace of a mosque among the actual remains; and he followed Kampouroglou in regarding the hypothesis of the mosque as being based on a false interpretation of the Kufic inscriptions. Cf. note 34, below.

²⁷ Ét. Combe, J. Sauvaget et G. Wiet, *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe*, Cairo, 1931 ff., Vol. 1, no. 46. Cf. J. Sauvaget, *La Mosquée Omeyyade de Médine*, Paris, 1947, p. 58.

²⁸ *Répertoire*, Vol. 2, no. 682.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, no. 2173.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, no. 2310.

³¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 11, no. 2733A (cf. Vol. 7, no. 2720).

³² *Ibid.*, Vol. 7, no. 2783.

³³ E. g., 6th century H.: Amida, 559 H., *Répertoire*, Vol. 9, no. 3258; 7th century H.: 'Alā'yah, 628 H., *Répertoire*, Vol. 11, no. 4029, cf. Ibrahim Hakki Konyalı, *Alanya*, Istanbul, 1946, p. 288; 8th century H.: Akshehir, 738 H., *idem*, *Akşehir*, Istanbul, 1945, p. 305.

from the Qur'ān from at least early 'Abbāsīd times onward. Incidentally the context of the passage is equally apposite for the embellishment of a mosque, and is singularly relevant to a mosque in a foreign or distant land beyond the Dār al-Islām. Verse 17 reads: "The idolators have no right to visit the mosques of Allāh while bearing witness to unbelief against themselves; these are they whose doings are vain, and they shall remain in the Fire eternally." And verses 19-20: "Do you reckon the giving of drink to the pilgrims and the visiting of the Sacred Mosque as equal with the acts of him who believes in Allāh and the Day of Judgment and fights in the path of Allāh? They are not held equal with Allāh; for Allāh does not guide the unrighteous. Those who have believed and went out from their country and fought in the path of Allāh with their possessions and their souls are in a higher rank with Allāh; those are they who are the triumphant ones."

The very fragmentary historical text must now engage our attention. In the lost piece (Pl. 49, d) there can be almost no doubt whatever about the correctness of the proposed reading — نشاء هذا الجا —. In view of the reconstruction presented above, the first word in this fragment is to be completed بانشاء ("the building of"), preceded immediately by امر ("ordered"), two letters of which are preserved after the end of the Qur'ānic quotation in Byzantine Museum no. 315 (Pl. 49, c). Thus, "Ordered the building of this . . .".³⁴

The third word in Plate 49, d poses a more substantial question. In all the attendant circumstances one is predisposed to complete it as الجامع, *al-jāmi'* ("mosque"), as Combe did; but this reading should not be accepted without careful consideration. There is only one objection. In mosque inscriptions of the early centuries of Islam the common word for a mosque of any sort is مسجد, *masjid*, not *jāmi'*. In due course the latter word, for the Friday or congregational mosque, makes its appearance, first in combination with *masjid* (i. e., *masjid jāmi'*), later alone. But still in the mid-third century H., in epigraphy at least, a large Friday mosque is called *masjid*: e. g., the mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn. The earliest recorded epigraphical use of *jāmi'* appears to be in Toledo in 423 H. (A.D. 1031/2).³⁵ Later in the same century we meet with the word in Esneh, 470 H. (A.D. 1077/8),³⁶ and in an inscription from the Alexandrian frontier, 477 H. (A.D. 1084/5).³⁷ From 485 H. (A.D. 1092) on, as van Berchem remarks, every large mosque is a *jāmi'*, while *masjid* is reserved for secondary mosques. But the

³⁴ Not to be excluded is the possibility that the builder did not construct a new building but adapted an old one for use as a mosque. Moslem princes sometimes took such liberties with the language of building inscriptions, and of course there are innumerable instances of the conversion of churches into mosques. Relevant is the conversion of the Parthenon church into a mosque (Michaelis, *Der Parthenon*, p. 55).

³⁵ *Repertoire*, Vol. 6, no. 2390.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. 7, no. 2719.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. 7, no. 2745. This plaque is in the University Museum in Messina. Note that this inscription also carries Qur'ān IX, 18.

preserved epigraphical evidence is sparse, and one cannot say with any certainty just when *jāmi'* begins to appear in building inscriptions. The literature offers more plentiful examples: *jāmi'* is rare with the historians and geographers until toward the middle of the 4th century H. (10th century after Christ); from then on it is common.³⁸ Thus, although one might expect the word *masjid* to be the more likely here, *jāmi'* is not out of the question.

The next fragment to be considered is Agora I 3837 (Pl. 49, a), separated from Plate 49, d, to judge by the Qur'ānic inscription, by about 0.85 to 0.90 m., as stated earlier. The question here is the context of the words *amīr al-mu'minīn*, "Commander of the Believers"; this question is an intriguing one, for the correct answer to it would go far toward explaining the historical significance of the entire inscription. What words preceded *amīr al-mu'minīn*, and what words, if any, followed? One might hope that somewhere about the Acropolis lie the fragments that will provide the true answers and that they will eventually be found. But meanwhile some speculation may be not without value.

The title *amīr al-mu'minīn* in this general period and area of the Islamic world was assumed only by the Caliph.³⁹ In view of the silence of the historians with regard to any occupation of Attica by the Arabs or their co-religionists, one can with fair confidence exclude the possibility that the title here refers directly to the Caliph, whether the 'Abbāsid Caliph in Baghdad, the Fātimid Caliph in Cairo, or the Umayyad Caliph in Cordoba. By this we mean that it is extremely unlikely that the inscription records the construction of a mosque, or any other building, in Athens on the orders of the Commander of the Believers himself. But there are two other possible explanations for the presence of the word. One is that the building was erected *fī-zamān*, "in the time of," or *fī-ayyām*, "in the days of," such and such a Caliph; the other, perhaps more probable, that the builder, or the patron under whose auspices the mosque was built, stood in a certain protocolary relationship to one or other of the rulers in question, and that he bore a title or honorific compounded with *amīr al-mu'minīn* as the second element.

Here there are several possibilities. The most likely—and incidentally the first to appear in epigraphy—is *mawālā*, "client" or "freedman." Numerous examples in the epigraphy of buildings, textiles and coins of the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th centuries of the Hijrah could be cited. To note only a few building inscriptions of the 3rd-5th centuries, there are occurrences in Fustāṭ (Cairo) in 213 H. (A.D. 828/9) and 265 H.

³⁸ Max van Berchem, *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum*, I, 1 (Égypte), *Mémoires de la Mission Archéologique Française au Caire*, Vol. XIX, 1894, pp. 172-174; cf. Johs. Pedersen, section C2 of the article *masjid* in the *Encyclopaedia of Islām*.

³⁹ See Max van Berchem, "Titres califiens d'Occident," in *Journal Asiatique*, 1907, pp. 258-270; and more recently, G. C. Miles in *Archaeologica Orientalia in Memoriam Ernst Herzfeld*, Locust Valley, N. Y., 1952, p. 168, and N. E. Elisséeff in *Bulletin d'Études Orientales de l'Institut Français de Damas*, XIV, 1952-1954, pp. 192-193.

(A.D. 878/9);⁴⁰ in Jerusalem in 216 H. (A.D. 831/2);⁴¹ many in Spanish cities, especially Cordoba, ranging in date from 318 H. (A.D. 930) to 366 H. (A.D. 977) or later;⁴² at Mayyāfarīqīn in northern Iraq in 391 H. (A.D. 1000/1) and in 405 H. (A.D. 1014/5);⁴³ at various sites in eastern Iran and Turkestan in the first half of the 5th century H.;⁴⁴ and at Aleppo in 483 H. (A.D. 1090/1).⁴⁵ Instances of *mawlā amīr al-mu'minīn* on coins (beginning in the 2nd century H. and continuing into the 4th) and on textiles (*ṭirāz*), especially in Egypt in the 3rd and 4th centuries, are too numerous to mention.

Aside from *mawlā* there are other words designating officers of the Caliph which appear in inscriptions, but it would seem that they are never directly compounded with *amīr al-mu'minīn* but rather refer to him (his name and title having occurred earlier in the text) by the use of the genitival pronoun. Thus we have *عامله* ("his governor") in Mecca in 272 H. (A.D. 885/6);⁴⁶ *وزيره* ("his vizier") at Cordoba in 329 H. (A.D. 940/1);⁴⁷ *فتاه* ("his young slave") at Tarragona in 349 H. (A.D. 960/1);⁴⁸ *حاجبه* and *كاتبه* ("his chamberlain" and "his secretary") at Cordoba in 353 H. (A.D. 964);⁴⁹ *قائده* ("his general") at Baños de la Encima in 357 H. (A.D. 967/8);⁵⁰ and *عبده* ("his slave") in Cairo in 360 H. (A.D. 970/1).⁵¹ It is conceivable that inscriptions containing one or other of these titles in direct conjunction with *amīr al-mu'minīn* exist but have never been recorded.

The possibility of some other more lofty title, used as an honorific, rather than as the designation of a specific function or position, by a prince or a functionary subservient or loyal to the Caliph, is not to be excluded. While the vogue for complex and resounding epithets reaches its apogee in the 6th and 7th centuries of Islam (12th-13th centuries after Christ),⁵² there are already examples of such titles compounded with *amīr al-mu'minīn* in the epigraphy of the 5th century H. The earliest of these appears to be *صفيّ امير المؤمنين*, *ṣafī* ("the close friend of the Commander of the Believers"), applied to a vizier of the Fāṭimid Caliph al-Zāhir at Jerusalem in 426 H.

⁴⁰ *Répertoire*, Vol. 1, no. 189 and Vol. 2, no. 682.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, nos. 209-210.

⁴² *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, no. 1131; Vol. 4, nos. 1306, 1382, 1485, 1499, 1562, 1578-1581; Vol. 5, nos. 1632, 1650, 1863, 1866, 1868. In many of the Spanish inscriptions *mawlā* is separated from *amīr al-mu'minīn* and occurs in the phrase "at the hands of" or "executed by" his *mawlā* (على يدي مولاه).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, nos. 2085 and 2184.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, nos. 2184, 2312-2313, 2331, 2335; Vol. 7, nos. 2489, 2626.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. 7, no. 2783. For a discussion of *mawlā amīr al-mu'minīn* see G. Wiet, *C.I.A., Égypte* II, 1 (*Mémoires de la Mission Archéologique Française au Caire*, Vol. LII, 1929), pp. 49-50. Wiet is not strictly correct in stating that *mawlā* disappears before the middle of the 5th century H.

⁴⁶ *Répertoire*, Vol. 2, no. 733. The dates here and below are the earliest in each case. There are many other instances.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, no. 1306.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, no. 1499.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, no. 1562.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, no. 1632.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, no. 1821.

⁵² Cf. Wiet, *loc. cit.*

(A.D. 1034/5).⁵³ Thereafter we meet with *خالصة*, *khālīṣah* ("sincere friend"), used by a Marwānid prince in Aleppo in 465 H. (A.D. 1072/3);⁵⁴ *حسام*, *husām* ("sword"), with reference to a Turkish amir in the employ of the Fāṭimid Caliph in Egypt at Esneh in 474 H. (A.D. 1081/2), the same inscription as that cited above as an example of the use of the Qur'ānic passage;⁵⁵ *يمين*, *yamīn* ("right arm"),⁵⁶ *ناصر*, *nāṣir* ("assistant"),⁵⁷ and *راضي*, *raḍī* ("favored one"),⁵⁸ in Seljuq inscriptions at Damascus of 475 H. (A.D. 1082/3). Many other such titles, compounded with *amīr al-mu'minīn*, make their appearance in the 6th century of the Hijrah, but these are too late to have any relevance here.⁵⁹

Of the historical material in the fragments under discussion there remains the third line of Byzantine Museum no. 313, which we believe to be related with the others. As stated above, we may have a common name derived from the stem *ḤMD* and the word *'amal*, "the work of," either in substantive or in verbal form. Such an inscription, containing the name of a subordinate person connected with the building and the name of the architect or chief mason, might well follow the principal formulary ending in *amīr al-mu'minīn*; but in view of the very obscure character of this fragment and our inability to decipher the upper lines, any attempt at further reconstruction at this time would be fruitless.

Before summing up, a few observations should be made about the palaeographical aspects of the fragments. The absence of a specific date and the almost complete lack of reliable written source material that can be brought to bear on the inscription as an aid in placing it in its proper historical context makes the dating of the epigraphical style on the basis of its physical appearance more than usually important. Here unfortunately we are on very uneven ground and are embarrassed to a degree which only those who are familiar with the aberrations of Kufic epigraphy can fully appreciate. There are no sure criteria for the accurate dating of Kufic characters. One can of course easily differentiate in date between a highly developed floral or interlaced Kufic of the 5th or 6th century of the Hijrah and the straightforward, un-

⁵³ *Répertoire*, Vol. 7, no. 2409. In historical literature *ṣafī* as well as *yamīn* ("right arm") appear even earlier: applied to Buyid princes in 381 and 392 H. Cf. Wiet, *op. cit.*, p. 49 and the references there.

⁵⁴ *Répertoire*, Vol. 7, no. 2699.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. 11, no. 2733 A (cf. Vol. 7, no. 2720). I have omitted *عبد أمير المؤمنين*, *ibid.*, Vol. 7, no. 2704, under the year 466 H., because this inscription is not preserved but only reported by a mediaeval historian.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. 7, nos. 2735, 2737.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. 7, nos. 2734, 2736, 2737.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. 7, no. 2737. Also used by Nizām al-Mulk at Khargird in Khorāsān about 485 H. (*ibid.*, Vol. 7, no. 2799).

⁵⁹ Cf. Elisséeff, *op. cit.*, pp. 192-3, and G. Wiet in *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale*, Vol. XXX, 1931, pp. 286-291.

adorned and primitive character of a 2nd century inscription. But between these extremes, especially in the 3rd-5th centuries, the development of ornamental Kufic is extremely irregular, and the problem of dating by style is one of infinite complexity. There is, needless to say, no single genealogy or line of development. There are almost as many Kufic alphabets as there were artisans who designed and engraved them. The controlling factors are numerous and diverse: the material, the nature of the inscription, the wealth or poverty of the builder or the patron, the ingenuity or imagination of the calligrapher, the geographical region or the local traditions of the workshop, etc. Simplicity is not necessarily a mark of antiquity, nor is an elaborate style necessarily later, in certain circumstances, than a plain one.⁶⁰ Given a ponderable body of material from a particular area with clues here and there to the chronology, whether relative or absolute, one can with fair confidence assign an approximate date to undated inscriptions attributable within the applicable area and period of time. But such is not the case here. These fragments are the only true Kufic inscriptions so far recorded in Greece or the Aegean.⁶¹

This is not the place to discuss the development of styles of Kufic in areas of the Islamic world which might be relevant to the Athens inscription. Such a discussion would lead us too far afield. We must content ourselves here with pointing out certain characteristics of the alphabet (Fig. 2)⁶² used by the artisan. It will be observed that while for the most part the alphabet is a very simple one, it is not without individuality and a certain sophistication. The vertical letters all have wedge-shaped terminations and a pleasing balance is achieved by juxtaposing tops sloping alternately to the right and to the left. There are very few foliate or floral elements: the upward-curling tails of the two *hā's* (in Pl. 49, c and d), the less elaborate curving heads of the *dhāl* and *jīm* (Pl. 49, d), the trefoil caps to the *mīm's* (in Pl. 49, a and c; note also Pl. 49, e), and the independent foliate scrolls descending from the band separating the lines of inscription (Pl. 49, a; and again also note Pl. 49, e).

A particularly noteworthy feature is the descending bow-shaped ligature between letters: six instances in Plate 49, a, three in Plate 49, d, and four in Plate 49, c. In one case this curved element is present even within a single letter: the *sīn* in Plate 49, a. This feature—bow-shaped joints descending below the line as opposed to a purely

⁶⁰ As a striking example of extremely simple Kufic of late date, see the alphabet of the epitaph of Ka'b, datable to the early 6th century H. (J. Sourdél-Thomine, *Les Monuments Ayyoubides de Damas*, Livraison IV, Paris, 1950, p. 205). In the 5th century there are numerous examples of very simple and of highly involved Kufic almost side by side: cf. S. Flury, *Islamische Schriftbänder Amida-Diarbekr*, Basel, 1920, pls. I-VII and pl. VIII.

⁶¹ Soteriou 1935 illustrates a very considerable number of imitation Kufic inscriptions and decorative elements in Greece, some of the 10th century, others of later date.

⁶² This alphabet is compiled from the three fragments illustrated in Plate 49, a, c, and d; Plate 49, e, which presents a few other characters, has been omitted because its relationship to the others has not been established.

rectilinear base-line—is perhaps the most significant characteristic that might aid us in arriving at an approximate *terminus a quo* for the palaeography. Ernst Herzfeld once made a study of this feature of Kufic inscriptions: ⁶⁸ in general his findings were

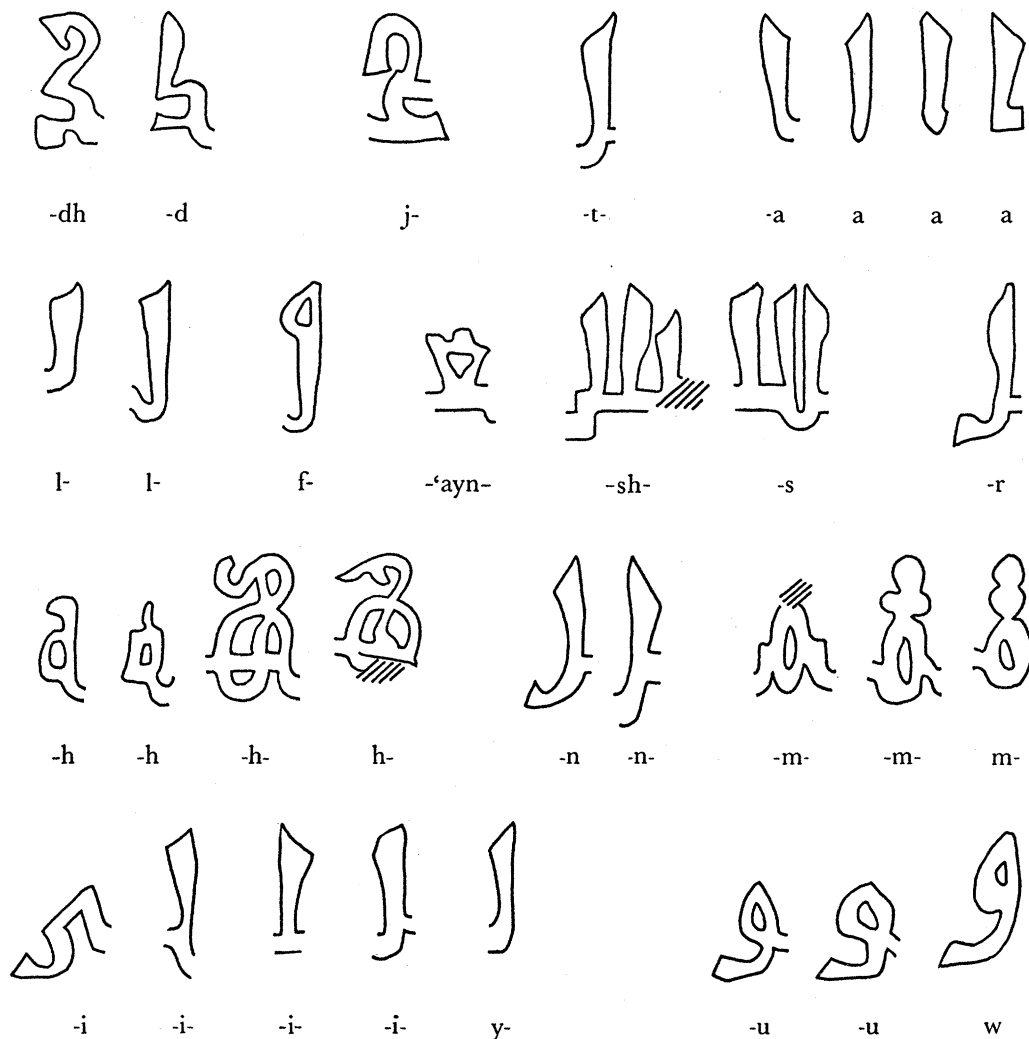


FIG. 2. Characteristics of the Alphabet of Agora I 3837, Byzantine Museum 315 and a Fragment found in the Asklepion in 1877.

that ligatures are universally rectilinear in the 3rd century H., that gradually in the late 4th century (beginning with the word Allāh) the curved form is introduced, and that it is common, although not always present, in the late 5th century. The question

⁶⁸ E. Herzfeld, "Mashhad 'Alī, ein Bau Zengi's II a. H. 589," in *Der Islam*, V, 1914, pp. 360-4.

should be re-examined, for Herzfeld by no means surveyed all the available material: for example, there are instances of bow-shaped ligatures on Egyptian tombstones at least as early as 350 H. (A.D. 961/2);⁶⁴ and toward the end of the 4th century the phenomenon is very common.⁶⁵ At Cordoba in 354 H. (A.D. 965) there are frequent occurrences.⁶⁶ It is true that the practice carries on through the 5th century and even into the 6th, but it is unlikely that an inscription of the later 5th century would not bear other traits such as more elaborate foliation, upward-curving terminals to final letters in the lower register, etc.

The *mīm* with trefoil head is a distinctive characteristic of our alphabet, but unfortunately not a restrictive one. A quite similarly ornamented *mīm* appears in an Egyptian title of property dated as early as 268 H. (A.D. 881/2);⁶⁷ but then again we find it also in an inscription at Ḥarrān, dated 451 H. (A.D. 1059).⁶⁸

It is evident, therefore, that any attempt to date our inscription within a limited number of years on palaeographical grounds would be unjustified without the benefit of some closely related material for comparative analysis. Meanwhile one might tentatively propose for the physical aspects of the epigraphy a span of years from roughly 350 H. to, at the very latest, 450 H. (*ca.* A.D. 961 to *ca.* A.D. 1058), not however wholly excluding the possibility that it might be earlier.

As it happens, no date could be more inconvenient than 350 H. as a *terminus a quo* if we are to express an opinion on the probable historical context of the inscription. For it was in March of the year A.D. 961 that Crete was recovered from the Arabs by Nikephoros Phokas. The conclusive Arab defeat on that island, after an occupation of approximately 140 years, radically altered the strategic situation throughout the Aegean and the whole eastern Mediterranean. Before that date Arab raiders and pirates based on Crete roamed almost at will northward as far as the Hellespont: scattered references in the Byzantine literature inform us of attacks and depredations, and sometimes perhaps of somewhat protracted occupations, in many localities—the western Peloponnesus, the Gulf of Corinth, Aetolia, Attica, the Gulf of Volo, Thessalonica, Mt. Athos, and the islands of Aegina, Naxos, Paros, Patmos, Samos and Lesbos.⁶⁹ In other words, before that date an actual Arab occupation of Athens

⁶⁴ G. Wiet, *Stèles Funéraires (Cat. Gén. du Musée Arabe du Caire)*, Vol. 5, Cairo, 1937, pls. XXXIII, XXXVI, etc.

⁶⁵ E. g., *ibid.*, Vol. 6, Cairo, 1939, pl. II, etc. Since writing these lines Dr. Richard Ettinghausen has, in another connection, drawn my attention to earlier instances of the bow-shaped ligature in media which I had not considered: e. g., on textiles, where it occurs as early as 283 H. (A.D. 896/7) (E. Kühnel and L. Bellinger, *Catalogue of Dated Tiraz Fabrics*, Washington, 1952, no. 73.366, p. 14, pl. VI); and on coins, as early as 282 H. (A.D. 895/6) (H. Lavoix, *Catalogue des monnaies musulmanes de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, Vol. I, Paris, 1887, no. 1047, pl. V).

⁶⁶ E. Lévi-Provençal, *Inscriptions Arabes d'Espagne*, Leiden-Paris, 1931, pl. III.

⁶⁷ *C.I.A., Egypte*, I, 1, no. 18 (*Répertoire*, Vol. 2, no. 696).

⁶⁸ D. S. Rice, "Mediaeval Ḥarrān," *Anatolian Studies*, II, 1952, pl. V.

⁶⁹ Full references to all these raids are conveniently brought together by Setton, *op. cit.*, pp. 312-314, 318.

is possible; after that date it is virtually out of the question. But both before and after 961 there could have been a "colony" of Moslem prisoners-of-war,⁷⁰ or even conceivably a settlement of traders.

Thus if the palaeographical and other internal evidence of the epigraphy were more positive, enabling us to date the inscription definitely before or after 350 H., we would be in a better position to express a clear-cut view as to the nature of the settlement. But neither the style nor the content of the inscription is sufficiently restrictive, and in both respects the evidence straddles a critical date. We must await, or find, more evidence, either locally or in the surrounding area. The first place to look is in Athens, around the Acropolis itself; one or two more small fragments of our inscription would solve many problems. Beyond the Greek mainland the arrow points toward Crete. There, if anywhere, we should find the epigraphical evidence that might provide at least the palaeographical link with known and datable forms of Kufic epigraphy. No Arab inscription from Crete has ever been recorded, although we have recently learned that the Amirs of Crete struck coins in gold and copper,⁷¹ and also perhaps in silver;⁷² it would be strange indeed if they left no epigraphical remains.

Meanwhile we can say this much: there was a mosque in Athens⁷³ bearing an Arabic inscription (both Qur'ānic and historical) in Kufic characters on Hymettian marble, cut from an ancient column drum; the builder, whether captor or captive, considered himself to be subject to, or at least in some protocolary or honorary relationship with, the ruling Caliph (which one is another question); and all the epigraphical evidence taken together suggests a date in the second half of the 10th century or the first half of the 11th. These are not daring pronouncements, but at least they provide a target for historians and archaeologists concerned with the mediaeval history of Athens.

GEORGE C. MILES

AMERICAN NUMISMATIC SOCIETY

⁷⁰ Cf. Setton, p. 319. The prisoners could have come not only from Crete but from the southeastern frontier of Anatolia. But as prisoners would the Athenian Arabs have been permitted to mention the name of the Caliph in their mosque inscription? Would the Greeks have known whether they did or not?

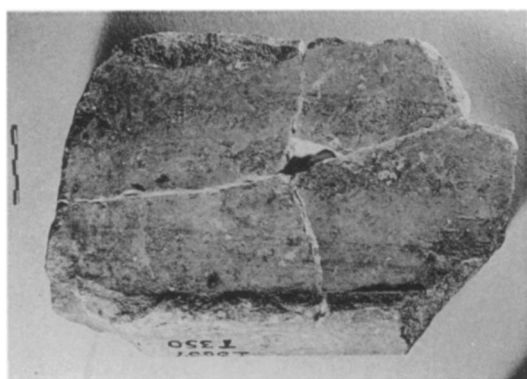
⁷¹ Cf. J. Walker, "The Coins of the Amīrs of Crete," *Numismatic Chronicle*, 1953, pp. 125-130; and G. C. Miles, "A Recent Find of Coins of the Amirs of Crete," *Κρητικά Χρονικά*, 1955, pp. 149-151. Since this article was written, I have reexamined a copper coin (*fals*) found in the Agora excavations (NN 4/27/39 #128), which in 1954 I was able only to attribute in a general way to the 8th or 9th century. Thanks to a more intimate knowledge of the coins struck by the Arabs in Crete gained during an archaeological reconnaissance of the island in April 1956, I am now able definitely to assign this coin to the Amirs of Crete.

⁷² See a forthcoming article by Ulla S. Welin in the *Numismatic Chronicle*.

⁷³ Even here one should make a reservation: might the mosque have been elsewhere—in Aegina for instance, where Byzantine sources record the presence of Arabs at one time—and the inscribed stone transported to Athens at a later date?



a. Agora I 3837



b. Agora I 3837, back



c. Byzantine Museum 315



d. Fragment found in Asklepieion in 1877



e. Byzantine Museum 313