

An Archaeological-Historical Study for Some Arabic Inscriptions from Cyprus

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to investigate a collection of inscriptions that date back to the period of Arab presence in Cyprus. The inscriptions are primarily found in the city of Nea Paphos, with one inscription discovered in the city of Kourion. This study aims to provide an explanation and analysis of the function and technical characteristics of these inscriptions, focusing on the form and content of the writings they contain. Additionally, this study aims to explore the historical context of the inscriptions by examining historical writings and comparing them with similar examples.

The first axis of this study is descriptive, which involves providing a detailed account of the inscriptions. This includes documenting their physical characteristics, such as their size, material, and any unique features. The content of the inscriptions will also be transcribed and translated, with attention given to the language(s) used and any linguistic peculiarities. The inscriptions' placement within the city or specific archaeological contexts will also be analyzed.

The second axis of this study is analytical, focusing on the interpretation and significance of the inscriptions. This involves examining the historical and cultural context of the Arab presence in Cyprus and how it relates to the content of the inscriptions. By comparing the inscriptions with other known examples from the same period or region, the paper aims to shed light on their potential function and purpose. This analysis may involve studying the religious, political, or social implications of the inscriptions, as well as any connections to broader historical events or trends.

To enhance the understanding of the inscriptions, this study will also draw upon historical writings from the relevant period. These sources may provide additional insights into the Arab presence in Cyprus and help contextualize the significance of the inscriptions. By considering both the descriptive and analytical aspects, the study aims to contribute to the scholarly understanding of this particular group of inscriptions and their historical importance in the broader context of Arab presence in Cyprus.

Keywords: Cyprus, Arabic Inscriptions, Basilica, Mu'āwiyah bin Abī Sufyān, 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān, Hishām ibn 'Abd al-Malik.

Introduction

The Arabs tried to reach maritime supremacy during the first half of the 7th century with Cyprus being one of their primary objectives.¹ Mu'āwiyah led the first raid of 649, which resulted, in the capture of the capital Salamis, but their advance to other island cities did not materialized. In 653, the second raid occurred, resulting in the occupation of the whole of Cyprus. According to Arab sources, an Arab garrison of 12,000 men was stationed at Nea Paphos, and a mosque was built, while according to another source, Arab population was transferred there from Baalbek, Syria.² Nea Paphos is a coastal town in southwest Cyprus and was the center of Ptolemaic and Roman administration on the island until the disastrous earthquakes of the 4th century AD.³

¹ We would like to thank the Director of the Cyprus Department of Antiquities for the permission given to us to take photos of the inscriptions.

Selected bibliography for the period: Hill, G., *A History of Cyprus*, tome 1, Cambridge 1949, 257-329; Jenkins, R. J. H., "Cyprus between Byzantium and Islam, AD 688-965," *Studies presented to D. M. Robinson II*, Washington University St. Louis, 1953, 1005-1014; Browning, R., "Byzantium and Islam in Cyprus in the Early Middle Ages," *Επετηρίς του Κέντρου Επιστημονικών Ερευνών* 9 (1977-1979); Grégoire, H., "Saint Demetrianos, évêque de Chytri (île de Chypre)," *BZ* 16 (1907), 204-240; Chrysos, E., "Cyprus in early Byzantine times," in A. A. M. Bryer & G. S. Georgallides (eds.), *The Sweet Land of Cyprus (Papers Given at the Twenty-Fifth Jubilee Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, Birmingham, March 1991), Nicosia (The University of Birmingham Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman and Modern Greek Studies and Cyprus Research Centre, Nicosia) 1993, 3-14; Kyrris, C. P., "Byzantium, Cyprus and the Arabs, from the mid-7th to the early 8th century," *Επετηρίς Εταιρείας Βυζαντινών Σπουδών* 49 (1994-1998), 185-236. Beihammer, A., "Audiatur et altera pars". Η Βυζαντινο-Αραβική συγκυριαρχία στην Κύπρο υπό το πρίσμα των Αραβικών πηγών," (Αφιέρωμα εις Θεόδωρον Παπαδόπουλλον) *Κυπριακαί Σπουδαί* 64-65, 2000-2001, 157-176; Foulías, A., *Αρχιτεκτονική και μνημειακή ζωγραφική στην Κύπρο κατά την περίοδο των αραβικών επιδρομών (649-965)*, Ph.D diss., National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens 2011; Zavagno, L., *Cyprus between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (ca. 600-800) An Island in Transition*, Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Studies, General Editions, New York: Routledge 2017.

² Hitti, Ph. K. (trans.), *The Origins of the Islamic State*, being a translation of *Kitāb Futūh al-Buldān*, by Abu al-Abbas Ahmed ibn Jabir al-Baladhuri, New York 1916, 236; Kyrris, C., "Byzantium, Cyprus and the Arabs from the mid-7th to the early 8th century," *Επετηρίς Εταιρείας Βυζαντινών Σπουδών* 49 (1994-1998), 190; Christides, *The Image of Cyprus*, 125; Chrysos, E., "Το Βυζαντινό πρόσωπο της Κύπρου," in I. Theocharides (ed.), *Κύπρος το πολιτιστικό της πρόσωπο δια μέσου των αιώνων*, Conference Proceedings, Nicosia 19-21 April 2001, Nicosia 2003, 142-150, esp. 145-146.

³ Maier, F. G., and Karageorghis, V., *Paphos History and Archaeology*, A. G. Leventis Foundation, Nicosia 1984, 226-297; Nikolaou, K., "The Topography of Nea Paphos," *Mélanges offerts à Kazimierz Michalowski*, Warszawa, 1966, 561-600; Papageorgiou, A., "Cities and Countryside at the End of Antiquity and the Beginning of the Middle Ages in Cyprus," in A. A. M. Bryer, G. S. Georgallides (eds.), *The Sweet Land of Cyprus, (Papers*

The garrison and settlers departed around 681 AD under Caliph Yazīd (680-683 AD).⁴ Justinian II (668-711 and 705-711 AD) and ‘Abd al-Malik (685-705 AD) concluded an agreement in 688. The agreement entailed the sharing of the taxes from various regions and the neutrality status of the ports of Cyprus with its validity lasting until 965 AD. Despite the treaty's provisions of 688, Cyprus seems to have remained administratively a part of the Byzantine Empire, as can be deduced from archaeological data, especially lead seals and coins.⁵

Evidence of Arab presence on the island is provided by 16 inscriptions found on the Island, dating from the 7th to the 8th centuries.⁶

These inscriptions can be divided into three groups: The first: Chrysopolitissa Basilica, with 7 inscriptions. The second: Basilica of Limeniotissa, with 8 inscriptions. And the third: Curium coastal Basilica with one inscription.

In this study, an attempt will be made to read all the inscriptions that have been found in Cyprus and especially those of Nea Paphos, which constitute the overwhelming majority. Only a few of the inscriptions have been read until now. An attempt is being made to read all the anecdotal inscriptions and those already published by other researchers in the hope of adding new historical or social data.

1. The Descriptive Study

The first architectural phase of the Chrysopolitissa Basilica (plate 1) was built towards the end of the 4th century and was one of the largest (55 m × 49 m) and richest Basilicas in Cyprus.⁷ After 653 AD, and the

*Given at the Twenty-Fifth Jubilee Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Birmingham, March 1991, The University of Birmingham Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman and Modern Greek Studies and Cyprus Research Centre Nicosia, Nicosia 1993, 27-51, esp. 29-30, 35-36; Raptou, E., “La périphérie de Nea Paphos aux périodes hellénistique et romaine,” C. Balandier (ed.), *Nea Paphos: Fondation et développement urbanistique d’une ville chypriote de l’antiquité à nos jours. Études archéologiques, historiques et patrimoniales*, Ausonius Éditions – Mémoires 43, Bordeaux 2016, 47-65 ; Michaelides, D., *Ελληνιστική και Ρωμαϊκή Πάφος*, A. Foulis, & Chr. Chatzichristodoulou, *Εκκλησιαστικά μνημεία της Νέας Πάφου*, Holy Bishopric of Paphos, Nicosia 2022, 15-39.*

⁴ Christides, *The Image of Cyprus*, 124-125. Beihammer, “Audiatur et altera pars,” 158-159.

⁵ Chrysos, E., “Το Βυζαντινό πρόσωπο της Κύπρου,” esp. 145-149; Metcalf, D.M., “Byzantine and Islamic coins and the topography of Nea Paphos,” in D. Michaelides (ed.), *Epigraphy, Numismatics, Prosopography and History of Ancient Cyprus. Papers in Honour of Ino Nicolaou*, Åströms förlag, Uppsala 2013, 69-75; Metcalf, *Byzantine Cyprus, 491-1191*, 478-486.

⁶ Christides, *The Image of Cyprus*, 53-58. Cf. Metcalf, D. M., *Byzantine Cyprus, 491-1191*, (Cyprus Research Center, Texts and Studies in the History of Cyprus LXII), Nicosia 2009, 425-441.

⁷ Papageorghiou, A., “The Early Christian Architecture of Cyprus,” *XV^e Congrès international d’études byzantines, Rapports et Co-Rapports, V. Chypre dans le monde byzantine*, 4. L’art paléochrétien de Chypre, Athènes 1976, 6-10; Papageorghiou, A.,

second Arab raid against Cyprus, Paphos was captured and, according to historical sources, a garrison and settlers from Baalbeck were installed there. The area of the Basilica seems to have been used by them, perhaps as a mosque. Arabic inscriptions were found in various parts of the Basilica, but mainly on its granite columns. The inscriptions of Chrysopolitissa remain unpublished until now.



(Pl. 1: Paphos, South east view of the Basilica and Church of Chrysopolitissa)

Most of the inscriptions are to be found on the central aisle southern colonnade (plate 2). The columns are numbered from the easternmost granite column. Some of the columns were fallen down and restored to their previous position during the excavations by the late Athanasios Papageorghiou from 1972-1990.

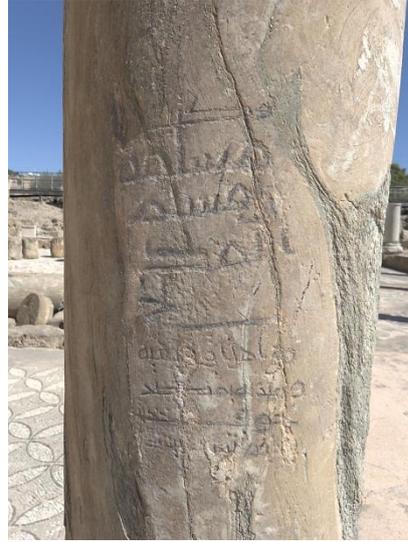


(Pl. 2: Paphos, Panaghia Chrysopolitissa, General view of the central aisle southern colonnade)

“Cities and Countryside at the End of Antiquity and the Beginning of the Middle Ages in Cyprus,” A. A. M. Bryer & G. S Georgallides (eds.), *The Sweet Land of Cyprus, (Papers Given at the Twenty-Fifth Jubilee Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Birmingham, March 1991, The University of Birmingham Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman and Modern Greek Studies and Cyprus Research Centre Nicosia, Nicosia 1993, 27-51, esp. 35-36; Papageorghiou, A., “Η Κύπρος κατά τους βυζαντινούς χρόνους,”* in G. Tenekidis & G. Kranidiotis (eds.), *Κύπρος, Ιστορία, προβλήματα και αγώνες του λαού της*, Athens 20002, 33-78, esp. 42-48; Foulis, A. & Chatzichristodoulou, Chr., *Εκκλησιαστικά μνημεία της Νέας Πάφου*, Holy Bishopric of Paphos, Nicosia 2022, 62-80.

Chrysopolitissa inscription No 1 is found engraved on the third column from the east, of the central aisle southern colonnade (plate 3). The writing is Kufic and is located at a distance of 1.58 m from the ground. The size of the entire inscription is 0.28 m wide and 0.52 m high. The size of the letters is from 3 cm – 8 cm.

(Pl. 3: inscr. nr. 1)



line	The English/Arabic pronunciation	English Translation	Arabic
1	kataba	Wrote	كَتَبَ
2	Maslamah	Maslamah	مَسْلَمَةَ
3	bin Muslim	bin Muslim	بِنِ مُسْلِمٍ
4	al-Madu	Al-Mad-	الْمَدَّ-
5	nī	ny (al-Madany)	نِي
6	min 'ahl Ifrīqiyyah	from the people of Ifrīqiyyah	مِنَ أَهْلِ إِفْرِيقِيَّةِ
7	wa bi-Misr	and in Egypt	وَ..... بِمِصْرَ
8	.....	.....	.....
9	khams wa-sitīyn	sixty five	خَمْسَ وَسِتِّينَ

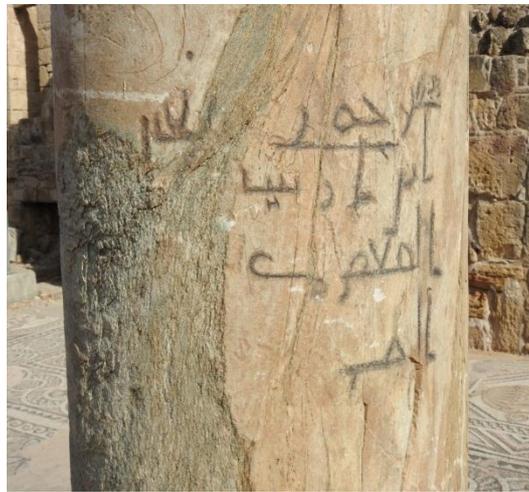
The identification in the inscription of the date 65 AH / 684 AD is an important element. This date falls within the period when the garrison, as well as the Arab settlers, were still in Paphos, four years before the conclusion of the treaty of 688 AD.

Chrysopolitissa inscription No 2 is Kufic and is located on the eastern face of the third granite column from the left, on the central aisle southern colonnade and at a distance of 0.62 m from the floor (plate 4).

The size of the entire inscription is 0.34 m wide and 0.32 m high. The size of the letters is from 3 cm to 9 cm. The inscription reads:

line	The English/Arabic pronunciation	English Translation	Arabic
1	arḥam rabiyy	My God have mercy on...	ارحَم رَبِّي...
2	bin Arashad ...	bin Arshad...	بن أرشد...
3	al-Mu‘am..	al-Mu‘am..	المُعَم..
4	amir....	Amīr....	أمير....

The fifth column of the central aisle southern colonnade is rich in engravings since at least three inscriptions can be found on it.



(Pl. 4: Chrysopolitissa, inscr. nr 2. LORD HAVE MERCY)

Chrysopolitissa inscription No 3 is located on the west side of the fifth granite pillar at a distance from the ground 1, 55 m (plate 5).

line	The English/Arabic pronunciation	English Translation	Arabic
1	ʿAsad	ʿAsd	أَسَدُ
2	abū Salmān	Abū Salmān	أَبُو سَلْمَانَ
3	Ḥamd	Ḥamad	حَمْدُ

(Pl. 5: Chrysopolitissa, Inscr. nr 3.
ʿAsd Abū Salmān Ḥamd)



Chrysolitissa inscription No 4 is located on the west side on the fifth column of the central aisle southern colonnade at a distance of 4.10 m from the ground (plate 6). The size of the letters is about 8 cm and the height of the inscription is about 0.30 m.

line	The English/Arabic pronunciation	English Translation	Arabic
1	Bism	In the name of	بسم
2	Hishām bin	Hishām bin	هشام بن
3	‘Abd al-Malik	‘Abd al-Malik	الملك

This name corresponds to the tenth Umayyad caliph Hishām ibn ‘Abd al-Malik, who ruled the Caliphate from 105-125AH / 724 - 743 AD. It is known that Hishām bin ‘Abd al-Malik bin Marwān raided Cyprus in the year 108 AH/706 AD⁸.



(Pl. 6: Chrysolitissa, inscr. nr 4.
Bism in the name of Hishām bin
‘Abdul Malik)

On the same column, **Chrysolitissa inscription No 5** on the same side (plate 7), a little below the previous one at a distance of 3.20 m from the ground, there is a simple mention of the name:

line	The English/Arabic pronunciation	English Translation	Arabic
1	...sayid	...Sayd	... سيد
2	...	...	...
3	...	...	...
4	..	..	..

⁸ Al-Suraifī, Muhammad Nima Tāher, “The Island of Cyprus and its impact on the Islamic conquests and the Crusades,” *Journal of the Faculty of Jurisprudence*, Issue 28, University of Kufa, 2018, 246 (in Arabic).

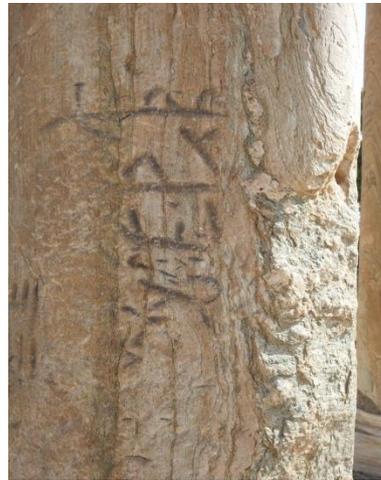
(Pl. 7: Chrysopolitissa, inscr. nr 5.
Sayd)



The Chrysopolitissa inscription No 6 is on the fifth column again and from a distance from the floor of 1,95 m 0,40 m height and 0,30 width (plate 8). The size of the letters are from 5-7 cm.

line	The English/Arabic pronunciation	English Translation	Arabic
1	Muhammad Y P E	Muhammad Y P E	Y P محمد E

(Pl. 8: Chrysopolitissa, inscr. nr
6. Muhammad)



The Kufic **Chrysopolitissa inscription No 7** is on a granite fragment on the ground (plate 9), probably a column. The inscription reads:

line	The English/Arabic pronunciation	English Translation	Arabic
1	'Anīs	'Anīs	أنيس
2	'Abdullāh (or al-Malik)	'Abdullāh (or al-Malik)	عبد الله (أو الملك)

(Pl. 9: Chrysopolitissa,
inscr. nr 7 'Anis
'Abdullāh or al-Malik



LIMENIOTISSA

The Basilica of Limeniotissa (plate 10) is located in the area of the port of Nea Pafos, hence its name. The Basilica was built in the 5th century and was decorated with mosaics, marble inlays and marble architectural members. The Basilica was probably destroyed in 653 and with the establishment of the Arab garrison and settlers it seems that it was used as a residential area as well as iron processing workshops.⁹

((Pl. 10: Limeniotissa
Basilica from North East
(photo rev. Th. Costi)



Limeniotissa inscription No 1¹⁰:

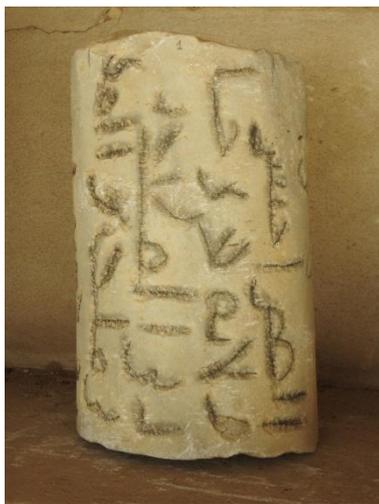
line	The English/Arabic pronunciation	English Translation	Arabic
1	Allāhuma 'aḥsen	O Allāh, make better	اللَّهُمَّ أَحْسِن
2	wilāyat Ḥajar bin Ḥassā-	the reign (<i>welāyat</i>) of	ولاية حَجْر بن

⁹ Papageorgiou, A., *Ιερά Μητρόπολις Πάφου, Ιστορία και Τέχνη*, Nicosia 1996, 35-36; Foulis, A., & Chatzichristodoulou, Chr., *Εκκλησιαστικά μνημεία της Νέας Πάφου*, Holy Bishopric of Paphos, Nicosia 2022, 131-139; Megaw, A. H. S., “Betwixt Greeks and Saracens,” V. Karageorghis (ed.), *Acts of the International Archaeological Symposium, Cyprus Between the Orient and the Occident*, Nicosia 8-14 September 1985, 505-519, esp. 513-515.

¹⁰ Aisha S. Abul-Jadayel, Ibrahim Fadel, and Muhammad 'Uthman, “Five Arabic inscriptions from Paphos,” 119.

		Ḥajar son of Ḥassā-	حسا-
3	n bin al-Mundher	n son of Mundher	ن بن المنذر
4	bin Malik bin al-Mundh..	son of Malik son of al-Mundh[er]	بن ملك بن المنذر
5	bin Ḥasnī bin	son of Hasnī son of	بن حَسْنِي بن
6	‘Abdullāh	‘Abdullāh	عبد الله
7	bin Ḥajar bin	son of Ḥajar son of	بن حَجْر بن
8	Ḥassān bin	Ḥassān son of	حسان بن
9	Khalīl bin al-Mundh..	Khalīl son of al-Mundh[er]	خليل بن منذ
10	r Tha‘labah	r Tha‘labah	ر ثعلبة
11	bin...	son of...	بن...

The inscription is found on a fragmentary marble column (inv. No. MP. 3814) 0.28 m high and 0.19 m in diameter (plate 11). The letters are 4-5 cm in size.

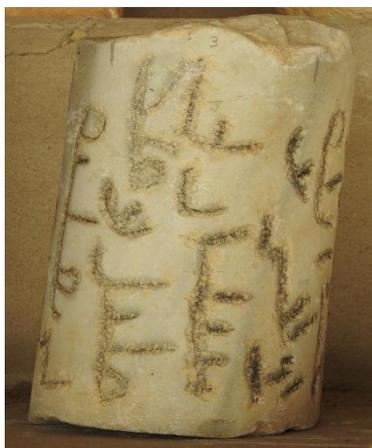


Side nr 1 (l. 1-4)

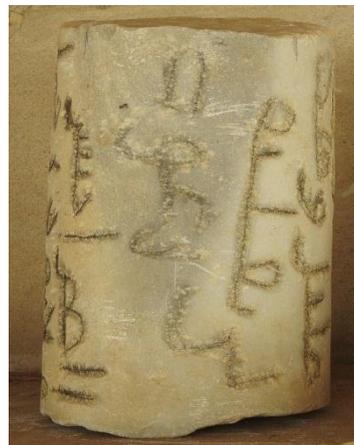


Side nr 2 (l. 4-7)

(Pl. 11:
Limeniotissa, insc
nr 1. Allāhuma
ahsen)



Side nr 3, l. 7-10



Side nr 4 (l. 9-11, 1)

Limeniotissa inscription No 2¹¹

The inscription is today lost (plate 12).

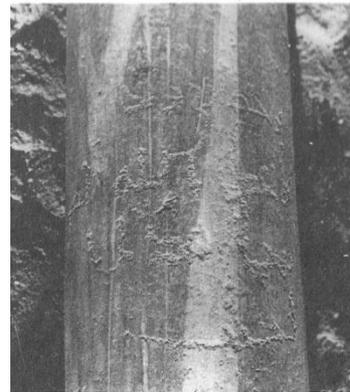
line	The English/Arabic pronunciation	English Translation	Arabic
1	arḥam rabiyy	My God have mercy on	ارْحَمْ رَبِّي
2	Sulaymān	Soliman	سُلَيْمَانَ
3	min 'ahl Ḥims	from the people of Ḥoms (Emesa)	من أهل حمص



(Pl. 12: Limeniotissa, inscr. nr 2, (Photo, Christides, 118. Soliman)

Limeniotissa inscription No 3:

This inscription which was engraved on a marble pillar is now lost (plate 13). From previous reading by Abul-Jadayel, Fadel and 'Uthman we code: "This inscription is not clear. It could be also a funeral prayer because the word 'Allah' is repeated. It is very important that the date is clearly written: iḥdā sana wa-mi'ah 101 AH (719 AD).¹²



(Pl. 13: Limeniotissa, inscr. 3
(Photo, Christides, 120)

¹¹ Cf. Aisha S. Abul-Jadayel, Ibrahim Fadel, and Muhammad 'Uthman, "Five Arabic inscriptions from Paphos," 118. Photo was reproduced from the same publication.

¹² Aisha S. Abul-Jadayel, Ibrahim Fadel, and Muhammad 'Uthman, "Five Arabic inscriptions from Paphos," 120.

Limeniotissa inscription No 4:

line	The English/Arabic pronunciation	English Translation	Arabic
1	raḥīma Allāh	God bless	رَحِمَ اللهُ
2	Al-Mismā..	Al-Mismā..	المسما..
3	bin ‘Āmer	son of ‘Āmer	بن عَامر
4	al-Mad-	al-Mad-	المد-
5	nī (al-Madnī)	ne (al-Madanī)	ني (المَدَنِي)

The inscription is 0.45 m high and 0.28 m wide (plate 14). The size of the letters is 8-10 cm. The distance from the base of the column is 1.20 m. while the high of the whole column is 1.93 m. In Christides' publication inscription 1 and 2 are recorded as separate and with a different reading. They actually belong to the same inscription.¹³



(Pl. 14: Limeniotissa, inscr. 4,
Al-mamdani)

¹³ Aisha S. Abul-Jadayel, Ibrahim Fadel, and Muhammad ‘Uthman, “Five Arabic inscriptions from Paphos,” 117.

Limeniotissa inscription No 5A

In 1950, the former director of the department of antiquities of Cyprus A. H. S. Megaw published an Arabic inscription found in Kato Paphos.¹⁴ According to the inventory of the Archaeological Museum of Paphos District, it was found in the early Christian Basilica of Limeniotissa. Two more unpublished inscriptions can be found on the same marble column (plate 15). It is clear that this column was used as a tombstone in a burial or cemetery for several people.

The inscription (Lim. 5A) is reproduced here after correcting the reading of the name:

line	The English/Arabic pronunciation	English Translation	Arabic
1	Allāhuma aghfir	God forgive	اللهم اغفر
2	li-‘Abd al-Raḥmān bin	for ‘Abd al-Raḥmān son of	لعبد الرحمن بن
3	Mutraḥ al-Shaybānī	Mutraḥ al-Shaybānī	مطرح الشيباني
4	min ’ahl Misr	one of the people of Egypt	من أهل مصر
5	katab fī al-Muḥrram sanat	written in al-Muḥrram in year	كتب في المحرم سنة
6	arba‘ wa-sitiyn wa-mā’ah	164	أربع وستين ومائة

The inscription is 0.23 m high and 0.20 m wide. The size of the letters is 3-4 cm.

Limeniotissa inscription No 5B

Another inscription (Lim. 5B), which is in the middle of the column (plate 15) we can read the following:

line	The English/Arabic pronunciation	English Translation	Arabic
1	.....		.....
2	raḥīm arḥam	Merciful have mercy on	رَحِيمٌ ارْحَم
3	‘abduk ‘Omar bin	your servant ‘Omar son of	عَبْدُكَ عُمَرُ بْنُ
4	al-Walīd, ’Amīn, rabi	Al-Walīd, Amen, Oh Lord of	الوَلِيدِ أَمِينَ رَبِّ
5	al-‘ālamyn	the worlds	الْعَالَمِينَ

¹⁴ Megaw, A. H. S., “A Muslim tombstone from Paphos,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1950), pl. IX, 108-109.

Limeniotissa inscription No 5C

The one at the top (Lim. 5C) of the column is illegible (plate 15) and cannot be restored. The inscription is 0.23 m high and 0.19 m wide. The size of the letters is 3-4 cm.

(Pl. 15: Limeniotissa, inscr. nr 5a, 5b, & 5c.)



Limeniotissa inscription No 6

The Limeniotissa No 6 inscription is illegible (plate 16). The column today is lost.

Curium coastal Basilica, inscription

This three-aisled coastal Basilica of Curium (plate 17) seems to have been built or drastically repaired in the 6th century.¹⁵ From the

¹⁵ Christou, D., *Ανασκαφές Κουρίου 1975-1998*, Department of Antiquities, tome 2, 237-310, Nicosia 2013; Christou, D., *Kourion, its Monuments and Local Museum*,

archaeological findings it seems to have been destroyed by fire in between 650-654. It was repaired again and finally destroyed in the 8th century by a strong earthquake and tidal wave. On the fifth column of the northern colonnade is an inscribed Arabic inscription (plate 18),¹⁶ which stands 1.50 m from the floor, is 0.21 m high, 0.20 m wide, and its letters range in size from 3-5 cm.

line	The English/Arabic pronunciation	English Translation	Arabic
1	arḥam rabiḥ	My God have mercy on	ارْحَم رَبِي
2	‘Abd Allāh	‘Abdullāh	عَبْدُ اللَّهِ
3	bin a	son of ....a	بن ... ا
4	l-Shu‘aybī	l-Shu‘aybī	لشعبيي



(Pl. 16: Limeniotissa, inscr. nr 6. Illegible)

(Pl. 17: Curium Basilica from North West)

(Pl. 18: Curium Basilica inscription)



Nicosia 1996, 74-76; Megaw, A. H. S., *Kourion, Excavations in the Episcopal Precinct*, (Dumbarton Oaks Research and Collection), Washington D.C. 2007, 175, footnote 91.

¹⁶ Pralong, A., “La sculpture de la basilique de la plage de kourion,” in D. Christou, *Ανασκαφές Κορυπίου 1975-1998*, tome 2, Department of Antiquities, Nicosia 2013, Appendix B, 373-374.

2. Analytic Study

The previous inscriptions provide valuable information, including the names of Arab Muslims who lived in Cyprus. Historical sources have mentioned the participation of numerous companions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in the invasion of Cyprus. Notable among them were Abū Ayyūb Khālīd bin Zaid al-Ansārī, Abū Dardā', Abū Dhar al-Ghaffārī, 'Ubādah bin al-Sāmit and his wife, 'Umm Ḥarām bint Malḥan al-Ansāriyyah, Fadālah bin 'Ubaid al-Ansārī, 'Omar bin Sa'd bin 'Abdul-Ansārī, Wathālah bin al-Asqa' al-Kinānī, 'Ubaid Allāh bin Bishr al-Maznī, Shaddād bin 'Aws bin Thābit, al-Miqdād, Ka'b al-Ḥabr bin Manea', Jubair bin Nāfir al-Ḥadramī, and 'Urwah bin Thābit¹⁷.

The inscriptions that this paper deals with also reveal additional names, such as Maslamah bin Muslim al-Madanī, 'Asad bin Salmān Abū Ḥamad, 'Anīs bin 'Abdullāh, Ḥajar bin Ḥassan bin al-Mundher bin Malik bin al-Mundher, Suleiman from the people of Ḥoms, bin 'Āmer al-Madanī, 'Abd al-Raḥmān Muṭraḥ al-Shaybānī from Egypt, 'Omar bin al-Walīd, and 'Abdullāh bin al-Shu'aybī.

These names and accompanying texts indicate their regional origins and the countries from which they came to Cyprus. For example, one of the inscriptions mentions Ḥoms (Limeniotissa inscr. No. 2), which is consistent with historical sources stating that Mu'āwiyah bin Abī Sufyān urged Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb to approve the conquest of Cyprus due to its proximity to the Levant and Islamic conquests¹⁸, so that he

¹⁷ Al-Baladhurī (Abū al-'Abbās Ahmed bin Yahya bin Jābir d. 279 AH / 892 AD), *Futūh al-Buldān*, ed. by 'Abdullah 'Anīs al-Tabbaa', Beirut: Al-Ma'ārif Foundation, 1987, 209, 210; Al-Tabarī (Abū Ja'afar Muhammad bin Jarīr, d. 310 AH / 922 AD), *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa-l-Mulūk*, ed. by Muhammad Abū al-Fadl Ibrāhīm, vol. 4, Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif 1967, 258; Ibn al-Athīr ('Izz al-Dīn Abū al-Hassān Alī ibn Abī al-Karam Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Karīm ibn 'Abd al-Wāhed al-Shaibānī al-Jazrī (d. 630 AH / 1232 AD), *Al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, ed. by Abū al-Fidā' 'Abdullāh al-Qādī, vol. 2, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah 1987, 48; Ashour, Saeed, *Cyprus and the Crusades*, 2nd ed., Cairo: The Egyptian General Book Organization, History of the Egyptians Series, 210, 2002, 6 (in Arabic); Badr Abd el-'Azīz Badr, *Islamic Architecture of Cyprus*, PH.D, Faculty of Archaeology, Cairo University, 2007, 27 (in Arabic); Al-Suraiḥī, "The Island of Cyprus," 244.

Regarding Al-Harawī's report of a tombstone that he saw in Cyprus naming 'Urwah ibn Thābit, it is associated by scholars with the tomb of 'Umm Ḥarām see, Sourdell-Thomine, J., Al-Harawī (d. 611/1215), *Guide des lieux de pèlerinage*, Damascus 1957 Christides, *The Image of Cyprus*, 61-63 and recently Foulias, A., "The beginnings of the monastery," in K. Demetriades (ed.), *The Holy monastery of Apostolos Andreas in Karpasia*, Nicosia 2022, 72-109, esp. 100-106.

¹⁸ Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. 2, 488; Al-'Adawī, Ibrāhīm, *The Umayyads and the Byzantines, the Mediterranean is an Islamic Lake*, Cairo: Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop, 1953, 74 (in Arabic); Ashour, *Cyprus and the Crusades*, 6; Badr, *Islamic Architecture of Cyprus*, 25 (in Arabic).

once said to him: "...people of A village from the villages of Homs hear the barking of their dogs and the cry of their chickens..."¹⁹.

It was also proven that Mu'āwiyah transported groups from Baalbek, Ḥomṣ, and Antioch in the year 42 AH / 662 AD to Tyre and²⁰, from where he launched campaigns to invade Cyprus. However, Prof. Chrysos has recently questioned the accuracy of this report²¹.

As for Egypt, it is mentioned twice in the inscriptions (Chrysopolitissa inscription No. 1 & Limeniotissa No 5A). Since the Muslim conquest of Egypt, the Muslims relied on its industry and maritime trade. Coptic workers of the shipyards of Alexandria and the House of Industry of Jazīrat al-Rawḍah, as well as the sailors from among many Copts, participated actively in the first Muslim naval battles that took place in the Mediterranean against Byzantium,²² and they also participated with the army of 'Abdullāh bin Sa'd bin Abī Sarḥ in the battle of "Sbeitla" that took place in the year 28 AH / 648 AD²³.

It is also known that Egypt participated in the campaign of Mu'āwiyah bin Abī Sufyān in the year 28 AH / 648 AD with a number of Coptic sailors of Alexandrians under the leadership of 'Abdullāh bin Sa'd bin Abī Sarḥ,²⁴ and he took over the supervision of managing the command boat of Mu'āwiyah bin Abī Sufyān and his family and his son, the Coptic navigator Talia²⁵.

The inscription Chrysopolitissa No. 1 mentions Ifrīqiyyah, which aligns with Mu'awiyah's naval policy and encouragement of migration to coastal areas. The inscription suggests that people were attracted to these

¹⁹ Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kamil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. 2, 48; Al-Tabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa-l-Mulūk*, vol. 4, 258, 259; Ibn A'tham al-Kūfī (Abi Muhammad Ahmad d. 314 AH / 926 CE), *Kitāb al-Futūh*, ed. by Alī Shiri, Part 1, Cairo: Dār al-Aḍwaa', 1991, 264, 265, footnote 1; Al-'Adawy, *The Umayyads and the Byzantines*, 74; Ashour, *Cyprus and the Crusades*, 5; Badr, *Islamic Architecture of Cyprus*, 27.

²⁰ Badr, *Islamic Architecture of Cyprus*, 31; Al-Suraifī, "The Island of Cyprus," 245; Al-Sulaimanī, Al-Sharīf Yahya bin Ḥamzah al-Waznah, "The Army and Navy in the Umayyad Era," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, College of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 42, Beirut 2023, 79.

²¹ Chrysos, "Το Βυζαντινό πρόσωπο της Κύπρου," 145-146.

²² About the role of the Copts in the early Islamic-naval conquests see, Muhammad, Tarek M., "The Role of the Copts in the Islamic Navigation in the 7th-8th Centuries: the Papyrological Evidence." *Journal of Coptic Studies*, 10 (Louvain 2008), 1-32.

²³ Al-'Adawy, *The Umayyads and the Byzantines*, 78-80; Ahmed, Ahmed Ramaḍan, *History of the Art of Naval Combat in the Mediterranean: the Middle Ages*, Archaeological and Historical Culture Series, Project 100 Books, Issue 7, Cairo: Egyptian Antiquities Authority Press, n.d., 8 (in Arabic).

Badr, *Islamic Architecture of Cyprus*, 31; Al-Suraifī, "The Island of Cyprus," 245.

²⁴ Ibn A'tham al-Kūfī, *Kitāb al-Futūh*, Part 1, 355, 356; Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kamil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. 2, 489.

²⁵ Ashour, *Cyprus and the Crusades*, 6; Badr, *Islamic Architecture of Cyprus*, 27.

areas due to the privileges they enjoyed. Mu‘āwiyah established permanent armies in cities and coastal areas to defend them and launch invasions and raids against Byzantium. The Umayyad era had the presence of three fleets, including one guarding the eastern coasts and two fleets in the southern sea, the Egyptian fleet and the northern African fleet²⁶.

Interestingly, the name of Caliph Hishām bin ‘Abd al-Malik appears in one of the inscriptions (Chrysopolitissa No. 4) may be the archaeological evidence for what Ibn al-Athīr mentioned in his book *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh* regarding that the aforementioned caliph raided the island of Cyprus within the events of the year 108 AH / 726 AD²⁷ and the text of that: “... and in it Mu‘āwiyah bin Hishām bin ‘Abd al-Malik and with him Maymoūn bin Mahrān invaded the people of the Levant, so they crossed the sea to Cyprus, and Maslama bin ‘Abd al-Malik bin Marwān invaded on land...”²⁸.

باليمن محكما فقتله أميرها يوسف بن عمر وقتل أصحابه وكانوا ثلاثمائة. وفيها غزا معاوية بن هشام بن عبد الملك ومعه ميمون بن مهران على أهل الشام فقطعوا البحر إلى قبرس، وغزا في البر مسلمة بن عبد الملك بن مروان. وفيها كان بالشام طاعون شديد.

On the other hand, it turns out that most of the inscriptions dealt with in this paper can be classified as memorial writings and propaganda phrases, unlike the common ones that are tombstones.

In other words, most of the inscriptions included in this paper can be considered as “Epigraphic Graffiti” because most of them are informal inscriptions found on the surfaces of marble columns and only include personal names, dates, or supplications.

Technically, the fonts used were limited to the Kufic script, which is historically consistent with the widespread use of the Kufic script throughout the first centuries of the Prophet's migration. Most of these inscriptions were executed in the style of recessed and slightly prominent engravings (Chrysopolitissa 4, Limeniotissa No 2, 3), and at different heights that sometimes exceed the stature of an ordinary person. (Table 1), which raises a question about how it was implemented, and it is most likely that it was implemented after the churches were demolished and the columns fell to the ground, which may suggest the opinion that these churches were not converted into mosques. The second year, 33 AH / 653 AD, he did not think of evacuation as he did the first time, but rather

²⁶ Ahmed, *History of the Art of Naval Combat in the Mediterranean*, 9. Badr, *Islamic Architecture of Cyprus*, 30-31; Al-Sulaimanī, “The Army and Navy in the Umayyad Era,” 80.

²⁷ Al-Suraifi, “The Island of Cyprus,” 246.

²⁸ *Al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. 4, 380.

sent a group of the people of Baalbek to it, and those remained on the island of Cyprus until the establishment of the Umayyad state in the year 40 AH / 660 AD. On the island, they established a number of mosques²⁹, which is historically consistent with the dates mentioned in the inscriptions that the study deals with, as they extend between the years 65-164 AH / 684-780 AD.

Table 1

Inscription	Distance from the ground with Meter	The size of the entire inscription with Meter		The size of the letters with cm
		wide	High	
Chrysopolitissa 1	1.58	0.28	0.52	3-8
Chrysopolitissa 2	0.62	0.34	0.32	3-9
Chrysopolitissa 3	1.55	-	-	-
Chrysopolitissa 4	4.10	-	1.30	8
Chrysopolitissa 5	3.20	-	-	-
Chrysopolitissa 6	1.95	0.30	0.40	5-7
Chrysopolitissa 7	-	-	-	-
Limeniotissa 1	-	-	-	4-5
Limeniotissa 2	-	-	-	-
Limeniotissa 3				
Limeniotissa 4	1.20	0.28	0.45	8-10
Limeniotissa 5A	-	0.20	0.23	3-4
Limeniotissa 5B	-	-	-	-
Limeniotissa 5C	-	0.19	0.23	-
Limeniotissa 6	-	-	-	-
Curium	1.50	0.20	0.21	3-5

In terms of form, it is also noted that there is a discrepancy in the size of the font, even sometimes, in one inscription (inscription No. 1 Chrysopolitissa) (Table1), which may lead to the belief that it was executed at different time periods or was executed by more than one writer or calligrapher.

²⁹ Al-Baladhurī, *Futūh al-Buldān*, 209; Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. 3, 30; Al-‘Adawī, *The Umayyads and the Byzantines*, 85; Ashour, *Cyprus and the Crusades*, 9; Badr, *Islamic Architecture of Cyprus*, 32.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the inscriptions discovered in Cyprus offer valuable insights into the presence of Arab Muslims on the island during the early centuries of Islamic history. The inscriptions reveal other names besides the prominent companions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and provide clues about their regional origins, highlighting the involvement of individuals from various parts of the Arab world. These inscriptions support historical accounts of the Muslim conquest of Cyprus and shed light on the strategies employed by Muslim leaders, such as Mu‘āwiyah bin Abī Sufyān, in mobilizing forces from different regions.

Furthermore, the presence of inscriptions mentioning Homs and Ifrīqiyyah reflects the deliberate settlement policies implemented by Muslim leaders, such as Mu‘āwiyah, who encouraged migration to coastal areas and established permanent armies to defend these regions. The use of the Kufic script in the inscriptions points to its widespread usage during the early Islamic period.

Overall, the inscriptions provide valuable evidence of the cultural and religious dynamics during the early centuries of Islam in Cyprus. They depict the establishment of mosques and the presence of Muslim communities on the island, indicating the lasting impact of the Muslim conquest and the subsequent settlement of Arab Muslims in the region. These inscriptions contribute to our understanding of the historical and cultural interactions between the Arab-Muslim world and Cyprus, highlighting the island's significance in the broader context of early Islamic history.

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