

This is the unrevised version of a paper that was presented at the *Aswan tombstones workshop* organized by the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut in Aswan, 13-15 February 2010. The proceedings were never published.

**TOMBSTONE INSCRIPTIONS AND THEIR POTENTIAL AS TEXTUAL SOURCES
FOR SOCIAL HISTORY**

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In the frame of this conference I was specifically asked to tackle the issue of the historical exploitation of epitaphs, and particularly those found and excavated in the cemetery of Aswān. Consequently, I did not deal with other issues like paleography, decorative elements or linguistic features.

¹ This paper was written in the frame of a research programme financed by the Italian Government (“Incentivazione alla mobilità di studiosi stranieri e italiani residenti all’estero”).



Epitaph of the 12th c. in A. Reeland, *De nummis veterum hebræorum* (Utrecht, 1709)

Though studies of epigraphical texts from the Muslim world started in the early eighteenth c. with the publication of a stela in floriated kufic script by one of the most promising Orientalist of the time, Adriaan Reeland (1678-1718)², it was not before the end of the nineteenth c. that the field was truly founded with the publication of Max van Berchem's *Corpus inscriptionum arabicarum*. Since that time, epigraphy has witnessed an exponential growth of publications for all the areas where Islamic inscriptions have been discovered. Unsurprisingly, new

² *De nummis veterum hebræorum, qui ab inscriptarum literarum forma Samaritani appellantur, dissertationes quinque. Cum tabulis æri inscriptis. Accedit Dissertatio de marmoribus arabicis puteolanis* (Trajecti ad Rhenum: Prostant apud Gulielmum Broedelet, Bibliopolam, 1709). The stela is dated 20-30 («al-^ʿašr al-ahīr») Ramaḍān 566/26 May-6 June 1171 and was made for al-Ḥājj Yaḥyā ibn ʿAlī al-Wālī.

projects aiming to make the texts easily available to researchers, like the *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie islamique (RCEA)*, saw the light of day. Lastly, the *Thesaurus d'épigraphie islamique (TEI)*, a database that plans to record all the inscriptions published so far or, for some, unpublished, has been launched and already counts about 20.000 items with areas, like North Africa or Syria yet to be covered³. Despite all this, it remains that the field is still far from what has already been done for other languages like Greek or Latin⁴, and requires many more researchers getting involved in projects of interest. Inscriptions have been produced and preserved in large quantities in the Islamic world (past or present) thanks to the significant role played by epigraphy in architecture as a decorative element. On the other hand, the Muslim funerary customs, be they recognised by the law or not, favoured the emergence of inscribed stelae that have been preserved in huge quantities, mostly in Egypt. The majority of those produced in Egypt have been published, but several thousands are still awaiting in the depositories of museums, in Egypt or abroad. Notwithstanding that relative progress in the analysis of that kind of material, two major contributions regarding the stelae and the ritual practices recently appeared. The first one is due to Werner Diem and Marco Schöller⁵. The aim of the authors was to collect all the material published regarding epitaphs: they took into consideration both the artefacts themselves and the literary sources where such texts were mentioned, and they analysed the material from various points of view: the data,

³ See Frédérique Soudan's contribution in this volume.

⁴ See Rudolf Haensch's contribution in this volume.

⁵ W. Diem and M. Schoeller, *The Living and the Dead in Islam. Studies in Arabic Epitaphs*, 3 vols. (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 2004).

the formulas, etc. The authors worked on the basis of the published epitaphs but probably started their work at a time when the *TEI* was just starting and unfortunately they could not take advantage of it. The book is of a tremendous help to understand all the issues that deal with the funerary traditions in Islam, particularly the structure of the stelae, the evolution of the formulas, and the analysis of the data. Covering epitaphs from all the areas where Islam spread, the book suffers from a caveat as no exploitation of the data could be provided on a regional, detailed basis. The fact that the greatest part of the epitaphs are known to come from Egypt also biased the analysis: the samples for the other areas did not provide a similar number. The second book, published by Leor Halevi⁶, has a different scope: the author chose to investigate in a historical perspective the rites practiced for the dead starting from the earliest testimonies in Islam. The body of his material was provided by the sources (historical or juridical) and the artefacts. In the end, it only secondarily deals with epigraphy. Nonetheless, both books appeared at about the same time and represent excellent introductions to epitaphs as texts and to the rituals for the dead.

This said, it remains that the stelae of Egypt still deserve a thorough study from all points of view taking into account the data provided by archeology, epigraphy, history, sociology and anthropology. Aswān constitutes a wonderful case study if one bears in mind that this is one of the largest and most ancient cemeteries of the Muslim world, that it is located in a remote place compared to Cairo, Qayrawān or Mecca and that only a small portion of the stelae has

⁶ Leor Halevi, *Rites for the Dead. Funerals and the Afterlife in Early Islam*, (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007).

been published and studied so far. Consequently, one can only welcome such an initiative as the one launched by the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut in Egypt.

Before tackling the issue of the value of epitaphs for their historical exploitation, I would like to raise some problems. Some of these problems have been dealt with by other speakers and I shall refer to their contributions in this volume.

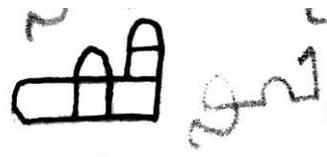
One of the most significant problems regards the number of stelae that are or/and were in the Aswān cemetery. The vast majority of them were transported to Cairo where they are still stored or exhibited⁷ while a small number is still to be found in Aswān⁸. Others found their way to the market of antiquities as early as the late nineteenth c. and travelled abroad where they are still preserved in various museum collections of Europe and the United States. This dissemination in and outside Egypt complicates the task of the epigraphist who needs to know the exact origin of a stela in order to be able to replace it in its context and to exploit it historically. A good example of this pitfall can be given for two epitaphs now held at the Musée royal du Cinquantenaire in Brussels⁹. They were apparently bought by Franz-Valéry-Marie Cumont (1868-1947), the famous Belgian historian of religions, who bequeathed them

⁷ See the contributions of Muḥammad °Abbās and Ibrāhīm °Abd al-Raḥmān in this volume. According to Herz Bey, between 1892-1904, 2104 stelae were unearthed during hasty diggings, most of which were brought to Cairo. They were all published in the 10 vols. of the *Catalogue du Musée arabe du Caire. Les stèles funéraires*, H. Hawary, H. Rached, G. Wiet (eds.), Cairo, 1932-1942. See Gaston Wiet, «Stèles coufiques d'Égypte et du Soudan», in *Journal asiatique* 240 (1952), p. 273-297, p. 273. During °Abd al-Tawwāb's excavations, about 1600 stelae were discovered, some of which remained in Aswān while others, the majority, were carried to Cairo. Only 450 of this group were published by °Abd al-Raḥmān M. °Abd al-Tawwāb with the help of Solange Ory, *Stèles islamiques de la nécropole d'Assouan*, 3 vols. (Cairo: IFAO, 1977-1986).

⁸ See the contribution of Rageh Zaher Mohamed and Magdi Abdin in this volume.

⁹ Frédéric Bauden, «Les Stèles arabes du Musée du Cinquantenaire (Bruxelles)», in Id. (ed.), *Ultra mare. Mélanges de langue arabe et d'islamologie offerts à Aubert Martin* (Paris-Leuven-Dudley: Peeters, 2004), p. 175-193.

to the museum, probably when he was curator of the department of antiquities (1899-1912). Their provenance is recorded in the inventory as being Aswān, a piece of data that remains doubtful if not only because both of them are in marble and the stelae from Aswān are known to be in sandstone¹⁰. I have tried to demonstrate that their most likely origin was the Cairene cemetery of °Ayn al-šīra. The erroneous record of the origin of these two stelae is something that is often repeated in other museum collections and one can always doubt that the stelae truly originate in Aswān if the material is not sandstone. Obviously, marble stelae could be transported to Aswān from Lower Egypt upon special request of the deceased as a will or the family, but this must have happened quite rarely as is underlined by the proportion of marble stelae found in Aswān, as already stressed. Incidentally, the study of the two stelae now in Brussels evidenced the necessity to revise the work already done. Though both of them had been published in the *RCEA*¹¹, a unique feature remained unnoticed by the epigraphist who investigated them. The engraver of the first stela (dated 213/829) innovated a unique decorative system for the end of the word *tuwuffiya* («he passed away»): the last two letters (*fā°-yā°*) were drawn in the shape of a tomb in side view, thus transforming this part of the word in an ideogram.



¹⁰ Among the 450 stelae published by °Abd al-Raḥmān M. °Abd al-Tawwāb and Solange Ory, only one in marble is recorded (vol. I, n° 150).

¹¹ *RCEA*, vol. I, n° 188 and vol. II, n° 532.

The word *tuwuffiya* (توفي) on the stela dated 213/829. Brussels, Musée royal du Cinquantenaire (IS.505)

One of the main challenges of a project of this kind will thus be to gather as many stelae as possible once they will have been identified inside and outside Egypt. As already stressed, the material of the stelae will be the most helpful detail for such an identification: sandstone is abundant in the area around Aswān and it is easily distinguishable from other materials used for stelae in the Islamic period. If marble stelae found their way to Aswān, it was only incidental and they should only be considered for study if they are still in Aswān. I am afraid that the marble stelae that are now in collections outside Aswān and that are clearly identified in the records as coming from Aswān could not be considered for the project on the sole basis of this piece of information as we have shown with the two stelae now in Brussels.

Another problem concerns the displacement of the stelae. The stela in itself offers some information about the deceased and his social status, but if it is still in place, it gives many more details because the structure of the tomb can be studied (simple tomb, mausoleum, other). If the tomb can be excavated, which is rarely the case with Muslim cemeteries, it will provide even more information about the deceased: DNA analysis, status, illness, etc. Unfortunately, all these details will not be available in the frame of this project as all the stelae were removed from their tombs and apparently their location was not recorded.

Last but not least, while historical sources can be very helpful for the study of natural calamities, population movements, social categories, and the like, it must be kept in mind that Aswān remains a peripheral area and that no local history has been preserved. The epitaphs

thus represent the best source for the historian, but they need to be studied keeping in mind their shortcomings.

Let us now proceed with the historical exploitation, reminding that the elements provided here are based on a small sample of stelae said to be from Aswān in the *TEI* (838 items). The conclusions drawn from these elements should consequently be considered as provisional and approximate. References will sometimes be made to epitaphs from Egypt in general but it will be specified.

The epitaphs are valued by the historian for their textual and extratextual aspects, i.e. the contents of the text and the facture of the stela. The constituent elements of the epitaph in Islam are present to state the identity of the deceased, his adherence to Islam through the expression of the credo (*šahāda*) and to bring on him the blessings for the thereafter. The first and the last of these elements are the most informative from the historical point of view and will be dealt with in detail.

The structure of the name in medieval Islam is such that it opens several paths of investigation. The name (*ism*) of the deceased is generally mentioned with the ones of his father and grandfather; those are accompanied, quite often, by a *nisba* that may indicate a geographical origin or a profession referring to the deceased or to one of his ancestors. In that case, the *nisba* plays the role of the family name like in our modern societies. In some cases, another element of the name, like the *kunya*, may also precede the first *ism*. Thanks to the various elements of the name it is possible to proceed to various studies. The study of the sequence of names confirms the tendency to give a son a name that is by no means fortuitous,

thus improving our knowledge of onomastic system. This is the case for instance for the sequence Hārūn > Mūsā, as has already been demonstrated, a sequence that rests on their appearance in the Quran¹². Family ties can also be reconstructed on the basis of the genealogy, provided that enough details are available, among which a long sequence of names (at least three generations), mention of a *nisba*, convergence in the dates of death and a sufficient number of stelae. Another prospective field of research concerns the problem of conversion to Islam in a remote city like Aswān. So far, this question has not been tackled through the stelae, perhaps because Coptic names transcribed in Arabic are difficult to decipher and interpret, even more so when they are found on stelae where diacritical dots are almost never provided for the period under consideration.

¹² This was already stressed by Gaston Wiet, «Stèles coufiques d'Égypte et du Soudan», *Journal asiatique* 240 (1952), p. 281.



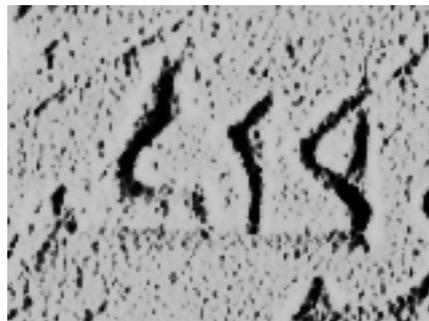
Stela n° 12, dated 256/870

Among the stelae published by °Abd al-Tawwāb and Ory, I have witnessed such a case. My attention was drawn by stela n° 12 (dated 256/870¹³) where the name was read Ibrāhīm ibn Baydūs ibn Fayd al-Zaġġāġ.

¹³ *Stèles islamiques de la nécropole d'Assouan*, vol. I, n° 148.



The name of the deceased's father, Baydūs



The name of the deceased's grandfather, Fand

Ory recognised that she couldn't find any reference to the first of these two names (Baydūs) in the repertoires of *nisbas* written by Muslim authors. There was no chance that she would have because this name, as well as the second read Fayd, are just Coptic names. What is surprising is that she did not even take into account this hypothesis, considering, *a priori*, that they had to be Muslim names. Baydūs must correspond to ΠΑΙΤΟΣ/ΠΑΙΕΙΤΟΣ (Paitos/Paeitos) while Fayd should be read Fand which must be tantamount to ΦΑΝΤ (Fant)¹⁴. Once correctly

¹⁴ See Monika Hasitzka, *Namen in koptischen dokumentarischen Texten* (unpublished manuscript last updated on 22 January 2007 and downloadable at the following link: http://www.onb.ac.at/files/kopt_namen.pdf), respectively p. 68 and 104. This shows the necessity to revise in a new light the material so far published.

interpreted, one discovers that the name Baydūs was quite common in Aswān in the 3rd/9th c.

It is found on eleven additional stelae¹⁵:

- 1) Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Baydūs (d. 250)¹⁶
- 2) Muḥammad ibn Baydūs al-Ṣayyād (d. 261)¹⁷
- 3) Zaynab bint Hārūn ibn Baydūs (d. 303)¹⁸
- 4) Ḥadīja bint Muḥammad ibn Baydūs al-Ṣayyād (d. 304)¹⁹
- 5) Raḥma bint Baydūs ibn °Īsā (d. 313)²⁰
- 6) Ṭāhira bint Ismā°il ibn Baydūs al-Ṣayyād (d. 318)²¹
- 7) Fāṭima bint Hārūn ibn Baydūs al-Ṣayyād (d. 319)²²
- 8) °Ubayd Allāh ibn Bakr ibn Baydūs (d. 324)²³
- 9) Muḥammad ibn °Abd Allāh ibn Baydūs (d. 336)²⁴
- 10) Zaynab bint Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Baydūs (d. 353)²⁵
- 11) Umm al-Ḥasan bint Hārūn ibn Baydūs al-Ṣayyād (d. 376)²⁶

One notices immediately that several of these persons (nos. 2, 4, 6, 7, 11) share a common ancestry thanks to the *nisba* al-Ṣayyād (the fisherman). If all these persons are related, it shows that three of his sons (Muḥammad, Ismā°il and Hārūn) converted to Islam some time

¹⁵ One may add to this number the following stelae which origin is not always confirmed as being Aswān: *Catalogue général du Musée arabe du Caire: Stèles funéraires*, vol. II, n° 486 (Aswān, Baydūs ibn MT°R ibn MḤM°a, dated 243/857-8); *ibid.*, vol. VII, n° 2658 (Upper Egypt, Ibrāhīm ibn Baydūs ibn Ḥātim, date lost); *ibid.*, vol. VIII, n° 3058 (Egypt, Kamāl ibn Baydūs ibn BYūs, date lost); *ibid.*, vol. VII, n° 2627 (Upper Egypt, Fāṭima bint Ḥusayn ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Baydūs ibn Aṣfar, date lost); *ibid.*, vol. X (Upper Egypt, Sa°id ibn Bakkār ibn Baydūs al-Qūṣī, dated 358/968-9); *ibid.*, vol. V, n° 1992 (Upper Egypt, °Alī ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-ḤFR ibn Baydūs, dated 382/992-3).

¹⁶ *Stèles islamiques de la nécropole d'Assouan*, vol. I, n° 107.

¹⁷ *Catalogue général du Musée arabe du Caire: Stèles funéraires*, vol. III, n° 1021.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, n° 1508.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, n° 1521.

²⁰ *Stèles islamiques de la nécropole d'Assouan*, vol. III, n° 358.

²¹ *Ibid.*, vol. III, n° 368.

²² Gaston Wiet, « Stèles coufiques d'Égypte et du Soudan », *Journal asiatique* 240 (1952), p. 286, n° 11.

²³ *Stèles islamiques de la nécropole d'Assouan*, vol. III, n° 394.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. III, n° 434.

²⁵ *Catalogue général du Musée arabe du Caire: Stèles funéraires*, vol. V, n° 1872.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. V, n° 1971.

before the middle of the 3rd/9th c. In this sense, it is interesting to note the names that were chosen by these converts: the name of the Prophet Muḥammad and the names of two persons mentioned in the Quran, but also in the Bible.

Another important issue regards gender. As already noticed by Wiet, Egypt is particular in that there exists a gender parity as is shown by the distribution of the number of stelae for both genders. Considering the stelae preserved until the year 550 (3.776 stelae), Wiet could establish that the distribution was almost equal: 1976 for men to 1800 for women. In addition to the parity in numbers, it must be stressed that the stelae produced for women are not less carefully realised than those for men. What is true for the quality of the execution is also valid for the contents. This particularity, so far only noted for Egypt²⁷, still needs to be addressed by scholars. From a sociological point of view, it would be interesting to investigate if this is also true for earlier periods in Egypt and if this can explain why this is so peculiar to this area, even during the Muslim period.

The stelae may also help to understand the personal ties. Given the period considered, we are still dealing with the relationships between the *mawālī* (clients, freedmen/freedwomen) and their protectors or between a slave and his master. The slaves were apparently buried in the same conditions as their masters as one does not notice a difference of treatment in the stela of a slave. As for the *mawālī*, the case of two women whose stelae have been preserved is

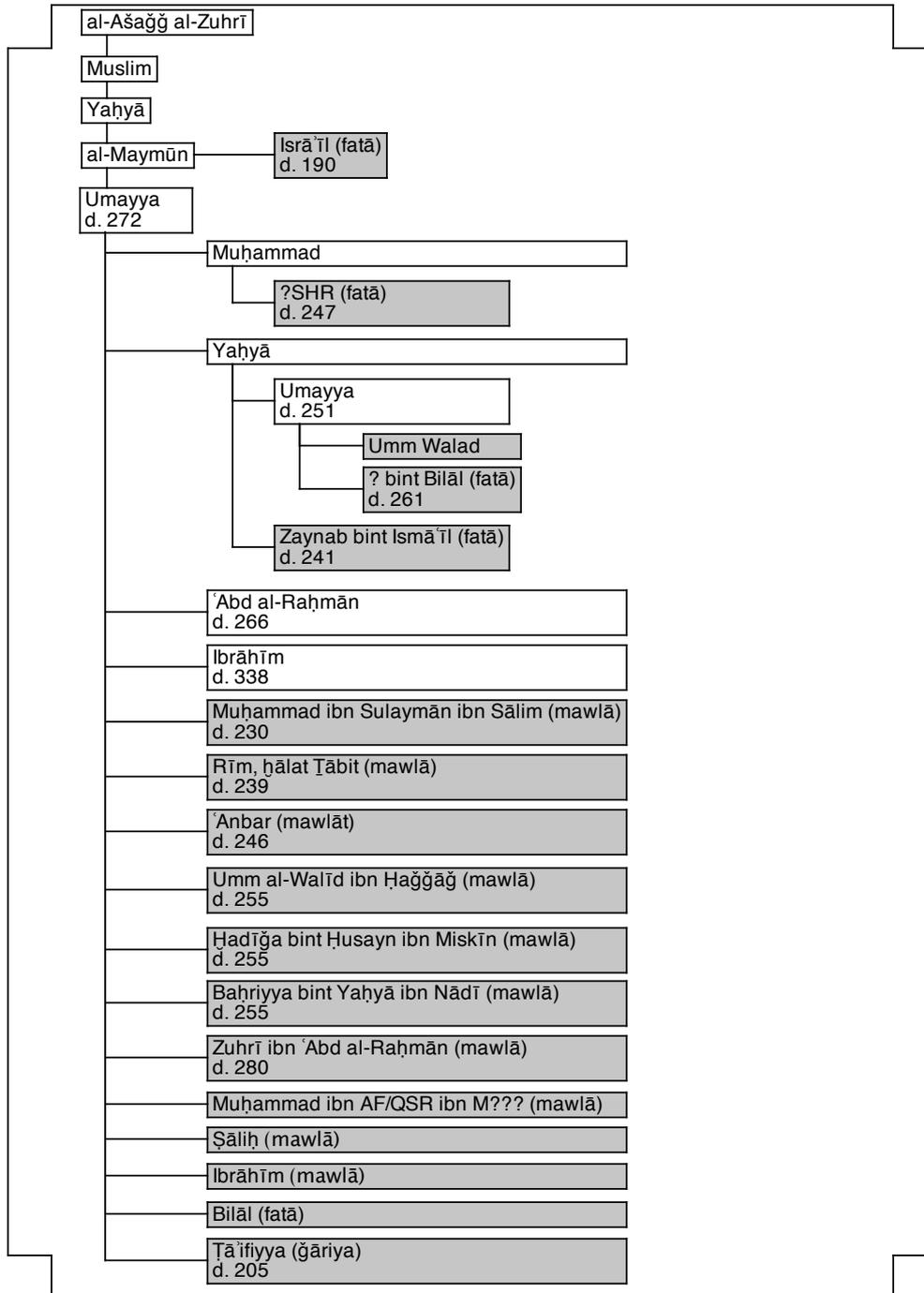
²⁷ One must not forget that Egypt is also particular in that it is the area where the greatest number of stelae has been discovered so far.

quite eloquent. These are Umm al-Walīd ibn Ḥaġġāġ²⁸ and Ḥadīġa bint al-Ḥusayn ibn Miskīn²⁹, both the daughters of clients of Umayya ibn Maymūn ibn Yaḥyā ibn Muslim ibn al-Aṣāġġ al-Zuhrī. Their tie to this person is explicitly quoted on their stela, just after their names, indicating their social status but also that of their protector. A survey of the stelae published so far has revealed that several individuals were connected to the Banū al-Aṣāġġ al-Zuhrī³⁰. In the genealogical tree presented below, the members of the family are represented by white boxes while the persons who had a relationship of client or slave are indicated in grey boxes.

²⁸ *Stèles islamiques de la nécropole d'Assouan*, vol. I, n° 134 (dated 255/869).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. I, n° 142 (dated 255/869).

³⁰ See also Gaston Wiet, « Stèles coufiques d'Égypte et du Soudan », *Journal asiatique* 240 (1952), p. 282.



One understands that Umayya ibn al-Maymūn must have been a very prominent man as no less than ten persons claimed to have sought his protection as *mawlā*. Some of those persons were in fact the sons, the daughters or the aunt (*ḥāla*) of such a *mawlā* and it was considered

significant enough to mention on their graves the relationship that was established with Umayya by their father or even grandfather. Umayya also owned slaves as both a male slave (*fatā*) and a female slave (*ġāriya*) were buried in the cemetery. Even though this remains conjectural, it is highly probable that their tombs were paid for by their master, Umayya. Unfortunately, the stelae were taken away from their graves. So it will never be possible to understand whether the slaves were buried together with the Banū al-Ašaġġ al-Zuhrī or in a separate area in the cemetery. The same is true for the family itself: did they have a mausoleum for the whole family, one of those still visible nowadays in the cemetery ? The chart also shows that two of his sons also owned slaves and concubines and this relationship was also stated on their graves. The Banū al-Ašaġġ al-Zuhrī were certainly a major family in Aswān: it is known from al-Kindī that in the year 132/750 their ancestor, Yaḥyā ibn Muslim, stirred up the revolt in favour of the Abbasids there³¹. This fact, confirmed by an early source like al-Kindī, demonstrates that the family settled in Aswān at an early date and that more than one century later their offspring still enjoyed a leading social status.

As stated earlier, many stelae mention the *nisba*, sometimes corresponding to a profession. Diem already established that professions appear on a little bit more than 10% of the corpus of stelae from Egypt (254)³². He could also prove that in only 137 cases among these, the profession was exercised by the deceased. This can be explained by the fact that the *nisba* indicating a profession could have become a family name and that it didn't necessarily

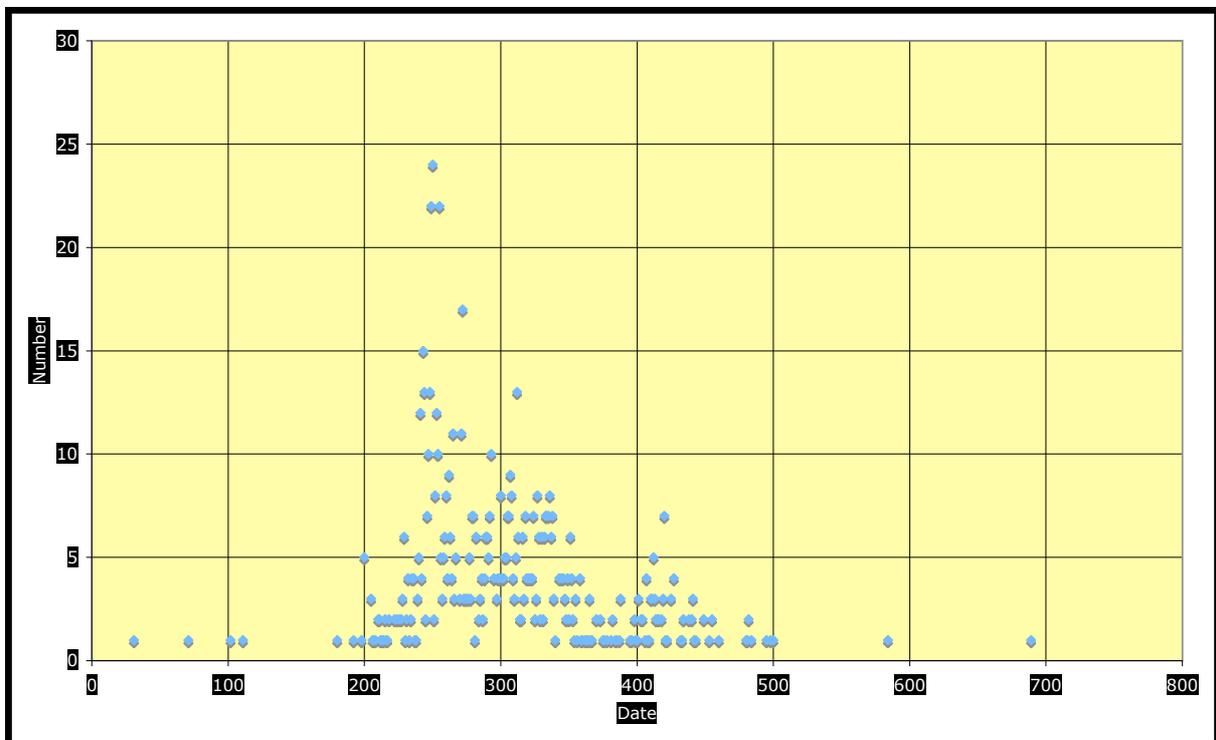
³¹ al-Kindī, *Kitāb al-Wulāt wa-l-Quḍāt*, ed. R. Guest (Leiden-London, 1912), p. 95.

³² Diem, *The Living and the Dead*, p. 23-24.

correspond anymore to the reality two or three generations later. This is particularly visible in the case of a woman whose *nisba* is given in the masculine, thus showing that it refers to her father or even grandfather. In the light of this, it is clear that historically these data can only be exploited with caution. Another drawback regards the range of professions attested on stelae. Diem counted not less than 80 professions, mainly dealing with manual labour (crafts) and activities in trade. One could take this variety as faithfully reflecting the activities practised in Aswān for the given period, but a comparison with those mentioned in the documents of the Genizah (roughly 450) shows that we are far from getting a real picture of the social situation on the sole basis of the stelae. The same holds true for the number of deceased who were active in a particular field at a given time. The historian can study the data to see their chronological distribution and find, for instance, that they point to the existence of many more fishermen and bakers than millers, something that, given the location of the city, can be surmized without having recourse to epitaphs. The study of the professions appearing in epitaphs can thus bring some interesting data but it remains doubtful that they will allow a fair reconstruction of the social milieu.

The date of death is one of the recurring elements found on stelae. With the name, this is one of the most promising piece of data for the historian. Statistical analyses remain possible keeping in mind that only a partial segment of the society is represented because not everyone could afford an inscribed stela. Slaves, for instance, would hardly receive such a treatment unless their master would do this favour for them in the name of a particular relationship, like it was the case with those of the Banū al-Ašağġ al-Zuhrī, as mentioned before. On the other

hand, we must not forget that several hundreds of stelae have disappeared, during the Middle Ages (some being reused) or in the modern period, and that they will probably never be located: in this sense, we only have at our disposal a limited number of stelae, a fact that distorts the statistics³³. Used with caution, the dates will however give good results once all the available stelae will have been published and studied. The following chart provides just a sample of what can be done in this respect. It is based on the 837 stelae from Aswān published so far.



Compared to other years, certain years are overrepresented in this chart: 249 (22), 250 (24) and 255 (22), and this even though a larger amount of persons died and received a stela during those years. Still they represent a small amount of the deceased in this period: it is

³³ There are only two stelae attested for the 1st/7th c. and six for the 2nd/8th c.

quite clear that more than 24 persons died in the year 250. Do these figures reflect the consequences of a particular event like drought resulting in famine, epidemic of a disease, or anything else having to do with local conflicts ? Or do they just indicate that the families of those persons were enough wealthy to afford an inscribed stela ? Only literary historical sources could enlighten us. The problem is that due to its peripheral location in Egypt, Aswān was never the subject of a local history and it barely drew the attention of medieval historians³⁴. Here again, the advantage drawn from this category of data will be limited.

The last element of the stelae that can be exploited from the historical point of view is the formulas. The engravers worked with models and formularies³⁵, just as did the notaries for judicial documents. In both cases, it is quite clear that the formularies changed as slowly the uses did. However, as far as epitaphs are concerned, an evolution remains perceivable in the use of Quranic quotations, for instance, or the use of a specific term or expression like the one that personalized the stela (*hādā mā yašhad bihi Fulān ibn Fulān al-Fulānī*). Most interestingly, Egypt witnessed an important ideological shift with the advent of the Fatimid dynasty that, even before it settled in Cairo, favoured the development of shiism in the country. The most visible element concerns the introduction of the *tašliya* over the Prophet and his family at the beginning of the inscription. It is noticeable that it appears on sandstone

³⁴ The only interesting reference is quite an exception: al-Udfuwī's *al-Ṭāli' al-ša'id al-ġāmi' li-asmā' al-fuḍalā' wa-l-ruwāt bi-a'lā al-Ša'id*, but it mainly deals with the medieval period. See Jean-Claude Garcin, *Un Centre musulman de la Haute-Égypte médiévale* (Le Caire, 1976). See also Sofia Bjornesjo's contribution in this volume.

³⁵ This is corroborated by the finding of a stela where the inscription is for an anonymous person (*Fulāna ibnat Fulān al-Fulānī*). This model was later used for a woman whose name was inscribed between the lines. See *Catalogue général du Musée arabe du Caire: Stèles funéraires*, vol. X, n° 3974.

stelae (thus from Aswān) as early as the year 279, that is eighty years before they conquered Egypt. Wiet already concluded that this was the result of propaganda, a means cherished by the Fatimids to reach to goals³⁶. The study of these formulas will certainly uncover other stimulating hints of the shift in the ideology in Egypt.

To sum up, the potential results of the study of the Aswān stelae are manifold and should deal mainly with:

- demography
- prosopography
- links between the number of deceased and the historical events
- the social milieu and the status of the deceased
- the ideology
- conversion

Yet, it remains that such a study will never be tantamount to what could be done for other cities, like Istanbul, for instance³⁷. The historian must take this into account before starting his work.

³⁶ Wiet, « Stèles coufiques d'Égypte et du Soudan », *Journal asiatique* 240 (1952), p. 289.

³⁷ See Nicholas Vatin's contribution to this volume and Id. and Stéphane Yerasimov, *Les cimetières dans la ville. Statut, choix et organisation des lieux d'inhumation dans Istanbul intra muros*, (Istanbul: Institut français d'études anatoliennes Georges Dumézil; Paris, Lib. d'Amérique et d'Orient A. Maisonneuve, 2001).