

Muhājirūn

In Arabic literature, the word *muhājirūn* is used primarily to describe the Companions of the prophet Muḥammad who emigrated from Mecca to Medina, but this was not the exclusive usage of the word in the early Islamic era. The word is a plural active participle meaning “those who emigrate (i.e., make the *hijra*)” or “those (nomads) who settle.”

1. MUHĀJIRŪN IN PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIC AND THE QUR’ĀN

In Ancient South Arabian inscriptions, the root *hgr* connotes settlements, a meaning also attested in Classical Arabic (Beeston et al., 56). In Ancient North Arabian epigraphy, the verb *hgr* occurs in the meaning “migrate” in at least one Safaitic inscription. The relevant inscription (ASWS 73, in Al-Jallad, 224) contains the phrase *hgr m-mabr*, “he migrated from the inner desert.” Because the language of the Safaitic inscriptions arguably belongs to the Old Arabic continuum (Al-Jallad, 12), it is possible that the meaning “migration” is attested, albeit rarely, for this root in pre-Islamic Arabic as well. Safaitic script does not write vowels, even long ones, but the verb probably corresponds to Classical Arabic *hājara*.

The verb *hājara* and its participles appear some twenty times in the Qur’ān, without explicit connection to any toponym; *hijra* never appears in the Qur’ān as a word (the Qur’ānic occurrences are surveyed by Mortensen). The *muhājirūn* are depicted as believers facing persecution (Q 3:195; Crone, 354). Qur’ānic verses such as 3:195, 8:72, and 22:58 link emigration and holy war (Crone 354–5; Donner, 85–6; Masud, 32). Part of 3:195 says, “Those who emigrated (*alladhūna hājarū*), were evicted from their houses, harmed

in My path, and fought and were killed. I will absolve them of their evil deeds and make them enter gardens beneath which rivers flow.” In other verses (e.g., 4:97), the Qur’ānic *muhājirūn* are discussed in the context of renouncing the surrounding, unbelieving, world (Mortensen). In Q 29:26, Abraham says, “I will emigrate to my Lord (*innī muhājir ilā rabbī*)”; this makes emigration a spiritual concept.

2. SYRIAC AND GREEK SOURCES

Continuing chronologically with the available sources, we encounter the words *magaritai* in Greek and *mhaggrāyē* or *mhaggrē* in Syriac sources written in the early Islamic era. The first (dated) occurrence of *magaritai* is in a bilingual Greek-Arabic papyrus (PERF 558) dated 22/643, while *mhaggrē* is first attested in Syriac in the writings of Isho’yahb III, who died in 659 CE (Hoyland, 179–80). Some scholars have traced this word etymologically to Hagar, the biblical character (Crone and Cook, 8–9; Griffith, 122–4), but others have argued that the Greek and Syriac words derive from the Arabic *muhājirūn* (Donner, 86; Hoyland, 76; Webb, 170). The words *magaritai* and *mhaggrāyē* have not been found in pre-Islamic Greek and Syriac sources, which perhaps favours an Arabic origin (Hoyland, 180, n. 25).

The Greek and Syriac texts’ use of *magaritai* and *mhaggrāyē* is broad, referring to early Muslims, save for their *mawālī* (freedmen and clients) (Crone, 359–62). The words thus denote the conquerors and settlers encountered by the non-Arabic speaking populace (Webb, 142).

3. MUHĀJIRŪN IN ARABIC

LITERATURE

In much of Arabic literature, the word *muhājirūn* is employed to refer to “those Companions of the Prophet who