

KARL JETTMAR

(with a contribution by Theodore Kwasman)

HEBREW INSCRIPTIONS IN THE WESTERN HIMALAYAS

In the last days of August 1982 our expedition – Prof. Dr A.H. Dani, Mr M.S. Qamar, Dr V. Thewalt, Dr Guksch, Mr Kauper and myself – studied, mapped and documented the rock-carvings along the southern bank of the Indus river west of Chilas.*

At a distance of 8 km from the township of Chilas there is a sandy plain between the rocky slope of the mountainside bordering the Indus valley in the north, and an area intersected by numerous cliffs and boulders. This area must have been a convenient place for a last halt before reaching Chilas for caravans approaching from the West. The next kilometres lead through a much more difficult terrain with cliffs and barriers, today, of course, all intersected by the splendid Karakorum Highway. The highway is now skirting the sandy plain mentioned above on its northern border. A few metres away there is the old path certainly used during the Buddhist period. Following it you will find carvings and inscriptions again and again, the distance between them is 50 to 100 metres.

Since the sandy plain is so suitable for a rest and even for a caravan camp, we called the place “campsite”.

If this was so, we may understand that the rocky slope on the southern border of the plain is decorated by inscriptions. They were studied and translated on the spot by Prof. Dani, so it was more or less by curiosity that I, too, inspected the site together with Mr Qamar. My intention was to show him how to use a telelens – in fact in the meantime he became an excellent photographer.

During our “exercise” I saw a group of inscriptions (later on it turned out that they had escaped the attention of my colleagues – no wonder in an area where you make new findings behind any corner). They were about 5 metres above the sand on a steep cliff, but I could see that none of the

* Earlier reports of our activities, see Jettmar 1980 a, 1980 b, 1980 c, 1982.

scripts found so far in the area (Kharoshthi, Brahmi, Proto-Sharada, Sogdian etc.) had been used. They looked like Aramaic – so I became alarmed. Therefore I used the telelens repeatedly. Later on, one of the younger members of the team climbed up and made a Polaroid photo from a difficult angle, not fit for an actual reading.

A Polaroid snap was sent to Prof. Fussman. On the 11th of October 1982, he gave the following answer:

Sur le Polaroid que vous m'avez envoyé, on croirait distinguer de l'hébreu carré! Il faut faire la part des déformations optiques, mais j'ai comparé les signes avec ceux des inscriptions araméennes d'Aśoka les plus proches. Apparemment, ce n'est pas le même type de signes que ceux de deux inscriptions d'Aśoka trouvées dans le Laghman; par contre, il semble qu'il y ait des ressemblances avec l'inscription gréco-araméenne d'Aśoka à Kandahar. Mais il est difficile d'en dire plus sans avoir des photos prises de face et avec des déformations de perspective réduites au minimum. A la rigueur on pourrait penser à du judéo-persan, comme on en trouve en Afghanistan sous les Ghaznévides et les Ghorides.

After my return to Heidelberg I showed much better photographs made by Dr Thewalt (one of them is published here) and copies made after my colour slides to Prof. Schall. His competence in so many fields allowed him to inform me immediately that the explanation "hebräische Quadratschrift" must be correct (Plate I).

So I contacted the Hochschule für Jüdische Studien, Heidelberg, and Prof. Radday mentioned Mr Theodore Kwasman as the best expert for such problems. Mr Kwasman was ready to take over the task and I gave him all the necessary photos; the colourprints turned out to be most useful.

His – of course, preliminary – report is as follows:

Preliminary Report of Hebrew Rock Inscriptions in Northern Pakistan

Text (Transliteration)

Middle Triangle

1'		x x x
2'	[xx]xl	br' xxx'l
3'	x[x]bnûmn	br šmû'l
4'	yôsf br	'l'zry
5'	x[]xxx
6'	xxx[]x
7'	xxxx	

Description: The entire surface of the rock is covered with writing. The inscriptions seem to have been made at various time periods since there are two types of incisions – 1. the surface is scratched; 2. the surface is engraved (deeply incised). Secondly, the writing has different directions: horizontal and diagonal. The horizontal type is scratched and the

diagonal type is engraved. The above text is horizontal-scratched and is that which is apparent on the photograph. The diagonal type of writing can be seen on the photograph, but only individual letters can be identified (exception: *ysr'l* = *Yisra'el*). From what can be read on the photograph (that is lines 3' and 4' in the above text), the inscriptions are personal names.

Paleography: The script is Oriental-Hebrew. Geographically, this includes the following regions: Yemen, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Eastern Turkey, Iraq, Persia, Bukhara, and Uzbekistan (cf. M. Beit-Arie, *Hebrew Codicology*, Jerusalem, 1981, p. 17). The letters seem to be very close to the form used in the Karasubazar Codex dated circa 847 (cf. D. Chwolson, *Corpus inscriptionum hebraicarum*, St. Petersburg, 1882, coll. 184-197). If this is correct, it is possible that the persons concerned come from Bukhara or Uzbekistan.

Orthography: The name *bnumn* in line 3' of the above text is unusual, since the common spelling is with *y* instead of *u*. This should not be considered as a graphic/scrabal error.

Translation: The names in l. 3' and 4' are: 3' Benuman (for Benyamin) son (of) Samuel; 4' Yosef son (of) 'El'azari.

Observation: It is absolutely necessary to obtain high quality photographs, in order to get better readings.

A few remarks on this most stimulating contribution may be added already now.

There were certainly several inscriptions made by different hands. It seems that they were not engraved or scratched at the same time. Secondary patination of the lines is different. So we can exclude that they were made by several members of one caravan, each traveller writing his own name.

On the other hand, the location of the inscriptions is not at all prominent. In order to recognize the spot you had to know the site. Therefore, we must suppose that later caravans had the same guide or at least one member showing the place where predecessors had already left their names. There must have been a regular traffic of Jewish travellers (merchants) through the Indus valley.

Al-Bērūnī in his *India* (Chapter XVIII, Russian edition, II, 1963, p. 202) offers the key for the understanding of the political and economic background of the newly discovered inscriptions. He writes that the Kashmiris were very anxious to protect their country against an invasion. It is clear that conquests and plunderings of the Muslim powers, especially the Ghaznavids, were felt as a permanent dread. Therefore, all passes and the roads to them were kept under strict vigilance. The guardians did not allow foreigners to enter. Even Indians were only permitted if they were well acquainted with them. However, it is said that in former times the regulations had been more liberal and Hebrew visitors had the best chance to be accepted.

In this connection we may remember that the Sogdian inscriptions near Shatial Bridge were published (not completely) by Humbach (1980). I tried to analyse the drawings of this site. Among them there are symbols also occurring on Sogdian coins (cf. Smirnova 1981: Pl. XCIV). I cannot go into details here, but I think that inscriptions and drawings indicate an intensively

used trade route across the mountains connecting Sogdiana with South Asia. The first and most important goal of a journey was Kashmir.

This trade, however, stopped when the Sogdians were forced to become Muslims. So far, we have not found a single inscription in Arabic script which was used extensively in Sogdiana since the middle of the eighth century A.D. The time of this change is well attested by the coins. That means that the Sogdians under the control of the Islamic invaders were themselves considered to be suspected persons, maybe spies.

Therefore, the Hebrew traders got their chance. They were still accepted as friends or, at least, as neutrals.

Perhaps my idea that non-Muslim groups could get a special rôle in international trade and diplomacy during the ninth century A.D. is supported by the well-known inscription of Tankse, Ladakh (studied by Müller, Benveniste and Henning, lately republished by Gropp 1974: 367, fig. 219 b). Here we read of a Sogdian (or a man using Sogdian script) acting as a messenger to the Kaghan of Tibet in the year 841/842 – but evidently he himself is a Nestorian.

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According to a note the manuscripts have *madhyāśelīkāś*. De La Vallée Poussin quotes the Tibetan translation: *bar-ma 'don-par byed-pa dag* which he reconstructs into Sanskrit as *madhya-pāśhaka*. Jacques May translates: "Enfin les Madhyadeśika, d'après le système des terres enseigné dans le *Mahāvastu*, affirment que le Bodhisattva de la première terre a produit le chemin de la vision [et] fait partie de la communauté" (*Candrakīrti Praxanopadā madhyamakavṛtti. Douze chapitres traduits du sanskrit et du tibétain*, Paris, 1959, p. 220). Apropos of the reading *Madhyadeśikāś*, May remarks: "Cette leçon paraît préférable à *Madhyoddesīkāś*. Le terme ne semble pas désigner une secte déterminée, mais seulement une localisation géographique. Le tib. a *madhyapāśhaka*". In my review of May's work I pointed out that the reading *Madhyoddesīka* corresponds exactly to Tibetan *bar-ma 'don-par byed-pa* (*JW* 5, 1961-1962, p. 164). The mea-