

APPENDIX

THE ARABIC INSCRIPTIONS AT HORVAT BERACHOT

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1. The Arabic inscription (fig. 46) was incised on the south wall of the crypt, *ca.* 1.25 m. above the floor level of the Early Arab period (i.e., *ca.* 1.40 m. above the mosaic), on the east (left) side of the blocked south staircase. At a later period this part of the wall was revealed and the inscription was redrawn in black charcoal; this probably occurred in recent years.

The measurements of the inscription, written on three stones, are: length, 130 cm.; height, 30 cm.; average height of letters, 8 cm.

The Arabic text reads:

1. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
2. اللهم اغفر ليوسف [بن]
3. ياسين

Transliteration:

1. bismi allāh alrahman alrahīm
2. allahumma 'ighfir liyūsuf [ibn]
3. yāsīn.

Translation:

1. In the name of God the merciful, the compassionate
2. Oh God, grant pardon to Yūsuf [son of]
3. Yāsīn.

There is no archeological evidence for the date of the inscription and the dating of it is based entirely on paleographical considerations. Therefore, to suggest any exact date is impossible.

On the basis of the characteristics of several letters, we are able to identify this inscription as early Kufic, datable from the first century A.H. (A.D. seventh to eighth century).

- a) The initial *alif* has a horizontal bend to the right.
- b) The final *mīm* ends without a vertical tail below the base line.
- c) The medial *sīn* is written with three angular uprights.
- d) The initial *hā'* has only two rude strokes.
- e) The *rā'* is partially above the base line.
- f) The final *nūn* is not completed as a semicircle.
- g) The final *fā'* has an open horizontal terminal.
- h) The medial *hā'* forms an elliptical half-round, and has an oblique line crossing it in the middle.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *EI* (old edition), s.v. "Arabia," pl. 1: stone inscription on seventh-century column.

The formula "allahumma 'ighfir li . . ." (Oh God, grant pardon to . . .) is not unknown in Moslem civilization. An unsystematic survey of the inscriptions and graffiti discovered and deciphered in Syria and Palestine furnishes some parallels.<sup>2</sup>

In all such parallels, the names following the pious invocations are those of the writer and his father. The same is true of inscriptions with slightly different formulas which have probably the same purpose. For this reason we propose to insert the word "ibn" (son of) between the two proper names of our inscription.

Yāsīn is rare as a proper name in this early period. It is derived from the initial word of the thirty-sixth sura of the Koran.

The identity of the writer is unknown. It was perhaps more than coincidence that an inscription of this kind was incised in a Christian shrine so shortly after it had been deserted.

An identical graffito in one of the corners of the great church of St. Symeon, in northern Syria, may throw some light on the problem of a Moslem God-fearing prayer in a non-Moslem shrine. The graffito is near a Greek inscription which reads:

Χριστή, βοήθῃ πασιν<sup>3</sup>

One is inclined to assert that perhaps the whole idea of writing reverent inscriptions, the exactly similar formula for expressing such feeling, and the place where they were carved were imitated by the Moslems in the early centuries of their intensive acculturation in the Near East. The inspiring source of that holy tradition would be, therefore, the Christian world.

We may also suggest the possibility that the writer was one of the Moslem mystics who wandered as pilgrims in the vicinity of Jerusalem and the Judean desert as early as the Omayyad period.<sup>4</sup>

In the lower part of the inscription some more letters, smaller and less deeply cut, can be seen. They do not provide a complete reading. One can recognize م ل م (A, L, M) as well as other letters ي ز (perhaps 'yazīd'). We could not decide whether these letters have a meaningful relation to the main inscription. Their location under the single word of the third line rather than in the remaining space dates these letters to a time later than the principal carving. It is very hard to date them exactly; however, they have paleographic elements indicating a very early period (first century A.H.).

<sup>2</sup> E. Littmann, *Semitic Inscriptions* (New York, 1905), 196, nos. 19, 20 (undated, place not mentioned). *Idem*, *Semitic Inscriptions* (Leiden, 1949), section D: Arabic inscriptions, 5, no. 5 (probably datable to 177 A.H./A.D. 793-94, but not later than 199 A.H./A.D. 814-15, in the ancient part of the east wall of a mosque); 72, no. 95 (undated); 73, no. 96 (either from 100 A.H./A.D. 718 or 600 A.H./A.D. 1203-4); 73, no. 97 (619 A.H./A.D. 1222-23); 74, no. 98 (646 A.H./A.D. 1248-49); 75, no. 99 (700 A.H./A.D. 1300-1); all from southeast Syria. Van Berchem, "Note on the Graffiti of the Cistern at Wady-el-Joz," *PEFQ* (1915), 87 (no date).

<sup>3</sup> Littmann, *Semitic Inscriptions* (Leiden, 1949), 93, no. 135.

<sup>4</sup> S. D. Goitein, "The Sanctity of Jerusalem and Palestine in Early Islam," *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* (Leiden, 1968), 135-48, esp. 142.

2. The aforementioned inscription is not the only one found in the small crypt. On the south part of the east wall of the north staircase leading to the crypt we could observe some Arabic letters (fig. 47). The stone on which they are carved is trapezoidal in shape. It is 1.30 m. high above the step. Its length is 58 cm. Its maximum height is 43 cm. and its minimum height is 31 cm. The letters are 2.5 cm. high and 2 cm. wide. The longest line is 50 cm. long.

Our reading of this fragmentary inscription is very doubtful. Relying solely on paleographic considerations, we are unable to suggest any date for it.

The Arabic text reads:

1. بسم [الله] الرحمن الرحيم [ ] هذا  
 2. [ ] > [ ] ابو ا  
 3. [ ] يوسف [ ]

Translation:

1. In the name of God the merciful, the compassionate [ ] this  
 2. [ ] ḥ [ ] Abu A.  
 3. [ ] Yūsuf [ ]

3. Another fragmentary Arabic inscription is to be seen on the lower stone blocking the way which leads from the crypt to the south staircase (fig. 48). Both the fine letters and their location on the margins of the stone lead to the assumption that the Arabic inscription was carved when the stone was set in a more central place, and that our stone carries only part of a longer inscription, the rest of which has not yet been found.

The letters are 13 cm. high, 3 cm. wide, and of a 4–5 mm. stroke width. The whole line is 30 cm. long.

From a preliminary glance one may suggest that the inscription is later than the first century A.H. and its maker was skilled in his craft.

The Arabic text reads:

1. م ط ل [ ]  
 2. ار ح [ ] على

Translation:

1. [ ] m(?) ta (?) l  
 2. [ ] have mercy on

It is very likely that there was also a third line; however, we were not able to decipher it.