

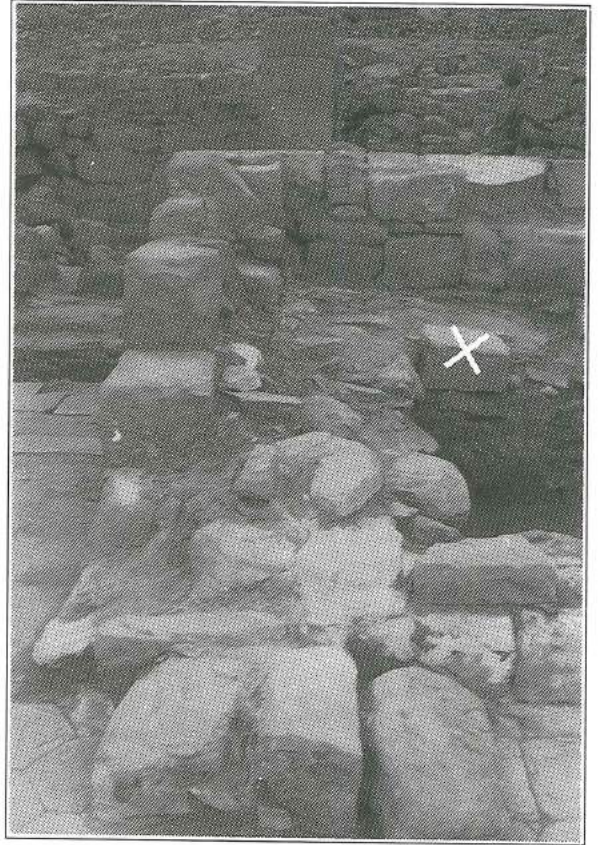
## TWO NORTH-ARABIAN INSCRIPTIONS FROM THE TEMPLE OF LĀT AT WĀDĪ IRAM

by

Fawzi Zayadine and Saba Farès-Drappeau

In the years 1996 and 1997, the Department of Antiquities consolidated the temple of Lāt in Wādī Iram which had been shaken by the recent earth tremors (Figs. 1 and 2). The work was supervised by Sawsan Fakhiry, Inspector of the 'Aqaba District with the assistance of Muhammed Malkawi. The workers found there, during the clearance of the central cella, an inscribed block and deposited it at the entrance of the monument. On June 9th, 1997, Saba Farès-Drappeau and Fawzi Zayadine visited the temple as part of the epigraphic survey of the area, and noticed the inscription. They returned the next day in the company of Hussein Abu Al-Hassan (King Sa'ud University in Riyadh) and Mahmud al-Russan (Yarmouk University) who participated in the preliminary decipherment of the inscription.

The block of yellowish sandstone measures 53 x 23 x 26 cm and was apparently built into the floor of the cella (Fig. 2) where its negative was clearly visible. The face bearing the inscription was turned inward, a



2. The inscribed block *in situ*. (x=Block with inscription) (Photo: L. Tholbecq).



1. General view of the Temple of Lāt Temple.



fact that prevented Diana Kirkbride from noticing it during her excavation in 1959.

1. Text of three lines of Thamudic E nicely incised in spiral.

H. of letters: *alef*: 5.5cm; *sin*: 2cm. (Figs. 3 and 4).

**Transliteration**

*LĠT BN 'SLH BN TKM WBNY BT LTD 'L 'D*

“By Ġa(w)ṭ the son of A(w)slh, son of Tkm and he built the sanctuary (bayt) of Lāt of 'L 'AD (tribe).”

**Interpretation**

*ĠT*, Ġa(w)ṭ is a frequent north Arabian name (Harding 1971: s.v.; Negev 1991: *GAWTW*, No. 862.

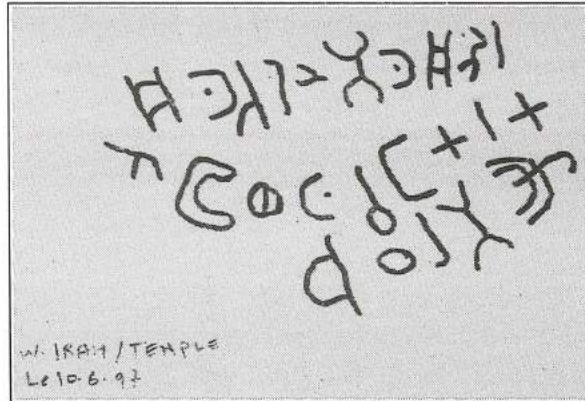
'SLH, A(w)slh is also common in Thamudic and Safaitic and Nabataean: Negev, *op. cit.* No. 50; Harding 1971: s.v.

*TKM* is a new name in the north Arabian onomasticon. In the Arabic Lexicon, *TKM* means: the middle of a way. See Harding 1971: s.v. *TKMTN*.

*BNY*, to build, see Jean and Hoftijzer 1965: s.v.

*BT*, *bayt* means the sanctuary in North Arabian dialects (Jean and Hoftijzer 1965: s.v.). The Ka'ba of Mekka was designated as *al-bayt al-'atīq* by the Arab chroniclers (Fahd 1965: 213).

*D* is the proposition of *nisba* = 'be-



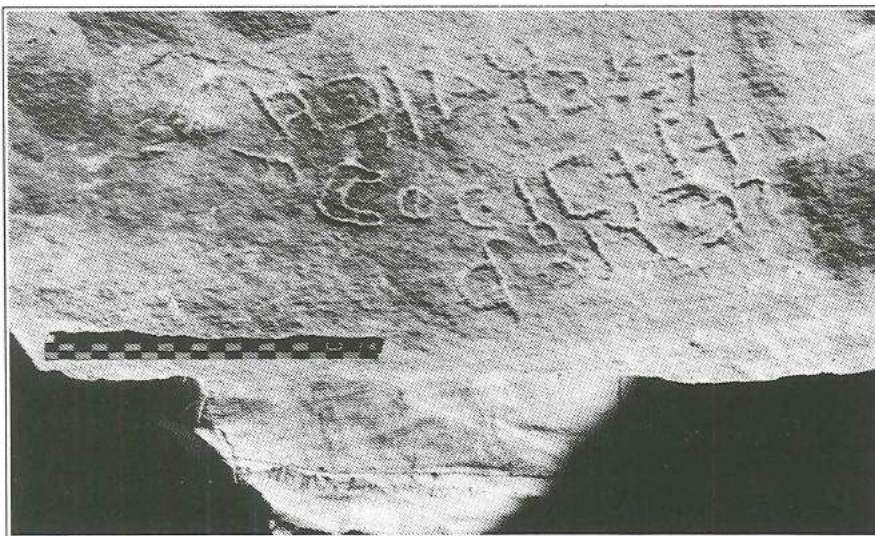
4. Facsimile of Inscription I.

longing to' in Thamudic and Safaitic. 'L 'D is the north Arabian tribe mentioned several times in the Koran. The most significant reference is sūrat 89, al-Fajr: 5-8:

“Have you not heard how your Lord dealt with 'Ad, (and with) Iram of the high peaks, whose like was never created in the whole land? And (of) Thamud who hewed the rock in the valley?”

Some translators of the Koran misunderstand the word *'imād* and render it into “many columned city of Iram”. But in Arabic it means: the “high support” and *'Imād al-samā'* refers to the “high mountains”. 'Mūd in Al-Bakry (1983: 971-972) is cited in several instances as a mountain in the al-Ḥijāz. In Wādī Iram, Jabal 'Amud is well-known.

2. A reused sandstone block in a wall of the settlement south of the Temple of Lāt is



3. Thamudic E Inscription I of the Temple of Lāt.



inscribed with one line in Thamudic E. It measures: 63 x 35 x 15 cm (Figs. 5 and 6). H. of *mem* : 6cm; *waw* and *bâ* : 3cm.

**Transliteration**

L'MR BN GWT

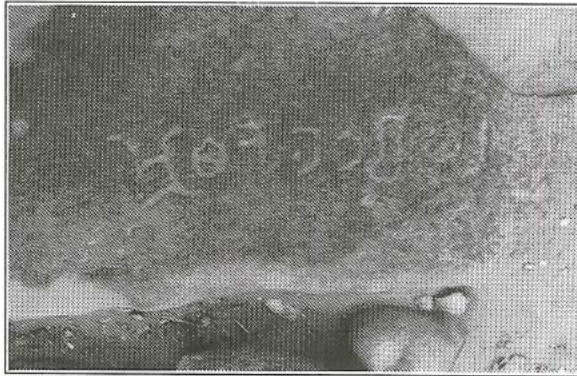
By 'Amr son of Gawṭ.

**Interpretation**

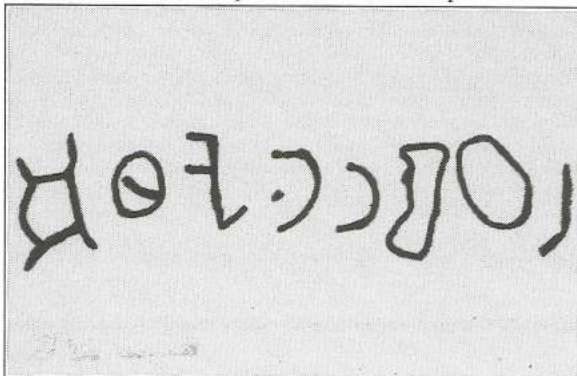
It is probable that 'Amr is the son of the former, although the tribe is not mentioned. It is remarkable that in this graffito, the *waw* of Gawṭ, was marked as in Nabataean.

**Conclusion**

The name of the valley was known from a Nabataean inscription published by Savignac (1932: 591-592): "May be remembered Hayan, son of 'Abdallahi, son of Ibn 'Atmu, in front of Allat, the goddess of Iram, for ever". It is possible in this case that the site which was located on a major artery between the al-Ḥijāz and Syria was considered by the Koran as one of the wonders of the world. It is today one of the



5. Thamudic E Inscription II of the Temple of Lāt.



6. Facsimile of Inscription II.

greatest touristic attractions, known as "the Valley of the Moon". Other tribes such as Mezn, Ḥl'l, and M'n'l assembled around the Temple of Lāt, together with the Nabataeans. But the original founder of this sanctuary is Gawṭ son of Awsalah, from the tribe of 'Ad. The recent soundings of L. Tholbecq did not provide evidence of this temple (see his article in this volume). But in her report, Diana Kirkbride (1960: 85) assumes the existence of an earlier sanctuary: "Bien que le sondage n'ait pas fourni de preuve d'un sanctuaire antérieur, il reste possible qu'il y en ait eu un, à peu près sur le plan de l'actuel". This earlier sanctuary (*bayt*) need not be monumental and was most probably a cubic building to house the baetyl of Lāt. It is posited that the Nabataeans remodelled the earlier temple by the addition of a columned portico, possibly in the time of Aretas IV. Savignac (1935: 267-268) published a Nabataean graffito on the plaster of the temple dated 40+(see also discussion: Tholbecq, in this volume). He assumed, without providing convincing evidence, that this date should be calculated according to the era of the *Provincia Arabia* (106 AD). However, a Nabataean inscription of Jabal al-Kharaza in Wādī Iram, near a dam, is dated to the "41st year of Aretas who loves his people" (Milik 1958: 249-250). It is more plausible in this case that the graffito of the temple is to be dated to the year 41 of Aretas IV (= 32 AD), not ignoring the fact that the Nabataean presence in Wādī Iram goes back to at least the sixth-fifth century BC. How they imposed their leadership on to the other tribes remains an open question which will be discussed in another paper.

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