Notes on the Discovery of Hebrew Inscriptions in the Vicinity of the Minaret of Jām
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In Number 4, December 1962, of « East and West », Dr. G. Gnoli mentioned some Hebrew inscriptions which I discovered in Afghanistan in the zone of Jām. Since this is an important discovery, which took place in a little-known area, and which presupposes the existence of a completely unknown Jewish colony, I think it opportune to relate exactly how the discovery took place.

I must state that the find was accidental, and that I was drawn to investigate the area in which I found the inscribed stones through the curiosity aroused in me by the contradictory information linked to a series of fantastic descriptions which the inhabitants of the place used to describe that same locality, called in the language of this people « the mountain of green stones », but which is really named Kush Kak.

I went to Jām to control the conditions of stability of the Minaret of Jām, and to study the possibility of setting up protective works at the base of the Minaret, rising at the meeting-point of two streams (the Hari Rud and the Jām Rud) which, as can be seen in the photograph, are undermining its base (Fig. 1). During my stay in the small village of Jām, I was able to question the local people to the end of gathering many bits of information regarding the site. (∗)

Before going on to a description of the area and the discovery, it might be of value in explaining the presence of a Jewish settlement in this zone, to recall that the area in which the Minaret of Jām rises is even today the centre of a series of historical hypotheses which place it as the sign of Firuzkuh, capital of the Ghurid empire. (∗∗)

When the work scheduled at the Minaret was done, (∗∗∗) September 28, 1962, on the

(∗) See ANDRÉ MARICQ, Le Minaret de Djam, la découverte de la capitale des Sultans Ghorides (XII-XIII siècle), (Mémoires D.A.F.A. 1959).

(∗∗) I was helped in finding the « green stones » by Mr. Payman. He has been my interpreter and has accompanied me during my surveys in Afghanistan; he questioned the dwellers of that valley with patience and ability so as to gather as much precise information as possible. However we did not get any exact description of the place either because people ignored anything certain about the location or they feared having to move the « green stones ». As already stated, the finding was rather occasional, chance favoured me after many unsuccessful attempts.

(∗∗∗) As a supplement to the first brief note on the Minaret of Jām published in this magazine in the issue of June-September 1952, and in anticipation of a more complete graphic illustration of this monument, I am taking the occasion of this brief essay to present some drawings of the Minaret of Jām which I executed at the time of the survey carried out to study the possibilities of preserving the monument. Some protective measures — such as a dike at its base against the waters of the rivers — built by using the material found.
way back to the village of Jam, I wanted to try once again a route proposed to me by a porter who had been with me for some days, and who lived near the village of Jam. Climbing the crumbling slopes of the mountain called Kush Kak, I saw, at the point marked in the photograph (Fig. 2), a large stone, roundish in shape and dark green in colour; in drawing closer, I could see that it was covered with inscriptions in Hebrew letters. One can see in the photograph the exact position in which it was found, and beside it is the guide who led me to the spot (Fig. 3). I then discovered many other stones at a short distance from the first, and in the two erosion ditches to right and left of the ridge on which the cemetery was in all probability located, and which the rains and the crumbling of the mountain had toppled down below.

Since it was growing late and I was absolutely obliged to be back at Herat the following day, I decided to carry four of these stones with me so as to be able to study them, and to hand them over to the Kabul Museum, where they are at the moment. During the mission carried out in 1963 to collect further epigraphic material, and keep the other stones from being lost, I collected various other inscriptions. I brought three of these stones to the Kabul Museum, while the others were grouped together at the site and entrusted to the head of the village of Jam, who was to see that they were delivered to the Governor of Sharak, so that their final destination might be the Kabul Museum.

We are obviously dealing with a Jewish cemetery cut into the sides of the mountain, and which, on the basis of observations I have made, may be localized in the outlined zone (Fig. 4).

I was not able to carry out any exploration of the ground, to try and find some burial spots; we therefore cannot know the exact position of the cemetery as yet, but it is very likely that it is to be set above the highest point at which the stones were found, since all the finds were evidently stones rolled downhill by landslides.

As can be clearly seen in the photograph, these are semata which must have been placed above the tombs to record the departed, and, given their shape and the direction

on the spot have been taken by the local Authorities after my survey in October 1961.

I have chosen two designs which seem to me the most characteristic among those I made of the Minaret, so as to give, if even in a summary fashion, some idea of the structural and decorative importance of this great work which rises as one sees in Fig. 1) in a harsh mountain landscape at about 3,000 metres, in a locality that was unknown until a few years ago (see the preceding note).

Plate I shows the vertical section of the Minaret and some horizontal sections corresponding to the most characteristic points of the constructions. From merely viewing this drawing, one can plainly see the importance of this monument from a structural point of view.

Plate II presents two of the eight decorative bands of the first section of the Minaret, and some geometrical schemes of the decorative details of which they are composed; in this drawing too one may observe the richness of the motifs developed in the great sections into which the cylindrical surface is subdivided. All these decorations are realized in brick elements applied to the cylindrical surface of the first section of the Minaret.
Fig. 1. - The Minaret of Jam as seen from the Hari Rud valley.

Fig. 2. - The place of Kush-Kak, situated between the village of Jam and the Minaret: a) The place where the Hebrew inscriptions were found - b) The location of the Minaret of Jam.
Fig. 3. - A dweller of Jām phished near the first discovered.

Fig. 1. - The probable position of the Hebrew necropolis as shown in the photograph.
Plate I - Minaret of Jam.
The vertical section of the Minaret and some horizontal sections.
Plate II - Minaret of Jam. A study for the restoration of the decorations. Two of the eight decorative bands of the first section of the Minaret.
of the inscriptions, we must imagine that they were resting on the tombs themselves. The problem which arises from the discovery of this necropolis is that of finding the settlement in which the persons who were placed in these tombs must have lived.

The ruins above the Hari Rud near the Minaret of Jām have an obvious character of fortifications, and therefore the general aspect of the area gives one the impression that the Minaret of Jām was not surrounded by a city proper, but by a fortified military camp.

A fortified camp which functioned as a resting-place and a zone for concentrating troops might well be assigned to such a locality. If this hypothesis is valid, the Jewish tombs discovered in the zone might belong to a small community of Israelites who carried out varied activities of a mercantile and financial nature, necessary for the nearby camp and military installation.

In regard to these inscriptions, let it be noted that another Hebrew inscription was found some years ago in Afghanistan, and is now to be found in the Kabul Museum; this, I was told in Kabul, did not come from the zone of Jam, but from a locality near the city of Kabul.

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P.S. Since the discovery was made on the occasion of my visit to Jām, and this visit was made at the request of the Archaeological Department of Afghanistan, I take this opportunity to express my thanks to the Department which provided me with an interpreter and bestowed upon me many kindnesses.