

A new Parthian Inscription

(PLATE V)

By W. B. HENNING

THE scantiness of Parthian inscribed material enhances the importance of any new find. The existence of inscriptions and drawings on the rock-walls of a gorge near Birjand (Southern Khorasan) had been known for some time; but their antiquity was not recognized until Mr. Jamal Rezai, a Persian student from Birjand, visited the gorge and took photographs, which he submitted to Dr. Sadiq Kiya, of the University of Tehran. Dr. Kiya at once correctly identified the writing as Parthian and, in company with Mr. Rezai, published the whole material, together with a preliminary reading of the inscriptions.¹ Dr. Richard N. Frye also paid a visit to the site and reported on it briefly in the Persian literary monthly *Mihr*.² Later some uninformed criticism, claiming modern origin of the remains, appeared in the same periodical³; it was justly refuted by Dr. Kiya.⁴

The name of the gorge is *Kāl* ⁵⁻ⁱ *Ĵangāl*. It is situated among the western spurs of the *Kūh-i Rūč*, itself the westernmost part of the *Kūh-i Bāqrān*, the considerable mountain-range stretching to the south of Birjand.⁶ Its distance from *Khusf*⁷ (which lies to the west) is 11 kilometres, from the village of *Rūč* (which lies to the north-east) 2 kilometres. The remains noted by Mr. Rezai consist of the following:—

¹ J. Rezai and S. Kiya, *Guzâriš-i navîstehâ va peikarhâyi Kâl-i Ĵangâl* (= *Īrân-Kūde* No. 14). Tehran, Isfandârmudh-mâh 1320 Yezd. [= Feb.-March, 1952]. Here quoted as *Report*.

² Year 8, No. 4, Tîr, 1331 [= June-July, 1952], p. 220. Only the principal drawing and inscription had attracted Dr. Frye's notice.

³ Year 8, No. 6, Šahrivar, 1331 [= Aug.-Sept., 1952], p. 383.

⁴ *Mihr*, year 8, No. 9, Ādhar, 1331 [= Nov.-Dec., 1952], pp. 538-9.

⁵ Acc. to *Report*, p. 6, n. 3, *kâl* is a local word, in *Khusf* and *Birjand*, with the meaning of *darre* "valley". Cf. Ivanow, "Rustic Poetry in the Dialect of Khorasan" (*J. and Proc. As. Soc. Bengal*, N.S. xxi, 1925, No. 3), p. 257, *kâl* "a river-bed, wādī, nullah"; see Vullers s.v. *kâl* 6.—As the brief vowels of place-names are not given in the *Report*, the correct pronunciation of *Ĵangâl* is necessarily uncertain.

⁶ Useful information on the geography and history of this region is contained in W. Ivanow's article, "Persian as spoken in Birjand" (*J. and Proc. As. Soc. Bengal*, N.S. xxiv, 1928, No. 4), pp. 236-246.

⁷ On the origin of this name (*Xusf/b* from *Xwasp*) see Markwart, *Wehrot und Arang*, p. 20, n. 2. The forms with final *-st* are due to dissimilation, cf. the reverse change from *-st* to *-sp* (see *Trans. Phil. Soc.*, 1942, 50, n. 2).



(a) A rock-drawing of a man and a lion, accompanied by a Parthian inscription (No. 1). See Plate V.

(b) A rock-drawing of a male bust (bearded head, with helmet and diadem, in profile turned to the left),¹ with a damaged Parthian inscription (No. 5).²

(c) Fragments of seven further inscriptions,³ all apparently in Parthian. They belong to different periods. Some may constitute parts of a larger inscription⁴ (Nos. 6 and 7, in a formal type of script); some are written in a cursive style reminiscent of Sogdian (Nos. 2 and 3).

It is evident that further investigation on the spot is required (as well as some measure of excavation) before the remains can be satisfactorily interpreted.⁵ For the present we have to confine ourselves to an examination of the inscription No. 1, for which alone sufficient material is at hand.⁶

All the letters in this inscription, which comprises two lines, are clearly legible:—

גריארתחשתר	<i>gry'rthštr</i>
נחודר ו השתרף	<i>nhwdr W hštrp</i>

The reading offered by Dr. Kiya was almost correct; he gave it in Persian letters in this form:—

ری ارتخشتر نخوری خشترپ

The *tašdīd* indicates that he read the first word in the second line as *nhwrr-y*; but, as the photographs show, *-d-* is clearly distinguished

¹ *Report*, pp. 10 sq., figs. 4 and 5.

² Presumably giving the name and title (or office) of the man represented in the drawing. A purely tentative reading: *Wyš'ny K'styr(wk)*. It is impossible to say how much (if anything) is missing at the end. The writing, compared with that of Inscr. No. 1, tends to the cursive; the letter *K* deviates from the norm. *Wyš'ny* probably = Hystanes | Histanes | Bisthanes.

³ One of them on a slab found among the debris on the floor of the gorge (*Report*, p. 13). There are, in addition, several isolated letters, belonging perhaps to Nos. 6 and 7.

⁴ *Report*, pp. 12–13.

⁵ It would be advisable to take squeezes rather than direct photographs. For the purpose of photography, the *Report* states, "the letters and lines of the inscriptions and drawings were whitened with plaster to make them show up better" (p. 7). We thus entirely depend on Mr. Rezai's powers of observation; he seems to have done his work with commendable care.

⁶ I owe thanks to Mr. J. Rezai for sending me, through the good offices of Dr. E. Yarshater, a copy of the photograph he had taken (which was published before in *Report*, p. 7); it accompanies this article. I am further indebted to Dr. R. N. Frye for giving me a print of his own photograph.

from *-r-* in the usual way by a diacritical mark. As the first word of the inscription Dr. Kiya assumed *BRY* "son"; this gives an easy, but doubtless wrong, reading; for the first letter is a very determined *G*; also there is no word-division in the first line.

Nhwdr = *Naχwaδār* means (as will be shown presently) "prefect" or the like; it is approximately equivalent to *hštrp* "satrap". In the first centuries of our era "satrap" was not so much a rank as an office; the word is invariably accompanied by the name of the district which was governed by the "satrap". Thus in the Parthian inscription found at Susa, *Hwsk Šwš hštrp* "Khwāsak the satrap of Susa"¹; and so often in the inscription of Shapur I. The status of a satrap in those centuries cannot be compared with that enjoyed by his Achæmenian namesake; the area he now governed was small, scarcely more than a town with its surroundings; the inscription of Shapur names satraps of e.g. Hamadan, Gay, Weh-Ardašīr, Gundēšābūr, Nīrīz. On these grounds one would assume that the long word which occupies the first line of our inscription was the name of a town or smallish district; so that the inscription means "the prefect and satrap of *Gry'rthštr*". This entails the further assumption that the inscription is incomplete; its first line is close to the present edge of the rock: a piece that carried a further line, with the satrap's name, may have broken away.

Next to nothing is known about the history, in the early centuries of our era, of the wider neighbourhood of Birjand, the sub-province called *Qūhistān* "mountain-land" in Muslim times; the inscriptions of *Kāl-i Jāngāl* are indeed the first inscribed monuments ever discovered in Eastern Persia. It is thus not surprising that such a place-name, *Gari-Artaxšaθr* or *Gar-Ardašīr*, cannot be traced in other sources.² Certainly it has all the appearance of a name given by the first Sassanian King of Kings, Ardašīr,³ or given in his honour (there are many such names). One may even suggest that *Gar-Ardašīr*, which perhaps meant "the mountains of Ardašīr", was the name of the very district of which Birjand formed a part, a forerunner of the later *Qūhistān*.⁴

¹ See *Asia Major*, ii, 176.

² There is, however, a personal name of somewhat similar aspect (but uncertain reading), see Justi, p. 156a, *Karardašīr* (which could be *Gar-* instead).

³ The *Kermān-Šāh* Ardašīr need not be considered here.

⁴ Alternatively (but less likely), the name could be a recast of *Γαρί πόλις* (Isidorus Characenus, § 16), which lay in the neighbourhood of Farah—Neh.

If this interpretation is correct, it follows that the inscription belongs not to Parthian times (as its Parthian language *prima facie* suggests), but to the Sassanian period, probably its early years. We do not know how long the distinctive Parthian script continued in use; as the letters of our inscription are substantially the same in form as those familiar from the monuments of the third century,¹ we should claim it for that century, the heyday of Middle-Iranian epigraphy. This is in consonance with the date which one would be inclined to attribute to the rock-drawing beside the inscription.² It is true that rock-drawings (very differently from rock-reliefs) are altogether unusual in ancient Iran; there is thus no strictly comparable material. Nevertheless, the style of this drawing³ has all the traits characteristic of the art of the early Sassanian period (man in profile, except for his chest and his eye; absurd misrepresentation of his right arm and hand).⁴ From the scene depicted⁵ one may infer that Kāl-i Ĵangāl served as a hunting-camp for the local chieftains of Qūhistān, who probably retired to the Kūh-i Bāqrān in summer.⁶ The chief importance of the inscriptions lies in the proof they afford that the language now generally described as *Parthian* was in fact used in (at least a part of) *Parthia*.⁷

It remains to discuss the new title, *Nhwdr*, which etymologically means "he who holds the beginning, the first (place)". Such a word has often been postulated; but this is the first time that it actually occurs in an Iranian document. The following forms have been noted previously:—

(1) *Nohodares*, the name (rightly, probably, the title) of a Persian

¹ The only significant deviation is in the letter *b*, which has developed a loop at the bottom of the first vertical.

² The other drawing, above p. 141, under (b), may be somewhat older; it is reminiscent of the representations of the Parthian kings on their coins.

³ The photograph, having been taken at an angle from the left, is somewhat deceptive; there is increasing distortion to the right side, causing the man to appear over-slim (except for his right leg and hand): in fact, as Dr. Frye's photograph shows, his chest and shoulders are abnormally broad.

⁴ Cf. Sarre, *Die Kunst des alten Persien*, p. 40.

⁵ Intended to show the man strangling a lion (in the outcome, he seems to be tickling its ear).

⁶ As the village of *Rič* near-by is now used as *yailaq* by the people of Khusf.

⁷ As yet we cannot take into account the documents, believed to be Parthian, which were recently discovered by the Russians at the site of Nisā. No copy, as far as I know, of the book in which they were published (D'akonov, *Parf'anskie dokumenti iz drevney Nisi*) has reached this country. See provisionally M. E. Masson, *Vestnik Drevney Istorii*, 1950, No. 3, p. 54.

general under Shapur II, Ammianus Marcellinus xiv, 3: 1, 2, xviii, 6: 16; 8: 3; xxv, 3: 13.

(2) *Nwhdr* in Syriac, as a title in a pre-Christian Syriac inscription, where it precedes a place-name (Pognon, *Inscr. sém.*, No. 5), in the local name ܢܘܚܕܪ ܕܥܘܠܐ (Hoffmann, *Märtyrerakten*, 209 sq.), and glossed by ܐܘܪܝܚܐ and as "army-chief" by Bar Bahlul. See Nöldeke, *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, xxi (1908), 153 sq.

(3) *Naxarar* in Armenian, "feudal chief, prefect." The actual existence of *Nwhdr* as a title in Parthia itself, in a sense closely corresponding with that of *naxarar*, makes it necessary to return to the explanation advanced long ago by F. C. Andreas (see Hübschmann, *Arm. Gramm.*, 514 sq.).¹ *Naxarar*, which agrees with *naxwaδār* exactly,² should be regarded as a loanword from Parthian.³ The older derivation is preferable to that proposed by Meillet⁴ (Sogdian *nāfδār*), which required the assumption of an exception from the sound-laws,⁵ see *Rev. Ét. Arm.*, ii, 2.

(4) *Nwγδ'r*, in Sogdian-Uigur writing, = *Noχδār*, the name of a Manichæan presbyter, in *Türkische Manichaica*, iii, p. 35, No. 16.⁶

¹ Differently N. Marr, *Etymologi'a dvux terminov Arm'anskago Feodal'nago stro'a (sepuh and naxarar)*, *Zap. Vost. Otd. Imp. Russk. Ak. Obšč.*, xi, 1898, 165-174.

² -axa- from -axwa- as in *kaxard*.

³ This was rightly seen by Meillet (differently Hübschmann).

⁴ Who compared *nahapet* < *nāfapati*, which may occur in the inscription of Paikuli, see *BSOAS.*, xiv, 511, n. 6. Of the other words mentioned by Meillet, *nahatak* and *nahang*, the latter, which means "province" (*ἐπαρχία*), does not belong to *nāfa*- (it reflects MTr. *nah*- from *naθ*-). It is met with several times in the inscriptions of Kartir, spelt *nsngy* (which has been oddly explained as meaning "few").

⁵ An assumption made also by Marr, loc. cit., p. 171.

⁶ The Manichæan *naxwyr* (cf. Andreas *apud* F. W. K. Müller, *Handschriftenreste*, ii, 111) does not belong to this group, see *Mittelir. Manichaica*, i, 197, n. 2.