

XXVII. *Account of an ancient Arabic Grave-Stone, found at Dhalac-el Kibeer, near Massowah, Abyssinia, decyphered by GRAVES C. HAUGHTON, Esq., A.M. F.R.S. M.R.A.S., &c.*

Read July 3, 1830.

THE grave-stone, of which I propose to give a short account, was laid on the table of this Society a few weeks back by Mr. Samuel D. Broughton, the brother of our respected secretary. It had been left with him by the late Mr. Salt; but, since decyphering it, I have learnt that this and a similar monument were found in the year 1805 by that gentleman when accompanying Lord Valentia, now the Earl of Mount-Norris, at Dhalac-el-Kibeer, near Massowah, on the coast of Abyssinia. The following account of the discovery and bringing away of the stone is given in the second volume of his lordship's travels, pp. 41-42 and 235-236.*

“ On the northern side (of the port of Dhalac-el-Kibeer) are the ruins of two small mosques, built of stone, with round cupolas at top, but of a rude workmanship. In the one towards the sea is an Arabic inscription cut on a stone placed in a recess. Around the mosque a great number of monumental stones are placed upright in the ground, at the heads of the persons whom they commemorate; many are well carved, and beautifully adorned with flowers and other ornaments, some in the Cufic, some in the Arabic character. As the stones are in general of a portable size, Mr. Salt was desirous of taking one away; but, as he was assured by the priest that this could not be done without express permission from the Nayib of Massowah, he contented himself with taking a copy of one inscription which seemed to be held in the highest veneration, although externally it had nothing to recommend it, being indifferently carved and having a corner broken. The priest informed him that it belonged to the Sheik or Suldaun

* Voyages and Travels to India, Ceylon, the Red Sea, Abyssinia, and Egypt, in the years 1802, 3, 4, 5, and 6, by George Viscount Valentia. London, 1809. 3 vols. 4to.

(he is called both) who built the tanks. It is immediately opposite to the principal mosque, and by the natives constantly kept moist with oil." Vol. 2, page 41-2.

January 14, 1805.

Dhalac el Kibeer.

"At daylight I (Mr. Salt) went with Abdallah and the two Europeans to the northern mosque, for the purpose of getting possession of some of the monumental stones mentioned in my former account. The best finished inscriptions were engraved on stones too heavy to carry away. I therefore made choice of two of the most perfect, carved in different characters, that were portable, and, wrapping them up very carefully, proceeded back to our lodgings, not quite satisfied, I own, with the propriety of what I was about.

"Our proceedings having been observed, by the time we reached the house a crowd had assembled, among which were several principal inhabitants. I immediately perceived that they were acquainted with what we had been doing, and that they wished to examine the contents of our bags, which we evaded and got our plunder safe into the yard. The crowd now began to increase, and I heard them debating the matter rather warmly on the outside. Soon afterwards they came into the yard in a body, with Seied Yusuff and the Nayib's messenger at their head; there were also among the foremost the Sheik-el Belled, and the Sheik of the mosque. Abdallah being called, they began a most lamentable complaint against our proceedings; said these stones were sacred to the dead, and that the Nayib had positively forbidden that any of them should be removed. The Nayib's man, however, who was spokesman, said nothing as from himself, but premised every sentence with "Thus do they infer." The Seied Yusuff also (having been previously bribed) kept a becoming silence. So I cut the matter short, by telling them that they might rest assured that I should do nothing but what the Nayib approved, and that I should not think of arguing with them on the subject (whom it did not at all concern), but would settle the matter with their superior when we arrived at Massowah. This I told them was my determination, and forbade Abdallah to interpret another word on the subject. The only fear now was that we should not get any animal to carry them away. As soon, therefore, as tranquillity was a little restored, we took an opportunity of making rather a larger present than we had intended to the two sheiks, and distributed the remainder of our tobacco among the lower order. This completely removed their scruples, and they imme-

diately assisted most cordially in repacking the sacred spoils, and in fastening them on the back of a camel. It was eleven o'clock before we got away." Vol. 2, page 235-6.

When the trouble and expense that have attended the procuring this tomb-stone are considered, it will be matter of regret with every one that these had not the good fortune to be bestowed on some object of greater interest. In this instance, as in many others, the risk of life, as well as the perseverance and zeal of the traveller, have been thrown away upon an object that had much better have remained in the sanctuary in which it had been set up.

This stone and its epitaph might be adduced as one of the many facts which prove, that females in Muhammadan countries enjoy a degree of respect and consideration little short of what exists in Europe.

The duration which has been, and seems likely to be the lot of this simple grave-stone, might well be coveted for the sepulchral monuments of the most celebrated individuals. It records the burial of a female of the lower orders, who died nearly eight hundred years ago. It has been executed with care, and, when the station in life of the parties is considered, evidently at considerable expense. This could scarcely have been the case at so remote a period, in an obscure town, or rather village, on the coast of the Red Sea, if females had not held that rank in society for which they were intended by nature, and which may always be considered as the surest standard of the civilization and refinement of every people.

I should not have thought it worthy the attention of the Society but for the antiquity of the inscription, which affords at once a longer and more undoubted specimen of Cufic characters than is to be found in any other relic of the same age with which I am acquainted. I was besides informed, that though a plate of it is published in Lord Valentia's Travels, it had hitherto remained undecyphered, and that a translation of it would be acceptable to the Society.

It seemed of use, therefore, to have it exactly copied, as it might afford some facility in making out similar inscriptions at a future period. It likewise appeared to me that it might not be altogether uninteresting to the European reader to know how nations, thought to be so dissimilar in usages and manners from ourselves, testified the last feelings of sorrow for departed friends and relatives. I beg leave, therefore, to submit a few brief remarks

on the stone and its inscription; and to subjoin a transcript in modern Arabic characters, together with a translation.

The stone, which is an unhewn misshapen mass, and very hard, is twenty-three inches long and fifteen inches broad, and is of that variety of the trap family of rocks, to which the term clinkstone seems the most applicable.* The surface had never been polished, and the engraver or stone-cutter took advantage of the natural fracture of the stone, as it was sufficiently smooth for his purpose. The letters are so slightly raised, that the hand might be passed over the surface of the stone without the idea being suggested that characters existed upon it. Indeed the relief is so inconsiderable, that the stone has been little more than abraded by the chisel.

From the perfect state in which the stone even now is, it is clear that the climate of the country where it has lain must have been most favourable to its preservation, as in some parts the touch of the graver has the freshness of a recent work, a circumstance that would be very conceivable had it been brought from the all-preserving climate of Egypt; but which we were not prepared to expect on the variable shore of the Red Sea. A similar stone exposed in our own climate, would, after twenty years, have shewn more symptoms of decay.

The inscription is in Arabic, written in Cufic characters, and of that form which is found full one hundred years later on the coins of the Seljūk sovereigns, as may be seen on referring to the plates of Mr. Marsden's excellent work on Oriental Numismatics. The letters are not of that simple, formal kind that belong to the earliest Cufic monuments, but are varied and twisted into shapes that render them rather puzzling at first sight.

The inscription consists of fourteen lines, of which the first nine and a half contain what may be considered the usual formulary for such monuments, being a passage taken from the Koran. I find the same passage occurring on the tomb-stone of the celebrated MİR JUMLAH, which has been just added to the Society's Museum; and of which I purpose to give a notice at some future period.

Subsequently to decyphering the inscription, I was favoured by our Secretary with a sort of translation of the formulary, written down by his

* I am indebted for this information to Dr. Mac Culloch, so well known for his profound acquaintance with geology.

brother, as dictated to him by Mirza Jafer, one of the young Persian gentlemen sent to this country about fifteen years since by Prince ABBAS MİRZA, the heir apparent to the throne of Persia. This was evidently only made from a knowledge of the Koran, and of the common formulary on grave-stones, and not from his being able to decypher the character. Had this been the case, he would have given some explanation of the rest of the inscription.

The stone-cutter has given a letter too much in the word بين *bain* of the sixth line; and I was at first inclined to think, that he had introduced an *alif* where it ought not to be in the phrase ايديهم *aidhim*; but I now think the letter *alif* of the line beneath has perhaps been lengthened to give a little variety and symmetry to the line above, and to prevent the monotonous recurrence of three letters which have nearly similar forms in the inscription. The word شاء *shá-a* occurs with three dots, as in *naskh* characters.

In the benedictory sentence, beginning at the thirteenth line, we have حمداً لله though the form is commonly, as is well known, الحمد لله *Alhamdu lilláh*; and from the fanciful turn given to the letter د *dal* of the word حمد *hamd*,* it might at first be supposed that it had an *alif* too much. But it is obvious that where illiterate workmen are employed mistakes do frequently occur; and in this and similar cases, when once cut into the stone, they cannot be obliterated without repolishing the surface and running the chance of fresh errors.

* My friend Mirza Ibrahim of Shiraz, now assistant professor at Haileybury College, whom I consulted on this expression, suggests that حمداً لله *hamdan lillah*, may have been intended; a form which he says is used بين الاعراب *bain al aráb* (among the wandering Arabs).

بسم الله الر

حمن الرحيم الله

لا اله الا هو الحي القيوم لا تاخذه سنة
و لا نوم له ما في السموات و ما في الارض
من ذا الذي يشفع عنده الا باذنه يعلم
ما بين ايديهم و ما خلفهم و لا يحيطون بشي
من علمه الا بما شآ وسمع كرميه
السموات و الارض و لا يوده حفظهما
و هو العلي العظيم * هذا قبر فاطمه
بنت محمد الخياط تدفنت يوم
السبت لعشر خلون من المحرم
سنة تسع و ثلثين و اربعما
ية و حمدا لله و صلي الله علي محمد
و آله و سلم تسليما

Translation.

IN THE NAME OF GOD, CLEMENT AND MERCIFUL.
GOD ! THERE IS NO GOD BUT HE, THE LIVING, THE SELF-SUBSISTING ;
NEITHER SLUMBER NOR SLEEP SEIZETH HIM ;
TO HIM BELONGETH WHATSOEVER IS IN HEAVEN OR ON EARTH.
WHO IS HE THAT CAN INTERCEDE WITH HIM, BUT THROUGH HIS GOOD PLEASURE ?
HE KNOWETH THAT WHICH IS PAST AND THAT WHICH IS TO COME UNTO THEM,
AND THEY SHALL NOT COMPREHEND ANY THING OF HIS KNOWLEDGE, BUT SO FAR AS HE PLEASETH.
HIS THRONE IS THE EXTENDED HEAVENS AND EARTH ;
AND THE PRESERVATION OF BOTH IS NO BURTHEN UNTO HIM.
HE IS THE HIGH, THE MIGHTY.*

THIS IS THE GRAVE OF FATIMA,
THE DAUGHTER OF MUHAMMAD, THE TAILOR.
SHE WAS BURIED ON THE SABBATH-DAY, † THE TENTH OF THE *MUHARRAM*,
IN THE YEAR FOUR HUNDRED AND THIRTY-NINE. ‡

PRAISE BE TO GOD,
AND MAY HIS BLESSING BE UPON MUHAMMAD AND HIS DESCENDANTS.
THE PEACE OF GOD BE WITH YOU !

* Sale, Koran, Vol. I., p. 44, ed. 1821.

† Saturday.

‡ According to the Hijra, and corresponding to the 6th July 1047, A.D.

AN ANCIENT GRAVE-STONE, WITH INSCRIPTION IN UFFIC CHARACTERS
FROM DHALAC-EL-KIBBER, NEAR MASSOWAH, ABYSSINIA.



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