



## DAŠT-E NĀWOR

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**DAŠT-e NĀWOR** (lit. “plain of the lake”), a depression (average elev. 3,100 m) 60 x 15 km with a brackish lake (*nāwor*, *nāvor*, Mong. *nor*) in the center, located at 33° 41’ N and 67° 46’ E, about 60 km west of Ġaznī. It is now permanently inhabited by Persian-speaking Hazaras and is also the summer grazing ground for Pashto-speaking nomads; formerly the Afghan cavalry also summered there.

Middle and Lower Paleolithic and Mesolithic artifacts have been found in a survey conducted along the lake shores by Louis Dupree (pp. 40, 69-70; Ball, p. 86). The lake may have been mistaken for the source of the Arachōtos river by Ptolemy (6.20.2; cf. Bernard, pp. 182-85), and there is a possible 10th-century reference to it in *Ḥodūd al-‘ālam* (tr. Minorsky, pp. 64, 199).

In 1346 Š./1967 André Boutière, a French geologist, found five badly defaced Kushan inscriptions on a ridge (elev. 4,320 m) overhanging the western edge of Dašt-e Nāwor; they have since been destroyed. DN I and DN II were written in Greek script, probably in the Bactrian language, though there is some doubt on the latter point (Lazard et al., pp. 217-18); DN III and DN V were in a script that has not yet been deciphered; DN IV was in Middle Indian written in Kharoṣṭhī script. DN I, III, and IV together clearly constituted a single trilingual inscription from the reign of the Kushan king Vima Kadphises, in the month of Gorpiaiios 279. As all the inscriptions were badly engraved and defaced, readings can be only tentative (Fussman, 1974, for the most part repeated by Mukherjee with occasional acknowledgments; for an attempt at reconstruction from Fussman’s photographs, see Davary and Humbach; cf.



Lazard). The name of the goddess Šao Nana can be read in DN I, line 2, which suggests that the content of the trilingual inscription was primarily religious. From the evidence published by Robert Göbl (pls. I-III) it is now clear that the titles accompanying Vima's name in DN I and IV are not evidence for a date early in his reign, as originally suggested (Fussman, 1974, p. 38). Nor do the Dašt-e Nāwor inscriptions provide evidence for the dating of Kanishka's reign. Scholars are still debating the correct way of reconciling the date of 279 in Vima's inscription with other chronological schemes (e.g., Fussman, 1974, pp. 38-50; Bivar, 1976).

The script of DN III and V seems to be derived from Aramaic or from Kharoṣṭhī, which was itself derived from Aramaic. In 1353 Š./1974 very few instances of this script were known, one of them from Surkh Kotal (Sork Kōtal). Gérard Fussman (1974, pp. 32-34) suggested that it was meant to express Kambojī, an early language still unattested in surviving examples, which was spoken by a tribe settled in this very region and which may have been Iranian, perhaps even akin to proto-Ormuri. On the basis of evidence surviving from Central Asia, Soviet scholars (Livshits; Rtveldadze and Livshits) have, however, proposed that the unknown script from Dašt-e Nāwor was used to transcribe the language of the Yüe-chih invaders of [Bactria](#) in the late Hellenistic period. Whether or not this view is accepted, there are now sufficient surviving examples of this script from Central Asia and Afghanistan, particularly from Surkh Kotal, [Āy Kānom](#), Qara Tepe (old Termed), Issyk, and other sites, to ensure that the language is not Kambojī. It should be emphasized, however, that the scripts from Issyk and some other sites are not exactly like that of DN III; the category of "unknown scripts" still contains several different types (Fussman, 1978, pp. 435-36; idem, 1987, p. 356).

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