



LĀḲ-MAZĀR

LĀḲ-MAZĀR “Rocky sacred place (?),” name applied to gorges not far from the settlement of Kuč, 29 km southeast of [Birjand](#) in Khorasan Province (*ostān*). For the name, compare Pers. *sanglāk* “stony place, gorge of stones,” *dīwlāk* “dwelling of *div*” (q.v.), *rūd lāk* “river bed.” In April 1992 Iranian scholar-archeologists, students of local lore, and linguists working in the Department of Cultural Heritage of Khorasan Province investigated rock inscriptions and petroglyphs there (the results were published in 1994; see [Ḳāniki](#) and [Baššāš](#)).

Through the gorges of Lāk-Mazār runs the road from Khorasan to Kerman. Travelers have left on the rocks numerous inscriptions: Arabic (Kufic and later, 35 inscriptions in all, some of them with dates of the lunar Hijra calendar, from the 9th to the 18th century); New Persian (8 inscriptions, all of them very brief; see [Ḳāniki](#)), containing personal names and Qur’anic formulas (only in Arabic); and Parthian, more lengthy ones. [Rajab ‘Alī Labbāf-e Ḳāniki](#) (p. 22) mentions 80 Parthian and Middle Persian inscriptions, but on the photographs and tracings ([Ḳāniki](#) and [Baššāš](#), pp. 40-43) one can find only one Middle Persian inscription and six Parthian. On the tracings there are about 40 Parthian inscriptions, but the tracings are very inaccurate, and in most cases it is difficult to set boundaries between the inscriptions.

The authors of the publication date the Parthian inscriptions to the fifth century. This date is confirmed by the finds of the coins of King Kawād I (r. 488—531) in the gorges and by the presence of an engraved image representing a man’s head in a crown in which [Ḳāniki](#) ([Ḳāniki](#) and [Baššāš](#), p. 31) sees the portrait of this king.



In the publication the Parthian inscriptions are reproduced on 6 photographs and 5 plates of tracings (Ḳāniki and Baššāš, pp. 40-44; Baššāš). It can be noticed that in the tracings among other inscriptions one can distinguish variants ('drafts') of the same Parthian texts, which are very carefully (even calligraphically) executed on other rocks by the same hand with a clear difference between *r* and *d* (the latter with a diacritic below the character) and the forms of *h* and *ḥ*.

Rasūl Baššāš, who published the transliteration, transcription, and translation into Persian of the six most clearly distinguishable Parthian inscriptions of LāḲ-Mazār, came to a conclusion that they were ritual, telling about religious ceremonies in honor of the Zoroastrian deities of Truth and Righteousness. The word *drwdšt* "firm, righteous"—which is present in some of the inscriptions—Baššāš associated with the Middle Persian name of the religious sect of *drist-dēnān*, lit. "(with) the right faith," connected with the Mazdakite movement (on which, see in brief IRAN ix[1.1]). The second subject that, in the opinion of Baššāš (Ḳāniki and Baššāš, p. 74), is considered in the inscriptions is a reflection of the Zoroastrian ritual of *nōknawār* connected with the coming of age (15 years), when a boy received his sacred belt (*kustī-bandī*), and the performance of the rites through which faithful Zoroastrians attain the priestly rank of *hērbed*.

However, the reading of the Parthian inscriptions from LāḲ-Mazār shows that they have nothing to do with Zoroastrian ritual practices or with the Mazdakite *drist-dēnān* sect. The LāḲ-Mazār inscriptions present an example of humorous texts. The authors of these inscriptions were six Parthian lads working as guides on the mountain road running through the gorges. Their names were Mihrbān (*Mtrybn* "possessing the brilliance of Mithra"), Wišādewēnēn (*Wyštywynyn*, "with open gaze"), Ardaxšīr (*rtḥstr*, "having the favor of the deities of Righteousness and Power"), Girdāzād (*Grt'z't*, "having the free [celestial?] orb"), Paryōžnaw (*Prgwznm* "new victor"), and Warhrām (*Wrhr'm*, "created by the deity of Victory"). Their 'visiting card' is the inscription, in which their names are enumerated, demonstrating that these lads were not remarkable for their modesty: (1) *mtrybn* (2) *wyštywynyn Wmtrybn* (3) *MNW n'yt drwdšt* (4) *drysyd sr ḤWYt* "[Says] Mihrbān: if Wišādewēnēn and Mihrbān take anyone across [the gorges], he stays in good order (and) (his?) head sound (?)." That they were proud of their profession is revealed in another inscription: *mtrybn Wwystywynyn MNW n'yt drwdšt ḥšyt* "Mihrbān and Wišādewēnēn [if they] take anyone through, will strive [to take

him] in good order.” Those lads were probably taking pleasure making jokes and laughing at each other. For some reason they did not like Ardaxšīr’s donkey, of which they twice informed in two identical inscriptions: (1) *’rthštr* (2) *ḥwtwy pty* (3) *ḤMR ’yysyt* (4) *pty ḤMR MH* (5) *’nywš* “Lord Ardaxšīr comes upon a donkey, the donkey which is out of his mind” (lit. ‘which is mad’).

The guides did not lack certain artistic abilities; they carved on the rocks several images of lions. Upon one of them they wrote: (1) *šgrw ZNH kyrt* (2) *grt’z’t (W)mtrybn* “This lion has been made by Girdāzād and Mihrbān.” Once three of the lads decided to add some images of bears. Upon one of them they wrote: (1) *ḥrsk ZNH kyrt* (2) *wyštywynyn Wrthštr* (3) *WMNW p(t)y ZNH ḥrsk* (4) *ḤMR ’KLw Wš’t [ḤMR?] ’KLw* (5) *wyštywynyn L[Ḥw prz]ryt* “This bear Wišādewēnēn, Mihrbān, and Ardaxšīr have made. And [if] anyone has drunk wine upon this bear and drank [wine] with joy, then Wišādewēnēn will [withhold [him] from further libations].”

Such are the texts of the Parthian inscriptions on the rocks in the gorges of LāḲ-Mazār, as far as it is possible to read them from the published photographs and tracings.

Bibliography:

Rasul Baššāš, “Katībahā-ye ḳatt-e pārti-ye dawra-ye sāsānī-ye sangnigāra-ye LāḲ-Mazār-e Kūč,” in *Ḳāniki* and Baššāš, pp. 58-63.

Rajab ‘Alī Labbāf-e Ḳāniki, “Gozāreš-e barrasī-ye sangnegāra-ye LāḲ-Mazār-e Bīrjand,” in *Ḳāniki* and Baššāš, pp. 22-23.

Rajab ‘Alī Labbāf-e Ḳāniki and Rasul Baššāš, *Selsela-ye maqālāt-e pažuhiši-ye mirāt-e farhangī-ye kešwar I. Sangnegāra-ye LāḲ-Mazār*, Bīrjand, 1373 Š./1994.

V. A. Livshits, “Parthians Joking,” *Manuscripta Orientalia. International Journal for Oriental Manuscript Research* 8/1, March 2002, pp. 27-35.