

KHAN GESHER: EPITAPH OF A MUSLIM

MOSHE SHARON

A slab of limestone (40 × 45 cm; Fig. 1), broken on top and slightly damaged on the left and side, was discovered in the fill of the Mamluk water system. Five lines, in elegant, provincial *naskhî* Mamlûk script, are professionally cut in relief; there are points, no vowels. The inscription is encompassed by raised borders, narrow on the right and left, wide at the bottom (and top?), and its lines are divided by narrow bands in relief, following a well-established fashion; no other decorations.

(One or two lines)

- (1) اللَّهُ تَعَالَى.. [هذا قبر].
- (2) عُثْمَانُ بْنُ (!) عَبْدِ الْبَرِّ بْنِ (!) سَيِّدِ عُثْمَانَ
الْبَدْلَيْسِيِّ الشَّهِيرِ
- (3) بِالْإِسْعَرْدِيِّ وَكَانَ غَرِقَهُ وَوَفَاتَهُ فِي تَارِيخِ يَوْمِ
الْجُمُعَةِ خَامِسَ عَشَرَ رَبِيعِ الْآخِرِ سَنَةِ ثَمَانِ
- (4) وَسَبْعِمِئَةٍ (!)
- (5) وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ وَصَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَى سَيِّدِنَا
مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ وَصَحْبِهِ وَسَلَّمَ.

...Allah may He be exalted...(This is the tomb of) 'Uthmân b. 'Abd al-Barr b. Sayyid 'Uthmân al-Badlîsî famous (also) as al-Is'irdî. He drowned and died on the date of Friday, twenty-five of Rabi' II the year seven hundred and eight (Saturday, 12 October 1308). And praise be to Allah the Lord of the worlds, and may Allah bless our master Muḥammad and his family and companions, and give them peace.

It is impossible to read 908 instead of 708 despite the temptation to do so. The dot under the *bâ*' of the *sab'umi'ah* is clear, and the reading of the date is certain. The discrepancy regarding the day of the week is very common in cases of calculated conversion of Muslim dates into common dates.



Fig. 1. An inscribed limestone slab.

LL.2, 3: The *nisbah* Badlîsî refers to the city of Badlîs (Bitlis) on the southwestern corner of Lake Van in eastern Anatolia (Le Strange 1930:184 and authorities there; Yâqût, *s.v.* "Badlîs."). It is very possible that this *nisbah* refers to the family's place of origin. The deceased was also known by another *nisbah*, Is'irdî, referring to a town on a subsidiary of the upper Tigris called Is'ird (Ibn Mâkûlâ, 1:154, n.3) and also Sâ'irt, Is'irt and Sî'ird. It was a large town renowned for its coppersmiths and copper vessels. Particularly famous were its widely exported copper drinking cups. The town, also in the vicinity of Lake Van, was not too far from Badlîs, to the south (Le Strange 1930:114, Map III). The two *nisbahs* refer therefore to the same area, and reflect the movement of the immediate family of 'Uthmân from one town to another neighboring one.

The information about the death by drowning of the deceased is interesting. It is known

locally that in this area the Jordan claimed many lives, even in modern times. In the Middle Ages, before the southern outlet of the Sea of Galilee into the Jordan was dammed, and the Yarmuq's waters too flowed freely into the Jordan, the latter's water level was much higher than it is today. No other information was found

about 'Uthman b. 'Abd al-Barr. The beautiful professional inscription points, however, to his having been an important person. Whether the title *sayyid* before the name of his grandfather (also called 'Uthmân), means that the family was related to the Prophet is hard to know, though this cannot be ruled out.

REFERENCE

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