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## CHAPTER 3

### The *al-Namārah* Nabataean Arabic Inscription (328 CE)

#### 3.1 Introduction

The inscription of *al-Namārah* is by far the most important, controversial, and challenging pre-Islamic Arabic inscription— it is the earliest discovered but youngest dated inscription of only three Nabataean inscriptions considered by Western scholars today as fully Arabic. It is also the oldest Arabic document on record with relatively good classic Arabic language. Dated 328 AD and written in clear cursive forms, it was hailed by many scholars as definite evidence that the modern Arabic script had evolved from the late Nabataean script. Many prominent Muslim scholars (who lived only a few centuries after the script's assumed birth around the 3<sup>rd</sup> century) believed it was derived from the Arabic *Musnad* script. *al-Namārah* inscription is also extensively cited by historians as an important reference to the historical events of the early decades of the prominent pre-Islamic Arab Lakhmid kingdom (*al-Lakhmiyyūn*) of *Hīrah*, modern day Iraq. Despite more than a century since its discovery in 1901, the reading of *al-Namārah* inscription is still questionable, even at present time.

Dussaud, the French archeologist who discovered *al-Namārah* stone near Damascus and transferred it to Paris for further examination, had possibly misread the most important part of the inscription—the first line. Based on his reading, it is generally believed today that *al-Namārah* was the gravestone of king *Umru'ū al-Qays al-Bid'*, the second king of the kingdom of *al-Hīrah* and the most significant pre-Islamic Arab leader. Dussaud's reading was partially influenced by an unfortunate mistake in today's Arabic language grammar textbooks. To make matters worse, other scholars who read *al-Namārah* in the past century uncritically strived to uphold Dussaud's reading fundamentals thus reinforcing its equally uncritical acceptance. To prove, at any cost, that *al-Namārah* was *Umru'ū al-Qays* tombstone, some were even willing to present readings that manifestly contradicted the rules of Arabic grammar, geographical facts, and recorded history.

In order to re-read *al-Namārah* inscription, I found it necessary to re-read the *Umm al-Jimāl* Arabic Nabataean inscription as well since the two inscriptions had contained identical words and shared similar historical facts and timeframes. To read the two inscriptions, I had to also read Raqqush and numerous other Nabataean, Palmyran, and Arabic Musnad inscriptions to study the linguistic usage of similar words and phrases.

Regarding *al-Namārah* inscription, I will, using the tools of the Arabic language, demonstrate through in-depth analytical reading that it is not the tombstone of King *Umru'ū al-Qays bin 'Amrū*, or even about him. Written, most likely, several years after his death, the inscription recorded the important accomplishments of a previously unknown personality, *'Akdī*, who was possibly one of *Umru'ū al-Qays bin 'Amrū* army generals, an Arab tribal leader who collaborated with the Romans, or maybe a top ranking Arab soldier in the Byzantine Roman army. According to my reading, the opening sentence was only a swearing (vow) to the soul of King *Umru' al-Qays bin 'Amrū*, similar to the customary opening sentence used by Arabs and Muslims since the 7<sup>th</sup> century, *Bism Allāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm* بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم. The main topic of the inscription was the apparent defeat of the prominent *Midhḥij* tribe of southern Arabia in the hands of *'Akdī*'s fighters and the possible subsequent control of Yemen by the Byzantine Roman Empire. The final sentence concluded the inscription by informing the reader about *'Akdī*'s death, maybe in the battlefield, and stating that his parents should be happy and proud of him. This narration is consistent with how soldiers are typically mourned.

I am hopeful that my new readings of *al-Namārah* and *Umm al-Jimāl* inscriptions would prompt scholars in this field to re-examine the current readings in a fundamentally different way. I hope that future history textbooks and the Louvre museum will not state as certain that *al-Namārah* inscription stone was the gravestone or epitaph of King *Umru'ū al-Qays bin 'Amrū*. I also hope that future publications would correct the obvious current readings' errors of the *Umm al-Jimāl* Nabataean inscription. As a linguistic side benefit, I am optimistic that future Arabic language grammar textbooks would cease repeating a common grammatical error regarding simple feminine demonstrative pronouns by re-examining a poem line from *Alfiyyat Ibn Mālik*. Certainly, my new readings could add even more critical, historical, and linguistic importance to *al-Namārah* inscription itself, since the language used in this inscription was clearly and essentially classic Arabic. This can incontrovertibly prove that the grammar and language of the Quran are deeply rooted and developed in Arabia, long before Islam. That is, they are not Islamic or Abbasid inventions as many Western scholars claim.

Because a successful reading of any involved inscription, like *al-Namārah*, requires a comprehensive and organized vision, I divided my reading into convenient sections corresponding

to the main topics conceived as preliminary tools to read the full inscription. I have also provided detailed sketches and images to guide the reader into a full visual understanding of the topic of this particular study. Throughout this chapter, I will transliterate (following Library of Congress rules), translate, and write in Arabic various words and phrases to benefit the expert as well as non-expert readers.

### 3.2 Historical and Geographical Overview

It is problematic to read the inscriptions of *Umm al-Jimāl* and *al-Namārah* without studying first the historical events taking place during the second and third centuries CE — particularly during the early decades of the third century CE and during the reign of King *Umru'ū al-Qays bin 'Amrū* of the city of *al-Hīrah*. The name of this king was mentioned in the first line of *al-Namārah* inscription. Arab and Muslim historians knew *Umru'ū al-Qays bin 'Amrū*, as *Umru'ū al-Qays al-Bid'*, meaning the first. (The desert town of *al-Hīrah* is located less than 30 miles south of Babylon, the famed Mesopotamian city that had fallen to the Persians over eight centuries earlier.)

Luckily, *al-Namārah* inscription had provided a precise date that can easily be checked against the more accurate dates provided by the remains left by the three main power players in the Arabian Peninsula during that time: the Persians, the Roman Byzantines, and the Yemenite Arabs. Several other Arab kingdoms existed too, but they were either very weak or tightly under the control of either the Persians or the Romans who fought for the conquest of new territories in the peninsula. After the fall of the northern Arab Nabataean kingdom of Petra at the hands of the Romans (105 CE), the kingdom of Yemen became the only Arab power challenging their rule in the south. Because of repeated Roman attacks, and in order to defend their territory, the Yemeni kings had occasionally forged close ties with the Persians. <sup>[6][30]</sup>

According to several Muslim scholars, *'Amrū bin 'Uday*, the father of King *Umru'ū al-Qays bin 'Amrū*, was the first king of the ethnically Yemenite Lakhmid kingdom (later, called *al-Manādhirah* Kingdom by the Arabs) to designate *al-Hīrah* as the capital city. The *Hīrah* Kingdom became the most powerful member of a tribal alliance known as the *Tannūkh* Kingdom, which was established around the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE by *Mālik bin Māhir* of Yemen. The *Tannūkh* Kingdom controlled a vast area extending from *Ūmān* in the south to *al-Hīrah* and the Syrian Desert near Damascus in the north, occupying the entire west coast of the Persian Gulf, historically known as the Gulf of *Baṣrah*. Islamic Arab era scholars linked the Lakhmid and *Tannūkh* kingdom to the powerful *Ma'ād* tribe of Yemen. The three kings who ruled *Tannūkh* before king *'Amrū bin 'Uday* visited *Hīrah* extensively and regularly, but probably had their capital in Bahrain or even Yemen.

Most of *Hīrah*'s original population had eventually moved north to the *Anbār* area before it was made the capital city by King *ʿAmrū bin ʿUday*.<sup>[14][20]</sup>

King *ʿAmrū bin ʿUday*'s father was probably a northern Arab. His mother was the sister of *Judhaymah al-Abrash* who was the first king and the founder of the *Tannūkh* Kingdom dynasty. He maintained close relations with the Persians and ruled before and after the time of King *Ardashīr bin Bābik* (224-241 CE), the first king of the third and last Sassanid dynasty, and the son of the Zaradust priest, *Bābik*, who had earlier toppled the last king of the second Sassanid dynasty.<sup>[15]</sup>

It seems that *Judhaymah al-Abrash*, a Yemenite Arab, had decided to offer his sister to a northern Arab from the *Hīrah* area to establish closer blood relation with the northern tribes. The practice of marrying sisters and daughters to link with other tribes is quite common among Arab tribes. As we shall see later, both of the words *Tannūkh* and *Judhaymah* will appear briefly in the important Arabic Nabataean inscription, *Umm al-Jimāl*, found south of Damascus and believed to be dated 250 CE. According to sources, King *ʿAmrū bin ʿUday* took advantage of the temporary weakening of the Sassanid Persian Empire after the death of King *Ardashīr bin Bābik* and decided to invade the Persian-controlled Arab areas of Bilād al-ʿIrāq (Mesopotamia) with the help of the Romans and the Arab tribes north and west of *Hīrah*.<sup>[20][30]</sup> His action had therefore reversed the traditional alliance of the previous, purely Yemenite, kings of *Tannūkh* with the Persians.

After the death of King *ʿAmrū bin ʿUday* in the year 288 CE, his son, *Umru'ū al-Qays bin ʿAmrū* took over and decided to expand on his father's attacks even further to include all Persian-controlled areas in Arabia. He was the first Arab leader who seriously attempted to unify all parts of the Arabian Peninsula in a single kingdom challenging both the Romans and Persians, and was therefore considered the most revered man in Arabia before Islam. Taking advantage of further conflicts within the Sassanid Persian royal family, he had even crossed the Persian (Arabic) Gulf to raid the heartland of Persia. Pre-Islamic Arabic poetry spoke of several virulent raids by the Arab tribes against the Persians in Bilād al-ʿIrāq. It is known that poems are the most important record-keeping evidence of the Arab tribes who traditionally relied on memory, not writing, to document their events. King *Umru'ū al-Qays* succeeded in bringing most of the Arabian Peninsula under his control except for the powerful Yemen and the Roman-controlled Arab kingdom in Syria, known as *al-Ghasāsīnah* Kingdom. History recorded that, because the Roman supported the campaigns of *Umru'ū al-Qays*, the Persians were forced to accept a deal with the Romans (298 CE) whereby they ceded many of their previously captured territories in Mesopotamia.

A decade later, a new powerful king took over Sassanid Persia. He was *Shabur II* (309-379 CE) known to the Arabs under the nickname *Dhū al-Aktāf* ذو الاكتاف (the owner of the shoulders.) It was believed that he had pierced his Arab prisoners' shoulders to tie them together after captivity. *Shabur II* regained control over most of the areas lost to the Romans and their Arab allies. It was said that he had captured *Hīrah*, the seat of King *Umru'ū al-Qays*, after a bloody battle in the year 225 CE, three years before the date mentioned in *al-Namārah* inscription.<sup>[14][15]</sup> However, it is not known whether King *Umru'ū al-Qays* had survived that battle. Only after the discovery of *al-Namārah* and subsequent Dussaud's reading had experts claimed that King *Umru'ū al-Qays* had escaped to Damascus and died in the city of Bosra on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 223 Bosra (equivalent to 228 CE), which is the date mentioned in the inscription.

I have to mention, however, that there is no other evidence supporting the above claim except the supposed evidence of *al-Namārah* inscription. Nonetheless, based on my reading of the first line of the inscription as a vow to his soul, I am prone to think that he died earlier, possibly in the battle of *Hīrah*, 325 CE. After the death of king *Umru'ū al-Qays*, the Roman and Persians fought extensively all over Arabia until the year 363 CE when they finally signed a treaty acknowledging Persian supremacy over Iraq.<sup>[15]</sup>

Consequent to fierce Arab attacks on the Sassanid forces stationed in Mesopotamia (330 - 370 CE), descendants of king *Umru'ū al-Qays* were allowed to go back to *al-Hīrah* and rule under the protection of the Persians. Finally, the Muslim Arabs defeated the Persians in the battle of *al-Qādisiyyah* (638 CE) which effectively put an end to the Sassanid Empire.<sup>[14][30]</sup>

In the early decades of the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, Yemen, the seat of the oldest known Arab kingdoms in the peninsula, was a prime target for both the Romans and the Persians. The Yemenites were generally referred to by the rest of the Arabs as *al-Himīriyyīn*, and depending on whom and when, Yemen was additionally known as *Midhḥij* or *Ma'ad*. The tribes of *Midhḥij* and *Ma'ad* are the largest and most powerful tribes in Yemen. Being the most powerful among the Arab kingdoms of that time, Yemen had maintained its status as an independent kingdom.

As mentioned earlier, King *Umru'ū al-Qays* was never able to control Yemen. In fact, during his time around the year 300 CE, a Yemenite king named *Shammar Yuhar'ish*, was able to unify Yemen including *Hadramawt* to create a powerful kingdom.<sup>[6]</sup> If logic matters, It would be impossible that a defeated king *Umru'ū al-Qays*, who had just lost his capital city of *al-Hīrah* in a bloody battle around the year 225 CE, would accomplish the highest military victory of his times— the conquest of Yemen— at the same time of *al-Namārah* (328 CE.)

Reportedly, king *Shammar Yuhar'ish* had maintained close relations with the Persians by sending a diplomatic mission to the Sasanian court at Ctesiphon, *al-Madā'in*, Iraq.<sup>[6]</sup> *Khawārizmī*, a prominent Muslim scholar who lived during the early Islamic centuries called him *Shimr Yar'ish* or *Abū Karab Bin Ifrīqis*, which could mean he was of African origins as per the use of the word *Ifrīqis*. No diacritic vowel was placed on the first word *shimr* شمر. This could indicate that his name was either *Shimr* — a classic Arabic name—, or *Shammar* — a well-known name of a prominent Arab tribe in Northern *Najd*. I do believe though, it is the former because *al-Namārah* inscription has one *mīm* letter in the name. *Khawārizmī* further wrote that King *Shimr* was called *Yar'ish* (trembling) because he was suffering of a nervous condition that made him tremble. According to *Khawārizmī*, King *Shimr Yar'ish* was, as claimed by some, nicknamed king *Dhū al-Qirnayn* (the one with two horns) contrary to the belief of many who thought this was a nickname for the Macedonian conqueror, Alexander the Great. Further, *Khawārizmī* listed King *Shimr Yar'ish* as the 20<sup>th</sup> king of Yemen before Islam and listed king *Umru'ū al-Qays bin 'Amrū* as the 21<sup>st</sup> king of *al-Hīrah* before Islam.<sup>[14]</sup> This means, the two kings had ruled approximately during the same period. In fact, the dates reported by *Khawārizmī's* coincide well with the dates provided by historians today. Most importantly, this coincidence would make it highly probable that King *Shimr Yar'ish* was indeed the king of Yemen during the times of *al-Namārah* inscription.

While it is not impossible that King *Umru'ū al-Qays bin 'Amrū* could have died in the year 328 CE, the historical evidence, including *al-Namārah* inscription, indicates otherwise. Again, I do believe that he died between the years 309 CE after *Shabur II* took power, in 325 CE, the year *al-Hīrah* was captured. As we shall see later, when reading *al-Namārah*, the historical analysis above could become vital to the understanding of the events, dates, and names appearing in the inscription.

### 3.3 Rereading the *Umm al-Jimāl* Nabataean Arabic Inscription

As mentioned earlier, according to Western scholars, among the numerous Nabataean inscriptions discovered so far, only three were written fully in the Arabic language. Dated 328 CE, *al-Namārah* was the latest inscription of the three. The two earlier inscriptions are *Umm al-Jimāl*, found in the same area, around Damascus, where *al-Namārah* was found, and *Raqqūsh*, found in *Madā'in Ṣālah*, not very far south of Damascus in Northern *Hijāz*. Both areas were previously Nabataean territories. *Raqqūsh* indicated the date of 267 CE while *Umm al-Jimāl*, which explicitly mentioned the names *Judhaymah* and *Tannūkh*, was dated around the year 260 CE, clearly a successful estimate when checked against our geographical and historical review in the previous section. The

two inscriptions are therefore older than *al-Namārah* by at least 60 or even 70 years. This would make them useful references for this study. As we shall see later, reading the three inscriptions together is valuable for the separate reading of each one of them correctly.

While *Raqqūsh* and *Umm al-Jimāl* were decidedly gravestones, *al-Namārah* could be either a gravestone or an honoring monument (I shall come back to this later.) Further, as *Raqqūsh* and *Namārah* included several text lines, *Umm al-Jimāl* was brief. Unlike in *Namārah* *Umm al-Jimāl* the language used in *Raqqūsh* was not classic Arabic entirely.

Moreover, the Nabataean script used in both inscriptions was not solidly cursive, and did not follow closely current Arabic cursive rules. Both inscriptions clearly started with the word *dnh* دنه, but scholars read the word differently in *Raqqūsh* where the first letter *dāl* was slightly attached to the second letter *nūn* forming another possible shape. The Arabic word *qabrū* (tomb) was mentioned three times in *Raqqūsh*, and was read as such by all scholars. The same exact word though in *Umm al-Jimāl* was read as a person's name, *Fahrū*, which clearly was an error, as I will demonstrate later.<sup>[11]</sup>

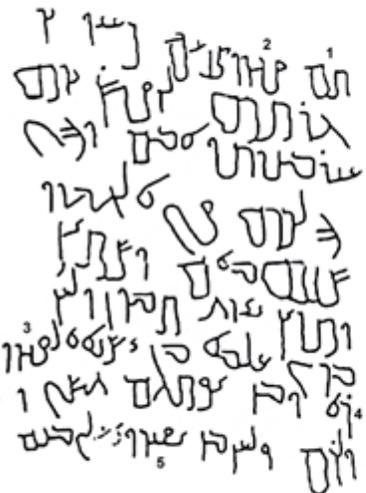
Current <i>Raqqūsh</i> Nabataean tracing	letter-for-letter Arabic transcription
	<p>دنه قبرو صنهه كهجو بر  حذتت لرقوش برت  عبذ منرتو امه وهي  هلكت في الحجر و  سنت مده وستين  وتنين بيرخ تموز ولعن  مري علما من يشنا القبر و  ذا ومن يفتحه خشبي و  ولذه ولعن من يقبر ويهلي منه</p>

Figure (3.1) Arabic Nabataean inscription *Raqqūsh*, dated 267 CE, with author's improved tracing. Numbers added to facilitate discussion.

Photographs of the *Umm al-Jimāl* inscription stone



Author's Nabataean tracing	Current Nabataean tracing
<p>Author's letter-for-letter Arabic transcription</p>	<p>Current letter-for-letter Arabic transcription</p>
<p>دنه نفسو قبر فرء بر سلي ربو جذيمت مملك دنوخ</p>	<p>دنه نفسو فهرو بر سلي ربو جذيمت ملك دنوخ</p>

Figure (3.2) Arabic Nabataean inscription of *Umm al-Jimāl*, dated around 250 CE, with current and author's tracing and reading for comparison. Numbers added to facilitate discussion.

Unfortunately, I was unable to view enough photographic details of either inscription. However, for the purpose of this study, I feel it is adequate to rely on the available Nabataean tracing of

*Raqqūsh*. A word of caution: without retracing it personally, I would be reluctant to offer a full letter-by-letter transcription or modern Arabic reading.

As for *Umm al-Jimāl*, examining a high-resolution picture of the stone was very sufficient to illustrate the validity of my new tracings of a few key words in the inscription. Accordingly, I provided here the above original photo and another zoomed-in photoshoped image of the eroded re-traced area of the stone, along with current tracing — a letter-by-letter Arabic transcription and corresponding modern Arabic translation. Based on this new tracing, a new detailed reading emerges that significantly differs from the current reading.

In Figure 3.1, the first word in *Raqqūsh* and *Umm al-Jimāl* was clearly a three letter word *dnh*, but scholars differed both on its tracing and reading in *Raqqūsh*. Some read it as *th* ﺙ, claiming it was an Arabic simple feminine demonstrative pronoun; this is neither correct nor possible since the following word *qabr* is a masculine noun.<sup>[23]</sup> Others read it as the Arabic letter *dhāl*, probably for the simple masculine demonstrative *dhā* ﺫ, which would contradict directly with the reading of word #4 in the same inscription showing *dhā* spelled as letter *dāl* with dot above followed by *alif*.<sup>[11]</sup> Yet, few traced it as *dh.n.h* for *dhnah* ﺫﻧﻪ claiming this was a northern Arabic feminine demonstrative pronoun.

However, most scholars traced word #1 in both inscriptions as *dnh*, a word present in numerous other fully Nabataean inscriptions, and read it as an assumingly Aramaic masculine demonstrative. I traced it in both as *dnh*, too, but I read it as *adnāh*, ﺍﺩﻧﺎﻩ, a word used in Arabic to point to a nearby object or text that is located generally below the horizontal visual level. The beginning *alif* with *hamzah* above was possibly omitted because the word was possibly pronounced *dnāh* ﺩﻧﺎﻩ, in the local Arab Nabataean dialect. *Raqqūsh* and most other inscriptions used several local dialect words, notably *bir* for *bin*, or *‘abdh* for *‘abd*. Otherwise, beginning *alif-hamzah* could have been omitted, just as the second *alif* between the letters *nūn* and *hā’* was omitted, consistent with Arabic writing throughout the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE, as evident in all available inscriptions and manuscripts.

The Arabic word *adnāh* is utilized extensively today in the meaning of “see by, or near, you”, “see below” or “the following below.” It can be used effectively as a gender neutral demonstrative in the meaning of *hunā* ﻫﻨﺎ as in “here” or “here in”. When I searched for the use of this word in older Arabic references, I was surprised that I could not find any documented evidence of its usage in that contest. Assuming my reading is correct, which it is, this would make the two inscriptions the earliest Arabic references documenting the usage of the word in such

manner. The word *danā*, a classic Arabic verb, means “became physically close or near to someone or some object.”<sup>[13]</sup> Among numerous examples, the Quran (53:9) used it in *ثُمَّ دَنَا فَتَدَلَّى فَكَانَ قَابَ قَوْسَيْنِ أَوْ أَدْنَى*. Also, the Islamic *Hadīth* used *ʿadnāh min nafsih* to describe how Prophet Muhammad had a visiting Arab king sitting — physically — very close to him.<sup>[17][26]</sup> Less likely, this word could be *idnah* *إِدْنِه* for the imperative: “come close to,” omitting beginning *alif-hamzah* with *kasrah*. Regardless of how one would read the first word *dnh*, the most important fact is that it was explicitly used as a word pointing to a masculine object: *qabr* *قَبْر* and consistently used as an opening word for most Nabataean gravestones, including these two.

In *Umm al-Jimāl* scholars spelled the next word after *dnh*, as *n.f.sh.ū*, and read it *نفشو* supposedly from a “Semitic” feminine noun *napš*’ or from Arabic *nafs* as in the Quran (89:27) *يَا أَيُّهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ*. This same word can also be pronounced in Arabic as *nafas* in the sense of “inhalation or breathing” which would be a masculine noun. It is not clear, how scholars pronounced this word found in various Nabataean inscriptions as *napš* or *napiš*, still, in both cases it would be a feminine noun. Even before analyzing the meaning and usage of *nafsh*, one can already suspect through *Umm al-Jimāl* that its current reading is questionable since the word *dnh* was used in *Raqqūsh*, and many other Nabataean inscriptions to point to *qabrū*, a masculine noun. This contradiction can only be solved by relating *dnh* as *adnāh*, a neutral Arabic demonstrative pronoun, as I have argued above. As we shall see later, *dnh* was used to point to a feminine noun, *mqbrt*’, in at least one Nabataean inscription from Petra. Alternatively, *dnh* could be pointing to a third masculine noun and the second word *nafsū* is not a noun (I shall discuss this soon.) Still, it is also possible that the word *nafsū* was actually *naqshū* *نَقْشُ*, for the classic Arabic masculine noun, *naqsh* (etching), used to indicate the act of writing or sketching on all mediums including epitaph’s stones and even sand.<sup>[13][22]</sup> Unlike the Nabataean letter *fā*’, which is a left starting loop with a right side downward vertical stem, the letter *qāf* is a circle attached in the middle to a downward vertical stem. This was evident in the three inscriptions.

Reading the second word (let us call it #2) of *Umm al-Jimāl* as *naqshū* can conflict with the current reading of word #3 of the inscription, which is thought to be *Fihrū* for *Fihr* *فِهْر*, a classic Arabic name. Even though it is possible to read the opening phrase (based on our reading of the second word as *naqshu*) as *adnāh naqshu Fihrū bin Sālī*, after examining the photo of Figure 4.1 and even according to the current tracing it is clear that word #3 of *Umm al-Jimāl* is not *Fihrū*. It is *qabrū*, followed by a first name containing the letters *fā*’, *rā*’ and *alif/hamzah* as in *Fara*’ *فَرَاء* or *Firā*’ *فِرَاء*, an old Arabic male name meaning “wild donkey” which is known for its excellent skills

to escape hunters! This name was possibly modified to *Faru'* فرء according to old Northern Arabic and Aramaic practice of using *wāw* sound at the end of names.

In the Hadith, Prophet Muhammad told *Abū Sufyān*: “You are as they say, all hunting is in the belly of the wild donkey”. Translated from the Arabic text: يا أبا سفيان! أنت كما قال القائل : كل الصيد في جوف الفراء<sup>[13]</sup>. The three partially damaged letters for *Faru'* can clearly be traced in the subsequent space, which is suspiciously wide for an intentional space! To illustrate my point, I provided a partial image of the stone utilizing the Brush Strokes filter utility in Photoshop to emphasize stroke edges and reveal the new traced letters. The third word (we indicated with #3) has only one prominent long horizontal stroke connected to the letter *rā'* on the left, just as it was the case with medial letter *bā'* in *qabru* of *Raqqūsh* (words #3, #4, and #5). There is a short downward line pointing to the left that seems to be stone discoloration, not a stroke. Nevertheless, even if it were a stroke, the formed shape would surely not resemble the Nabataean letter *hā'*. A second short, left-pointing, downward line just below the letter *rā'* is not a stroke either, as it resembles an extensive crack. The only difference between the word *qabr* we see in *Umm al-Jimāl* and the one in *Raqqūsh* is that the upward line stroke forming the medial letter *bā'* in *Umm al-Jimāl* was not vertical. Instead, it was pointing left as it was the case with the previous word *nafsū* and the following word *Fara'*— clearly a scribe hand-writing style. One can even spot another faded parallel, left-tilted line connecting to the horizontal stroke of that letter thus forming a classic Nabataean medial letter *bā'*, slightly affected by a possible scribe style or error, stone discoloration and crack, or a subsequent alteration. Moreover, the first letter of this word is clearly *qāf*, not *fā'*, which can easily be compared to the many letters *qāf* in *al-Namārah* and *Raqqūsh*.

Reading word #3 in *Umm al-Jimāl* as *qabrū* or *qabr* would allow more possibilities for the meaning and usage of the previous word. An alternative to my reading of the word as *naqshū*, could be *nafsū*, but in the meaning of *nafshū*, *hūwa nafshū*, for “itself”, referring to *qabr*. This reading would fit well with reading *dnh*, either as a masculine, or as a neutral demonstrative. The beginning phrase could then be “this itself is the tomb of” similar to *hadhā hūwa qabr* هذا هو قبر, a standard usage on gravestones in Arabic, or *hadhā nafshū qabr* هذا نفسه قبر. To summarize, an initial modern Arabic reading of the opening phrase of *Umm al-Jimāl* inscription could be either *dnh naqshū qabr Faru' bir Sālī* هذا نقش قبر فرء بن سالي, or *dnh nafshū qabr Faru' bir Sālī* هذا هو قبر فرء بن سالي.

However, I should now bring attention to a curious fact: my reading of the opening phrase in *Umm al-Jimāl* as *nafsū qabrū* or *nafsū qabr* is intriguingly identical to the usual opening phrase in the Arabic *Musnad* script found on eastern Arabian tombs' inscriptions: *nafs.w.qabr* نفس و قبر.

King *Judhaymah*, whose name appears in the *Umm al-Jimāl* inscription, was linked to the eastern Arabian area where the *Tannūkh* kingdom was supposedly situated before moving to *al-Hīrah*, as I indicated in my review section above. Most scholars read that phrase as *nafs wa-qabr* and translated it as “funerary monument and grave of”, by assuming that the middle *wāw* was “and”. Based on this and other readings of Nabataean, Hebrew, and Palmyra inscriptions, most scholars assumed that the word *n.p.š* (also *n.f.š* or *nafs*) was used individually in the sense of “funerary monument” or “memorial stele” (we shall discuss that in detail later.) Analyzing the *Musnad* script is outside the scope of this chapter, however, the very likely meaning of this phase should be روح و قبر “soul and grave of.” Alternatively, with the striking similarity between the *Musnad* letters *fā'* and *'ayn*, both in the *Musnad Liḥyanī* and *Saba'ī* styles, the word *nafs* could also be *na'sh* نعش which is the classic Arabic word for coffin or deathbed. It is highly unlikely that the word *nafs* was commonly used among the Arabs in the meaning of “memorial stele,” but would suddenly disappear from usage, without a trace, only a couple of centuries later! Most important, even if the word was indeed *nafs* (not *nafsū*) in these few *Musnad* inscriptions, it is extremely crucial to observe that it was consistently used together with *qabr* as an opening phrase or prologue. None of the available burial *Musnad* inscriptions used the word *nafs* alone as a main introductory phrase preceding a name.<sup>[5][31]</sup> As mentioned earlier, based on the *Umm al-Jimāl* evidence, the phrase *nafs.w.qabr* could have been used to mean *hadhā huwa qabr* هذا هو قبر “this is the grave of,” consistent with all other Arabic usage throughout history.

In Arabic, the three letters word *nafs* is rather complex; consequently, I have some explaining to do. The root of the word is *nafas*, meaning “breath” from which two main types of usage were derived. The first includes “soul”, “life”, “person”, or “being”; the second “self” as in “same”, “identical”, “itself”, “himself”, and “herself”.<sup>[13]</sup> This first primary usage could even be traced to the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh where the god-man name *Ut.napištu.m* (the Sumerian mythological prototype which inspired the story of Biblical Noah who survived the flood) can literally be translated as “eternal great soul-being”. Just like Arabic, Hebrew used *napšā* and Aramaic Syriac used *napištu*. The Nabataean tomb inscriptions used *l.napš.h* extensively in the meaning of “for himself”; but the words *napšā* and *napštā* had also appeared in few other cases.<sup>[11]</sup> Palmyrenes used to portray the dead either in relief or in statues placed on tombs.<sup>[24]</sup> They usually referred to a statue as *šalam* (as in Arabic *šanam*). But they might have had also referred to it — although rarely — as *napšā*, or *napeš* to mean “the same” or “the identical”, which 1) it conforms to the second main usage of the word in Arabic just mentioned, and 2) it fits well when naming a personal statue. The Nabataeans, instead, used an architectonic form (a cone topped by inflorescence) placed on a cylindrical or square base that they might have, arguably, referred to as

*napšā*, or *napeš*, too. These memorial stones can be carved or engraved into rock faces with an identifying inscription that occasionally accompany them and is normally located in the base. <sup>[24]</sup>  
[29]

Although unlikely, it is possible that the Nabataeans had explicitly used the word *nafash* for their architectonic-shaped personal memorial monuments, instead of their frequently used word *našb* (as in Arabic نصب,) and for monuments they erected for their idols. It is my firm opinion that scholars who read *Umm al-Jimāl*, which was discovered after *al-Namārah*, rushed to replicate, verbatim, Dussaud and other scholars' readings of the word *napš* to mean “memorial Monument” or “funerary Monument”. Some even stretched its meaning to *shahidat qabr*, which can be translated to “tombstone” or “burial monument”. To emphasize the usage of the word *napš*, Healey referenced *Le Nabatéen*, by Gantineau who defined the word as such, offering only two Nabataean inscriptions as evidence: *Umm al-Jimāl* which Gantineau called the *Fahrū* inscription, and *al-Namārah!*

In his indispensable book about *Madā'in Šāliḥ* tombs inscriptions, Healey further opined that this “Pyramidal stele carved in the rock” could explain the “mysterious” absence of inscriptions from the numerous tombs found in the city of Petra, which he believes had banned tombs inscriptions. <sup>[10]</sup> Surprisingly though, the *Umm al-Jimāl* stone and its inscription do not even conform to the physical and inscriptional characteristics of a typical so-called Nabataean *napš*, which rarely included any type of inscription except for an occasional name. Furthermore, the majority of the hundreds of Nabataean tombs' inscriptions found so far had consistently used the introductory phrase *dnh kapr'* or *dnh qabr'*. My reading of the two inscriptions listed by Healey, in which he read the word *napš'* in the meaning of “burial monument” and the other word, *napšt'*, as “two burial monuments,” <sup>[10]</sup> led me to a different conclusion.

My initial analysis of the two inscriptions, the Madeba and Strasbourg inscriptions revealed that the word *napš* was actually used in its usual Arabic language meanings of “identical”, “same”, “similar”, or “itself”. The opening phrase of Strasbourg inscription as of his tracing *d' napš' dy 'abr br mqymw dy bnh lh* was possibly *ذا هو نفس الذي لأبار بن مقيمو الذي بناه له*, or “This is the same [tomb] that belong to 'abār son of *mqymw* which his father built for him”. The word *dy* is similar to the Arabic word usage of *dhī* and *dhū* in the meaning of “which belongs to”. <sup>[13]</sup> Also notice that *d'* (or *dā*), which is spelled exactly as the classic Arabic masculine demonstrative *dhā*, is unlikely a Nabataean feminine demonstrative as believed by some scholars today. Clearly, it was used in the Nabataean *Raqqūsh* inscription (the fourth word we indicated as #4) after a masculine noun, *qabrū*, not a feminine! In fact, *d'* was not used in this and several other

Nabataean inscriptions listed by Healey as a simple demonstrative pronoun, but as a neutral gender identity or emphasis pronoun. Very likely, its usage is related to that of classic Arabic as in: *dhā, huwa dhā* or *dhā huwa* as in *dhātih* (ذاته) هو ذا هو، for masculine, and in *hiya dhā* or *dhā hiyah* as in *dhātihā* (ذاتها) هي ذا هي، for feminine.

As for Madeba inscription, the opening phrase *dnh mqbrt' wtrty napšt' dy l' mnh dy 'bd* was likely *ادناه (هذه) هي المقبرة والثلاثة المشابهة لها التي اعلى منها التي* or “This is the tomb, and the three identical ones that are above it, which ...” Or saying it in other words “Below is the tomb, and the other three that look just like it that sit above it that ...” The letter *tā'* in *napšt'* is likely referring to feminine noun *mqbrt'*. The number word was possibly *tlty*, from the Nabataean word for “three” *tlt*, not *trty*, which Healey linked to *tryn*, supposedly a Nabataean number word meaning “two.” Supporting this argument, the inscription listed three, not two, owners after the opening phrase. I do believe though that the number word *tryn*, for two, is actually *tnyn*, because all other Nabataean number words are identical to Arabic and the Nabataean letters *nūn* and *ra'* can easily be mixed up. This can be verified in *Raqqūsh*, where the first word of the sixth line is clearly *wtnyn*, not *wtryn*. Still, even if the number was actually “two,” the Madeba opening sentence would be *ادناه (هذه) هي المقبرة والاثنين المشابهة لها (عينها) التي اعلى منها التي*.. or “Here below is (or this is) the tomb and the two identical to it (that sit) above it, which...”

As a conclusion, I am convinced that the best way to analyze the language used in any Nabataean inscription is to rely on classic Arabic first. I see no solid evidence to presume that the word *nafsh* or *nafs*, in an opening phrase of an Arabic or Nabataean burial inscription, would necessarily mean “funerary monument” or “memorial monument”. Furthermore, it is vital to observe that the word *qabr* was consistently used whenever a burial place was involved, whether in *Musnad*, Nabataean, or Palmyrene inscriptions. It is not impossible that the phrase *nasfu qabr* could have been used to mean *shāhidat qabr* or “grave marker” (stele), which may lead us to believe that the word *nafs* alone could have been used to mean “marker” or *shāhidah*. However, in such case, it is of paramount importance to observe that there is no solid evidence in any *Musnad* or Nabataean inscription where the word *nafs* alone was used to mean stele, let alone memorial monument. It is very unlikely, therefore, that the *'Umm al-Jimāl* inscription was part of a monument that was erected without an actual grave in a cemetery, which in turn, is the only possible case that can justify using the word *nafs*, by itself, in the meaning of “memorial monument” in an opening phrase.

Before analyzing the final line of the *Umm al-Jimāl* inscription, it is worth mentioning that although this inscription was not a bilingual inscription, it was discovered next to a separate stone

with a Greek inscription, which appears to be an exact translation of the Nabataean text (see Figure 3.2.) Despite my belief that the Nabataean inscription should be the main reference to use in our ongoing analysis (pronouncing Arabic names can be deceiving in the Greek translation), I will analyze the first four or five words of the Greek inscription which, by all accounts, seems to support our new reading of the Nabataean text. Although there were no spaces in the Greek inscription, as evident in Figure 3.2, the first five words seem are Η ΣΤΗΛΗ ΑΥΤΗ ΦΕΡΟΥ  
 ΚΟΛΛΕΟΥ. According to my reading of the Greek text, the first line can be translated in English as “This is the stele (grave marker) of Feroo Salleo”. Clearly, the first name was ΦΕΡΟΥ or Feroo, not Fehroo — there is no indication of the guttural sound of the Arabic letter *hā’* anywhere in the word, unless the reader was invoking past Phoenician letter *he* origin of the Greek Ε! My belief, the inscription used the Greek sound ΟΥ (sounds like oo as in wood) at the end of the first name ΦΕΡΟΥ to substitute for either *Alif-Hamzah* or *Dhammah-Hamzah*. You may recall, according to my reading of the Nabataean inscription, the word was either *Fara’* or *Faru’*. The sound ΟΥ was repeated at the end of the last name ΚΟΛΛΕΟΥ (Salleoo) too — in spite of the existence of the letter *Yā’* at the end of that word in the Nabataean text. The repeated use of the sound ΟΥ further indicates that the first name was not necessarily ending with a *wāw* as experts (evidently depending mainly on the Greek text) mistakenly assumed. I will discuss again this Aramaic and Northern Arabic usage of the sound *wāw* after names, later. In addition, using the word ΣΤΗΛΗ (Stele) would not necessarily mean that this word was an exact translation of *nafs*, because translating a text is not linear; that is, it is not a word-for-word process. At best, this type of usage could mean that some Nabataean Arabs used *nafsu qabr* combined to mean stele.

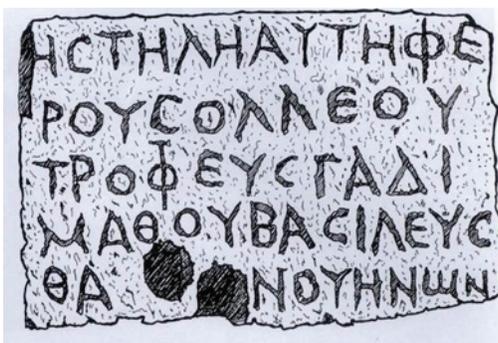


Figure (3.3) Transcription of the he Greek *Umm al-Jimāl* inscription.

More observations on the *Umm al-Jimāl* inscription reading include the following:

1. Word #4 was read *mark* for Arabic king. However, after careful tracing of the Nabataean text, we can clearly see a second letter *mim*; therefore, the correct reading should be *mmk*, for

classic Arabic *mumallik* مَمَلِّك, which literally means, “the one who crowned or gave kingship to”; meaning in current context: “the founder of the dynasty of”. Moreover, reading word #4 in this way would accurately fit the meaning conveyed by word #5 *Tannūkh*, king *Judhaymah*’s tribe, which, as you will see below, was inaccurately read as *Dannūkh*.

2. Word #5 (*Tannūkh*): The first letter of this word is clearly a Nabataean letter *tā*, not a *dāl*. As stated earlier in our history review section, King *Judhaymah al-Abrash*, *Umru’ū al-Qays*’ uncle, was the founder of the *Tannūkh* kingdom, or, using the inscription words, he was the one who crowned them. This assertion can be substantiated by the fact that Arab history never recorded the existence of a tribe or kingdom in Arabia under the name *Dannukh*.
3. The final phrase would then be *mumallik Tannūkh*, or “the one who started the Tannukh dynasty”.

To summarize, a letter-by-letter transcription of *Umm al-Jimāl* is as follows: “*dnh nfsu qbr fra bir sali rabu jdhimat mmlik tannukh*.” Line-by-line, the Arabic text is: دنه نفسو قبر فرء - بر أدناه (هذا) هو قبر فرء بن سالي مربي جذيمة . سالي ربو جذيمت - مملك تنوخ . أدناه روح وقبر فرء بن سالي مربي جذيمة مؤسس مملكة تنوخ , مؤسس مملكة تنوخ . Translated to English, it says: “Below is (itself) the tomb of *Faru’ bin Sālī*, custodian of *Judhaymah*, crowner of *Tannūkh*,” or “This is the soul and tomb of *Faru’ bin Sālī*, custodian of *Judhaymah*, crowner of *Tannūkh*.”

Before proceeding to the next section, I need to elaborate on the important usage of the letter *wāw* at the end of nouns. For example, notice the words *qabrū* for *qabr*, *Ka’bū* for *Ka’b*, and *Hijrū*, for *Hijr* in *Raqqūsh*. This practice is consistent with that of most pre-Islamic northern Arabic inscriptions that are available today, whether written in Nabataean or Arabic *Jazm* scripts. As we shall see later, *al-Namārah* added *wāw* after all names too. The Arabic inscriptions of *al-Jazzāz* (410 AD), *Sakkākah* (late 4<sup>th</sup> Century), *Zabad* (512 AD), and *Harrān* (568 AD) had all added *wāw* after the names. This is a known Aramaic and Northern Arabic usage which was likely incorporated into these languages due to Greek or Roman influence.<sup>[1][21]</sup> In fact, the use of *wāw* is by itself a solid proof that most, if not all, Arab tribes which migrated north — centuries before the *Tannūkh* kingdom era, especially the ancestors of the Nabataeans — had heavily adapted the neighboring Aramaic culture. On the other hand, classic Arabic teaches us that the *wāw* of *‘Amrū* is added to distinguish the Arabic name *‘Amr* from *‘Umar*. My belief is that *wāw* originally existed in the name *‘Amrū*, and should be pronounced, at least when it is applied to *‘Amrū bin ‘Uday*, father of *Umru’ū al-Qays*, who was likely a northern Arab, not a Yemenite.

### 3.4 Arabic Grammar Prelude: Is *tī* a Simple Feminine Demonstrative Pronoun?

Before reading *al-Namārah*, it is important to thoroughly examine the first word of the inscription. The word is clear and legible and has two letters: *tī* تِي. Dussaud claimed this word was an Arabic simple feminine demonstrative pronoun, meaning “this is.” Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, all subsequent readers of *al-Namārah* agreed with him without any debate!

For example, in his comprehensive reading of 1985, Bellamy allocated only one line to address the word where he referred his readers to consult with two old reference books for further explanation.<sup>[7]</sup> The first book was an enhanced English translation of an older Arabic grammar textbook that was initially published in 1857 in German; and the second was a British book published in 1930 and had for a subject the history of the Arabs of the western peninsula.

The author of the first book listed among his other references, *Alfiyyat Ibn Mālik*, a long Arabic poem comprising one thousand verses summarizing the grammar of the Arab language.<sup>[32]</sup> Written by the great Arabic linguist, *Ibn Mālik*, about eight centuries ago, the *Alfiyyah* is the most authoritative reference for textbooks on modern Arabic grammar. Notably absent from his references was an important Arabic language reference book, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, written during the same period of *Alfiyyah* by another great Arabic linguist, *Ibn Manẓūr*. Both of these references are manuscripts that became widely available after the emergence of Arabic typography in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Being a collection of poems, *Alfiyyat Ibn Mālik* is only useful when read by a professional linguist. In fact, many revered scholars, like *Ibn ‘Aqīl*, wrote volumes of manuscripts to explain it. Unfortunately, these scholars had to rely on a manuscript that could have possibly included unclear words, missing verses, and scribes’ mistakes. Contemporary scholars mainly rely on these older explanations of the manuscript, known as *tafsīr*. On the other hand, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, predating *Alfiyyat Ibn Mālik*, was written with explicit explanations by the original author along with generous examples from pre-Islamic poetry and the Quran.

To summarize the simple demonstrative pronouns in Arabic grammar, *Ibn Mālik* wrote a single line (verse) of a poem:

بِذَا لِمَفْرَدٍ مُذَكَّرٍ أَشِيرُ                      بِذِي وَدِهٍ ؟؟ تَا عَلَى الْأُنْثَى اقْتَصِرُ

Translated into English the line says “use *dhā* to point to a masculine noun, and limit yourself to *dhī* and *dhīh* ?? *tā* for a feminine.” In the original manuscript, the unclear and disputed word between *dhīh* and *tā* (marked with two question marks by the author) was either a genuine word,

a corrected word, or a crossed out word. Researching several old *tafsīr* books, I discovered that scholars had read this unclear word quite differently.<sup>[8]</sup> However, most scholars of the Islamic Arab civilization era decided to omit this unclear word and simply list the only three known Arabic simple demonstrative pronouns for a feminine noun: *dhī*, *dhīh*, and *tā*. I am listing below in Arabic a few of these verse readings.

بِذِي وَذِهِ تَا عَلَى الْأُنْثَى اِقْتَصِرْ	بِذَا لِمِفْرَدٍ مُذَكَّرٍ أَشْرٌ
بِذِي وَذِهِ تِي تَا عَلَى الْأُنْثَى اِقْتَصِرْ	بِذَا لِمِفْرَدٍ مُذَكَّرٍ أَشْرٌ
بِذِي وَذِهِ نَسَى نَا عَلَى الْأُنْثَى اِقْتَصِرْ	بِذَا لِمِفْرَدٍ مُذَكَّرٍ أَشْرٌ
بِذِي وَذِهِ تِي تَه عَلَى الْأُنْثَى اِقْتَصِرْ	بِذَا لِمِفْرَدٍ مُذَكَّرٍ أَشْرٌ

Apparently, some overzealous and persistent scholars decided to read this unfortunate scribe's error by replacing it with one or more words. Almost all of these scholars justified their readings in Islamic religious terms. Those who claimed it was *tī*, explained how this reading would be consistent with the Islamic teachings allowing four wives for one man [sic]! With the passing of time, more Islamic scholars joined in. Some had even claimed that Arabic has nine simple demonstrative pronouns for a feminine noun. Some even claimed that, unlike a man, a woman does not have a specific social status; therefore, she must be pointed to with multiple pronouns. To conclude, unfortunately, the Arabic grammar textbook listed by Bellamy, which most likely was Dussaud's main reference too, listed nine simple demonstrative pronouns including *tī*, as many Arabic grammar textbooks do today.

It is inconclusive whether the scribe's error in the manuscript of *Alfiyyat Ibn Mālik* was the reason behind these claims. Clearly, *Ibn Mālik* used the word, *Iqtaṣir*, which is an imperative verb meaning "limit yourself to." My impression is that some Muslim scholars during *Ibn Mālik*'s time were busy making up feminine pronouns to support their religious claims and theories, a trend that evidently prompted *Ibn Mālik* to write his grammatical poem in that strong manner to correct them.<sup>[12]</sup> A simple online search today would lead to more of such Muslim scholars who are overly obsessed with the topic of females and Islam. Ironically — I must observe — to support their arguments, some Muslim scholars desperately tried to explain that the imperative verb *iqtaṣir* was referring to the masculine in the meaning of "do not use any of these pronouns for masculine" rather than what *Ibn Mālik* intended the meaning to be, which is, "use only these pronouns for feminine."

Regrettably, I could not examine the original manuscript of *Alfiyyat Ibn Mālik*. Fortunately though, the text line being discussed is a poem text line; meaning it can easily be checked against

the well-known Arabic poetry rhyming scale Arabic typography background with an eye to distinguish and ميزان الشعر to determine the correct reading. Coming from an understand Arabic letters' shapes, and using the simple fact that *Ibn Mālik* had used *wāw* between *dhī* and *dhīh*, I concluded that the puzzling word before *tā* must be another *wāw*, since in Arabic, one cannot add another item to an existing item without using *wa* before. It is my impression that the scribe had simply written a badly executed letter *wāw* with very small loop and long downward stroke, which can easily be confused with final *yā*?. Here is what I believe *Ibn Mālik* poem line said:

بذا لمفردٍ مذكرٍ أشرٍ                      بذى وذهٍ وتا على الأنثى اقتصرٍ

To test if my belief holds any truth, I sent an enquiry to *Sa'dī Yūsuf* (one among the most prominent Arab poets today whom I have the honor to know and befriend). I included in my email five versions of the *Ibn Mālik* poem line, including mine, and asked him which one would be the correct one according to Arabic poem rhyming rules. He replied promptly, stating that the correct one was my version, using *waw* before *tā*. I was not surprised that this would be his answer since *Ibn Manzūr*, who had studied the most important Arabic grammar books of his time, did not list *tī* as a simple feminine demonstrative pronoun in his dictionary textbook, *Lisān al-'Arab*.<sup>[13]</sup>

The second reference listed by Bellamy for the word *tī* was page 152 of *Ancient west Arabian*, by Chaim Rabin.<sup>[7]</sup> Rabin hinted that *tī* was used as a simple feminine demonstrative noun by quoting from *Bukhārī*, who wrote that prophet Muhammad had addressed *Ā'isha*, his youngest wife, with the phrase *kaifa tikum* كيف تيكوم. Rabin must have thought that using *tī* in the compound demonstrative word *tikum* would mean that it was also used as an independent simple feminine demonstrative pronoun. Writing his book three decades after the discovery of *al-Namārah*, he then listed the *tī* of *al-Namārah* as second reference!<sup>[25]</sup> Plainly said, this is wrong and misleading. The *tī* of *tikum* is derived from *tā*, the classic simple feminine demonstrative pronoun. *Ibn Manzūr* extensively discussed this topic in his introduction to the letter *tā*' in *Lisān al-'Arab*. He explained that *tā* is the simple feminine demonstrative pronoun and that it can be used as a standalone word to point to a single feminine. He further explained: *Tayyā* is the diminutive demonstrative pronoun of *tā* which can possibly be used for a younger female too. Clearly, when pointing to a single feminine noun as a third distant party, *tā* can be combined to form a new compound demonstrative pronoun, as *tī*, but one cannot use this part as a standalone word. For example, the words *tīka*, and *tilka* are derived from *tā*, not *tī*. The Arabs used *tīka* instead of *tāka*, but some had used *tālika*, instead of *tilka*, which *Ibn Manzūr* called the ugliest usage in the language.<sup>[13]</sup> Other than this occurrence claimed by the readers of *al-Namārah*, I could not

find a single example for using *tī* as a simple feminine demonstrative pronoun, be that in the Quran, Arabic poetry, or anywhere else. Even if one were to find such an example, it would be of a wrong usage and surely a post Islamic example. The three simple feminine demonstrative pronouns in Arabic are *tā*, *dhī*, and *dhih*.

### 3.5 Rereading *al-Namārah* Nabataean Arabic Inscription

Taking into account the numerous *Musnad* Arabic inscriptions available today, *al-Namārah* or any of the three other known Nabataean Arabic inscriptions cannot be classified as the earliest Arabic language documents on record. Although the classic Arabic language of *al-Namārah* is truly remarkable, the inscription quality is not impressive. Moreover, the quality of the stone and the efforts put to prepare it, are much higher than the quality of the inscription and the efforts put by the scribe, and most likely, this scribe was definitely not the same person who prepared the stone. Surely, *al-Namārah* stone as a whole does not look like a stone worthy of a king's tomb or monument. Despite visible damages, possibly including a complete breakup of the stone into two or more pieces, most of the words of *al-Namārah* inscription are uncomplicated to read by a person familiar with the Nabataean and Arabic scripts. Out of the several erosions that afflicted the stone, only one or two areas of erosion had somewhat affected the reading of the inscription. Although reading *al-Namārah*, a fascinating archeological and philological task, can be very challenging, it is not very complicated once the first two lines, and particularly the first two words, of the inscription are read correctly. Numerous scholars studied *al-Namārah* after Dussaud, but Professor Bellamy of the University of Michigan should get the highest credit for re-reading *al-Namārah* from scratch and presenting original corrections along with fresh new pictures, in the eighties of last century.

The first time I read *al-Namārah* was in 2008, the year I published my first article about the history of the Arabic *Jazm* script. My involvement in Arabic typography brought me earlier into the field of history of the Arabic script. In my earlier readings, I utilized available pictures and tracings, particularly those provided by Bellamy. With the help of my patient brother who visited the Louvre Museum in 2009, and the aid of the great technology inside his digital camera, I was able to examine the stone *in person* and obtain numerous detailed pictures of the areas disputed by previous readers including myself. I have provided, in Figure 4.4, the original Nabataean tracing of *al-Namārah* by Dussaud, along with his initial Arabic reading as referenced today by most textbooks. Thanks to Hassan Jamil, my ex-student and assistant who taught me Photoshop, I was able to provide my new tracing (Figure 3.5) of *al-Namārah* with eleven new changes —out of the eleven, three are Bellamy's and six are mine. To assist the readers locating these new tracings

and compare them with the old ones, I assigned a number to each affected area on Dussaud's original tracing (Figure 3.4.) Also, in Figure 3.5, I provided my own letter-for-letter Arabic transcription followed by my translation into Arabic of the inscription, where I added all necessary dots, diacritic vowels, punctuations, and missing letters *alif* in accordance with my new reading. I also provided a full Arabic explanation for my readings. In addition, for those who want to confirm the tracings of this study, I supplied a clear image of the *al-Namārah* stone (Figure 3.3.)



Figure (3.4) A photo of *al-Namārah* stone hanging on a wall at the Louvre Museum, Paris. © Marie-Lan Nguyen / Wikimedia Commons [20]

Dussaud's tracing of al-Namārah Nabataean inscription

Dussaud's letter-by-letter Arabic transcription and reading

قِي نَفْسِ امْرَأَةِ الْقَيْسِ بِنْتِ عَمْرِو مَلِكِ الْعَرَبِ كَلْدَةَ ذُو أَسْرَ النَّجَاحِ  
 وَمَلِكِ الْأَسَدِيِّينَ وَنَزَارُو وَمُلُوكِهِمْ وَهَرَبَ تَجُو عَكْدِي وَجَاءَ  
 بِرَجَائِي فِي حَيْجِ نَجْرَانَ مَدِينَتِ شَمْرٍ وَمَلِكٍ مَعْدُو وَيَتِي بَنِيهِ  
 الشُّعُوبِ وَوَكَّلَهُنَّ فَارِسُو رُومٍ فَلَمْ يَبْلُغْ مَلِكٌ مَبْلَغَهُ  
 عَكْدِي هَلَكَ سَنَتِ ٢٢٣ يَوْمَ ٧ بِكَسَلُولِ بِالسُّعْدِ ذُو وَكْدَةَ

Figure (3.5) Dussaud tracing of *al-Namārah* inscription with his revised letter-for-letter Arabic transcription and translation. [11]

Author's new tracing of *al-Namārah* Nabataean inscription

Author's letter-by-letter Arabic transcription

تيا نفس امرؤ القيس بن عمرو ملك العرب كله ذو اسد التاج  
وملك الاسديين ونزارو وملوكهمو هرب مذحجو عكدي وجاء  
يزجها في رتج نجرن مدينه شمرو ملك معدو وبين بنيها  
الشعوب ووكلهن فرسانو الروم فلم يبلغ ملك مبلغه  
عكدي هلك سنة 223 يوم 7 بكسلول يالسعد ذو ولده

Modern Arabic translation with *alif*s, dots and diacritic vocalization added

تيا نفس امرؤ القيس بن عمرو، ملك العرب كلها، ذو اسد التاج،  
وملك الاسديين ونزار وملوكهمو. هرب مذحج عكدي، وجاء  
يزجها في رتج نجران، مدينة شمرو، ملك معد، وبين بنيها  
الشعوب، ووكلهن فرسانو الروم، فلم يبلغ ملك مبلغه.  
عكدي هلك سنة 223 يوم 7 بكسلول، يالسعد ذو ولده.

Figure (3.6) New tracing by the author of the Nabataean text of *al-Namārah* inscription with an equivalent letter-by-letter Arabic transcription and a modern classic Arabic translation.

### Line 1

Demonstrating that Dussaud's reading of the first word *tī* was inaccurate, would most certainly open the way to question all current readings of the inscription. After all, if the writer of *al-Namārah* inscription had wanted to use a demonstrative pronoun for a tombstone, he would have

certainly used *dnh*, the one utilized in *Umm al-Jimāl*, *Raqqush*, and all other Nabataean tombstone inscriptions. Still, in order to fully accomplish the difficult task of challenging Dussaud’s reading, we are faced by an even more difficult task — how to read this unusual and difficult word? To begin, I started in Aramaic where *tī* is thought to be a simple demonstrative pronoun for a singular masculine noun. The name of the Syrian village *Tīshūr*, *Tartūs* province, is believed to be derived from an Aramaic compound name made of *tī* (this) and *shūr* (wall), a masculine noun in both Aramaic and Arabic. <sup>[3][9]</sup>

However, the second word, *nafs*, of *al-Namārah* is a feminine noun — as I have pointed out when re-reading the *Umm al-Jimāl* inscription. The extremely rare instance where *nafs* can be treated as a masculine noun in Arabic is not applicable here. Considering that *al-Namārah* language is relatively classic Arabic, it is seriously unlikely that it would start with an Aramaic word, let alone the wrong Aramaic word.

Regardless of the nature of the word *nafs*, feminine or masculine, one needs to first reinvestigate its meaning and usage in *al-Namārah*. As stated, since this word rarely appeared within the opening phrase of the Nabataean inscriptions but commonly within the Musnad inscriptions of eastern Arabian tombstones (always combined with the word *qabr*), scholars believe this word means “funerary monument”. However, no other existing evidence can attest to such common usage among Muslim Arabs. As I illustrated through my reading of the *Umm al-Jimāl*, Madeba, and Stratsbourg inscriptions above, this word was likely misread or even mistraced in these inscriptions. Among the long list of its usage in Arabic (compiled by major Muslim scholars who lived a couple centuries after *al-Namārah*), “tombstone” or “funerary monument” were both clearly absent. Two Arabic Nabataean inscriptions, dated few decades before *al-Namārah* and found in the same geographic area, and numerous other Musnad and Nabataean inscriptions, had consistently used the word *qabr* in relation to a burial place. Why would *al-Namārah* then use *nafs* alone?

Even if the word *nafs* was actually used individually in few inscriptions to mean tombstone, this should certainly not limit it to that usage or exclude others, especially since the absolute majority of the other inscriptions had consistently used it otherwise. The fact that *Umm al-Jimāl* had used *nafsū* with final *wāw*, while *al-Namārah* used *nafs* without *wāw*, is by itself a significant piece of information that needs to be examined closely. Furthermore, *al-Namārah* stone does not even resemble a typical Nabataean or non-Nabataean *nafesh*. I am of the opinion that in the context of *al-Namārah*, the word *nafs* should be read as “soul” — its common usage —, or “blood” — a less common but a very valid usage, given the events surrounding *Umru’ū al-Qays* defeat. As it will be emphasized throughout my re-reading, the overall text contents, paragraphs,

sentences, and information on the events cited in the inscription — whether read with classic Arabic or having Nabataean Arabic in mind — do not match the current reading of this word as “funerary monument.”

My reading of *nafs* in the meaning of “soul” would leave only a couple of possibilities for the reading of the previous word, *tī*.—it was either used to swear by or call upon the soul or blood of *Umru’ū al-Qays*, a very common Arab practice even today; or to bring the attention to or call upon his glory. It was customary that the Arabs, even before Islam, use introductory sentences before starting with their main topic as Muslims routinely do today by starting with an attention-grabbing swear sentence such as, *Bism Allāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*. Accordingly, I believe there could be four possible readings for *tī*.

The first and most likely reading of it is *tayā* تَيَا, a combined word composed of two parts, *ta* and *yā*. The first part is the swearing letter *tā’*, known as *tā’ al-qasam* تَاء الْقَسَم, as in *ta-Allāh* تَأَلَّه. Contrary to common belief today, starting with the swear letter *tā’* was not limited to *Allāh*. For example, the Arabs used *ta-Hayātika* تَحْيَاتِكَ when swearing by someone’s life. They also used *ta-rabbi al-ka’bati* تَرْب الكعبة when swearing by the god of *ka’bah* in Mecca— even before Islam.<sup>[4][13]</sup> Based on this reading, they may have used *tayā rabbi al-Ka’batati* تَيَا رَب الكعبة. The second part, the letter/word *yā* is *ḥarf tanbīh* حَرْف تَنْبِيْه commonly used to call, or call upon, the attention of someone or something as in *yā Allāh*, or *yā fulān*, or *yā ‘Irāq*.<sup>[13]</sup> Therefore, I read the first two words of *al-Namārah* as *ta-yā nafs* تَيَا نَفْس, as in *qasaman yā nafs* قَسَمَا يَا نَفْس, or *bikī yā nafs* بِكِ يَا نَفْس, which would mean, “swear by thee O’soul of”, or “in thee, O’soul of.”

The second possible reading is that *tī* could also be *tayā* تَيَا, but this time the two parts are used together as *ḥarf tanbīh*. *Ibn Manẓūr* listed several examples where *yā*, combined with additional letters before it were used as one word in the meaning of *yā*. The additional letters before *yā* were possibly used to add more emphasis, admiration, or to express feelings for revenge and sorrow. The few examples listed in his *Lisān al-‘Arab* included *āyā* أَيَا, *‘ayā* أَيَْا, and *hayā* هَيَا, but not *tayā* تَيَا.<sup>[13]</sup> My thinking, based on *Ibn Manẓūr* examples, is that *tayā* and several other combinations of *yā* had existed in classic Arabic.

The third possibility is that it could actually be *tī* تِي, but was used either as a feminine pronoun *hadhihī* هَذِهِ in the meaning of *ḥarf tanbīh*, solely to swear and give attention and admiration, or as a swearing letter *tā’* with final letter *yā’* to replace the *kasrah* diacritic. In the latter case, it would be read *tī nafs* as in *bi-nafs* بِنَفْس or *wa-nafs* وَنَفْس, commonly used to swear

by someone's soul. Swearing *tā'* is normally attached to a word and used with a *fathah* diacritic, but it is possible that it was given *kasrah* when used with a feminine noun like *nafs*. This is consistent with the typical Arabic association of *kasrah* with feminine. Since pronouncing *ta* with *kasra* when attached to *nafs* is awkward, a final *yā'* was probably used to represent *kasrah*, as practiced in pre-diacritic Arabic poetry writings.<sup>[13]</sup>

The fourth, an extremely unlikely possibility, is that *tī* could also be *tayā*, but in the meaning of *ṭawbá* طوبى or *taḥyā* تحيا (long live.) The inscription may have started with the phrase *taḥyā nafs* تحيا نفس but the *ḥa'* after *tā'* was possibly omitted by design or by mistake. This possibility is highly unlikely since I have not found any evidence linking *tī* or *tayā* with such usage. Also, *taḥyā* is usually used with a living person, not the soul of the dead.

Reading the first two words of *al-Namārah* is crucial to the reading of the rest of the inscription. In the case of the first three reading possibilities here above reported, swearing by or calling upon *Umru'ū al-Qays'* soul, the phrase should then be followed by a single major action or event announcement, not a group of events. As for the fourth possibility, the non-swearing readings above, a list of accomplishments is certainly possible. Regardless of which reading is used, the inscription has become much less likely a burial epitaph than a memorial monument. The first three swearing readings open up other possibilities for reading the rest of the inscription, since they indicate that this inscription is not about *Umru'ū al-Qays*.

The next questionable word of the first line was *klh* Dussaud traced the word as *klh* accurately, but read it wrongly as *kulluh*. It should be *kulluhā* (meaning, "all of them") referring to the previous word *al-'Arab* (the Arabs, or the Arab tribes); both are feminine nouns. However, the next challenging words of the inscription are *dhū* and the two words following it. As I explained earlier, in Arabic *dhū* is usually used in the meaning of *ṣāḥib* or *wa-lahu* ("owner of" or "he who owns"), normally for *laqab* or *kunyah* (last name), or in the meaning of "who or which belongs to", or "of". In both cases, it should be followed by a noun. However, in classic Arabic, *dhū* was also used in the meaning of *alladhī* (he who), followed by a verb. In *al-Namārah*, the next word was either *asad* (lion) or *asara* (took someone as prisoner). I believe it was the noun *asad*, and the previous word was either *dhū*, normally used for nicknames or other titles, or *dhū* in the meaning of "who belongs to", not *alladhī*.

It follows, I read the last three-word phrase as *dhū asadu al-tāj* in the meaning of "the one who owned *asad al-tāj*," possibly a nickname or title referring to a figure of lion adorning the top of an actual crown. Or in the meaning of "the one who belongs to *asadu al-tāj*". This refers to the

*Asad* tribe as the one with the crown or the one whose kings wore a crown, a well-known history fact.

In order to read *dhū* as *alladhī*, to fulfill Dussaud's and all current readings of the inscription, one must read the word after *dhū* as a verb. Scholars, who read the word after *dhū* as a verb, possibly *asara*, *assara*, or even *asada*, claimed that the word which followed and which can easily be traced as the noun *al-tāj* (crown,) was actually referring to the well-known historical city *Thāj* or *Tha'j* near the modern-day city *al-Dahrān*.

Even so, if this were true, one would not refer to it as *al-Thāj* using *al*. In fact, Arabic poetry had never used *al* with city names like *Thāj* or *Najrān*. Additionally, in Arabic the object of the verb *asar* or *assara* must be people, not a city. One does take people, particularly soldiers, as prisoners and not a city! Tweaking the reading of *al-tāj*, some scholars claimed it was actually *al-Tājyyīn*, possibly a tribe name, or *al-Thājyyīn*, the people of the city of *Thāj*. However, I was not able to trace the two or three additional letters needed for *al-tāj* to become *al-Tājyyīn* or *al-Thājyyīn*. Since those who read the word as the verb *assara* had also read each subsequent word *mlk* as the verb *malaka*, one may ask as why *al-Namārah* would use *assar* only for *al-Taj* or *al-Tājyyīn*. A more pertinent question would be, why not use *malaka*? It would certainly fit the meaning better.

Those who opposed reading *al-tāj* as “the crown” explained that Arab kings had never wore crowns. This is erroneous. History teaches us that some of the northern Arab kings of *Hīrah* and even *Najd*, home of the *Bani Asad* tribes, wore crowns. Even if this were not true, we do know that *Umrū'ū al-Qays* had carried many attacks in Persia whose kings did wear crowns. Since Persia historically used a lion as a national symbol, we cannot exclude the possibility that *Umrū'ū al-Qays* had managed to seize a crown with a lion effigy — this earned him the appellation: *dhū asad al-tāj* (the one with the lion of the crown), a valid Arabic phrase in terms of grammar and semantics. According to Muslim scholars, King *Umrū'ū al-Qays* was known for his many appellations. Doing so, that is to have multiple nicknames, is an established Arab tradition since time immemorial, through the Abbasid times, and even today. One would be surprised, if *al-Namārah* would mention king *Umrū'ū al-Qays* without following it with one of his many titles or appellations. It is unfortunate that the appellation listed in *al-Namārah* was not among those that Muslim historians accorded to him. <sup>[14][30]</sup>

Struggling to read the word following *dhū* as a verb to prove Dussaud's general classification of *al-Namārah*, some scholars hypothesized that *assar* was an equivalent to the verb *nāla* (won). They read the second word as “is”; that is, as *al-tāj* (crown), and read the three-word

phrase as *alladhi nāla al-tāj* (he who won the crown). Yet, I found no evidence that *assara* or *asara* was used in such manner.

Bellamy read the last four-word phrase as *wa-laqabahu dhū Asad wa-Midhḥij* (and his appellation as “the one who owned *Asad* and *Midhḥij* tribes”). I do agree with his tracing of the loop following *Asad* as possible letter *wāw*, but disagree with his tracing of the word that followed as *Midhḥij*. Doubly important, why would *al-Namārah* lists *Umru’ū al-Qays*’ as king of *Asad* and vanquisher of *Midhḥij* in Line 2 (according to Bellamy’s reading) when his appellation already included them on Line 1? However, I believe Bellamy’s tracing of *alif* as possible *wāw* would change *dhū asad al-tāj* ذو اسد التاج to *dhū asadūl-tāj* ذو اسدولتاج which would conform to the way with which *al-Namārah* pronounced the name *Umru’ū al-Qays* as *Umru’ul-Qays* مرء لقيس and, as I shall discuss later, the way it pronounced *fursān al-Rūm* as *fursanūl-rūm* فرسانولروم. On the other hand, even if all Bellamy’s tracing and reading of the last phrase of Line 1 were correct, this would still agree with my reading of *dhū* as the common *dhū* and not *alladhī*, and with my reading of the phrase as one of the king’s titles or appellations.

## Line 2

Reading the first two and the last three words of the first line was, without a doubt, the most demanding task in reading the Arabic language of *al-Namārah*. In comparison, reading the rest of the inscription is straightforward. If *dhū* was *alladhī*, one would expect a series of action (i.e. verbs) afterwards, all connected by *wa* (and). If it was simply the typical word *dhū* for appellations, one should then expect either additional titles connected by *wa*, or an announcement for an extraordinary event or a decree. Only in the second case could one start a new sentence with the letter *wāw* (not in the meaning “and”), which would normally be followed by a non-verb, as in *wa-qad*, or *wa-akīran*. The fact that *Umru’ū al-Qays* was the king of *Asad* and *Nazār*, is neither new nor an extraordinary announcement. The Quran stated many sentences with *wāw*, but it consistently used non-verb afterwards, as in the example of Quran (53:1) *wa-al-najmi idhā hawá* والنجم إذا هوى, where the word *al-najm* (the star) is a noun.

In my opinion, reading the word *mlk*, which appears twice in the second line, as the verb *malaka* is a major mistake since the first one was preceded by the letter *wāw*. I read both as the noun *malik* (king of), as this same word was read by all scholars in Line 1 in the phrase *malik al-‘Arab*. Muslim scholars wrote that *banī Asad* of *Najd* and *banī Nazār* of *Hijāz*, are *‘Arabun musta’ribah* (Arabized Arabs), not *‘Arabun ‘aribah* (pure Arabs.) They are the descendants of *‘Adnān*, not *Qaḥṭān* (presumably a “pure” Arab.) Accordingly, *‘Adnān*, a descendent of *Isma‘īl*, is the father (some wrote grandfather) of *Nazār* of *Hijāz* and *Ma‘ad* of Yemen, and great grandfather

of *Muḍar*. Depending on what time period, these mixed Arab groups were customarily referred to as *Maʿad*, *Nazār*, or *Muḍar* instead of *ʿAdnān*.<sup>[2][28]</sup> It is evident, therefore, that after stating that *Umruʿ al-Qays* was the king of all Arabs — the single largest group of people in the area — the writer of *al-Namārah* needed to state that *Umruʿ al-Qays* was also the king of both *Asad* and *Nazār*, two of the largest three mixed tribes in Arabia. The third group is *Maʿad* of Yemen. Yet, it is also possible that the term “all Arabs” was referring to all nomadic Arab tribes as distinguished from tribes that had settled down in cities and specific geographic areas and established kingdoms.

Based on my readings of the word *malik* above as noun, I had suspected right from the beginning, that the letter *wāw* after the next word, *mulūkahum*, should actually be a part of that word. This would make reading Arabic smoother, especially since the next word, *h.r.b* is a definite verb, as we shall see that later. This, of course, was not required for my reading of *al-Namārah* up to the word *mulūkahum*. As explained above, a sentence announcing an extraordinary event, like defeating the powerful *Midhḥij*, can start with *wāw* in the meaning of *wa-akīran* (at last or finally), or *hā-qad*. However, tracing and inspecting the Nabataean text, I can unmistakably see that the *wāw* after *mulūkahum* is actually connected to it. The downward stroke of this *wāw* is not vertical. It is pointing to the right. The final letter *mīm* of *mulūkahum* has a prominent lower-connecting stroke fading just before it reaches the downward stroke of *wāw*. I read this word as *mulūkahumū* not *mulūkahum*. This final *wāw* is referring to the people of *Asad* and *Nazār*. In Arabic grammar, it is called *wāw al-Ishbaʿ* (saturation *wāw*) or *wāw al-ṣilah* (relating *wāw*) and is usually used after *mīm al-Jamʿ* (plural *mīm*) to emphasize its *dhammah* diacritic. The word *mulūkahumū* is the last word of the opening sentence of *al-Namārah*. It does not only conclude the opening sentence in anticipation of the main subject of the inscription, but it surely makes the reading of the first word of *al-Namārah*, *tī*, as “this”, impossible.

The Arabic root of the word after *mulūkahumū* could either be *haraba* هرب (run away) or *hadhdhaba* هذب (disciplined), a verb in both cases. Tracing this word as *hrb* is accepted by all scholars. Since the word that comes after was *Midhḥij*, the name of the prominent Yemenite tribe, this verb must be in past tense and when read in Arabic must have a *shaddah* on the letter *rāʾ* to become *harraba* هرب (forced the object to run away) in order to refer to the subject committing the action of the verb. If *Midhḥij* is the object, as I read it, the subject can then be a name appearing before or after the verb. The only other possibility is to treat *Midhḥij*, a feminine noun, as the subject, not the object of the verb; in such case, one must say *harabat Midhḥij*, adding the feminine letter *tāʾ* after *bāʾ*. Since there was no *tāʾ*, this word must be *harraba* (defeated them or made them run away.) *Hadhdhaba* would not make sense after reading the next line.

Given that *harraba* was the first word of the new main event announcing a sentence/paragraph that followed an unrelated opening sentence, and since it was definitely a verb followed by a name within a three-word sub-sentence, the next word *ʿAkdī* عَكْدِي must be the subject name according to classic Arabic. It cannot be an adjective or adverb since this would leave the three-word sub-sentence incomplete. I agree with Dussaud's reading of the phrase as *harraba Midhḥij ʿAkdī*, but I read it in the meaning of the phrase *harraba ʿAkdī Midhḥij*, where *ʿAkdī* is the subject فاعل who defeated the object مفعول به *Midhḥij*. In Arabic, one can use both phrases, but should differentiate between them by using appropriate vocal accents on the object and subject. This vocal differentiation was never marked in writing until after Islam. The Quran and Arabic poetry have plenty of similar examples. In the Quran (35:28) *innamā yakhshá Allāha min ʿibadihi al-ʿulamaʿu* اِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللّٰهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ where the verb *yakhshá* is the first word followed immediately by *Allāh*, the object, and then comes the subject, *al-ʿulamaʿu*.<sup>[18][19]</sup>

However, assuming that *ʿAkdī* was a name in the phrase *harraba Midhḥij ʿAkdī*, one should also consider the possibility that *Midhḥij* was a personal name and is the subject. In such case, *ʿAkdī*, as the object, would be the personal or tribe name of the defeated party. Although this possibility is valid from a grammar and language angle, it would not fit at all with all readings of the last line of the inscription where the victorious (either *ʿAkdī*, or *Umrūʿ al-Qays*) was treated as a hero, not a villain. Similarly, the assumption that *ʿAkdī* was a last name, as in *haraba Midhḥij ʿAkdī*, would not work with the rest of the inscription.

Luckily, from the viewpoint of research, the word *ʿAkdī* appeared twice in the inscription. The last sentence started with the two-word phrase *ʿAkdī halak* (*ʿAkdī* died.) This phrase is, by itself, solid proof that *ʿAkdī* is a name of a person and that this inscription is about him, not *Umrūʿ al-Qays*. The main event of the inscription was his triumph over *Midhḥij*. Not a very common name, *ʿAkdī* sounds like a classic Arabic name. Many of Arabic names are formed by adding final *yāʿ* after a noun or after another name derived from a three-letter Arabic root, as in *Ramzī* from *Ramz*, *Saʿdī* from *Saʿd*, *Husnī* from *Husn*, ... etc. The name of the hero of *al-Namarāh* was *ʿAkdī* derived from the classic Arabic word *ʿakd* عَكْد. It is that simple! With a simple Arabic Google search for the name *ʿAkdī*, one can find many using it as a last name in an Arab desert town in Algeria, called *Umāsh* أوماش ! The fact that the name *ʿAkdī* was mentioned without the name of his father could mean that he was either an associate of *Umrūʿ al-Qays*, from a slave background like the famous Arab hero *ʿAntarah* (who many think was originally a slave) or a high ranking Arab soldier of the Roman Army.

According to *Lisān al-‘Arab*, although the root word ‘*akd* can be used in a variety of meanings; however, its primary meaning is, “the lower back part of the tongue.” For that reason, it was used in the meaning of *aṣl* (origin) as Libzbarski suggested. The word is probably related to ‘*iqd* عِقد (tie).<sup>[7][13]</sup> Likely, the derived word ‘*akdi* does not mean “strong” or “powerful”, as most Arabic publications desperately claim today following Caskel’s reading, but “original” اصلي. Besides, one can not see how anyone could read the same word *Akdī* in two ways at the same time: as “the strong” القوي, and “with strength or strongly” اقوتاً!

Bellamy thought this word was ‘*akkaḍá* عكضى, which he desperately tried to make derive from a two-word phrase ‘*an kaḍá* عن قضى with the letter *nūn* assimilated, the letter *qāf* replaced, and the letter *yā* ignored. He thought this word meant “thereafter”.<sup>[7]</sup> His reading of the word as an adverb would make sense if one would go along with Dussaud’s reading of the previous text. But even then, his convoluted assumptions to arrive to this unknown word, ‘*akkaḍá*, raise more questions but give no answers. For example, why can’t an inscription, with relatively good classic Arabic language, use *ba‘da dhālik*, instead? Why is there no reference to ‘*an kaḍá*, as “thereafter” in any historical Arabic reference? In the first place, why would the writer of the inscription use a non-crucial adverb twice?

### Line 3

Bellamy should be given due credit for tracing and reading two highly debated words in the beginning of Line 3. I verified his tracing and I agree with it. He traced the first word as *yzjh* and read it *yazujjuhā*. The missing final *alif* after *hā*’ is consistent with the word *kulluh* for *kulluhā* in Line 1 and with another word *banīh* for *banīhā*, in the end of Line 3. *Yazujju* has many meanings, but in *al-Namārah* context, it means, “to engage someone in a fierce battle.” Dussaud traced that word as *bzji* and read it as *bi-zjāy*, a non-existing Arabic word! The second traced word by Bellamy was *rtj*, which he read as *rutuji* in the meaning of “gates of”. I agree with his tracing of the word, but disagree with his Arabic reading and the meaning he gave to it. The presence of *fī* (in) rather than ‘*alá* (on) before the word indicates that it does not mean gates in this context. The word *fī* (in) needs a location where one can be physically “in” not “near to”. One cannot say in Arabic *fī abwāb Najrān* (in the gates of *Najrān*), but ‘*alá abwāb Najrān* (on/at the gates of *Najrān*.) I read the word *rtj* as *rutuji*, or possibly *ritāji*, in the meaning of “narrow roads of” or “narrow road of” as given by *Lisān al-‘Arab*, which indicated that the words *rutuj* or *marātij* are the plural forms of the word *ritāj* for “narrow road”, as in the Quran verse وأرض ذات رتاج<sup>[13]</sup>

Categorically therefore, only this reading is grammatically correct as it is in agreement with the historical and geographical facts of *Najrān* and Yemen, which are known for their narrow roads and mountainous valleys. The use of the word *harraba* in the second line was apparently deliberate. The crushing battle was in and around *Najrān*, where *Midhḥij* had escaped to for cover. Further, scholars read the word *Shimr* as *Shammar*, probably hinting to the well-known *Shammar* tribe of northern *Najd*. Reading the word as a tribe name rather than an individual name is clearly influenced by reading the following word *mlk* as the verb *malaka*. This hasty reading is yet another example of how scholars did all they can do to prove that *al-Namārah* was listing *Umru'ū al-Qays* accomplishments.

Two facts attest to the following conclusion: 1) geographically, in the sense of distance and location, the *Shammar* tribe had nothing to do with *Najrān* or Yemen, and 2) a renowned king of Yemen who ruled in the time of *al-Namārah* carried the first name *Shimr*.<sup>[2][6][14]</sup> Moreover, I wonder why *al-Namārah*, which had added *wāw* after every single name in the inscription, would skip that practice only with the name *Shammar*! I read the word *Shmr* and the *wāw* that followed as one word, *Shimrū*, referring to King *Shimr Yar'ish* of Yemen, and therefore, I read the next word that followed as *mālik* (king of), not the verb *malaka* (owned).

The last two words of the third line are *wa-bayyana banīhā*, as in *wa mayyaza bayna banīhā* (distinguished appropriately between its people). Bellamy read the two words as *wa-nabala bi-nabahi* (treated its nobles gently). His reading would fit fine with his and my reading of the fourth line, which included two important words, *al-shu'ūb* followed by *wa-wakkalahunna*. For a victorious army, discriminating between the defeated (as in treatment of women, children, and elders differently) is contrary to the usual indiscriminate rampage. In other words, it is a sort of gentle treatment reserved for the vanquished. Tracing the first word by Bellamy as *nbl*, which he read as *nabala*, is possible. Conversely, tracing the second word as *bnbh*, which he read as *bi-nabahi* is impossible since the third letter is clearly *yā'*, not *bā'*. I read the first word as *bayyana*, as did Dussaud even though the vertical stem of the final letter *nūn* was unusually high.

In Arabic *bayyana* in the meaning of *mayyaza* (distinguished between) or in the meaning of *wadhdhaha* (clarified) is the past tense for *yubayyin*. Among many diverse modes of usage, the Quran (2:118) used the following: قَدْ بَيَّنَّا الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ. The root word, *bayn* is among the few Arabic words that can be used to give an opposite meaning. Generally, it is used to express either separation or togetherness.<sup>[13]</sup> As for the second word, I believe it is *banīhā*, as in *abnā'ihā* (its sons or people). The word *bnh* should be read as *banīhā*, since we are referring either to the *Midhḥij* tribe or to *Ma'ad*, both of which are feminine nouns. Dussaud read this word, *banyihī*, as

in *quwwatihi* (his steadfastness). This would fit well with the rest, but it needs to be followed by *lil-shu'ub*, not *al-shu'ub* as illustrated in the next word of Line 4.

#### Line 4

The fourth line presents no obstacles to read. In the beginning, Dussaud read it correctly, but a few decades later, he reversed position. The word *wwklhn* should be read *wa-wakkalahunna* (put them under the protection of), a classic Arabic word that is grammatically correct.<sup>[13]</sup> As it happened, *al-Namārah* included the usual letter *nūn* with *shaddah* at the end, which is possibly used here for emphasis and confirmation and it is referring specifically to the plural feminine noun *al-shu'ub*. This word is the second widely-utilized taxonomic term used in the Arab tribal and modern systems as synonym for the word “people”. A tribe or *qabilah* is divided into *shu'ub*, plural for *sha'b*, which in turn is divided into *butūn*. We read in the Quran (9:36) **إِنَّ عِدَّةَ الشُّهُورِ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ اثْنَا عَشَرَ شَهْرًا فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ يَوْمَ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ مِنْهَا أَرْبَعَةٌ حُرْمٌ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ فَلَا تَظْلَمُوا فِيهِنَّ أَنْفُسَكُمْ**. The word *fihhunna* فيهنّ is referring to the plural feminine word *shuhūr* (months).

<sup>[18][19]</sup> The word *shahr* (month) is a single masculine noun, but when converted to plural form, it becomes *shuhūr*, a feminine noun. Similarly, the word *shu'ub*, plural of the masculine noun *sha'b*, is a plural feminine noun. This may explain, partially, why the word *al-'Arab*, a single feminine noun, in the first line was referred to with *kulluhā*, not *kulluhunna* or *kullahum*, and why the feminine noun, *Midhḥij*, for a single tribe, was referred to with the words, *yazujuhā*, not *yazujuhunna* or *yazujuhum*, and *banīhā* not *banīhunna*, or *banīhum*.

The contested word(s) of the fourth line was *frswlrwm*. The first three-letter part *frs* can be *faras* (horse), *fāris* (horseman or equestrian), or *Fāris* (Persia). Reading the word as “horse” cannot be considered. To read history correctly, it is literally impossible for the word to be read as Persia and that is because the previous word was clearly *wa-wakkalahunna*, and the following word was clearly indicating the Romans (there has never been an incidence in old Arabia where an area was put under the simultaneous protection of the Romans and the Persians.) During the time of *al-Namārah*, found in a Roman-controlled territory, these two powers were engaged in heated battles. Consequently, it was highly improbable to share domination of Arabia as partners.

At this point, we are left with only one possibility as how to read *frsw*, which is *fursānū* (horsemen) plural of *fāris*. I am inclined to believe there is a medial *nūn* between the letters *sīn* and *wāw*, which I will discuss in detail later. Accordingly, I read the two words as a compound: *fursānūl-rūm*, فرسانولروم, for *fursān al-Rūm*, فرسان الروم, similar to the reading of *Umru'ul-qays* أمرؤ القيس earlier in the inscription for *Umru' ū al-Qays*. The *alif* of *al-Rūm* was omitted because it was preceded by a word ending with the letter *wāw*, namely *fursānū*. This practice has

largely fallen out of use in modern Arabic writing. The name *Umrū' al-Qays*, is pronounced with heavy *dhammah* accent (as if there was a letter *wāw*) after *hamzah* as in *Umrū'ū-l-qays* أمرؤلقيس or *Umrū'u-l-qays* أمرؤلقيس. This is why the beginning letter *alif* of *al-Qays*, not same as *hamzah*, was also omitted. In fact, in modern Arabic, a majority of people write the name with *wāw* beneath *hamzah* as in *Umrū'ū al-Qays* أمرؤ القيس. Some still write it as 'Umrū'u al-qays أمرؤ القيس. In comparison, the *alif* of *al* is not omitted when the previous word ends with a soft *dhammah* diacritic, like *maliku al-Asadiyyin* in the second line. The letter *wāw* after the *nūn* in *fursānū* could be the plural *wāw* normally seen when a perfect masculine plural noun ending with *wāw* and *nūn*, is added to another noun to complete its meaning, as in *banū Asad* for *banūn Asad*. This is known as *jam' al-mudhakkār al-sālim* جمع المذكر السالم. The word *fursān* is called *mudhāf* مضاف (qualified) or translated literary from Arabic “the added word,” while *al-Rūm* is *mudhāf ilayh* مضاف اليه (qualifier) or translated literally from Arabic “the word which has been added to.” Otherwise, this *wāw* could also be *wāw al-ṣilah* or *wāw al-ishbā'* to emphasize the *ḍammah* diacritic on the *nūn*, as explained earlier when discussing the word *mulūkahumū* in Line 2.

Dussaud, who initially read the word *frsw* as *fārisū* (plural for *fāris*?), appeared not convinced of his reading. This explains why he decided to get rid of that reading later (when he re-read *al-Namārah* in the 1950s.) A justification does exist to explain this obvious confusion: the area of the stone occupied by the letters *frsw* appears significantly damaged. However, all what the word needs to become *fursānū* is the letter *nūn* between the letters *sīn* and *wāw*.

Fortunately, we do not need to dream up the letter *nūn*. Retracing that area extensively by using several photos, I observed that the down stroke of the letter *wāw* was pointing to the right, not perfectly vertical as traced by Dussaud. More important, the downward stroke of the previous letter *sīn* is clearly making an upward u-turn, probably to form the small missing letter, medial *nūn*, which was then connected to the letter *wāw* just at the loop area. Furthermore, the space between the letters *sīn* and *wāw* is suspiciously wide. Nevertheless, and given that this particular surface is severely damaged, we may never know for sure if there was ever a letter *nūn* in that area of the inscription.

I believe my reading of *frsw* as *fursānū* is more convincing than Dussaud's. It is surely more convincing than Bellamy's reading of it as *fā-ra'asū* فرأسو (to appoint someone as their head or leader.) He read the two-word phrase *fā-ra'asū li-Rūmā*. I cannot see how he traced *hamzah* between the tightly spaced letters *rā'* and *sīn*. *Hamza*, unlike *alif*, cannot be omitted in this case since *al-Namārah* used it consistently everywhere else. Bellamy's reading seems acceptable at first; but it would quickly crumple when combined with the previous word *wa-wakkalahunna* (placed

them under the protection of.) According to Bellamy’s reading, the defeated *Midhḥij*, were put under the protection of the defeater (*Umrū’ al-Qays*), and then accepted the Romans as their ultimate protectors. Why would an Arab king work so hard for the benefit of the Romans? The Arab kings were never enthusiastically subservient to either the Romans or the Persians. Their relation was primarily for mutual protection.<sup>[6]</sup> Bellamy’s elaboration on the differences between *raʿīs* and *malik* is not convincing. Also, his reading of the last word as the city *Rūmā* روم is confusing. Even though the Arabs called the Byzantine Romans *al-Rūm*, these Romans were not the Romans of *Roma* (current Rome of Italy). Why *al-Namārah* would then speak of *Rūmā*?

We have no clue as to how and why some readers read the word *wwklhn* as *wa-kullahum* in order to read the whole phrase as *wa-kullahum fursānan lil-Rūm* (and made all of them knights for the Romans). This highly speculative reading discards arbitrarily one of the two letters *wāw* and dreams up a final letter *mīm*, to replace the letter *nūn*, in *wwklhn*. Additionally, it adds a letter *nūn* after *sīn* (as I did) and replaces the *wāw* by *alif tanwīn* in *frsw*. It also adds, arbitrarily, a second letter *lām* before *lrum*. This and other peculiar readings are unfortunately the most popular ones in the Arab world today; probably because the current major Western readings of *al-Namārah* have failed to convince many!<sup>[27]</sup>

The last phrase of Line 4, *fa-lam yablugh malikun mablaghah*, which was read that way by all scholars, is clear but tricky. It can mean, “Not even a king could accomplish what he has accomplished” or “no other king has accomplished what he has accomplished”. There is a subtle difference between these two interpretations. The second could lead the reader to believe that it is referring to the only king mentioned in *al-Namārah*, king *Umrū’ū al-Qays*. I beg to differ; that is, it refers to the first interpretation of the first phrase — that is, the one referring to the accomplishments of *ʿAkdī*. It is worth mentioning that it is common in the usages of the Arabic to brag about something by stating, “not even a king has done such or had owned such.” As I have explained already, according to history textbooks before Dussaud’s reading of *al-Namārah*, king *Umrū’ū al-Qays* was not able to control Yemen or *Midhḥij*.

To summarize, the third and fourth lines of *al-Namārah* are describing the sole event of the inscription, namely the defeat of *Midhḥij*, which was introduced in Line 2. Their specific purpose appears to be informing the reader about where the battle took place, how it was conducted, and what was its aftermath. All of the keywords appearing in the two lines, *Midhḥij*, *Najrān*, *al-shuʿūb*, *malik*, *Shimr*, and *al-Rūm* are linked to one geographical location: Yemen, and to a single timeframe: circa 328 CE.

To continue, I read the single event paragraph starting by the word *harraba* (in Line 2) until the end of the Line 4 as follows: “*ʿAkdī* defeated *Midhḥij*, then engaged them in a fierce battle in the narrow road(s) of *Najrān*, the city of *Shimr*, the king of *Maʿad*, and separated its people as it fits before placing them under the protection of the Roman cavalry, a task that not even a king had accomplished before.” This reading is by no means speculative. I based it on historical and geographical facts— especially on the linguistic aspects of the inscription itself.

## Line 5

The final line of *al-Namārah* started with the word *ʿAkdī*, which we have already discussed (and seen) when we read the second line. Starting with this word in the final line was not a coincidence. The letters of the final word of the previous line, *mablaghahu*, were exaggerated in size and a generous space was left blank after it. It seems, therefore, that the scribe deliberately wanted to start the conclusive sentence in a new line. Starting with the name *ʿAkdī*, he wanted to remind the reader, once more, that the inscription was about him. The second word after *ʿAkdī* was clearly *halaka* (perished) therefore, the first phrase of the sentence was *ʿAkdī halaka* (*ʿAkdī* perished) The subject name here is after the verb, exactly as it was in the older Arabic Nabataean inscription, *Raqqūsh*, which had used the phrase *hiya halakat* (she perished).<sup>[11]</sup> In good classic Arabic, the verb is usually placed *before* the subject, but this is not required for correct Arabic grammar.

After stating the year, month, and day of his death, the scribe concluded the inscription (according to Dussaud) with the phrase “*bi-saʿd dhū waladahu*.” In Arabic language terms, this interpretation is incomprehensible. That is, we cannot understand it in Arabic. Nor can we understand “*yā-la-saʿdi dhū wālawhu*” meaning, “O, happiness for those who followed him” according to Bellamy. Going further, I agree with Dussaud’s tracing, except for the first letter, which he read as *bāʿ*, not *yāʿ*, as Bellamy did. One can easily see that the stroke for the letter *bāʿ* was a vertical straight line throughout the inscription, unlike the stroke for the initial *yāʿ*, which had always included a little dent. I am unable to see the second *wāw* of *wālawhu* that Bellamy traced with the intention to replace the letter *dāl* of *wldh*. It is my judgment that Bellamy’s reading of this word was clearly influenced by the assumption that *al-Namārah* was King *Umrūʿū al-Qaysʿ* epitaph. We read the last phrase as *yā li-saʿdi dhū waladah* (O, the happiness of those who gave birth to him). The first word is the letter *yā* known as *yāʿ al-tanbīh* (exclamation calling upon for either attention or admiration.) This is the same as *theyā* of *tayā*, the first word of *al-Namārah*. It is used here to draw attention to the word *saʿd* (happiness). Unlike the earlier *dhū* in the first line, *dhū* in this phrase was followed by a verb *waladahu* (gave birth to him), and therefore it is used in the meaning of *alladhī* (those who). The closing phrase should be read in

the meaning of “Oh, how happy should his parents be,” a classic and familiar line used even today when bringing the bad news of a fallen young soldier, not a king, to his parents!

### 3.6 Conclusion

For more than a century, it was assumed that *al-Namārah* stone, which Dussaud discovered in 1901 (it is hanging today on a wall in the Louvre Museum in Paris,) was the tombstone of one of the most important pre-Islamic Arab kings, King *Umru'ū al-Qays bin 'Amrū*. My tracing and reading of the inscription suggests that such an assumption (based on Dussaud's initial reading) is inaccurate. In fact, by rereading *al-Namārah* and the two other known fully Arabic Nabataean inscriptions, according to Western scholars, *Raqqūsh* and *Umm al-Jimāl*, I found out that *al-Namārah* inscription was actually about a previously unknown military or tribal person named *'Akdī*, who, while working with or under the Roman Byzantine army, managed to defeat the powerful *Midhḥij* tribe of Yemen in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century. The inscription included only three parts: an opening introductory sentence swearing by the soul of king *Umru'ū al-Qays bin 'Amrū*, a long paragraph detailing the specifics of *'Akdī*'s accomplishments in a single battle, and a closing sentence announcing *'Akdī*'s death.

Below is my modern Arabic translation and explanation of the *al-Namārah* inscription:

تَيَا (قَسَمًا يَا ؛ يَا) نَفْسُ (رُوحُ ؛ دَمٌ) اَمْرُو الْقَيْسِ بِنِ عَمْرُو، مَلِكِ الْعَرَبِ كُلِّهَا، ذُو أَسَدِ التَّاجِ (كُنْيَةِ)، وَمَلِكِ  
الْأَسَدِيِّينَ (نَجْدٌ) وَنَزَارٍ (بَنُو نَزَارٍ، الْحِجَازِ) وَمَلُوكِهِمْ. (لَقَدْ) هَرَبَ مَذْحِجٌ (قَبِيلَةٌ يَمَانِيَّةٌ) عَكَدِي (اسْمُ قَائِدٍ)،  
وَجَاءَ (أَيُّ عَكَدِي) يَزُجُّهَا (يُقَاتِلُهَا بِضِرَاوَةٍ) فِي رُتِجٍ (طَرُقٌ ضَيْقَةٌ) نَجْرَانَ، مَدِينَةَ شِمْرِ (شِمْرٌ يَرَعِشُ)، مَلِكِ مَعَدٍ  
(بَنُو مَعَدٍ)، وَبَيْنَ (مَيِّزَ بَيْنَ) بَنِيهَا الشُّعُوبِ (فِرْعَوْنَ قَبِيلَةٌ مَذْحِجٍ)، وَوَكَّلَهُنَّ (وَضَعَهُنَّ تَحْتَ حِمَايَةٍ) فُرْسَانَ  
الرُّومِ، فَلَمْ يَبْلُغْ مَلِكٌ (أَيُّ حَتَّى مَلِكٌ) مَبْلَغَهُ (مَا بَلَغَهُ عَكَدِي). عَكَدِي هَلَكَ (مَاتَ ؛ قُتِلَ) سَنَةَ 223 (328م)، يَوْمَ  
7 بَكْسَلُولٍ (كَانُونَ الْاَوَّلِ)، يَا لِسَعْدٍ (يَا لِسَعَادَةٍ) ذُو (الذِّي) وَوَدَّهَ (أَنْجَبَهُ).

And the following is my reading of the inscription translated to English:

In thee O' soul of *Umru'ū al-Qays bin 'Amrū*, king of all Arabs, holder of the crown lion, and king of *al-Asadiyyin* and *Nazār* and their kings. *'Akdī* has defeated *Midhḥij* engaging it in a heated battle in the narrow roads of *Najrān*, city of *Shimr*, king of *Ma'ad*, and befittingly differentiated between its people and placed them under the protection of the Roman cavalry — not even a king could accomplish what he had accomplished. *'Akdī* died on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 223 AD, O' the happiness of those who gave birth to him.

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