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*Indian Inscriptions on the Fire Temple at Bāku*—By the  
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ON his journey to Persia in 1903 Professor A. V. Williams Jackson visited the Fire Temple at Bāku on the Caspian Sea.<sup>1</sup> He kindly forwarded to me for deciphering a photograph of one of the fifteen inscriptions he noticed on the walls of the temple and its precincts.

Professor Jackson has since called my attention to three other undeciphered inscriptions, published in the Royal Asiatic Society's Journal for 1897, by Colonel C. E. Stewart, Consul General at Odessa, accompanied with a description of the Fire Temple as it appeared on his first visit in 1866, and again in 1881. So far as I am aware, none of these fifteen inscriptions have hitherto been deciphered and I have been entirely successful only with one, Inscr. A. (see below), the photographic reproduction of which is very distinct.

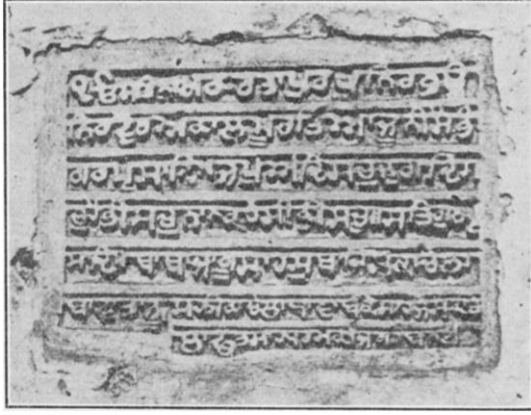
*Inscription A.* The letters of this inscription are clearly cut and well preserved. The language is Panjābi, and the alphabet is that of the ordinary Panjābi of the present day.<sup>2</sup> It is inscribed in seven lines.

The first four lines of the text are the opening lines of the "Japji," one of the sections of the *Adi Granth*, the great religious book of the Sikhs. This special verse of the Japji is one well known and is daily repeated by all faithful Sikhs. The remaining lines of the text contain the names of Bābā Jagushāh and his disciples, builder or builders of the "sacred place," Dharamki jagah.

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<sup>1</sup> See "Notes on a Journey to Persia" in the *JAOS.*, Vol. xxv, p. 177.

<sup>2</sup> W. St. Clair Tisdall in his *Panjābi Grammar* calls the language of the Japji "a mixture of Braj Bhāshā and old Panjābi."



## TRANSLITERATION.

१ ओं सति नाम करता पुरखु निरभऊ  
 निरवैरु अकाल मूरति अजुनी सैभं  
 गुर प्रसादि । जपु । आदि सचु जुगादि स  
 चु है भी सचू नानक होसी भी सचु ॥ सति गुरप्र  
 सादि ॥ बाबा जगूसाह सुबा जिसका चेला  
 बाबा तगूसाह जि[स]का चेला बाबा बकसाह जिसका चे  
 ला हतसाह धरमकी जगह बनई

Om sati nāma karatā purakhu nirabhau  
 niravairu akāla mūrati ajūnī saibham  
 gura prasādi | japu | ādi sacu jugādi sa  
 cu hai bhī sacū Nānaka hosī bhī sacu sati gurapra  
 sādī Bābā Jagūsāh Subā jisakā celā  
 Bāvā Tāgūsāh ji(sa) kā celā Bāvā Bakasāh jisakā ce  
 lā Chatasāh dharamkī jagah banāi

## TRANSLATION.

Om. Whose name is Existence, Creator, The Male, Without fear,

Without enmity, Timeless, Unborn, Self-existent,

Favor of the Guru. Repeat this. He is true in the beginning;

He is true from eternity; He is true now; Nanak (says) he will be true in the future. The favour of the true Guru.

Bābā Jagūshāh Subā, whose disciple is Bābā Tagūshāh, whose disciple is Bāvā Bakashāh, whose disciple is Chatashāh, built this religious place.

The Sanskrit equivalents for the Panjābi appellations used above are Sat, Nāman, Karatā, Purusha, Nirbhaya, Nirvāira, Akālamūrti, Ajanma Svayambhu.

A word may be added regarding the age of this inscription. It contains no date. As it, however, mentions Nānak (1469–1539), and quotes from the *Adi Granth*, a work ascribed to Bābā Nānak, and as considerable time must be allowed for the coming into existence of a feeling of reverence for the *Adi Granth*, such as to account for an insertion of a quotation in this inscription, it is probable that its age is the same as that of the Nāgari inscription (see *Inscr. C.* below) Samvat 1802, A.D. 1645.

*Inscription B.* This inscription may be found reproduced in the *Royal Asiatic Society's Journal* for 1897, page 311.

Like *Inscription A* above, it is in the Panjābi alphabet and language. It consists of eight lines, with as a rule 15 syllables in each line. It also begins with the same quotation from the *Japji* as *Inscr. A* above.

1. Om sati nāma karatā purakhu nirabha
2. u niravairu akāla mūrati ajūnī
3. saibham guraprasādi vāhu guruji sarāi
4. Bābā . . . . .
5. . . . . .
6. . . . . .
7. . . . dharamaki jaga banāi . . .
8. . . . . .



*General Remarks.* This Fire Temple is situated on the Caspian sea in the Trans-Caucasus Province of Russia, at Surukhaneh, a few miles from Baku. Surukhaneh is the site of a petroleum refinery which uses the natural petroleum gas for its operations. Whether this phenomenon of burning gas has had at this place any religious significance in ancient times is a question that yet remains to be settled. Some travellers have assumed that the temple has existed from ancient times, but so far as the evidence of the inscriptions at present available goes, the Fire Temple is of Indian origin, and the date of its erection A. D. 1745.

A possible difference of date for that of the center shrine and that for the enclosing precincts has been suggested. Over one of the archways of the center shrine there is an inscription which if it were available would doubtless definitely settle the question whether the shrine in the center was of the same date or older. Visitors to the temple have found the inscription too high up for a satisfactory photograph. In the photo-zinco reproduction of the center shrine illustrating the description by Colonel Stewart (JRAS. 1897, p. 311) this inscription can be seen above the archway, but the letters are too minute and indistinct to yield any result. For the present the only conclusion that can be drawn from the inscriptions is that the temple, including the present center shrine, is quite modern, dating A. D. 1745.

It is of course possible that the present temple may be on the site of an older structure. The accounts of travellers before A. D. 1745 who may have visited this region might possibly settle this question. I have, however, had access to only a few accounts of such travellers, and these have been silent as regards the existence of any temple there.

As a matter of interest Prof. Jackson has called my attention to several modern travellers who have visited Baku, and mention the temple.

Morier's reference to the temple (in his *Second Journey Through Persia*, 1800-16, Vol. 2, p. 243) is scant, but he mentions meeting with a Hindu pilgrim returning from Baku to Benares.

John Ussher (*Journey from London to Persepolis*, London, 1865) appears to have visited Baku in Sept. 1863. The book

contains a coloured frontispiece representing the center shrine lighted up by the natural gas, both within in the center of the floor and without at the upper four corners.

Baron Thielmann is referred to in Col. Stewart's article as mentioning the Fire Temple, but I have not had access to his description.<sup>1</sup>

When Colonel Stewart visited the temple in 1866 one Hindu priest alone remained to minister to the sacred fire. In 1881, when he made his second visit, he found the priest gone, the fire extinguished and the keys of the temple in the hands of the engineer of the refinery.

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[<sup>1</sup> The reference is to Thielmann, *Journey in the Caucasus, Persia, etc.*, 2. 9-12, London, 1875.—There is a brief anonymous paragraph, with a photograph of the temple precinct, in *Men and Women of India*, 1. 695, Bombay, 1905. Moreover, under date Sept. 21, 1904, the Parsi Priest Jivanji Jamshedji Modi, of Bombay, wrote me a letter saying that he had a copy of the inscription on the gate of the temple, given him by the noted traveler, Sven Hedin, and adds that the copy "clearly shows that the inscription is Hindu. We read therein Shri Ganesh and Viram, etc. Unfortunately the very portion of the date is not clear."—In Henry, *Baku, an Eventful History*, pp. 25-28, London, 1907, will be found some general references to the natural fire at Baku and also a picture of the shrine.