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FURTHER ARMENIAN INSCRIPTIONS FROM NAZARETH

by

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The Galilee was traditionally on the pilgrim route, because of the importance of the Christian sites in this part of Israel. The sites around the Sea of Galilee formed one focus; Mount Tabor was a second and, from the fourth century on, it was associated with the Transfiguration. Nazareth formed a third major magnet for pilgrims to the Galilee. However, the information about Armenian pilgrimage to the north of Israel has been rather sparse. Perhaps the best-known single source relating to Armenian pilgrimage is the homily of (?pseudo-)Elišē *On the Transfiguration*¹. The information contained in this source has not yet been mined fully and it clearly speaks of a group of Armenian pilgrims to the Galilee (perhaps in the seventh century), some of whom remained as monks on Mount Tabor².

Ancient Armenian inscriptions, now preserved in the museum of the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth, were published a few years ago³. Not only did they turn out to be the oldest datable specimens of Armenian writing, but we were able to show that the same persons who wrote these graffiti in Nazareth, continued on the pilgrims' route as far south as the southern Sinai, where they left inscriptions not far from Jebel Musa. At the end of the present article some pieces of new information now available from these stones will be published, as well as two new photographs of them. This additional information enriches

* The preliminary edition of the inscriptions published here was prepared in M.E. Stone's seminar on Armenian paleography and epigraphy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem 1995-1996. M.E. Stone is responsible for the text of the article, and Th. M. van Lint and J. Nazarjan made substantial contributions to the decipherment of the inscriptions and the first draft of the notes on them.

¹ See THOMSON 1967; LELOIR 1986-87.

² M.E. STONE will publish a detailed study of this source in the close future.

³ STONE 1990-91; and 1990.

the picture of Armenian pilgrimage to the north of Israel in the first millennium C.E.

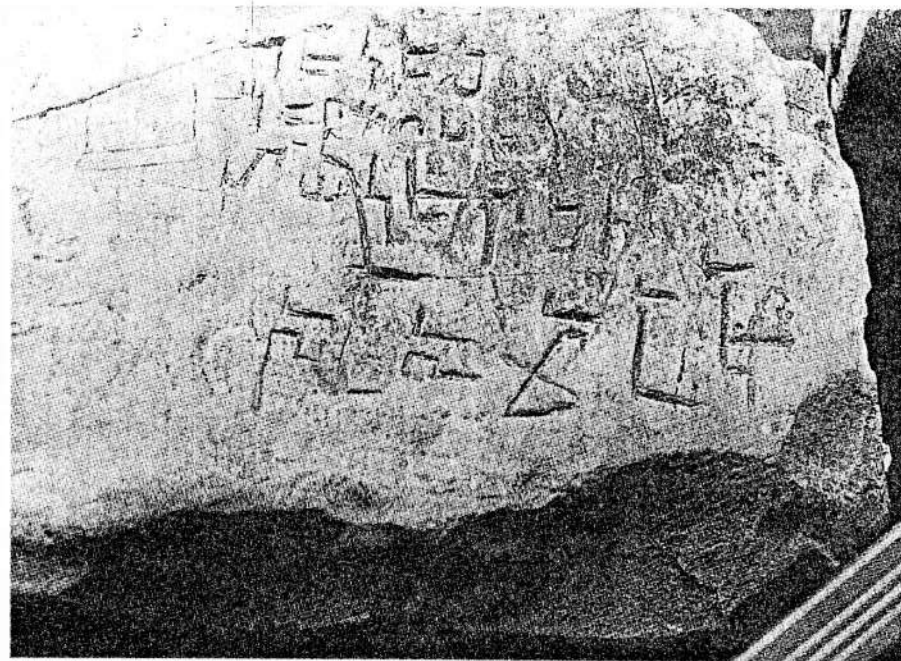
In the course of the fieldwork in the museum at the Basilica of the Annunciation on the occasion of the first discovery, we were also shown a store room beneath the Basilica in which a number of inscribed rocks were kept. One of them was a fragment of a Hebrew inscription which was passed on to Dr. Hanan Eshel for editing. This turned out to be a Jewish inscription of the early centuries of this era⁴. Some rocks in this store room also bore inscriptions in Armenian and these were photographed. The present article presents all of these remaining Armenian inscriptions. The series of numbers by which the inscriptions are designated here continues that which was commenced in the previous articles⁵. It should be observed that nearly all the dated inscriptions group around the same year (1688 C.E.) and that two of them, with quite similar hand-writing, were written by persons bearing the local designator Mašker[c']i. Mašker is in Turkey near Arabkir. Therefore, it is not unlikely that most of this group of inscriptions came from the same site and were written by the same group of travellers, who may have come from Mašker.

No information is available, however, about the exact provenance of these stones which also bear inscriptions in Latin and other languages. Presumably the Franciscan Fathers brought them from one of the sacred sites in or near Nazareth where they were written by pious pilgrims, gathered them together and stored them. They provide direct witness to Armenian pilgrimage to Nazareth and its environs in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Unfortunately, the inscriptions are nearly all very poorly preserved. They have been deciphered as far as possible, and in some instances drawings are presented here. However, much remains obscure about them, and not merely their provenance.

Nazareth Arm 3

Graffito of 1688 C.E.

1	<i>պե՛Հեց</i>	1	He preserved
2	<i>պեբոսսս</i>	2	Pertos
3	<i>ճաշկեբցի</i>	3	of Mašker.
4	<i>թվ[իհ] ւ ՛ ՛ ՛ ՛</i>	4	In the year 1137 [A.E. = 1688 C.E.]



No. 1: photograph of N Arm 3.

1. The inscription is 2.5 cms high and 3 cms wide.
2. It is written in a rough script. Note the form of *ճա* which resembles that in M Arm 3, S Arm 28 and S Arm 3. None of those inscriptions is dated⁶. The form of *պե* with an open head is notable. This is comparable with *բոլորցի* in S Arm 3, which is in a *erkat'agir* inscription⁷.
3. The unskilled character of the inscription is also shown by the error "Pertos" for "Petros".
4. Mašker is in Anatolia near Arabkir⁸.
5. The first word is to be taken as a dialectal form of *պաշկեցի*, itself to be understood as an aorist of *պաշկեմ*. The inscription is presumably an expression of thanks by a pilgrim who had arrived safely in Nazareth from Anatolia.

⁶ The Sinai inscriptions referred to are published by STONE 1982.

⁷ On this phenomenon, see STONE, forthcoming.

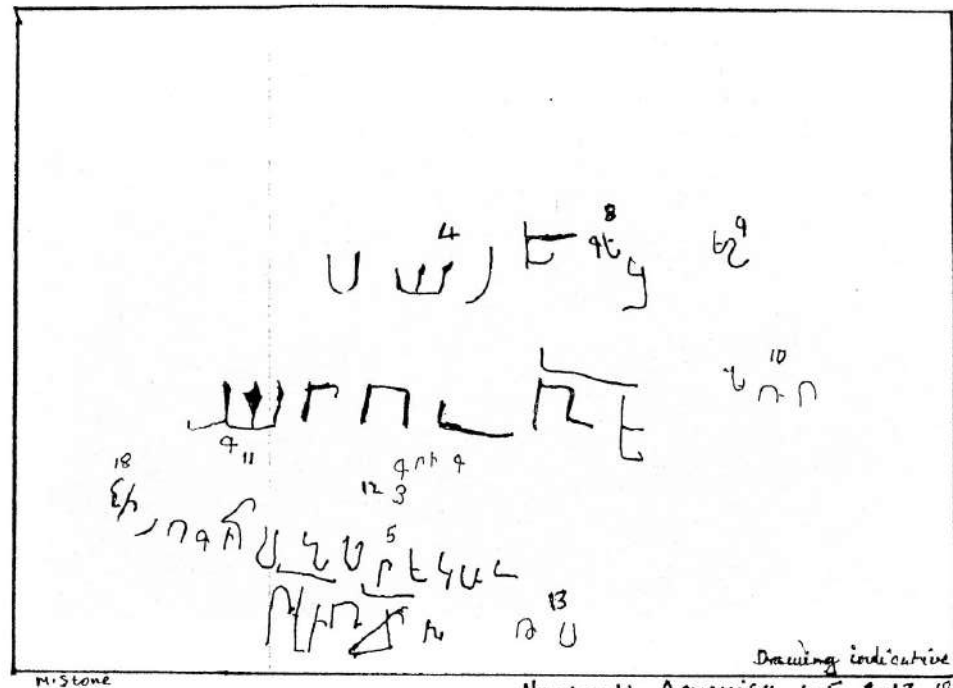
⁸ Library of Congress Ms orient. Nr. east. 6002 was copied in 1653 in Aleppo by deacon Yovhannēs of Mašker: see SANJIAN 1976, 764. Mašker is not mentioned in THIERRY 1992.

⁴ ESHEL 1991.

⁵ See n. 3 above.



No. 2: photograph of N Arm 4-5, 9-13, 18.



M. Stone

Nazareth Armenian 4-5 8-13 18

Drawing indicative

No. 3: drawing of N Arm 4-5, 9-13, 18.

Nazareth Arm 4

undated

- 1 u uy l y
- 2 [j]wpm [d] l

This inscription is on a stone which contains a number of further poorly preserved Armenian inscriptions which are published below. The following observations may be made about it.

1. This inscription is very difficult to decipher and no sense can be made of the remains of line 1. The stone has broken at the beginning of the first line and, presumably, something preceded. The inscription is deeply incised and the upper points of the *ayb* are decorated with deeply chiselled arrow-head shaped incisions.
2. The *eč* in line 1 is raised half a line higher than the preceding three letters. The *c'o* is lower. Preceding *c'o* two faint letters are barely visible, *gim* and *eč*. These are part of another inscription, N Arm 8, which is described below.
3. The form of *c'o* in line 1 resembles that in N Arm 3.

4. Line 2 has a word, the genitive of *յարմթիւն* which means "resurrection". It might be a proper name or it might designate the event or the place (i.e., the Church of the Holy Sepulchre). The first two letters are ligatures and a *patiw* surmounts the abbreviated ending.

Nazareth Arm 5

Graffito (1691-1700)

- 1 Հսար էկու
- 2 թվի ոճիւ

1. This inscription is on the same stone as N Arm 4. It is poorly preserved and some letters can barely be made out. The first four letters may be by the same person who wrote line 2. No sense can be made of them.
2. Perhaps the last word of line 1 means "he came". The first signs of the second line seem to be surmounted by a *patiw*.
3. The second line is difficult to read. It is made up of two groups of characters, each of which is surmounted by a *patiw*. The first is *թվի*

which should be taken as a form of $\beta\alpha\eta$ "in the year". The second is surely a date, 1140, though the last letter is somewhat uncertain. It is not clear whether another letter (digit) followed. If so, the date might have been any year between 1140 and 1149 A.E. This would yield a date for the inscription within the decade 1691-1700.

Nazareth Arm 6

Graffito (1676 C.E.)

1	. $\eta\pi$ $\lambda\epsilon$ $u\bar{t}$ β	1	. who also .. in
2	. $\epsilon\pi\pi\eta$ $n\bar{q}\eta$	2	. erbi son
3	$\epsilon\pi\omega\delta\omega$	3	of Eram
4	. $\beta\alpha\eta$ $n\bar{\delta}\eta$	4	[in the] year 1125 = 1676

1. The inscription is written in a rough script, not dissimilar to Nazareth Arm 3 in character. The date is unambiguous and it precedes the other clear date (1688) by a few years⁹.
2. The inscription is not well preserved and only the three last lines can be made out more or less clearly. It is 3.5 cms high and 6.5 cms long.
3. The first word of the second line seems to be a personal name, though it is difficult to see what it is. The last word we have taken as an abbreviation of $\eta\pi\eta$, since it is surmounted by a π .
4. The name Eram also occurs in H Arm 16. Ačaryan only records this name from the eighteenth century. The Sinai inscription is clearly older than that, and so is this Nazareth one.
5. It is not certain that there was a letter at the start of the last line. It could have been β "in".

Nazareth Arm 7

Fragmentary Inscription (undated)

1	β η [1	i n [
2	ω π [2	a r [

This group of letters is above and to the right of N Arm 6. The second letter in line 1 is uncertain and a flake has fallen out of the rock follow-

⁹ A colophon of 1677 refers to a group of Armenian pilgrims in the Holy Land. See BOGHARIAN 1967, 326. It is Ms J317, fol. 266v. See also SAWALANEANC' 1931, 634-635. No mention is made of the north of the country, but that is of no significance one way or the other.



No. 4: photograph of N Arm 6-7.

ing it. The last letter of the second line is difficult and it might be a π . No interpretation can be offered.

Nazareth Arm 8

Fragmentary Inscription (undated)

1 q k .. 1 g e ..

This inscription is written beneath N Arm 4 on the same rock. It is lightly incised and the letters can be barely discerned. The two letters read in the first line seem certain, and another unidentified letter follows them. It cannot be discerned whether these are *bolorgir* or *erkat'agir*.

Nazareth Arm 9

Fragmentary Inscription (undated)

1] $\lambda\alpha$ [2] $e\bar{s}$ [

This inscription is to the right of and slightly higher than N Arm 4 and N Arm 8. The letters noted may be preceded by a $t'o$ and perhaps an $e\bar{c}$. The fact that these letters, which seem to be ligatured, are Armenian

seems certain, but nothing else is of interest about this inscription apart from the very fact of its existence.

Nazareth Arm 10

Fragmentary Inscription (undated)

1] ւմբ [1] նր [

This inscription is to the right of and slightly above the end of line 2 of N Arm 4. The three surviving letters are barely visible. We have read the second one as *u* but it could equally be an *n*. In that case, it might be the word ւմբ “new”, but this is very far from certain. Faint signs which have been a second line of writing can be detected.

Nazareth Arm 11

Single Letter (undated)

All that remains of this inscription, which is located below the ligatured first sign in line 2 of N Arm 4, is the single letter Գ. *G*.

Nazareth Arm 12

Graffito (undated)

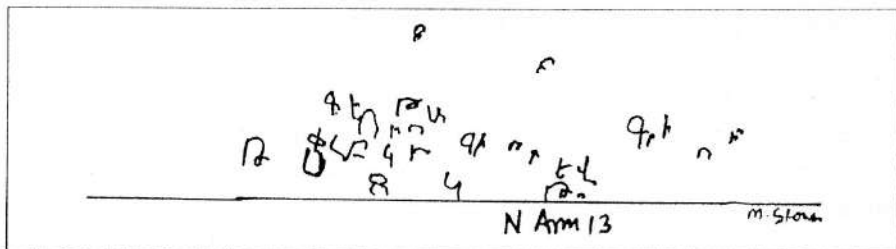
1 ԳՐԻԳ[ՈՐ] 1 Grig[or]
2 Յ [2 Y[

The first four letters of N Arm 12 are faintly incised below the middle letters of N Arm 4. They are in all probability the beginning of the name Grigor or Gregory, which was very popular among the Armenians. The script appears to be majuscule.

Nazareth Arm 13

Fragmentary Inscription (undated)

ԹՄ [ՏՏ[



No. 5: drawing of N Arm 13.

These two letters are found some distance to the right of N Arm 5. To the right of them faint signs may be observed which seem to be the debris of a number of lines of Armenian writing. They probably formed part of the same inscription or maybe of two or more inscriptions. We do not venture to transcribe these, since the lineation is unclear. We have made a drawing which represents what we can discern on the rock. Fragments of what might be the names Գեորգ “Georg” and Գրիգոր “Grigor” can be seen. The bottom of these signs is cut off in the photograph.

Nazareth Arm 14

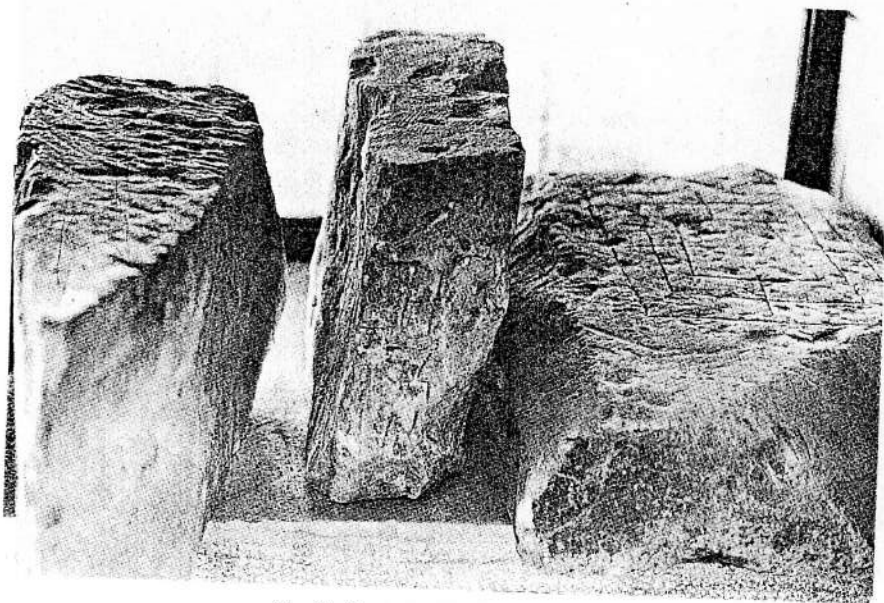
Graffito of 1656-1746.

1] Երեբ [1 in the name (?)
2 Գ Ե Գ Թ Գ Ի Է	2 g ec' in the year
3 Ը Ծ • Է	3 11 • 5

The inscription is poorly preserved. Only a few letters of each line can be read. These seem to have been incised by an unskilled mason. In general, the inscription resembles N Arm 3, but is by a different hand. It is 2 cms high x 5.5 cms wide.



No. 6: Photograph of N Arm 14.



No. 8: Photograph of N Arm 16.



No. 9: Photograph of N Arm 17.

less clear. The third line is more damaged but nonetheless part of the dating formula *թվի* can be identified.

3. The letters in line 1 are larger than those in lines 2 and 3.
4. Due to the fragmentary nature of the inscription no interpretation can be proposed.

Nazareth Arm 17

Graffito of 1651-1750

1	<i>Պոպոս</i>	1	Քոօս
	<i>վա</i>		va
2	<i>Անդօլ է ճօն</i>	2	Andōl ē čōn
3	••••	3	••••
4	<i>թվի և ճի</i>	4	in the year 11[

1. The inscription is rather badly preserved. The two letters *va* at the end of line 1 are not clear and no meaning can be suggested for them. A letter (perhaps a *sa*) seems to precede them. The *ē* at the end of *Andōl* is either part of the name (itself going back, perhaps, to Anatole) or the verb “he is”. The word *čōn* seems to be between lines 2 and 3, and perhaps in a different hand. Is it the English or French “John” or “Jean”?* Line 3 is completely illegible.

[* Maybe *čōn* ‘tanner’, not quite uncommon as a surname, J.-P. M.]

2. The inscription is written in an upright minuscule script. The initial letters of the two names in lines 1 and 2 are written in enlarged majuscule letters. The bottom line is only partly preserved and only the hook of the *čē* remains on the stone.
3. Thus, the names appear to be certain and the date has lost its last two digits.
4. The letter *čē* that can be seen to the left of line 4 might be part of another inscription.

Nazareth Arm 18

Fragmentary Inscription (before 1691-1700)

1] *նի յոպի* 2] ni spirit

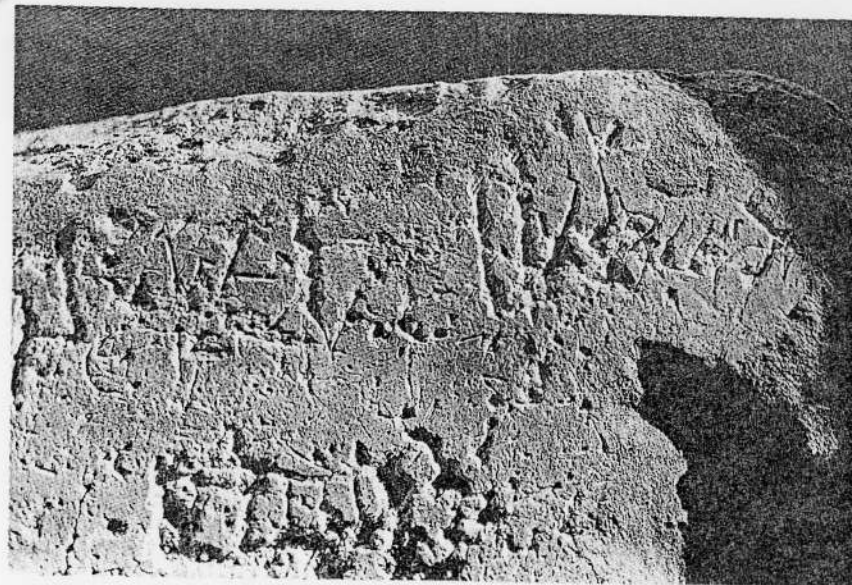
This inscription is found to the left of N Arm 5. Since the first letter of that inscription is over the last letter of N Arm 18, it is clear that it preceded N Arm 5. On this basis we have established its date. It is clear that the first two letters are the end of a word which is lost. The next word can be read fairly surely. It means “spirit” or “soul”.

THREE NEW FIFTH-CENTURY ARMENIAN INSCRIPTIONS
FROM NAZARETH¹²

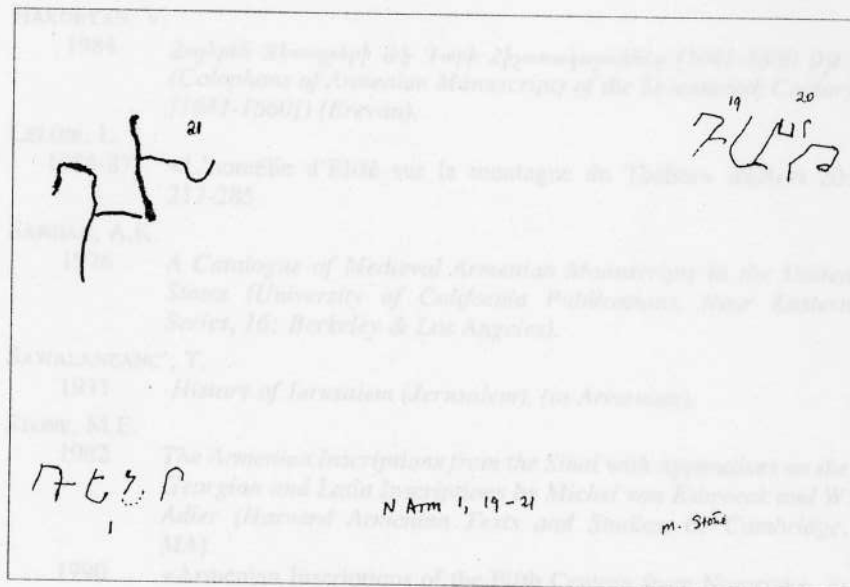
A new series of black and white photographs were taken of the previously known fifth-century inscriptions¹³. As a result three new fragmentary inscriptions became evident, and one additional letter of a previously known inscription. Unfortunately, no meaning can be assigned to any of these scattered letters.

Nazareth Arm 19 and 20

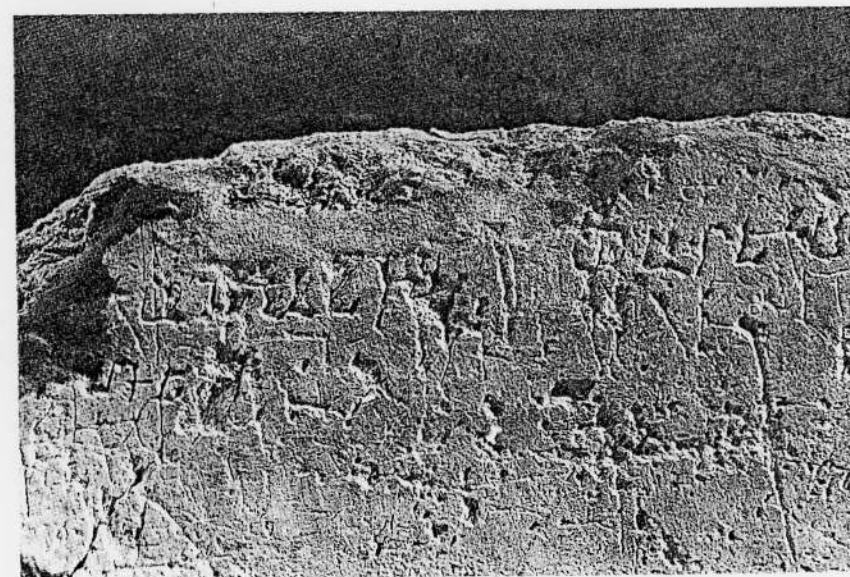
On the same stone as N Arm 1-2 an additional group of Armenian letters was discerned. At the upper right-hand corner of the rock an unmistakable *ayb* is visible. Preceding it is what might well be a *da* and following it might be a *t'o*. Above the *ayb* is another inscription composed of smaller characters, a *sa* and a *rē*. The large letters are incised cleanly, while those of N Arm 1 and N Arm 20 are much more unevenly made.



No. 10: Photograph of N Arm 19-21.



No. 11: Drawing of N Arm 19-21.



No. 12: Photograph of N Arm 1 and part of N Arm 2.

¹² M. STONE is the author of the following lines.

¹³ See n. 3 above.

Nazareth Arm 21

Following the final *da* at the end of the first line of N Arm 1 is a *xē*. This is higher than the line of writing in N Arm 1, and at a different angle. Thus, it is presumably the first letter of another inscription.

Nazareth Arm 1

A *rē* has been made out following the *nu* of the second line of this inscription. This must now be read as is given below. No meaning for this word can be suggested nor are any letters visible following it. After re-examination of the stone, it seems to us not unlikely that this line is written by a different hand to the line above it.

] ՌԵՆՐ] RĒNR

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