

# “A Forest of Crosses” discovered in Saudi Arabia



## Ancient Christian Inscription in Saudi Arabia

Source: F. Imbert, *Asian News*

After we [posted](#) on an *Israel Hayom* article on a fascinating exhibit at Israel's Biblical Lands Museum of Judean cuneiform tablets from ancient Babylonia, our colleague Christina McIntosh wrote this thoughtful comment:

I keep wondering just how much more we'd know about both Jewish/ Hebrew/ Israelite history, and the history of Christianity, including the canonical texts of both groups, if Islam had never been invented. Just how many records – priceless torah scrolls and all sorts of other things – and early manuscripts or even (who knows?) original manuscripts of things like the Christian gospels – were destroyed in the initial jihad assaults or in all the pogroms, synagogue and church burnings, pillagings, sackings of villages, towns and cities (with concomitant destruction of religious communities and their libraries and of private or school libraries) that went on , and on, and on, subsequent to that initial conquest? The real miracle is that *\*anything\** of the pre-islamic artefacts and written documents has survived at all. And the same goes for India, in spades; how much more would we know about their deep history and their ideas and literature, if Muslims had never invaded and destroyed all those temples and cities and places like the University of Nalanda?

That prompted me to recall a recent email sent by Fjordman (h/t) containing an Asia News report on a French /Saudi

Archeological discovery of an ancient Christian community antedating the eruption of Islam on the Arabian Peninsula, ["A forest of crosses and names of martyrs in the desert of Saudi Arabia."](#)

Note the pre-Islamic history:

**A Franco-Saudi archaeological team is responsible for the discovery. Prof Frédéric Imbert dated the graffiti to 470-475, a time when anti-Christian persecution began, culminating under the usurper Yusuf. Even the Qur'an refers to it indirectly. The findings show how far Christianity had spread at the time, until the arrival of Islam.**

Beirut (AsiaNews/Agencies) – A forest of crosses engraved in the rocks of the desert of Saudi Arabia is a sign of the presence of a vibrant Christian community around the fifth century AD.

Unearthed by a Saudi-French archaeological team, the graffiti include inscriptions with a number of biblical and Christian names, perhaps those of martyrs killed during a wave of persecution in the fifth century.

*L'Orient-Le Jour* reported that Prof Frédéric Imbert, a professor at the University of Aix-Marseille and a member of the team, presented his findings at a conference at the American University of Beirut on the rock engravings of Jabal Kawkab ("Star Mountain"), in Najran, southern Saudi Arabia.

The area is called Bi'r Hima or Abar Hima, names "that refer to places with wells known since ancient times." According to Imbert, an epigrapher, the area is located on the route "that connected Yemen to Najran" where caravans could be resupplied in water.

Inscriptions were found with crosses, scattered over a

one-square kilometre. Some inscriptions appear to be in a local version of Aramaic, a pre-Islamic form of Arabic, Nabataean-Arabic to be more precise.

The inscriptions have been dated to the reign of Shurihbil Yakkuf, who controlled southern Arabia in 470-475. The persecution of Christians appears to have started under his rule.

It is interesting to note that the names Marthad and Rabi were found inscribed on the crosses. Both are on the list of martyrs of Najran, in the so-called Book of Himyarites.

In order to understand crosses and rock inscriptions, it is necessary to know that back in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, southern Arabia was ruled by the Ḥimyarite dynasty, which lasted for about 150 years.

In order to maintain its neutrality between the two great powers of the time, the Byzantine and Persian empires, its kings chose Judaism as their religion.

However, Christianity began to spread in Arabia in the fourth century. By "the sixth century, it reached the Gulf region, Najran and the Yemen coast".

The missionary activities of Christians from Iran's Sassanid Empire and Monophysite Christians from Syria hostile to the Council of Chalcedon (on Christ's dual nature) favoured the spread of Christianity. Two Syriac bishops, probably from what is now Iraq, were consecrated in 485 and 519.

Later, Yusuf (Dhu Nuwas) seized power in the Kingdom of Ḥimyar, ordering the massacre of Christians in Najran, an event reported in several Christian chronicles, with a reference even in the Qur'an, in *Shura Al-Buruj* (The Celestial Stations).

When Christian survivors sent an appeal to Khaleb, King of Ethiopia, he organised a military expedition to rescue the persecuted. Yusuf's army was defeated and the usurper himself was killed. A Christian kingdom was established in Arabia, as an Ethiopian protectorate, until it was conquered by Islam.

For Frédéric Imbert, the crosses and the inscriptions are "the oldest book of the Arabs," written "on desert stones," a "page of Arab and Christian history".

Given these ancient Christian rock inscriptions, it may have been difficult to erase them during the great wave of Jihad of Islam that made the Arabian peninsula virtually both "Jewish and Christianrein."