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To cite this article: E. Davis (1894) The Siloam and Later Palestinian Inscriptions Considered in Relation to Sacred Textual Criticism, *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, 26:4, 269-277, DOI: [10.1179/peq.1894.26.4.269](https://doi.org/10.1179/peq.1894.26.4.269)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1179/peq.1894.26.4.269>



Published online: 20 Nov 2013.



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THE SILOAM AND LATER PALESTINIAN INSCRIPTIONS CONSIDERED IN RELATION TO SACRED TEXTUAL CRITICISM.

By E. DAVIS, Esq.

THIS nineteenth century, now near its close, has been remarkable for extraordinary activity in two widely different but immensely important lines of research. While, on the one hand, scientists have explored the *arcana* of nature with glorious success, so on the other hand, there has not been wanting a band of earnest and diligent inquirers, who, uniting profound scholarship with untiring enthusiasm, have achieved splendid results in the attempt to solve the problems and to illumine the mysterious darkness of the past.

Thus the scientific genius of this era which has given birth to railway locomotion, to electric illumination, and which (far outstripping the wildest flights of fancy of the "Bard of Avon," that would put a girdle round the earth in forty minutes) has enabled far-distant continents to hold instantaneous converse with each other, has, in the domain of archæology, paralleled these results by the discovery of a key to the hieroglyphs of Egypt and the arrow-headed writing of Mesopotamia, by the rescue of whole libraries of long-forgotten literature, and the ideal reconstruction of the great civilisations of remotest Oriental antiquity.

These results of exploration and archæological research, which throw great light on the path of every reader of ancient history, are especially interesting and valuable to the earnest student of Holy Scripture, whose faith is strengthened and whose intelligence is brightened by the study of sacred history and prophecy in the clear light of contemporary evidence.

The outcome of recent Biblical study, as set forth in the works of the great scholars of Germany and England, has been to a large extent an opinion that the historical books of the Old Testament are in great part untrustworthy. But where is the proof of this outside the pages of these writers?

The great value of the work carried out by the Palestine Exploration Fund lies in this—that it has given impetus to the study of the Bible in a more excellent way. Old sites have been re-discovered, a multitude of names and facts occurring in the Biblical writings have been verified by comparison with contemporary monuments of other nations, and our whole knowledge of the manners, customs, and characteristics of the ancient peoples of Bible lands has been immensely increased, while Jew and Syrian, Moabite and Hittite, have been made to live again in the lively and picturesque pages of the Fund's publications.

The more indeed we study the results of the recent scientific explora-

tion of Palestine the more we become convinced that the Sacred Writings have an unassailable basis of truth in their agreement in so many particulars with the most remarkable discoveries in Oriental archæology, ethnology, and geography.

If the Biblical record be as unhistorical as we are told it is, even by scholars of our own universities, it is the most wonderful of all literary productions. Forgers are seldom impeccable artists, and it is very strange that these old writings, upon which so much falsehood has been charged, should bear the test of comparison with the facts brought out by modern scientific research as well as they do. Bearing in mind the *dicta* and *dogmata* of the modern critical school, we should have expected the contrary.

But the sciences of sacred geography, ethnology, and criticism are not the only branches of knowledge which have largely benefited by the work of Palestine exploration. There is another line of archæological inquiry known as palæography, the purpose of which is to discover the origin, affinities, and powers of ancient graphic systems, and to classify the results of such discovery. The object of this science in its application to Biblical criticism is to determine the forms and relative age of the various types of Hebrew and Greek writing used by ancient copyists up to the time when the art and fancy of the caligraphist were superseded by the rigid uniformity of the printing press.

Two kinds of writing are recognised as having been used at different periods by the Jewish scribes—the more ancient form or so-called Samaritan letters, and the later, or modern square Hebrew. Our knowledge of the exact original forms of the Samaritan letters was, up to a recent date, extremely limited, from the paucity of graphic material. All that the great scholars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who wrote on this subject had upon which to base their opinions on the matter was a small number of Jewish coins, which, although preserving the main features of the ancient alphabet, could not be pointed to with certainty as contemporaneous with the sacred autograph. Nor were Hebraists of our own age much better informed, even Gesenius and other later Semitic specialists had nothing more than Phœnician texts on which to ground their statements with respect to the ancient alphabet of Israel. No Jewish monumental text was available for research, as none such was known to be in existence. The opinions, therefore, of even the most profound scholars as to the form of the letters which were actually used by the sacred penmen were based rather on probability and analogy than on positive knowledge.

And this would still be the case but for a remarkable and most valuable discovery made in 1880 at Jerusalem. Most readers of the Bible are familiar with the Pool of Siloam, "the waters of Shiloah that go softly" (Isa. viii, 6), in which the blind man was enjoined by our Lord to wash, and after washing in which "he came seeing" (John ix, 7).

It was here in 1880 that the famous inscription was found which had the merit of being the earliest extant specimen of ancient Hebrew

writing—the story of its discovery has often been told.¹ Some Jewish boys in attempting to pass through the tunnel accidentally found some writing on a recessed tablet of square form, measuring about 27 inches on each side, the lower portion of which was occupied by the inscription, which was in six lines, and curiously enough, “the top of the tablet was only about a yard above the bottom of the channel, which is here 2 feet wide and 11 feet high.” The inscription was reported to Herr v. Schick, and was subsequently visited and studied by Professor Sayce, Dr. Guthe (who removed the calcareous incrustation which had formed in the incised characters by a weak bath of hydrochloric acid, but without in any way injuring the surface of the hard rock on which the inscription was cut), and by Captain Conder and Lieutenant Mantell, who procured² a squeeze and also a cast of the inscription. The result of these researches was the publication of a tolerably correct text and translation by Professor Sayce, and a lengthy study of the “Alphabet of Israel” by Canon Taylor, in his very valuable work, “The Alphabet,” vol. i.³ By the kindness of my learned and esteemed friend Major Conder, I have been enabled to study the squeeze which was taken by himself and Lieutenant Mantell, and from his tracing of this I give the

TEXT OF THE INSCRIPTION IN ORDINARY HEBREW CHARACTERS.

- (1) [זוה] נקבה זוה היה דבר הנקבה בעוד [על]ו
 (2) הגרון אש אל רעו ובעוד שלש אמה[ה] לזה
 קל אש ק
 (3) רא אל רעו כי הית זוה בצר מימן ובימה
 (4) נקבה חנו החצב[ן] אש לקרת רעו גרון על גרון וילכ[ו]
 (5) המים מן המוצא אל הברכה במא[ת] [ת]אם . . . אלף אמה ונ
 (6) ת אמה היה גבה הצר על ראש החצב

¹ See P.E.F. *Quarterly Statement*, 1881; article on “Ain Silwan,” in Jerusalem Vol. of “Memoirs of Survey of Western Palestine”; Major Conder’s “Palestine,” in Philip’s “Great Explorers” Series, 2nd Edition, 1891; Canon Taylor’s “The Alphabet,” Vol. i, 1883.

² Unfortunately, one must speak in the past tense of this precious monumental text, since folly and cupidity have combined (as in the case of the Moabite Stone) to effect its destruction. [The fragments are now preserved in the Imperial Museum at Constantinople.—Ed.]

³ Canon Taylor’s work above mentioned is indispensable to every student of Jewish palæography. I have found it an invaluable aid in my study of the subject, although I am not able to accept all the learned author’s conclusions.

TRANSLATION.

1. [This is the ex]cavation, and this was the manner of the excavation, while they lifted up
2. the pick each to his neighbour, and while three cubits [of rock remained] the voice of one cal-
3. led to his fellow-workman, for there was excess of rock to the right and to the west
4. of the excavation they struck through the cutting, each meeting his fellow, pick upon pick, and flowed
5. the waters from the spring to the pool through the space of a thousand cubits, and . . .
6. . . . cubit was the height of the rock over the head of the excavat[ion].

ANALYSIS.

Line 1.—I suppose the inscription to begin with the demonstrative pronoun זה *this*, Major Conder supplies the article ה, Professor Sayce suggests the exclamation הן *behold!*

נקבה *excavation, tunnel*. Of rare occurrence in the Old Testament in this sense. נקב Ezek. xxviii, 13, means a musical pipe.

The root נקב *perforare*, and the noun נקבה *femina*, are common.

וזה *and this*, the pronoun with ו prefixed.

היה *was*, a verbal root of common occurrence.

דבר נקבה. This phrase appears to mean *manner or method of the excavation, i.e.*, the way in which the work was carried out. דבר occurs Deut. xv, 2, in the sense of *manner, method*. "At the end of seven years thou shalt make a release, and this is the manner of the release," וזה דבר השמטה.

According to Gesenius the primary idea of the root is, to arrange, set in order. Hence *speech* as an orderly arrangement of words, and in the later Hebrew דברים *chronicles, i.e.*, facts set forth in order of time—Psalm cx, 4, Thou art a priest for ever after the order, manner of Melchizedek, על-דברתי מלכיצדק.—LXX, προσταγμα, *taxis*.

בעוד *while*. עלו they lifted up. Between בעוד and עלו we must supply a word meaning "excavators" or "workmen." The text is broken at this place. עלו from עלה to be raised high, lifted up in the hand. Common in Old Testament.

Line 2.—הגרזן *the pick*. See Deut. xix, 5; Isa. x, 15.—LXX, ἀξίη.—אש *each, each one*, a shortened form of איש.

ל to. רעו *his fellow-workman*. רע with the pronoun. So English workmen speak of their "mates," their companions in labour. ובעוד *and while*, שלש *three*, אמה *cubit*. The text being here imperfect we

must supply the words, "of rock remained to be broken through." קל
 אש voice of one, ק (pass on to line 3).

Line 3.—רא אל רעו called to his fellow-workman, כי for. הית there being, זרה excess, an unusual word, the cognate זרן occurs in the sacred text, in the sense of *pride, arrogance*. בצר in the rock. צר rock with the prep. ב in. מימן on the right (ימן the right hand, with מי). After this word is another break in the text. ובימה and in the west, westward. ימה = the ordinary ים sea. Used also to indicate the west, i.e., the region of the Great Sea, or Mediterranean, which lay to the west of Palestine.

Line 4.—נקבה of the excavation, to be read with preceding word "westward," or "on the west side of the excavation." הכו they struck through. Hiph. of נכה third person pl. החצבן an unusual noun, חצבן with the article, the excavation, from חצב, to cut, to hew out. אש each, לקרת, to meet, from קרה, to meet accidentally, to light upon, as in Ruth ii, 3. רעו his fellow, as before. גרון על גרון pick upon pick, וילכו and flowed, third person pl. pret. kal., from ילך, synonymous with הלך, to go, walk, flow, &c., a very common Hebrew, Phœnician, and Arabic root.

Line 5.—המים the waters. מן from, המוצא the outlet, spring, the root-idea of the word is *going forth, egress*, often occurs in Old Testament, as of the upper Gihon outflow, 2 Chron. xxxii, 30. אל to, הברכה the pool, occurs frequently in Old Testament, "the upper pool," Isa. vii, 3, xxxvi, 2. Arabic *birket*, Spanish *alberca*, a pond, Portuguese *alberca*, a trench, drain. The next word Major Conder takes to mean for two hundred, Professor Sayce translates it for the distance of, מתי from a root implying *extension*, אלף a thousand, אמה cubit.

Line 6.—At the end of line 5 and beginning of line 6 is a broken word, which is read by Professor Sayce with the following word אמה and three-fourths of a cubit, היה was, נבה the height, elevation, common in Old Testament. הצר the rock. על over, ראש head, beginning, a common word. החצב the excavation, tunnel.

It will be seen that most of the words in the inscription are common Bible terms, although some are used in an unusual sense.

The great value of the Siloam inscription can be rightly estimated only after consideration of what was known before its discovery with respect to the graphic art and literary culture of Palestine at the period when this inscription was cut on the wall of the famous subterranean aqueduct. Up to a very recent time all primitive Semitic writing was supposed to be Phœnician, the Phœnicians in turn being supposed to

have derived their knowledge of the art from the Egyptians. This view was generally received by the small band of scholars who knew, or cared to know anything about the subject—its ablest champion being Dr. Isaac Taylor, who, in his great work on "The Alphabet," vol. i, has said about all that can be said in favour of the Egyptian parentage of Semitic letters. Recent discoveries tend to prove (and, I believe, do prove with as much certainty as we can hope to arrive at in a matter of this kind) that the Phœnician alphabet is the sister rather than the parent of the Jewish and Aramean letters. I am much interested in the recent discoveries in this branch of archæological research, because I, an obscure student working all alone in the great field of Biblico-archæological enquiry, hesitated from the first to accept this view, however ably supported by the learned historian of the art of writing. The forms of many of the Siloam letters bearing, as they do, a positive resemblance to the objects whose names they bear, would suggest the derivation of this early Semitic script from an ancient ideographic system, which, from the result of recent study of the question, would appear to be of Asian rather than Egyptian origin. The supporters of the Egyptian hypothesis have never satisfactorily demonstrated the inability of the Semitic peoples to frame a system of alphabetic writing for themselves, nor do they appear to have given adequate attention to the history and comparison of other great Asian scripts, which rival the hieroglyphics of Egypt in antiquity. I rather favour the view of Professor Meyer, held likewise by Major Conder, that the oldest Semitic writing had at least a definite relation to that graphic system, which, for want of a better name, is known to scholars as "Hittite," or "Altaic." I believe the origin of alphabetic writing will be found in that direction. Further discovery and comparative study will clear up the matter, which is of great interest and importance, not only to the Biblical critic but to every student of human civilisation.

The Siloam alphabet presents some peculiar forms which are worth careful study, being apparently more ancient than those of any other text yet discovered, although some of the letters show the early operation of the "law of least effort" in their tendency towards hieratic or cursive types.

The Beth, Gimel, Daleth, Vaw, Zayin, Yod, Caph, Lamed, and 'Ain are evidently pictorial, and easily deducible from a primitive hieroglyphic system.

The Aleph is similar to the type of that letter found on the Asmonean coins, but unlike the Moabite or later Phœnician forms.

Probably this form of Aleph was adopted in lapidary writing, in order to improve the appearance of the letter and to avoid the acute angle, which would be very troublesome in inscribing texts on stone at all liable to fracture. I notice, however, in Professor Sayce's "Assyrian Syllabary," 232, a Cuneiform sign having various phonetic values, of which the Assyrian rendering is "Alpu," *bull*, this sign being very similar to the ancient Jewish Aleph, may be connected with it.

The Beth is very archaic, and appears to be closely related to the pictorial type, which I believe to have been an outline of a circular-roofed dwelling, similar to the Eastern domed house, this rather than a tent.

The circular form of building was adopted by early races in many countries, and was, I believe, the most ancient of all.

The Siloam type of Gimel, although ancient, gives no additional support to what Canon Taylor calls "the camel etymology." Many scholars have been puzzled by this name as applied to this letter, as the type very little resembles the thing said to be represented. At most, it is the head and neck of an animal that is shown, and it may be the head and neck of any other animal as well as of a camel. It has been suggested that the name gimel is derived from the Talmudic "gimla," a yoke, which Taylor alleges, after a German authority, to be "philologically impossible." This, I think, is quite a mistake, as *yoke* is given as one of the meanings of "gimla" in that well known and generally reliable authority Buxtorf's "Lexicon Rabbinico-Talmudicum." I have thought of an alternative etymology. The word גמול, which is also spelt גמל, signifies both in Hebrew and Chaldean, *recompense, retribution*, and occasionally, as in Isa. xxxv, 4, *punishment*. Hence the name as applied to this letter may mean an instrument of punishment, *i.e.*, a whip, or scourge. The form of letter would appear to support this idea, although Dr. Taylor and others of that following would of course pronounce it to be philologically impossible. The hieratic type of this letter found in the Prisse papyrus is a widely different character.

Daleth, the name of the fourth letter, generally means "door," a movable cover of an aperture hanging and turning on hinges, and not the aperture itself, as Dr. Taylor explains. The word appears to mean, in its widest signification, anything that may be opened and shut. The Siloam letter suggests a curtain, covering the entrance of a tent.

Vaw means a tent peg or curtain hook, the name is fully explained by the form of the Siloam letter.



Zayin in the Siloam alphabet is very peculiar. Major Conder first pointed out to me the well defined hook at the end of each of the two parallel bars. The name is usually supposed to mean "weapons." Our epigraphic type suggests the idea of two battle-axes joined together with a ligature. The letter is very little different from a mere picture, and must represent the earliest form of the phonetic element Z. (*See the accompanying table.*)




























Yod is the common Hebrew word for "hand." The Siloam letter gives the outline of a portion of the arm and hand with the thumb extended. (*See the table.*)

Nun means "fish." Great difficulty has been found in tracing the letter which bears this name back from its existing form to the earlier pictorial type. In the table I have endeavoured to show that the idea may have been that of a fish caught on a spear, or suspended from a hook to dry.

(*To be continued.*)

ANALOGUES OF THE SILOAM CHARACTERS.

PRIMITIVE HIEROGLYPH.	SILOAM TYPES.	MOABITE TYPES.	SAMARITAN.	NAMES OF LETTERS.
				Aleph = Ox.
				Beth = House.
				Gimel = Scourge.
				Daleth = Door.
				He = Window.
				Vau = Tent-peg, Nail, or Hook.
				Zayin = Weapons.
				Kheth = Fence.
				Yod = Hand.
				Caph = Palm of the Hand.
				Lamed = Ox-Goad.
				Mem = Wavy Water.
				Nun = Fish(on Hook)

PRIMITIVE HIEROGLYPH.	SILAM TYPES.	MOABITE TYPES.	SAMARITAN.	NAMES OF LETTERS.
				Ayin = Eye.
				Pe = Mouth (with Beard).
				Tzade = Fish-Spear.
				Koph = Opening (Eye of Needle).
				Resh = Head.
				Shin = Tooth (Molar, with Fangs).
				Tau = Mark (for Cattle).

THE BIRTH OF ABU-ZAID.¹

By P. J. BALDENSPERGER, Esq.

THE Birth of Abu-Zaid and the poem of Beni-Helal were told me by an illiterate fellah of the plain of Philistia. I wrote them down whilst he told them by heart. When I had written it all from his dictation, I revised and translated it, using no published work whatever. Clot Bey, in his "Egypte," states that this is a very popular romance amongst the Egyptians.

Abu-Zaid is the popular name of the black hero, but his real name is Barakat, and Salamé Shiha is his sister. Both Shiha and Barakat are

¹ A recension of this story was published in Arabic under the title "Kissat al Khadrā," &c., at Beyrout in the year 1869. A copy of this book is in the British Museum (14,570, C. 14 (1)). No English translation is known to have been published.—[ED.]