

III.

THE DATE OF THE SILOAM INSCRIPTION.

PROFESSOR SAYCE has, I believe, overlooked certain considerations which bear on the date to be assigned to the Siloam inscription.

On p. 145, he gives it as his opinion that it represents an earlier stage of the Semitic alphabet than the Moabite Stone, and he assigns it with some confidence to the time of Solomon. On p. 152, however, with his usual candour, he draws attention to an historical argument of great weight, brought forward by Dr. Neubauer, which would bring the date down to the reign of Ahaz. But the palæographical evidence, he argues, is "wholly" in favour of the earlier date.

On the other hand, I think that it may be maintained that the palæographical probabilities, as well as the historical evidence, are in favour of the later date.

The Moabite stone belongs to the beginning of the 9th century B.C. If the Siloam inscription is of the time of Solomon, it would belong to the beginning of the 10th century, if to the time of Ahaz to the middle of the 8th. Here then is a very definite issue. To the practised eye of the palæographer, there ought to be no great difficulty in deciding whether the inscription is either a century older, or more than a century later than the reign of Mesha.

The sole argument urged by Professor Sayce in favour of the earlier date is that three of the Siloam letters, *tsadhe*, *waw*, and *zayin*, seem to him of more archaic forms than on the Moabite Stone. At the same time he admits that several other letters belong to the more recent type which is used in the legends on the ancient Hebrew seals.

Now even if we admit the assumption as to the antiquity of the forms of the three letters, the conclusion by no means follows. It may be laid down as a palæographic canon, that the date of an inscription is to be determined by reference to the most recent rather than to the most archaic forms which it contains. The presence of one or two late forms is decisive evidence of the late date of a whole inscription, while the presence of one or two early forms is of no very great significance, as they can be accounted for as local survivals. For example, in Athenian inscriptions of the 5th century, we find the archaic form of the *lambda*, ν , whereas the new form Λ has already made its appearance in the Greek alphabet in the 7th century, as is evidenced by the Abu Simbel inscription. The old form of the *lambda* at Athens is clearly a mere survival, and it would be preposterous on such a ground to argue that an inscription such as the Erechtheum survey must be antedated by three centuries, and assigned to a time earlier than the reign of Psammethichus. But this is in fact what Professor Sayce has done, when he ante-dates his inscription on the sole evidence of two or three letters which seem to exhibit exceptionally early forms.

It must be contended that such a mode of argument is illegitimate, and

that the Siloam inscription, like all other inscriptions, must have its date determined by reference to the age of the most recent of the forms which it exhibits.

Now at least half of the Siloam letters appear in forms which are unmistakably later than those on the Moabite Stone. The curvature to the left of the tails of the tailed letters, viz., *beth*, *kaph*, *mim*, *nun*, and *pe* is more pronounced than on the Moabite Stone. Here we see in operation one of the chief causes which ultimately transformed the old Semitic alphabet. The *cheth* with three bars is also later than the Moabite form with two bars, and so is *q'oph*, whose head is partly opened, while the earlier form is completely closed.

But an argument to which still greater weight must be assigned is derived from the variant forms in which the letters *aleph*, *waw*, *mim*, and *resh* are written. The old Moabite forms of these four letters are used in the Siloam inscription side by side with the later forms, which subsequently supplanted them. These letters establish decisively the fact that the Siloam alphabet is a TRANSITION ALPHABET, belonging to a period intermediate between the Moabite alphabet of the 9th century, and the newer forms by which in the 6th century they were replaced.

Referring to the Siloam alphabet given by Professor Sayce on p. 144, the first *aleph* is the form on the Moabite Stone, while the second is the 6th century form which is found in the Gebál and the Nora inscriptions, and also on the early Hebrew shekels, which are ascribed by de Saulcy and Lenormant to the times of Ezra and Nehemiah. Again, the first form of *resh* approximates to the Moabite form, while the second is later. The same is the case with *waw*. The second form in Professor Sayce's table is Moabite, while the first, instead of being earlier, as Professor Sayce alleges, is decisively later, as is proved by its being used on the early shekels of the time of Ezra.

The two forms of *mim*, however, yield an argument so conclusive that they would by themselves suffice to settle the controversy. We actually have in the Siloam inscription, side by side, the two forms of this letter which are commonly used as the most convenient test to distinguish between the first and second epochs of the Semitic alphabet. The earlier, or zigzag form, is essentially the same as the Moabite form, and occurs twelve times. In the form which it had during the second epoch, with the horizontal bar and the cross stroke, the letter occurs twice, in lines 3 and 5. Now this later form is not found on the Moabite Stone, or in the earlier Phœnician inscriptions, or on the Assyrian Lion weights which belong to the beginning of the 8th century. On the other hand, it is found on the Eshmunazar sarcophagus, in the Gebál inscription, in the second Sidonian, and many other inscriptions from the 6th century downwards. On the Assyrian contract tablets, however, which belong to the 7th century, it is usually found, but occasionally approximates to the earlier form. Now in the Siloam inscription, the Moabite, or 9th century form appears twelve times, and the Sidonian or 6th century form appears twice. In the 7th century, as we learn from

the contract tablets, the old form had nearly disappeared; while at the time when the Siloam inscription was engraved, the new form was just beginning to come in. The evidence furnished by this letter alone might enable us with considerable confidence to assign the Siloam inscription to the middle of the 8th century, the exact date of the reign of Ahaz.

Professor Sayce bases his sole argument for the early date on the assumption that the forms of the three letters, *waw*, *zayin* and *tsadhe* are older than those on the Moabite Stone. Even if this were the case, his conclusion would by no means follow, the later forms of *mim* and other letters affording decisive proof that the more archaic forms must be regarded only as survivals.

But I cannot even admit that the forms of these three letters have the antiquity that is claimed for them. Much, no doubt, may be said in favour of the archaism of the forms of *tsadhe* and *zayin*, but with regard to *waw*, the very form which Professor Sayce considers to be so ancient is actually the later Hebrew form, exactly as found on the shekels of the time of Ezra, and manifestly the transition form from which the Asmonean letter was obtained. Both *zayin* and *tsadhe* are letters of comparatively rare occurrence, and the evidence as to their history is therefore scanty. The letter *zayin* does not happen to be met with on any of the early shekels, but the looped form, which Professor Sayce considers to be so early, is found on the coinage of Bar Cochba, which was imitated from the earlier shekels, and has actually been transmitted to the modern Samaritan alphabet.

As to the very peculiar shape of *tsadhe*, it seems impossible that it can have been the parent of the Moabite form, but on the other hand it can be connected without much difficulty with the form on one of the early shekels. On the whole, it may be affirmed that the weight of the evidence tends to show that Professor Sayce's three archaic letters are merely local Hebrew forms, and decidedly posterior to the Moabite letters.

The conclusion, therefore, is that out of the twenty letters in the Siloam inscription eleven or twelve exhibit forms later than the Moabite Stone, that not one is decisively earlier, and that even if this were the case, it would not affect the argument. Indeed, if it were not for the early forms of *he* and *lamed*, it would not be impossible to bring the inscription down almost to the time of the Captivity. The paleographic probabilities tend, however, very strongly to support the ingenious conjecture of Dr. Neubauer that the conduit was excavated in the reign of Ahaz, that is about the middle of the 8th century.

It may be noted in conclusion that the Siloam inscription throws valuable light on the date and affiliation of the South Semitic alphabets. The peculiar double-looped form of *tsadhe* connects itself with the double-looped forms of this letter, which characterize the South Semitic alphabets, e.g., the Himyaritic , the Harra , and the Thugga . So again the looped *zayin* is connected with the Himyaritic form of the letter  which is also looped.

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