

In 1877 M. Lartet summarised his knowledge in a magnificent quarto volume, well illustrated with maps, sections, and plates of fossils, entitled "La Mer Morte," and in the following year Dr. Fraas brought out the second part of "Aus dem Orient" in the shape of a "Geological Treatise on the Lebanon."

Many valuable notices, in addition to those already mentioned, are scattered up and down in the Proceedings of Societies throughout Europe and America.

HEBREW INSCRIPTIONS.

CONSIDERING how scanty the ancient Hebrew and Aramaic texts whence we may draw definite ideas of the growth of the Hebrew alphabet still are, it will perhaps be interesting to note the result of the exploration of Palestine in this respect. In 1864, Madden could only compare the Hebrew of the coins with the coffin of Eshmunazar (which dates 500–400 B.C.), the Assyrian lion-weights (750 B.C.), and the Carpentras stone and Ptolemaic papyri (300–200 B.C.); all his other alphabets are later than the Christian era—including the Palmyrene texts (second century A.D.), the Samaritan text (527 A.D.), the Bowls found at Babylon (fifth and seventh centuries A.D.), and the Stones from Aden (717 A.D. and 916 A.D.).

In addition to these texts, and to the Phœnician inscriptions of Marseilles, Malta, Cyprus, and Athens, together with the Jewish coins of the Hasmonean age, we now have the Moabite Stone (876 B.C.), and the Siloam inscription (perhaps 732 B.C.), all of which are in the ancient character called "broken" in the Talmud (Tal. Jer Megilla, i, 11), and said by Rashi to be called *Libonai*, because it was used by the inhabitants of Lebanon—that is to say, by the Phœnicians. The object of the present note is to gather together the instances which show the early existence of the square character in Palestine itself; for of the texts given by Madden, the earliest approach to the square character is found on papyri, and on a monument of Egyptian origin. The square characters are derived from the Aramaic or Syrian branch of the Phœnician alphabet, and not from that which gave birth to the Moabite, Siloam, and Hasmonean types.

Carrying our researches backwards, we must first recall the inscription at the Synagogue of Kefr Bir'im ("Memoirs," Vol. I, p. 233). It is in square Hebrew, and the character of the building agrees with Jewish tradition in attributing the erection of the doorway to about the year 130 A.D. The position of the text forbids us to suppose that it was executed later than the time of the erection of this synagogue. This was also the opinion of Dr. Robinson ("Lat. Bib. Res.," p. 70). It may thus safely be referred to the second century A.D. To the same date belongs

the similar square Hebrew text at the Synagogue of El Jish, and the illegible fragment from Nebratein.

The tomb of the Beni Hezir at Jerusalem presents us with another valuable text. In this case also the inscription can hardly be supposed to be later than the tomb, as it is quite inaccessible; and the tomb is most probably to be dated as earlier than the great siege (70 A.D.), since after that siege the Jews were excluded from Jerusalem down to the fourth century, whereas we know that the tomb in question was already in existence and supposed to be very ancient in 333 A.D. The Beni Hezir text is referred to about the Christian era by Du Vogüé; it should, however, be noted that the tomb within contains only *kokim*, which points to its being of considerable antiquity, and the Hasmonean period appears to be one during which many of the finest monuments round Jerusalem were constructed. The letters in this text, though nearly approaching square Hebrew, still retain traces of the older Aramaic forms, especially in the *Aleph* and the *Cheth*, while the *He* resembles that of the Carpentras stone, as do also the *Zain*, the *Yod*, the *Shin*. This text is the earliest and most important square text yet known in Palestine, and contains seventeen letters of the alphabet.

Another tomb near that of the Judges, north of Jerusalem, appears to belong to the same period, having an inscription in two lines, but giving no additional letters.

Jewish tombstones have been discovered in the Crimea with square characters, having the dates 702 and 726 of the Galuth (see "Transactions Soc. Bib. Arch.," Vol. III, p. 27). The Galuth of Jeconiah (Ezek, xxix, 17; xxx, 20) dates from 589 B.C., which would make these tombstones as early as 113 A.D. and 137 A.D.; a third dates from 785 of the Galuth, or 196 A.D. The genuineness of these tombstones is not disputed, but the era to which they have been ascribed by some writers seems to be too early, even if it be certain that the Jews were able to reckon the interval with exactitude, which is by no means the case with the later Jewish reckonings. The dates are, however, about the same as that of the Kefr Bir'im inscription. The Karaite era of the Galuth is generally identified with the captivity of the ten tribes in 696 B.C., because of an inscription which identifies the year 1700 of the Exile with 1316 of the Seleucid era, but this is not the Biblical date. It should be noted also that there is an era of Galuth on the coins generally identified with 139 B.C.

The sarcophagus of Queen Sara in the tombs of the Kings, discovered by De Saulcy, is attributable to the century after Christ, about 45 A.D. The letters are very rude, but the character closely approximates to the square type.

Beyond Jordan we have the inscription at 'Arâk el Emîr, which contains five letters of the alphabet. Of these three are of the old Phœnician forms, but two are quite distinct from any "broken" forms, and are clearly the *Daleth* and the *He*, or the *Resh* and the *He*, as on the Carpentras stone and the Papyri, but even closer than these, or than the Palmyrene, to the square forms.

In the course of the survey three tombs with Hebrew inscriptions were found, besides the Gezer stone, discovered by M. Clermont Ganneau. The first of these tombs was found by Mr. Tyrwhitt Drake at 'Ain Sinai. The text was very rude, but the letters are of the square form (see "Memoirs," Vol. II, p. 302), closely resembling those of the Beni Hezir tomb. The form of the *Aleph* in the word Eleazar is nearest to the Palmyrene. The tomb contained a *loculus*. According to my reading of the text it represents the words—

משה בר אלעזר בר . . . כהן . . .

"Moses, son of Eleazar, son . . . priest . . ."

The forms of some of the letters are those which are found as early as 300 B.C. The letters omitted seem most probably to form the word Zechariah. This with the next two I have submitted to Dr. Isaac Taylor for an opinion. The Aramaic word *Bar* is used instead of the older Hebrew *Ben*, pointing to a date later than the Captivity.

Two other tombs were found, having inscriptions in the older character. The first text was copied by me at Umm ez Zeinât ("Memoirs," Vol. II, p. 71), the inscription having been discovered by Corporal Armstrong, R.E. The letters were large but very rudely scratched, and had once been coloured red. Twelve letters in all were found.

א נ ס ז
 9 8 0 9
 3 0 9 9
 7 v 7

This tomb belongs to a large group of *loculus* tombs with a few *kokim*, and from the arrangement of the *loculi* it might be supposed to date at least as early as 200 B.C.; but, on the other hand, this part of Galilee had a thick Jewish population in the second century after Christ.

This inscription appears to me possibly to read—

אלעזר
 בר עז
 ריה

"Eleazar bar Azariah." The *Zain* would resemble that on the Hasmonean coins. The character approaches the Israelite rather than the Aramean.

The third tomb found during the course of the survey is that near the site of Archelais, a Herodian city in the Jordan valley. The letters are more distinctly cut than in the preceding instance (see "Memoirs," Vol. II, p. 396), and are of the older forms. The *Shin*, the *Vau*, the *Koph*, the *Aleph*, are all very near to the character of the Siloam text; but the tomb is only a grave sunk in the rock, and there is no indication of the exact date. Archelais was founded by Archelaus ("Ant.," XVII, xiii, 1;

XVIII, ii, 2) ; but an older town may perhaps have occupied the site, as in the case of Beth-Saida.¹

The indications as yet obtained show that the Aramean alphabet was used in Palestine in the time of Christ, and even 300 years before His birth, the shape of the letters being even more completely defined than in the Palmyrene ; and some of these forms seem to be used as early as 176 B.C., in conjunction with the older types of the Phœnician alphabet, as evidenced by the inscription of Hyrcanus at 'Arâk el Emîr.

On the other hand we have the older forms of the letters on the coins as late as the year 40 B.C., and even later if the conclusions of Madden and De Saulcy concerning certain coins be accepted. It is clear that the two alphabets occur in use, side by side before the Christian era, although the researches of Gesenius, Levy, Renan, Lenormant, Du Vogüé, Taylor, and others, show the gradual development of the square character from the older Aramaic and Phœnician forms. In Galilee, in the second century A.D., the square character was certainly in use, yet the Galilean tomb above noticed as having an inscription with the earlier forms, may possibly belong to the same period.

A curiously erroneous fashion of speaking of the characters used on the coins as "Samaritan" has survived, and leads to mistakes. Thus a correspondent to the *Athenæum* (4th August, 1883) contrasts the alphabet of the Siloam inscription with that of the "Samaritan" letters on the Jewish coins, and supposes two "broken" alphabets to have existed side by side in Palestine. The characters on the coins were called Samaritan originally at a time when the nearest known alphabet resembling them was the Samaritan. It is clear, however, that Jews would not use Samaritan letters if they could help it, and it would be quite as accurate to speak of the coins as Phœnician or Greek. A comparison of coins and Siloam characters shows that they are the same alphabet save for differences in the *Vau* and *Zain*, which are scarcely greater than the differences between these letters on different coins. Considering that the Siloam text belongs to the eighth century B.C., and that the coins are probably never older than the second century B.C., these minor differences are very natural.

In the Talmud (Tal. Bab. Sanhed., xxi, 22), the square character is attributed to Ezra, which is a view not confirmed as yet by the researches of scientific men. It is, however, quite clear that the square and the older forms were both in use when the tract *Yadaim* (iv, 4) was written, that is to say, in the second century A.D. ; the *Ashuri*, or square character, was then employed with the old Hebrew language by the priests, whereas the older alphabet and the Aramaic language were used by the *Hidiut*, or ignorant.

A passage in the New Testament (Matt. v, 18) appears to imply the existence of the square letters in the time of Christ, and it will be seen

¹ The graffite on osteophagi, and in the tombs of the Prophets at Jerusalem, are not noticed in the present paper, because there is reason to suppose that they are too late to be of much value, nor are the mediæval graffite at Neby Samwil.

from what has been above stated that the results of scientific exploration confirm the accuracy of this deduction. It seems to be proved that the two alphabets existed side by side as early even as 300 B.C., which would agree with the arguments deduced from a consideration of certain clerical errors in the LXX version of the Pentateuch. The Ptolemaic papyri seem to show that the change may have occurred in consequence of the difference of material employed, the older forms being preserved in inscriptions on stone and on metal, while the greater facility given by the use of ink on parchment led to the divergence of the MS. forms from the monumental forms. A similar divergence is observable in the hieroglyphic and hieratic forms in Egypt, the first being the monumental, the other the literary character.

The history of the alphabet has been made so plain in Dr. Taylor's volumes, which I have just received, as to render a lengthy note unnecessary; but at the same time the value of the three new inscriptions above noticed is rendered yet clearer by his masterly sketch of the Aramean alphabets.

Hebrew MSS. do not give us any assistance in the study of the present subject because of their late date. Various fragmentary MSS. in Russia are supposed to belong to the seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries, though in each case the real date may be 107 years later than that usually ascribed. It is doubtful, indeed, whether we possess any Hebrew MS. older than the tenth century. The date of the old roll at Shechem is unknown, but the character in which it is written cannot be supposed older than the sixth century A.D.

Considering how completely the two alphabets appear to overlap in Palestine, even in monumental inscriptions, and also how great length of time would be required for the development of the square forms from the older ones, it is perhaps not impossible that the Talmudic tradition, accepted by Origen and Jerome, may have been in the main correct, and that the square letters, or forms approaching to them, may have been used in MS. writing even as early as the time of Ezra.

These remarks are offered with great diffidence, as the progress of archaeology in this direction has been very rapid of late. A further note on the subject by Dr. Isaac Taylor, or Dr. Ginsburg, or M. Clermont Ganneau, would be of great value to future explorers, as enabling them to separate the true from the false, and indicating the sort of information which is required by the learned. The inscriptions of which no *fac-similes* have been given in this paper will be found represented in the "Memoirs" as noted.

C. R. C.
