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THE MOABITE STONE.


It is seldom that an archaeological discovery awakes such interest in these modern times as has been aroused during the present year by the curious monument of antiquity, known now far and wide as "the Moabite Stone." In general a few students, scattered sparsely over the length and breadth of the land, are stirred more or less deeply by such an announcement as that made in March last by M. Clermont-Ganneau, while the public at large remains unimpressed and apathetic, either unaware of the fact, or attributing to it little or no importance. But the Moabite Stone, by some happy concurrence of circumstances, was scarcely introduced to the notice of the British public when it found itself famous. Like a lucky actress or singer, it took us by storm. Not in the universities only, but in the metropolis—not in learned circles merely, but in fashionable ones—it was the topic of the day. Politicians, lawyers, statists, men of business, nay, ladies—ladies, moreover, never previously suspected of having in their mental colouring the faintest tint of blue—talked of it, discussed it, argued about it, expressed opinions as to its age and its contents, and smiled if they met with any one who confessed to complete ignorance on the subject. We need scarcely say that these drawing-room discussions were not remarkable for depth; nor need we add that after a brief space they passed away, yielding to the more ordinary topics of exhibitions, operas, balls, garden-parties,
engagements, flirtations, vacation flittings, and the like—the usual 
“small change” of social intercourse in the “society” of our time 
and country.

It would be a curious, but perhaps scarcely a profitable inquiry, to 
investigate the causes which gave to this particular discovery so ex-
ceptional a notoriety. It was not the mere occurrence in the monu-
ment of interesting Scriptural names; for “Omri” and “Mesha” 
cannot possibly compare for interest with Ahab and Benhadad, 
Hezekiel and Sennacherib, names which had been discovered on 
ancient monuments without producing anything like a sensation. 
It was not that the relic could claim any extraordinary antiquity; 
for the monuments of Egypt, about which no special enthusiasm has 
ever been felt, are in many cases at least a thousand years older. 
It was not that there had been any great triumph of human intel-
lect or ingenuity in the decipherment, for many scores of scholars, both 
in England and on the Continent, could have done the work per-
fomed by M. Ganneau equally as well, had they enjoyed his 
opportunity. It was rather, perhaps, in the first place, that the 
entire nature and character of the discovery was level to the ordinary 
intelligence; and, secondly, that it was ushered into the world—in 
England, at any rate—in a peculiarly favourable way. The “leading 
journal” first gave it to the British public; and gave it, moreover, 
with all the advantages of prominent situation, large type, and the 
strong remark, that it was “like a page of the Bible.” General 
attention was thus called to it at once; and the excitement being 
进一步 kept up by some controversy as to the relative share of 
England, France, and Prussia in the discovery, and there happening 
to be at the time a dearth of topics of importance to occupy the 
public mind, the matter acquired the prominence and notoriety 
which seem to us so remarkable.

We are far from complaining of the interest excited, or from 
wishing that it had been less than it has been. We only wish that 
in all cases a proportionate interest were felt in similar documents 
and discoveries—documents and discoveries, we mean, connected 
with the historical Scriptures, and authenticating the statements 
contained in them. Scarcely does a year pass without the exhumation 
from the records of Assyria or Babylonia of some facts bearing 
as closely upon Jewish or Israelite history as the facts recorded upon 
the Moabite Stone; but as they make their appearance in learned 
journals which enjoy but a small circulation, or in books of a solid 
character which are read by few, the impression that they produce 
upon the world is slight and almost imperceptible. It is not easy to 
device a remedy for this. We are afraid the “leading journal” 
would scarcely undertake to disseminate each such discovery as it
occurs; yet, while they have to be sought for in the pages of the *Athenaeum* or the *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache*, it can hardly be expected that they should produce any important effect upon the world at large.

Before the interest that the discovery of the "Moabite Stone" excited has altogether died away, it seems to us desirable that it should be understood somewhat more distinctly than it is, what really are the gains which science and literature have made from the document in question; what (if any) further gains are to be expected from it; and what, therefore, are its real value and proper place among the discoveries of our day. There has been, it seems to us, a tendency in many quarters to over-estimate, as there has been in some a tendency to under-estimate, the importance of the document; while very few indeed of those whose comments it has provoked have shown an intelligent appreciation of the peculiar value which it possesses, the respects in which it is unique and unrivalled, a treasure to the antiquarian unsurpassed in the present, and not very likely to be surpassed in the future.

First, however, not to assume too much knowledge on the part of our readers, let us briefly recapitulate the history of the "Stone." In the autumn of 1868, M. Klein, a Prussian gentleman, travelling for his pleasure in Palestine, received intelligence of a curious monument, as existing in the Moabite country, to the east of the Dead Sea; and being induced by the reports brought him to extend his travels in that direction, he saw the Stone *in situ*, amid the ruins of a town known to the natives as *Dhibán*, and copied a portion of the inscription upon it, which was at once seen to be in the character known to Oriental scholars as "Phœnician." The general nature of the discovery of M. Klein became known shortly after to the European Society of Jerusalem, and efforts were made, both by the French consul, M. Clermont-Ganneau, and the English agent of the Palestine Exploration Fund, Captain Warren, to obtain "squeezes," or paper casts, of the inscription by means of native agents. At the same time M. Klein entered into communication with the Turkish Government, and endeavoured to obtain the Stone itself through their instrumentality. Reports of the intention of the Government to interfere having reached the natives, their jealousy was aroused, and they determined to destroy the monument which seemed likely to bring them into trouble; a determination which they carried into effect by burning a fire about the Stone, and then throwing cold water upon it, whereby it was broken into fragments, which were then dispersed among the tribes and hidden away. Before, however, this had been done, M. Clermont-Ganneau had succeeded in obtaining a paper cast of the entire inscription by the exertions of a
native, who risked his life in the enterprise; but this cast was obtained under circumstances of so much difficulty, that it seemed at first to be valueless. It had to be torn while still moist from the stone, and was brought to M. Ganneau in seven fragments, all more or less rubbed and worn, so that the traces of the inscription were pronounced by him to be "imperceptible." Not long after, very fair paper casts of the two main fragments of the Stone (A and B) were obtained by M. Ganneau, and still better ones by Captain Warren, and the learned world was thus put in possession of about half the inscription. Finally, the two large fragments themselves, and eighteen smaller ones, were recovered by M. Ganneau from the natives, while certain morsels fell into the hands of Captain Warren, and were brought to this country.

It is from these various materials, carefully combined, that the text of the inscription will have ultimately to be reconstructed. The pillar itself will, we trust, be re-erected in Paris, the extant fragments, whether belonging to the French or to ourselves, being reunited, and each fitted into its proper place. It will then be patent to the eye how much of the inscription has perished, and how much has been preserved to us. M. Ganneau calculates that the document originally contained about a thousand characters. Of these the large fragment (B) exhibits 358; the smaller fragment (A) 150; the next largest to this, 38; and the remaining seventeen in his possession, 67; making a total of 613; which, as he remarks, is above three-fifths of the whole. The portions of the Stone in the possession of the Palestine Exploration Society, which consist of eighteen small fragments, add the further number
of 56 letters; so that the lost letters appear to amount to no more than 331, or less than seven-twentieths of the original inscription. Many of these may be supplied by almost certain conjecture, and others will probably be recoverable from M. Ganneau’s first paper cast and M. Klein’s copy. Eventually, therefore, it is probable that a very fair text of the entire inscription may be obtained, in spite of the act of Vandalism which seemed at first to have rendered such a result almost impossible.

We think it rather unfortunate that, in anticipation of the ultimate result, attempts should have been made in France, in Germany, and in England,* to present the world with what are called transcripts of the entire inscription in Hebrew characters, and with translations of these transcripts. Such attempts seem to us premature. At present the only portions of the inscription whereof scholars generally have any means of judging are the two fragments A and B, which have been made accessible to them by the excellent photographs of Captain Warren’s paper “squeezes,” published by the Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund. The remainder of the inscription is the ingenious restoration of a single scholar, M. Ganneau, whose method of procedure in the production of his text has never yet been explained,† and whose arrangement of his small fragments has been wholly unchecked by any second independent judgment. It may be that M. Ganneau has performed his extremely difficult task in the best possible way, absolutely without any error; and it may be that the most implicit reliance is to be placed upon his decipherment and arrangement; but of this there is at present no proof. Certainly the internal evidence of the document, as he presents it to us, is not such as to put his version beyond criticism, or to make us feel sure that he has neither misplaced any of his fragments nor misread any of their characters.

* Besides M. Clermont-Ganneau, the following Semitic scholars have either edited or translated the inscription of Mesha: in Germany, MM. Nöldeke and Schlottmann; in England, M. Neubauer. M. E. Deutsch has wisely declined to translate it until the disjecta membra are all fitted into place.

† We should have been glad if M. Ganneau had given us fac-similes of his fragments separately, or, at any rate, an account of the contents of each fragment, and had informed us whether or no he finds the fragments of the Stone fit into each other, like the parts of a puzzle. Again, we should have liked to have been told whether the original paper cast of the Stone, which is the only extant representation of the monument in its entirety, is found to be as indecipherable as M. Ganneau at first declared it, or whether it is mainly by following its guidance that he puts the fragments in their places. At present we can find no account of M. Ganneau’s method of procedure but the following, which is, we confess, to us quite unintelligible:—“La plus grande partie de ces morceaux, même les plus minimes, peut être mise en place facilement, en tenant compte de la correspondance horizontale et verticale des séries de caractères : il suffit (!) de procéder comme pour déterminer la position géographique d’un point par l’intersection des lignes de longitude et de latitude.”—Revue Archéologique, Juin, p. 358.
But while the complete text of the inscription, and therefore its full purport, are in our judgment still matters of doubt, its general character and its date, within certain rather narrow limits, seem to us fixed with an approach to certainty from the portions of the document preserved to us in the two large fragments. The fragment A contains the commencement of the inscription, and makes it perfectly clear that the monument was erected by a certain "Mesha, King of Moab," and spoke of a recent war waged between Moab and two, or more, kings of Israel. Now, as Israel ceased to be a kingdom about B.C. 721, the document must evidently be anterior to that date. This being the case, and a war between a "Mesha, King of Moab," and the kingdom of Israel being recorded in Scripture (2 Kings i. 1; iii. 4—27), at the distance of about a century and a half before B.C. 721, there seems to be no reasonable ground for doubting that the "Mesha" of the inscription is the same as the "Mesha" of Scripture, the only king of that name known to have reigned over Moab. This conclusion is confirmed by an indication, which this portion of the inscription contains, of the name of one of the kings of Israel who fought against Moab. In the place (line 5) where the expression "King of Israel" first occurs, and where we should look, therefore, to have (if anywhere) the name of the Israelite monarch, the character immediately preceding the first letter of "king" (melek), and which should therefore be the last letter of the king's name, is i. Now the letter i is not the terminal letter of the name of any of the later kings of Israel, but only of the three early kings, Zimri, Tibni, and Omri. But of these three names, one, viz., Omri, occurs beyond a doubt in another fragment of the inscription; and we are thus led to conclude as almost certain that the well-known Omri, the founder of Samaria (1 Kings xvi. 16—28; Mic. vi. 16), and his son Ahab, are the kings of Israel intended in the early part of the document. Thus its date is fixed to the earlier half of the ninth century before our era; and it may be taken as illustrating very satisfactorily the hostile relations between Israel and Moab described in Scripture as existing at this period.

The illustration, however, is general, not special; incidental, not

* Sir H. Rawlinson was the first to point out this probability, and to suggest that the name Omri immediately preceded Melek Israel in this place. (See the Athenæum of February 26, p. 296.) This conjecture has now been accepted by M. Ganneau, the Count de Vogüé, and others. M. Ganneau even states that on the fragment which he places at the close of line 4, where he originally read "y, the true reading may be "y, so that only one letter would be wanting at the end of line 4 to complete the name of Omri ("yūy"). See the Revue Archéologique for June, 1870, p. 362.

† The numbers of the present Hebrew text, calculated by the reigns of the kings of Judah, give B.C. 897 as the last year of Ahab; calculated by the reigns of the kings of Israel, they give B.C. 877. The chronology of the Assyrian canon would bring down the date to about B.C. 857.
express or direct. The campaigns recorded by Mesha are not those on which the Biblical writers lay stress (2 Kings iii. 4—27; 2 Chron. xx. 1—25), but certain previous campaigns, which are either wholly omitted in the Scriptural narrative, or are there touched with the utmost brevity (see 2 Kings i. 1). The case thus rather resembles that of the Assyrian inscriptions of the same date, which mention casually Ahab, Hazael, and Benhadad, than that of the more important inscriptions of later Assyria and of Egypt, containing the heathen account of wars which the sacred writers have made the direct subject of their narrative. Considered, therefore, as an evidence confirming the truth of the Hebrew Scriptures, the value of the inscription is slight, though it is not altogether nugatory. Some years back it might properly enough have been hailed with acclamations, as a testimony to the plain historic truth of a narrative which many were seeking to resolve into mere myth and fable. Now that the great inscriptions of Sheshonk and Sennacherib have been deciphered and published, it has only a minor value, since those documents directly confirm and illustrate the Biblical narrative, while this throws light on it only indirectly.

Considered as a fresh contribution to history, the interest of the document is also slight, though here, too, it is not without a certain value. We learn from it several facts not contained in the Scriptural narrative—as that Omri and Ahab were regarded as cruel oppressors of Moab; that the Moabite cities were destroyed or fell into decay under their rule, and required to be rebuilt; that hostilities between the two kingdoms began as early as Ahab's time; and that Mesha, having established his independence, restored the towns throughout his dominions,* and fixed his capital at Dibon,† where he set up the recently-discovered monument. Further, we have evidence that the Moabites regarded themselves, not only as under the special protection, but as under the actual direction, of their god, Chemosh, who was thought to signify his will that this or that city should be attacked, and was obeyed implicitly. It is probable that, when the whole inscription has been put finally into shape, some other facts, similar in their general character to these, may be made out; but it is tolerably clear that nothing is likely to be recovered of any deeper or wider interest.

On the whole, therefore, we must pronounce the historic importance of the “Moabite Stone” to be not very great—at any rate, not to be comparable with that of numerous Assyrian, Babylonian,

* The restoration of the towns is the principal subject of fragment B.
† Dibon is mentioned in Scripture as a Moabitite town (Num. xxi. 30, Isa. xv. 2, Jer. xlviii. 18—24), though not as the capital, which seems generally to have been Kir-Heros, called sometimes Kir-Moab. (Compare Isa. xv. 1, xvi. 7, 11, Jer. xlviii. 31 and 36.)
Egyptian, and Persian monuments recovered during the last twenty years without any great stir being made about them. It is not as an historic document that we have wished to call attention to the "Stone," or as such that we should have considered it a fitting subject for an article. To us its predominant interest seems to lie altogether on its linguistic side—to consist in the light which is thrown by it on Semitic grammar and on Palæography. It is in connection with the latter subject that the document seems to us of paramount importance; and we propose, in the remaining space at our disposal, to confine ourselves to this aspect of the recent discovery.

We have said that the moment a copy of a small portion of the inscription was obtained by M. Klein, it was seen at once that the writing was "Phœnician."* This is palpable to any one in the least acquainted with the Phœnician character; and a glance at the alphabets represented on the accompanying plate† (of which Nos. 2, 3, and 4 are undoubtedly Phœnician) will probably be enough to satisfy upon the point even the most sceptical inquirer. Now Phœnician writing is that from which the Greek, the Roman, and the other European alphabets were derived, so that all inquiries on

* The term "Phœnician," which has been applied generally to this class of writing, is not altogether a happy one, since there is no reason to believe that the character in question was at all peculiar to the Phœnician people. Rather the evidence goes to show that it was common to all the races of Western Asia from Egypt to the foot of the Taurus, and from the Mediterranean to Nineveh. The character is found to have been in use at Nineveh itself, in Phœnicia, at Jerusalem and Samaria, in the Moabite country, in Cilicia, and in Cyprus. M. Deutsch has proposed to substitute for "Phœnician," as the designation of this mode of writing, the term "Cadmean."

† A few words of explanation as to the plate itself, and the authorities upon which it rests, appear to be desirable. The plate represents, in its first four lines, the Phœnician or Cadmean alphabet, in four stages, arranged chronologically. Line 1 gives the characters as they exist upon the Moabite Stone. The forms have been traced over photographs of the paper casts sent to England by Captain Warren, or else copied from plaster casts (now in Oxford) of certain small fragments of the actual Stone. Line 2 gives the characters as they appear upon certain Assyrian tablets and gems, which are assigned by Sir H. Rawlinson to the period between Tiglath-pileser II. and Asshur-bani-pal, or to about B.C. 745—650. These characters have not been copied from the tablets themselves, but are taken from the fac-similes published by Sir H. Rawlinson in the Journal of the Asiatic Society for the year 1865. Line 3 represents the characters as they are believed to exist on the sarcophagus of Eshmunazar (supposed date about B.C. 600), which is now at Paris. It reproduces the forms from the copy of them published by Dietrich in the year 1855. Line 4 gives the ordinary Phœnician alphabet of Persian, Greek, and Roman times. It is taken mainly from the Scriptura linguae Phœnicie monumenta of Gesenius, but with some corrections from other sources. The remainder of the plate exhibits the forms of the most archaic Greek writing. These forms are exhibited solely as they occur when the writing is from right to left, for the sake of comparison with the Phœnician forms, though even in the most ancient inscriptions of Greece the writing is often either βουτροφήνω or from left to right, and the letters thus often face the other way. The authorities followed for the forms are chiefly Böckh and Rose, though sometimes inedited inscriptions existing in the British Museum have been made use of.
the subject are inquiries into the origin of the letters which we ourselves use. They are also, in point of fact, inquiries into the origin of alphabetic writing; for the other ancient modes of writing, independent of the Phoenician, were in no case really alphabetic, since in them characters represented, for the most part, either ideas, words, or, at any rate, syllables.

The special interest, then, that attaches to the "Moabite Stone" is this—that it is the most ancient specimen which we possess of that alphabetic writing which, in common with the other nations of Europe, we ourselves employ at the present day. It takes us nearer to the fount and origin of our written characters than any other document or monument that has as yet been found. We have in its inscribed forms, not perhaps the original characters themselves, but the earliest known representations of them. If we wish to know what the characters were at first, we must study especially these most ancient specimens.

It has been stated by a writer on the subject of the Moabite Stone—the only writer who has as yet called much attention to the palaeographical value of the discovery—that one of the things which "become clear" from a consideration of the inscription is, that "the more primitive the characters, the simpler they become, not (as often supposed) the more complicated, as more in accordance with some pictorial prototype." We do not think that this criticism is borne out by the actual facts. Of the twenty-two letters which constitute the later Phœnician and the Hebrew alphabet, twenty-one are represented upon the Stone. Six of these—alef, gimel, hé, nun, ain, and résh—are identical in shape, or nearly so, with the predominant forms of later times. Two others—béth and pe—are so slightly changed that no argument can be founded upon them. Of the remaining thirteen, while a certain number are "simpler," in the sense of their presenting to the eye fewer lines, others (as particularly mem and heth) are, in the same sense, more complicated. To judge, however, by the number of lines, is a mistake. The true simplification of writing is produced by economizing the number of strokes. In this respect it will be found, by a reference to the plate, that the later forms are almost always "simpler" than the earlier. In samech, for instance, apparently the most complicated of the later

* See a letter to the Editor of the Times, by M. E. Deutsch, published in the Times of March 3, 1870.
† The teth is the letter omitted. It was rare in Phœnician (Gesenius, Script, lingua-
gue Phœn. mon., p. 30), and not very common in Hebrew. There is no specimen of it on the Assyrian tablets or gems, and, if I remember right, only one in the inscription of Eshmunazar. A recent conjecture of M. Ganneau's would make the teth have occurred in one passage of the inscription of Mesha (Revue Archéologique, Juin, p. 336); but the form is unfortunately irrecoverable.
letters, a gradual diminution in the number of strokes may be traced from first to last. Originally the letter was written like an early Greek ωι—thus, Ω, with four distinct strokes; then the four were reduced to two by changing the three horizontal bars into a zigzag, which could be written without taking the hand from the paper, and adding a vertical bar beneath it; finally, the vertical bar was attached to one end of the zigzag, and thus made a continuation of it, so that a single continuous stroke sufficed for the whole letter. Similarly with the koph, which was a circle with a vertical bar attached below (Ϙ), the circle itself being formed probably by two semicircular strokes,* and the whole letter thus requiring three distinct efforts of the will to form it, the ultimate form, complicated as it seems, is a real simplification of the earlier one, the object being to produce the character by one stroke instead of three. This was done by commencing with the vertical line, and then representing the circle by two loops, one on either side of the line, the whole character being thus formed by a single continuous stroke. In like manner the original saïn required three distinct strokes, two horizontal and one oblique (צ), which were subsequently represented by the form still in use (צ), a form producible by a single effort, without any removal of the pen from the paper. The same principle will be found to apply to the vau, the heth, and the koph, whereof the later forms require in every case fewer strokes than the earlier. It is perhaps also traceable in the beith and the daleth.† The only exceptions to its prevalence are to be found in the jod, the mem, and the shin, where the commonest of the later forms require more strokes than the earlier. Here, however, there were in each case other forms in use requiring fewer strokes than the early ones, or the same number.

With respect to the interesting question of the probable derivation of the alphabet from pictorial forms of objects, and the bearing upon that question of the recent discovery, we must again venture to differ from the writer above quoted. It seems to us that the primitive shapes of the Phoenician letters, where they vary from the later ones, are more, and not less, “in accordance with the (probable) pictorial prototype.” In common with most writers on the subject, we take the objects themselves to be designated by the names which the letters bore, and still bear, in Hebrew and Arabic, the antiquity of which is attested by their communication to the Greeks at a time which we believe to have been considerably anterior to the first Olympiad. Thus, alef, we assume, should designate an “ox,” or some familiar

* This is almost the universal mode in which the head of the koph is formed on the Assyrian tablets and gems.
† The original pointed beith, a triangle with a tail, was probably made with three strokes; the rounded beith required but two. So with the pointed and the rounded daleth.
part of one; *gimel,* *a "camel;" *ain,* an "eye," and the like. Now the letters in which something like a clear difference can be traced between the earlier and the later forms are *bêth,* *daleth,* *vau,* *zain,* *heth,* *yod,* *kaph,* *lamed,* *mem,* *samech,* *tsade,* *koph,* *shin,* and *tau.* Let us see in each of these cases whether the earlier or the later form more resembles the probable "object."

The early differs from the later *bêth* solely in having a pointed head, instead of a rounded one. But the object which *bêth* was intended to represent was a tent, the earliest "house" of pastoral man; and this had in primitive times the simple triangular form, \(\Delta\). Thus the early *bêth* more resembled the object than the later one.*

The early *daleth* is a simple triangle; the later has the right side of the triangle elongated, and the other two generally rounded into one. But *daleth,* "door," represented the opening of a tent, the form of which was like that of the tent itself, triangular. Here again the earlier form is clearly the better representation of the object.

In the *vau* the case is not so plain. In its earlier form, we now find that it had a semicircular head, from the centre of which a vertical line depended. In the later, the vertical stroke was attached to one end of the semicircle, and the semicircle became a short curve, or even an actual straight line. Now if, as many do, we regard the *vau* as intended to represent a "hook" or a "tent-peg," we must say that the later forms are the better pictures; but if we take the true original meaning of *vau* to be a "nail" or "peg" for hanging anything on, then † the early form must be pronounced most like the object. It seems to us that the latter is the sounder view.

With regard to *zain* no judgment can be given. *Zain* properly means an "arm," offensive or defensive; but what particular arm was taken as the representative of the class it is impossible to say. Neither the earlier form of the *zain,* nor the later, resembles any known weapon.

In *heth* the difference between the earlier and the later forms is not great. Both sufficiently represent the object intended, a "field," or "enclosed space." But the early form seems to us somewhat the better "picture."

None of the forms of *yod* very much resemble a "hand," which is what the word means. According to the common explanation, the four vertical, or quasi-vertical, strokes of the later character represent

* The tail of the *bêth,* which can scarcely be pictorial, belongs equally to the earlier and the later forms. We regard it as a diacritic mark, intended to distinguish *bêth* from *daleth,* which would otherwise only have differed in size. A similar diacritic mark is to be found in the later Greek *vau* or *digamma,* \(\phi\), where the lower vertical line was added to distinguish *vau* from *gamma.*

† Gesenius assigns *clavus* as a true meaning of *vau,* equally with *uncus* (Script. linguae Phen. mon., p. 26), and indeed gives *clavus* the preference in his Lexicon. So Fürst.
three fingers and a thumb, while the horizontal line is the palm connecting them. If this be so, the earlier character must be pronounced less like the object than the later, since it consists of four strokes only, which, according to the explanation propounded, would be the palm, the thumb, and two fingers. But it may be questioned whether the original "picture" was not a hand and wrist in profile, in which case the four strokes, representing the wrist, the palm, the thumb, and the index-finger, would be more correct than the five.

_**Kaph**_ is properly "the hollow hand," _volo_ of the Romans. In the characters, both early and late, it is placed at the end of the fore-arm. Now here the "hollow" is certainly better represented by the open head of the earlier than the closed one of the later character.

_**Lamed**_ is a "prick-stick," or "ox-goad," which is well represented by the early character, where the long upper line terminates in a point, while the lower end represents a curved handle. In the later forms of the letter the point was lost, the handle became angular, and an addition to the handle was made, which had nothing corresponding to it in nature. This in the later Hebrew form, ב, became the main part of the letter.

Of _**mem**_, "water," represented originally by a wavy line, like that whereby the Assyrians represent water on their sculptures, the first and second forms (see the plate) retain the original idea, which is almost wholly lost in the third and fourth.

The original form of _**samech**_ is a good representation of a "prop" supporting a trellis for vines. The later, which are tachygraphical abbreviations, furnish far less accurate pictures. Ultimately the idea became completely lost in the square-headed Hebrew ד.

If _**tsade**_ means, as is probable, "a fish-spear," and if that had in early times the common later form of a trident, then we must pronounce the ancient _**tsade**_ a better representation of the object than the later, though even in the most ancient form the desire to write rapidly has caused a considerable departure from the original figure.

Scholars are not agreed as to the meaning of the word _**koph**_. It has been translated, "the back of the head," "an ear," "an axe," "a pole," and "the eye of a needle." If the last is, as we believe it to be, the true meaning, then the earliest form must be pronounced the best, indeed the only good, representation. In this the circle is small in proportion to the length of the stroke below it, as the eye of even a rude needle would be, and the eye is not traversed by any part of the shaft. In the second form, which resembles a Greek Φ (see the plate), this departure from truthfulness takes place. In the third and fourth everything is sacrificed to the desire of forming the letter by a single stroke.

Shin, we are told, means "a tooth." The original form was probably the picture of a molar with two long fangs. Of this the early shin, which resembles a W, is a fair tachygraphic imitation. The later forms are, all of them, less like; the last of all being, however, less unlike than some of the intermediate ones, since the fangs are there represented. In the "square" Hebrew the fangs were once more dropped, and the letter became w.

Finally, with respect to tau, which meant simply a "mark" or "badge," and which is generally explained as originally a "brand on cattle," it is clear that the simple cross of the Moabitic Stone would be more likely to be the actual mark used than the more ornate forms of later times, where first one, and then both arms of the cross have a terminal deflection.

It appears, therefore, upon the whole, that the alphabetic forms of the Moabite Stone strongly favour the view which is maintained by most critics,* and which the names of the letters suggest, that the original Phoenician writing was pictorial, resembling in this respect the writing of the Egyptians and (most probably) of the Babylonians. The letters were the pictures of familiar objects, which pictures underwent a gradual corruption, the great object being to simplify, by reducing the character to forms which could be traced without removing the hand from the paper. The similar corruption of the Egyptian hieroglyphics into the character known as demotic is generally admitted, and has been well illustrated by Lepsius and others.

Another interesting palaeographical question, on which the Moabite Stone throws considerable light, is that of the time at which the Greeks obtained the elements of writing from the Phœnicians. It has been strongly argued by Mr. Grote, and is now believed by many, that letters were absolutely unknown to the Greeks in the time of Homer and Hesiod (about B.C. 850—776), and were first introduced into Greece about the period of the first Olympiad, or soon after. The evidence of the newly-discovered Stone favours a much earlier date for the communication. The archaic Greek alphabet, as it exists in the earliest inscriptions, resembles far more closely the alphabet of the Moabite Stone than it does that of any subsequent period. In proof of this, we would refer especially to the following characters: beta, delta, zeta, iota, mu, xi, kappa, and tau, which correspond respectively to the beth, daleth, vau, zain, yod, mem, samech, koph, and tau, of the Phœnicians.

The early beta of the Greeks is angular, not rounded, and thus resembles the earlier, rather than the later, beth. It differs from the

* As Gesenius, Rödiger, Baron Bunsen, E. Twistleton, Wright, and others. Wuttke, however, and Fürst maintain the opposite view.
beth by repeating in the lower limb the form of the upper one, an alteration due apparently to Greek ideas of symmetry. But in both limbs the angle is kept as the essential idea, the rounded form being a later introduction, and the open head (see plate, line 2) being absolutely unknown in Greece.

The early Greek delta is commonly like the daleth of the Stone, a simple triangle. In a very few cases the right arm descends a little below the point of junction with the base. But in no early Greek inscription is the head open (as in plate, line 2), or the left angle rounded (as in lines 3 and 4), or the right arm much produced (as in lines 2 and 3). In other words, the early Greek delta resembles closely that on the "Stone," while it differs considerably from those of the Assyrian tablets, the Eshmunazar sarcophagus, and the monuments of the Persian time.

The earliest form of the Greek bau (βαυ, pronounced vau) was either Y or V, a form evidently derived from the vau of the Moabite Stone, rather than from any later Phoenician type. The later Greek vau, F, was a corruption of this, Y having first been changed, for expedition's sake, into ſ, and then a second horizontal stroke having been added, as a diacritic mark, to distinguish vau from gamma.

The Greek zeta, from the earliest times to a period later than Pericles, was always I, not Z. This form is only found in Phoenicia in the earliest period, being replaced by Z, uniformly on the Assyrian tablets, as well as in all the later inscriptions. The exclusive use of the perpendicular zeta by the early Greeks is an especially strong argument in favour of their having got their alphabet from the Phœnicians very considerably before the time of Tiglath-pileser II.

The most ancient form of the Greek iota was a zed placed diagonally (Z), the upper and lower arms being shorter than the line connecting them. This form will be seen by the plate closely to resemble the more ancient of the Phœnician types, only differing from them in the absence of a second line projecting towards the left below the upper arm of the letter. As, however, the Phœnicians continued to use this form as late as B.C. 650, no important argument can be drawn from this letter.

Mu, on the contrary, furnishes a strong argument in favour of the early derivation of the alphabet. It is only in the primitive Phœnician alphabet that the angular or zigzag form of this letter obtains. In the later types curved lines replace the zigzag, or forms still more remote from the primitive ones. But the early Greek μ, which is spread out and has the last arm short (]={), is exactly the mem of the Moabite Stone, except that the last line of the zigzag has been omitted.

The correspondency of the Greek xi with the Phœnician samech,
whose place it occupies in the alphabet, had long been suspected; but
the absolute identity of the two was first proved by our "Stone,"
which uses for samech the exact form—a perpendicular line, crossed
by three vertical bars — found to express xi, where it first occurs
in Greek inscriptions.† As this form was superseded by a simpler
one before the period of the Assyrian tablets and gems, we have here
again an evidence favouring the early passage of the Phoenician
letters into Greece.

A similar result ensues from a consideration of the Moabite koph.
The Greek koppa (Ω), the original of the Latin Q, had never pre-
viously been found in a Phoenician inscription; and its form seemed
so remote from the ordinary Phoenician types, that it was difficult to
regard them as having any real connection. We now find that the
original Phoenician letter was identical with the Greek, or differed
from it only by having the vertical line somewhat longer. By the
time of Tiglath-pileser II. (B.C. 745), the vertical line had been
further lengthened, being carried to the top of the circle (Φ). As
this is never the form of koppa among the Greeks, we must conclude
that they obtained this letter in the first, rather than in the second,
Phoenician period.

The Greek tau seems to be derived from the earlier, rather than
the later, tau of the Phoenicians, from the fact that its arms are
straight, and not deflected. The Phoenician tau is, in every case, a
cross; and the only important difference between the earliest and
the later forms is in the deflection of the arms at their extremities.
The Greek tau, which is sometimes a cross with the upper limb but
slightly developed (+), sometimes a mere T, with that limb wholly
suppressed, has in every case the arms perfectly straight, with no
sign of the terminal ornamentation which we observe in the later
Phoenician.

The only Greek letters whose archaic forms resemble the later
Phoenician types more than they do the earlier are lambda and pi.
The early lambda, whether it takes the form of λ or ϖ, is always
angular; the lamed of the "Stone," and of the Assyrian tablets and
gems, is rounded. Contrariwise, the early pi is either round or
square topped, and has never the angular head which marks it on
the Moabitic monument. Now this angular head was laid aside

* It was argued at first by some that the occurrence of this form upon the Stone was
fatal to its pretensions to a great antiquity, since there was, it was thought, no prece-
dent for its early use, and classical writers (Plin. H. N. vii. 56; Euseb. Chron. i. 13)
ascribed its invention to Simonides, who flourished about B.C. 530. But as the Assyrian
gems of the seventh or eighth century exhibit a very similar type (see the plate), and
one manifestly derived from it, there appears to be no reasonable doubt that the form
is really extremely ancient.

† The xi is rare in early Greek inscriptions; but still it occurs occasionally. (See
Böckh, Corpus Inscr. Gr., vol. i. pp. 53 and 55; Rose, Inscr. Gr. Vetust., pl. 8, and p. 71.)
before B.C. 750, and the round head, which thenceforth continued in use, was adopted. So far, therefore, as the evidence of these two letters goes, the alphabet might have been communicated to the Greeks about B.C. 750—700. But the point in question has to be determined by the balance of evidence; and the balance of evidence is as nine to two in favour of the alphabet having passed into Greece in the course of the first, rather than the second, of its known stages—about B.C. 900, rather than about B.C. 750.

Such are the chief palaeographical results which the Moabite Stone appears to us to have established. It favours, we think, the view that the "Cadmean" characters were originally pictorial—imitations, i.e., of familiar objects; and it helps us sometimes to determine the objects which the characters represented. It also lends important support to the view that the Greeks obtained the elements of writing from the Phœnicians at an early date, either before the time of the inscription of Mesha, or, at any rate, very shortly afterwards. These results may be, and no doubt will be, disputed; but we have little doubt that palæographical science will eventually accept them as established.

It is probable that the inscription may involve other important palæographical results which have escaped our notice. Certainly it must always be, unless superseded by some more ancient document, the final court of appeal in controversies as to the original shape and power of the characters by which Western thought has expressed itself since the dawn of civilization. It is at least a century and a half earlier than any other inscription that we possess in the same species of writing; and it is three centuries earlier than any other such inscription of any considerable length. By means of it we are informed what the characters were in which a contemporary and neighbour of Ahab and Elijah was in the habit of writing. As all the evidence goes to prove that one and the same system of written characters was spread over Western Asia, from the borders of Egypt to Assyria, we may fairly assume that the books of the earlier prophets, the correspondence between Hiram and Solomon, Solomon's Proverbs and Songs, David's Psalms, Samuel's history, were originally thus written. Further, perhaps, it may be over-bold to go; but a suspicion forces itself on us that, in the characters of which the photographic traces are before us to-day, we see the forms of the letters in which, more than three thousand years ago, the Pentateuch itself was penned, and which "the finger of God" impressed upon the Two Tables.

G. Rawlinson.
CONTENTS OF NO. CV.

1. THE MOABITE INSCRIPTION, (W. Dugger) 1

2. THE POEMS OF SHELLEY, 30

3. THE GROWTH OF A TRADES-UNION, 59

4. PHILOSOPHY, PSYCHOLOGY, AND METAPHYSICS, 115

5. THE RUSSIAN CHURCH AND CLERGY, 140

6. USES AND REQUIREMENTS OF ENGLISH DIPLOMACY, 162

7. THE VATICAN COUNCIL, 183

8. CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE, 230