

16. $\text{om. } U = \text{ABNO } e \text{ HI}$
 $\text{קדאבא } U = \text{ABNO } e$
 $\text{קדאבא } U = \text{ABNO } e$
17. $L \text{ HI}$
 $\text{pr. } U = \text{ABNO } e$
19. L
 $U = \text{ABNO } e$
 $L = e$
 $U = \text{ABNO } \text{HI} [\text{et } A]$
28. $LU = B e$
 $ANOX [\text{HI}]$
- 28 (29). L
 $U = \text{ABNOX } e$

It remains to be added that these collations are offered only as provisional. In the great majority of cases I have not found time to verify the readings given by a second examination of the MSS. But the interest attaching to some of the readings not found in *Lee* justifies, it is hoped, their publication in the *JOURNAL*; see (for example) xviii 24, 25; xix 24, 31; xx 4; xxi 7; xxii 2, 13, 14; xxiii 4, 8, 18, 29; xxiv 7; xxv 28.

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EZRA'S RECENSION OF THE LAW.

ACCORDING to a tradition repeated several times in the Talmud, Ezra wrote the Law *אשורית*, or *בכתב אשירי*, 'in Assyrian writing'. The most explicit passage is in *Sanhedrin* fol. 21^b :—'Mar Zutra, or according to others Mar 'Uqba, said, the Law was originally given to Israel in Hebrew writing and in the holy language. It was given to them again, in Ezra's time, in Assyrian writing and in the Aramaic language. Israel chose to retain the Assyrian writing and the holy language, leaving to the ignorant the Hebrew writing and the Aramaic language. Who are meant by "the ignorant"? Rab H̄isda said they are the Samaritans . . .'

Further on :—'Although the Law was not (actually) delivered through him (Ezra), the writing (of it) was changed by him.'

And again :—'Why was it called Assyrian? Because they brought it from Assyria.'

Similarly, in *Jer. Meg.* cap. ii (beginning), *Bab. Meg.* fol. 8^b, and elsewhere.¹

Much has been written on the meaning of the term 'Assyrian' here, but without making the matter clearer.¹ It has been explained as equivalent to Syrian, i. e. Aramaic; and as derived from a root אָשַׁר = אִשָּׁר in the sense of straight, i. e. square. Since the discovery of the Assyrian inscriptions it would be natural to suppose that cuneiform writing was meant; but this is impossible, for the Talmudic authorities plainly identify Ezra's innovation with the style in use in their own day, i. e. practically the modern square character. Hence it is sometimes said that the Talmudic statements are confused and worthless.

It seems, however, that we have here a genuine tradition, and that the Talmud is quite right in giving the obvious explanation that the Assyrian writing is so called because it was brought from Assyria. It evidently means the Aramaic writing as developed in Assyria, just as in modern Hebrew we speak of German or Greek writing, meaning Hebrew written by a German or a Greek Jew. Specimens of this Assyrian Aramaic have been preserved in the dockets or endorsements of cuneiform contract tablets. A convenient collection of them has been published by Prof. Clay in *Old Testament and Semitic Studies in memory of W. R. Harper* i 285. The cumbrous cuneiform characters must always have been troublesome to read as well as to write, and for business purposes it was handy to have the contents of a document noted on it in the much more practical Aramaic alphabet (and language). Although we have only a relatively small number of these short notes, scratched or written with ink on the edge of clay tablets, there can be no doubt that just as the Aramaic language was used (2 Kings xviii 26, Ezra iv 7) for official purposes alongside of the Assyrian, so the Aramaic alphabet was used along with the cuneiform syllabary. The latter, however, was more suitable for use on clay tablets, which have survived in large numbers, while Aramaic was more generally written on papyrus or skins (Ezra vi 2) which have, of course, perished. The specimens published by Prof. Clay are dated between the tenth year of Artaxerxes I (455 B. C.) and the first year of Artaxerxes II (404-3 B. C.); but the style of the writing shews that it was not then used for the first time. It must have been long in common and constant use. If then Ezra was brought up in Babylon, this (as well, no doubt, as cuneiform) was the writing he learned; it was in this that he became a ready scribe; and if he wrote a copy of the Law it was in this character that he wrote it. We even know approximately what his manuscript would be like. The Assyrian dockets are roughly and hastily written, as one might write a note for merely personal use; but, with this reservation, precisely

¹ See Kohut's *Aruch* s. v. אָשַׁר 2.

the same character is found in the Aramaic papyri recently found in Egypt.¹ These are legal documents, &c., carefully written by professional scribes in what may be called the court hand of the time, dated between 471 and 407 B. C., and thus covering about the same period as the Assyrian dockets. Evidently from the time of Xerxes at least, the Aramaic language and writing were officially used throughout the Empire, and there is no reason why we should not find in Egypt (it would not have survived in other climates) an Aramaic version, on papyrus, of some edict of the Great King. It may also be safely predicted that if we should find a fragment of the copy of the Law which must have existed in the Jewish colony at Elephantine, its writing, if alphabetical, will be this 'Assyrian' Aramaic. Meanwhile the Assuan papyri give a fair idea of the general appearance of Ezra's copy of the Law in its main features, and the fact is of importance in considering possible corruptions of the text. It is from this 'Assyrian' hand, and not from the 'Phenician', that the modern Hebrew square character is derived by a natural process of development.

What then was the alphabet (called 'Hebrew' in the Talmud) which was supplanted by the 'Assyrian' writing? The same opposition between כתב עברי and אשורית (on skin) is already found in the Mishna; e. g. *Yadayim* iv 5. No doubt the Talmud understands by עברי the character found in the Siloam inscription, and earlier on the Moabite stone, and the so-called Phenician alphabet, still retained in a modified form by the Samaritans. On the other hand we know that, in the Tell-el-Amarna period and later, cuneiform writing was used in Palestine and elsewhere as widely as Aramaic was used afterwards under the Persians. In fact there is no satisfactory evidence for the use of the 'Phenician' alphabet in Syria earlier than the Moabite stone, 900–850 B. C. It is therefore highly probable that whatever literature the Israelites had before that date was written in cuneiform,² and, considering the conservatism of the people, it is also probable that this would continue to be used as a sacred character. Moreover if, as there is reason to think,³ the 'Phenician' alphabet was introduced into Syria by Philistine settlers from Crete (after 1200 B. C.), the fact of its origin might well have caused it to be regarded in Israel as unfit for any but secular use. Ezra must have learned the cuneiform character in Babylon, and if he found the Law written in it, there was a good reason for his transcribing it into the Aramaic character, and also for the emphasis laid on his being a 'scribe of the Law'. Hitherto the Law

¹ Sayce and Cowley *Aramaic papyri discovered at Assuan*, London 1906; Sachau 'Drei aram. Papyrusurkunden' in *Abh. d. kgl. preuss. Akademie*, Berlin 1907.

² So Sayce. Cf. Ph. Berger in *Mélanges Dérenbourg* (Paris 1909) p. 21.

³ See A. J. Evans *Scripta Minoa* pp. 80, 82, &c.

had been the peculiar possession of the priestly and learned class: henceforward it was to be accessible to every one who would learn an alphabet (Ezra vii 10, 25; Neh. viii, ix). The change was a part, and an important part, of Ezra's scheme for forming a Jewish nation and impressing upon it the worship of the national God. It thus marks a turning-point in the history of religion, and we can easily understand that the tradition of it survived to the days of the Amoraim. There is no positive evidence as to the character in which the Law was written before Ezra's time; but if it was cuneiform, the reason for his work was much stronger than if he merely transcribed from the old-Hebrew or 'Phenician' script, which was after all quite as suitable for the purpose.

Finally, if by עברי (which the Talmud took as 'Phenician') we are to understand cuneiform, it may be possible to explain the two strange terms רעץ (*v.l.* for רעץ) and ליבונאה which are applied to the old writing. The root רעץ means 'to prick' or 'pierce'; and the word may thus denote the 'bristling' characters, or characters 'pricked' with a stylus¹ on soft clay; while ליבונאה may be a corruption of some derivative from לבנה 'a brick', meaning 'tablet-writing'. The appearance of the cuneiform character must have been quite familiar to Jews living in Babylonia in the early centuries of the Christian era.

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THE PARSING OF BĀZĀH IN 2 KINGS

XIX 21 = ISAIAH XXXVII 22.

בָּזָה here is either (1) Qal Pf. sing. 3rd *masc.* of בזה, or (2) Qal Pf. sing. 3rd *fem.* of בזו.

The first alternative involves a false concord. There are, of course, many cases where *masc.* is used in preference to the *fem.* It is specially appropriate where the *fem.* subject has a general reference. In Num. xv 31, e. g. בזה has נמש for its subject. The first two verbs are *masc.* though the subject and demonstrative are *fem.* But a *masc.* here would be very odd. The subject is 'Virgin daughter'; and בזה is closely linked with another verb in proper agreement with the subject.

Yet the Oxford Hebrew Lexicon, along with every other lexicon and concordance I have consulted, assigns the word to בזה and not to בזו.

The second alternative involves an unusual accentuation; for the word is accented as a participle and not as a perfect. The perfect accents the stem syllable, not the affirmative, in ע"י verbs.

¹ I find that this has already been suggested by Lidzbarski in his article 'Alphabet' in the *Jewish Encyclopaedia*.