

THE INSCRIPTION AT THE POOL OF SILOAM.

IN the month of August last year the Committee received from Jerusalem an announcement of the discovery of an inscription in the passage leading from the Pool of Siloam to the Virgin's Fountain. A squeeze accompanied the letter, but this was imperfect, and only a few letters here and there could be made out. The Committee immediately authorized Dr. Chaplin to draw upon them for such money as might be necessary to get the water lowered, and a better copy taken. This work was entrusted to Herr Schick, but it was not until January that he succeeded in procuring a copy of the inscription; this was not a squeeze, but a so-called *fac-simile*, in other words it had been copied from the rock by the light of a candle. Tracings were made of the *fac-simile* and sent to various scholars, but no one ventured from such slender materials to attempt a reading. Meanwhile M. Clermont-Ganneau, who had been appointed French Consul at Jaffa, started for that place early in February with the intention of proceeding immediately to Jerusalem for the examination of the inscription. Unfortunately he has been laid up with illness. Another and an improved transcript of the inscription arrived on the 1st of March, which was also copied and circulated, but with no result. This second copy is published with this number.

Professor Sayce, however, has been able to examine and copy the inscription on the spot, and has sent an important letter on the subject to the *Athenæum*, a portion of which (by permission of the proprietors) we extract.

I.

An accident which befel me in Cyprus has brought me unexpectedly to Jerusalem, and given me the opportunity of examining the inscription lately discovered in the conduit of the Pool of Siloam by Herr Schick. The inscription is the most important yet found in Palestine, as it belongs to the period of the kings, and is written in the oldest known characters of the Phœnician alphabet. As the readers of the *Athenæum* are already aware, the inscription is incised on the lower part of a tablet formed by cutting the rock wall of the conduit to the depth of about an inch. It is engraved on the east side of a rock-hewn passage, through which the water is conducted from the north into the Pool, and about twenty-five paces from its entrance.

I have paid two visits to the inscription, and succeeded in copying the greater portion of it. The task of copying, however, is a difficult one. The water flows past the foot of the inscription to a depth of over four

INSCRIPTION FOUND AT THE POOL OF SILOAM.

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inches, and in order to copy it I have had to sit in the water in a cramped position for more than an hour at a time, making out the letters, which are filled with silica, by the dim light of a candle. Had it not been for the kind offices of my companion, Mr. JOHN SLATER, who held the candle for me while I copied the characters, I should have found the work even more troublesome than I actually did.

The upper part of the tablet is smooth and plain, though a *graffito* of three lines is scratched upon one part of it. Whether this is in any intelligible system of writing I cannot say; some of the letters look like cursive Greek, but at the beginning of two of the lines the Arabic ciphers 1843 seem to occur. The lower part of the tablet is occupied by the ancient inscription, which consists of six lines of about thirty-five letters each. The letters are of a considerable size, and must originally have been very clear. Now, however, in consequence of the *silex* with which they are filled, the difficulty of obtaining sufficient light to see them, and the friction of the water, it is by no means easy to make them out. On the left side a fracture of the rock has caused the loss of several of the characters in the first three lines. Below the inscription comes an ornamental finish in the shape of two triangles, which rest upon their apices, with an angle between them similarly resting upon its apex.

The forms of the characters are identical with those of the Moabite Stone, and the words are similarly divided from one another by points. One of the characters, which occurs at least three times, is new to me; I conjecture that it may represent the missing *teth* of Mesha's inscription. The first line begins with the word **הנקבה** (ה); then follow, after two words which I cannot read with certainty, **הנקבה בענב(?)**. In the second line I can make out only the words **אל רעד..... שלש אמה**. The third line ends with the word **בירה**. The fourth line begins with the word **נקב**; then come, after a few doubtful letters, **גראן** (ג), and the line ends with **וילכו**. The fifth line reads: **מן המים מן המו..... אל הברכה בנאתי**. The sixth line has been so much injured by the friction of the water that the only words in it which I can make out with certainty are **על ראש**. I can find no words in the inscription for Jerusalem, Judah, or king (**מלך**), nor any proper names. But the forms of the letters prove that it cannot be later than the time of Hezekiah, and the "three cubits" mentioned in the second line, as well as the "thousand cubits" of line 5, will probably afford a clue to the meaning of the inscription. It is clear from the word **בנאתי** in the fifth line that the constructor of the conduit speaks in the first person.

February 7, 1881.

II.

The weather detained me at Jerusalem a day longer than I had intended to be there, and I accordingly paid another visit to the inscription about which I have already written. It was well that I did so, as it enabled me both to correct my previous copies and to fill in some of the lacunæ in them. In fact, I may say that I now have as perfect a copy of the inscription as can well be obtained; very little of it is missing, except where a fracture of the rock has occurred on the left hand side of the first three lines. I hope to place my copy, along with a translation of it, at the disposal of the Palestine Exploration Fund upon my return to England.

Meanwhile I must correct some of the statements I made in my previous letter. The more perfect copy I now possess shows that the inscription is not in Hebrew, as I imagined, but in Phœnician. The Phœnician relative pronoun **אנ** occurs more than once, and there are other peculiarities in the language which indicate that the author was a native of the Phœnician coast. On the other hand, as I have already stated, the forms of most of the letters are identical with those of the Moabite Stone, though there are two, or perhaps three, which seem to be still more archaic than those of Meshah's inscription. I do not see, therefore, how the inscription can be dated so late as the time of Hezekiah and his successors, when the destruction of the kingdom of Israel renewed the intercourse between Judah and Phœnicia, which had been broken off by the revolt of the ten tribes. Consequently I have little hesitation in assigning it to the age of Solomon, or possibly of David (2 Sam. v. 11), when Phœnician workmen were employed in the construction of the public buildings at Jerusalem. In this case it will be the earliest specimen of Phœnician writing which we possess. Of course it is just possible that the inscription may be of yet older origin, and be composed in the dialect of the Jebusites; but this is in the highest degree improbable.

The inscription is merely a record by the master mason of the excavation of the conduit in which it is found, and which leads from Saint Mary's Pool to the Pool of Siloam, a distance of 586 yards. I was wrong in stating that it was written in the first person, as the word which I read **בנאתי** is really **במאתי**, the whole sentence running—

במאתי אלף אמה וילכו המים מן המוציא אל הברכה

“And the waters flowed from their outlet to the lower pool for a distance of a thousand cubits.” The inscription will be of greater value to the topographer than to the historian, as it contains the names neither of royal nor of other personages. Mr. John Slater and myself attempted to walk up the conduit as far as its exit in Saint Mary's Pool, as had already been done by Robinson and others, since we thought that a second inscription might be discovered in some other part of it, now that the level of the

water running through the rocky channel has been so much reduced by Mr. Schick ; but we were stopped half-way by the lowness of the roof, which would have obliged us to crawl on all fours through a deep deposit of soft mud.

A. H. SAYCE.

February 26, 1881.

EL-HARRAH.

By CYRIL GRAHAM.

IN the few remarks which I wish to make on the subject of the proposed exploration of those regions which either lie beyond Jordan or eastwards to the north of it, I shall confine myself to the country with which I am best acquainted, the Haurân, old Bashan cut off from the great prairie which extends to the Euphrates, and the singular district known to the Arabs as el-Harrâh, with the ridge of hills es-Safâh, which I believe never were visited by a European before me.

The summits of es-Safâh can be seen distinctly on a clear day from the Antilebanon, and were represented until 1857 as two conical *tells* or hills in the most recent of maps in the book of the then most recent of explorers, Professor Porter.

My journey revealed the fact that they were merely the highest points of a range which extended over many miles. Like the Lejah, indeed, it seems to be a duplicate of that wonderful upheaval ; it is entirely volcanic, and I well remember Sir Roderick Murchison telling me that both the Lejah and the Safâh were monstrosities of Geology.

An account of my travels will be found in the "Journal of the Royal Geographical Society" of 1858, and rough copies of the inscriptions to which I am going to allude presently, in a number of the "Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft," 1857, and in the annual volume of our own Royal Asiatic Society for 1859.

I do not suppose, nor do I wish, that the resumption of our work should commence with Bashan and its wide outlying countries. Gilead, and Moab, more accessible, should be at first thoroughly explored, and every relic, whether of architectural structure, or of tablets or inscriptions on the stones lying *in situ* should be carefully drawn and copied ; and in the case of the latter it is of the utmost importance to philologists, and therefore to the object we have in view, to obtain rubbings or impressions from them. I need scarcely remind those who are as well acquainted as I am with the difficulty of a mere copying of unknown symbols, how tedious such a process is, and how uncertain must be the results after all the labour which has been bestowed upon it.

Amongst the places to which I think attention should be given in this southern section of our work, I pre-eminently place Kerak. Its history