

THE PRAYER OF BEN ABDAS ON THE DEDICATION
OF THE TEMPLE OF JOPPA.

SOUTHAMPTON, 3rd March, 1892.

THE squeeze of a Phœnician inscription, said to come from Jaffa, sent home by Mr. F. J. Bliss, seems to me to indicate that the original text is genuine, and of much interest. The characters are those used in writing by Phœnicians about the fourth and third centuries B.C., but no Phœnician text is, I believe, known in Palestine south of the vicinity of Acre. If we take as proven the later date of the Eshmunazar coffin, which M. Clermont-Ganneau advocates, and which seems to me well established, we know that, at the period in question, when Palestine was in the power of the Ptolemies ruling in Egypt, the plains of Sharon were given to the King of Sidon, to be Phœnician territory "for ever"; although this was soon brought to nothing by the rise of the Hasmonean family. It is thus very natural that a text of the third century, in Phœnician, should be found at Jaffa; and it seems from the text that a Phœnician temple was raised in honour of Eshmun—the chief Phœnician deity—by the writer of this text, which consists of three very long lines of writing in well defined characters.

The transliteration and transcription, which I have given from the squeeze, will serve to show the values of the letters, which resemble those of the Cyprus texts, and of the text of M'asub near Acre, published by M. Clermont-Ganneau, and dating 274 B.C. The letters which do not seem to occur are *Zain* and *Koph*: the rest of the 22 composing the Semitic alphabet are present, if I am right as to a single occurrence of a much worn *Tsadi* in the second line. They do not require particular notice, except that the *Cheth* has only one bar, which is not usual, and seems to betoken late date. This form is found on the Carpentras stone, but in Assyria it is as old as the seventh century B.C. in Aramaic texts.

The translation may be subject to revision, when the text itself can be studied by specialists; but as it makes good sense and grammar throughout, may, perhaps, be accepted as generally correct, and is to the following effect:—

Line 1.—A worshipper, the son of a worshipper, has very firmly founded the temple of Joppa, being prospered by Eshmun; (being) there Lord—Ben Abdas. Thou wilt hear with acceptance, and thou wilt save Ben Abdas—a servant for ever, a servant of Eshmun.

Line 2.—A sinner towards Baal, he returns drawing back. Thou shalt protect the worshipper as a son, O my Baal. Have mercy on me, O Baal, of good fortune¹ (who am) the son of a worshipper of

¹ "Baal Gad" is here a title of Eshmun.

Eshmun, a faithful servant, the son of a worshipper of Abset. The wanderer having rested—the son of the worshipper of Eshmun—cut a stone.

Line 3.—He carved an inscription. Have mercy, O Lord, on a servant, and save the son of a worshipper of Eshmun. . . . And he erected a high place (as) an obedient worshipper.¹

Perhaps the names “servant of Eshmun” (*Abd Eshmun*) and “servant of Abset”² (*Abd Abset*) are to be regarded as those of the father and grandfather of the writer of the inscription. When the text says that “the son of wandering had rested,” we might suppose that either a journey for colonisation is intended, or that the worshipper was a merchant whose travels were over, as he had become rich, and now desired to propitiate the gods.

The following points require to be explained :—

ערכת, for a “temple enclosure,” is well known in the ancient text of Yehumelek of Gebal, and has been fully discussed by Renan. (“Corp. Inscript. Sem.” i, 1, page 6.)

עבדא for the Hebrew עבד is found in Aramaic (Buxtorff, p. 1564).

מן is fairly clear on the cast. Compare the Arabic root من whence منان “propitious.” Perhaps, however, we may take the particle מן in the sense of *propter* (Buxt., p. 1219), and the words may mean “priest of Eshmun,” like the Talmudic ממונה and מני as given by Buxtorff (p. 1222).

אדני for “Lord,” occurs in the Hebrew in compound names, and in Phœnician texts, where it is rendered “his lord.”

עבדאס “The Servant of As” (*Abdas*) appears to be a personal name, and *As* is, I believe, a known deity, though I cannot find

¹ The writer appears to rely on the piety of his father, *Abd Eshmun*, rather than on his own, as he had been a sinner, or, perhaps, a worshipper of other gods.

² It should be noted that a person called *Abd Abset*, at Larnaca, describes himself as a Carthaginian. The present writer, *Abdas*, the son of *Abd Eshmun* and grandson of *Abd Abset*, may have come from Cyprus or from Carthage to settle in Joppa. Another case in which a Phœnician of Cyprus bore a name connecting him (like that of *Abd Abset*) with Egypt, is the Cition tombstone of *Horus*, son of *Abd Osiris*. The worship of the Egyptian gods during the time of the Ptolemies, who were in possession of Palestine, was not unnatural in Phœnicia, and, it seems, extended to Cyprus and Carthage. It might possibly have been introduced by Carthaginian emigrants to the eastern shores and islands of the Mediterranean.

the authority. Several Egyptian gods were adored in Phœnicia about this time, such as אִסְרִיס Osiris, and הֹרֻס Horus; and Abset, mentioned later, appears to be the Egyptian Bast. In the same way אִסְ might perhaps be Isis (*Uasi*).

חָטָא in Hebrew, means "to err," "to sin," and is here found with the contrary, תּוֹב "to return," and יִסֵּר for יִסוֹר "drawing back."

תִּצַּן I suppose to be the 2nd sing. masc. of the future of צָנַן "to protect," or from a cognate root.

בַּעַל גַּדָּת would seem to be the Hebrew Baal Gad, "Lord of good luck," in the feminine for the abstract.

אֲבַסְתָּ is known from a text in Larnaca (*Corpus I, i, p. 98*). Perhaps in both cases we should read עַבְדָּא בַסְתָּ (*Abda Bast*), which agrees with the name Ἀβδου Βαστιος found by Waddington (*No. 1866 c*) at Sidon, in a Greco-Phœnician text. Bast was the Egyptian goddess connected with Bes.

בַּד is from בָּדַד "to divide," cognate to בָּדָא "to fashion."

גְּרִית I suppose to come from גָּרַר "to scrape," and to mean letters "scratched:" the verb preceding (חָרַשׁ) means "to inscribe."

בַּעַל When Baal is intended the article in Hebrew precedes, except where there is a particle prefixed (as in the second line); but if my rendering be correct the word may here only mean "Lord."

שָׁלַם The 2nd singular imperative masc. As in the Aramaic שָׁלַם "absolvere" (*Buxt., p. 2422*).

גְּרָא perhaps a longer form of גָּר, which often occurs in the inscriptions of Carthage. It is there used in its well-known ancient signification of one "allied" or "taking refuge with" another, as in the term Ger-Ashtoreth, "the adherent of Ashtoreth."

On the other hand, it might be from the same root with גְּרִית above mentioned, and mean "the writer." The word being doubtful is omitted in the translation.

נָבַן I suppose to come from נָוַב, which has the meaning "to raise up" (*Gesenius*). The final ן in this and in the words שִׁיתָן and יִתּוּבֵן seems to be an affixed pronoun of 3rd person singular like the Syrian *ni*, and the older Assyrian demonstrative *annu*.

גָּפַן is not very clear in the squeeze. I have supposed it to come from the root גָּפַן "to be bent," and to be the present participle meaning "bowing" before the Deity.

This interesting text shows us the worship in Joppa by Phœnicians of Eshmun, Baalgad, Bast, and As, and the name Baal for "Lord." It would be interesting to know where the stone was found, as it might be near the **במא** (Aramaic for **במקה**), or "high place," which—enclosed in an *Arcah* or "temple court"—was erected, it would seem (if the text be genuine), at some time in the 3rd century, B.C., by Abdas, in Joppa.

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