

it—three of them epigraphists of the standing of Murray, Germer-Durand, and Clermont-Ganneau—have been unable to produce a reading that cannot be criticised. This is surely a remarkable circumstance; but it is, I think, capable of an easy explanation.

I have examined the inscription many times before and since I published my previous remarks upon it, and every time I see it the conviction grows on me that the whole thing is a forgery. The letters have, most certainly, been touched up at some time, for they are perfectly fresh, and show not the slightest sign of water-wear: a remarkable circumstance, as the tomb is always very damp, especially in winter. I am aware that the tomb has not been open more than 12 or 13 years, and that the inscription, being inside the chamber, has not been exposed to the weather for a longer time. But even allowing for this, I cannot help feeling that the inscription is so fresh and so remarkable in itself that it must be looked on with at least grave suspicion.

I forward with this paper a squeeze in justification of the comments I have ventured to make on readings by those who in Greek-Christian epigraphy are my masters.

(The inscription of the Abbess Thecla (*Quarterly Statement*, 1900, p. 238) has been cleaned since I examined it, and I had another look at it the other day—a disagreeable task, by the way, as a most unprepossessing family of fellahin have taken up their abode in the tomb. The little word under the Abbess's name I now make out to be **CECA**. What it means I have no idea; but I am quite convinced that my former reading, **ΘΕCA**, is as impossible as the old **CEBA**.)

THE "BUCKLER" OF HAMZA.

DR. D'ERF WHEELER, the Honorary Secretary of the Fund in Jerusalem, writes that the photograph of the "buckler" of Hamza, the uncle of Muhammad, was taken by the Rev. J. E. Hanauer from a replica in metal which now hangs in the large hall of the Armenian Patriarchate. Mr. Hanauer stated that he remembered the original, which appeared to be of bronze. "It disappeared about 17 years ago, and was said to have been sent to Constantinople. The copy in the Armenian Convent was made about 30 years ago by the Armenian Patriarch himself, who was a very clever man."

According to Dr. Schick (*Beit el-Makdas*, 1st edition, 1887, p. 12), the "buckler" formerly stood on an antique marble altar at the south-west pier of the "Dome of the Rock," and was "a round metal plate about 80 centimètres in diameter,¹ with very beautiful bird and animal forms in circles round it. . . . In the middle, on the reverse side, is a round.

¹ The actual diameter of the replica is 67 cm., or 2 feet 2¼ inches.

movable ring. It never was a shield. Some suppose it to have been the lid of a font. I hold it to be a bell, or that at least it served as a bell."

Dr. Wheeler also enclosed the following statement by Osman Effendi el-Khaldi, the Notary of Jerusalem, corroborated by the Danafs, custodians of the Ḥarâm es-Sherif:—"The so-called shield of Hamza was of marble stone, the shape of a shield, placed in the Şakhrâh at Jerusalem, on the back of which there were in relief engravings of various animals. This stone or shield was removed from the Şakhrâh by Râouf Pasha 15 years ago, and sent to the museum at Constantinople.



Buckler of Hamza.

Most probably this stone or shield was placed by one of the Crusader princes, as Moslems use no pictures or engravings to this day."

The "buckler," *Turs sayidna Hamza*, was pointed out to me in 1864. It was then enclosed in a wooden frame, which rested upon the altar mentioned by Dr. Schick, and was firmly attached to the pier. As the frame was strengthened by crossbars it was only possible to see portions of a polished surface which resembled the back of a bronze shield. In 1866 the frame had become partly detached from the pier, and I was able to obtain a glance at the other side, which proved to be ornamented with figures of birds and animals in low relief; and I came to the conclusion

that the "buckler" was an old bronze shield of Persian manufacture.¹ In 1881, when I next visited Jerusalem, the "buckler" had disappeared. On receiving the photograph from Dr. Wheeler I took it to the British Museum, and was at once informed by Mr. Read, F.S.A., Keeper of Mediæval Antiquities, that the supposed "buckler" was in reality a Chinese mirror of, probably, the early part of the sixteenth century.

The presence of a highly ornamented Chinese mirror in a Muhamadan mosque is difficult to explain. In the early part of the sixteenth century there was considerable commercial intercourse between the Arabs and Chinese, and it is possible that the mirror was brought to Jerusalem and given to the Sheikh of the Ḥarâm by some Arab trader on a pilgrimage to the Holy City. It was almost certainly placed in the "Dome of the Rock" before the occupation of Jerusalem by the Osmanli Turks (A.D. 1517).

M. Clermont-Ganneau describes the "buckler" as "a great metal mirror of exceptional size," like the ancient metal mirrors of the Arabs. He refers to an allusion to it by Ibn Batûta, 1355 A.D., and considers it to be of Persian origin, and that it descends, perhaps, from a Sassanid prototype, possibly of Byzantine origin (*Archæological Researches in Palestine*, i, 219).

C. W. W.

DEAD SEA OBSERVATIONS.

By Dr. E. W. G. MASTERMAN.

(Continued from p. 407, 1902.)

September 19th, 1902.—*Fall of Dead Sea level* since May 30th, 16½ inches.

October 24th, 1902.—*Fall of Dead Sea level* since September 19th, 8 inches.

December 31st, 1902.—*Rise of Dead Sea level* since October 24th, 6½ inches.

February 6th, 1903.—*Rise of Dead Sea level* since December 31st, 8 inches.

A Rain Storm.—On October 22nd we had our first rainfall, beginning with a thunder-storm, and a total fall of .32 inch in the 24 hours in Jerusalem.

On the 23rd, when on my road to Jericho, I saw rain falling all around me, but scarcely a drop in my actual path. The fall on the previous day must, however, have been exceedingly violent in the region traversed by

¹ The position of the "shield" in 1864 is shown on the O.S. plan of the "Dome of the Rock." See also *Notes to the O.S. of Jerusalem*, note, p. 35.