A SUPPOSED EARLY COPY OF THE SAMARITAN PENTATEUCH.

By A. E. COWLEY, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Some time ago a statement appeared in the daily papers announcing the discovery of a Samaritan Pentateuch dated in the year 116 of the Hejra, i.e., 734 A.D. As this was brought to my notice at the Bodleian Library, and as I was fortunate enough to obtain photographs of it, which enabled me to judge of the facts, I wrote a note on the subject in the Jewish Quarterly Review, vol. xvi, p. 483. Since then a friend has sent me a cutting from one of the daily papers, and the Secretary of the Fund has received an account of the MS. from Dr. Baroody, editor of At-taMba in Beyrout, so that it may be of interest to readers of the Quarterly Statement to know something about the volume. Of course an eighth century copy of the Pentateuch would be of great interest. Of the Masoretic text we have nothing dated earlier than the St. Petersburg codex of 916 A.D., though Dr. Ginsburg in his introduction assigns an undated MS. to an earlier period. No Samaritan copy, as far as I know, is nearly as old as this. The earliest (dated) is probably the fragment mentioned by Harkavy, which was written in 599 A.H. = 1202 (3) A.D., and is now in St. Petersburg. There is, of course, the famous copy at Nablus, said to have been written by Abisha, the great-grandson of Aaron, 13 years after the settlement of the Israelites in Canaan, but as no scholar has ever had an opportunity of really examining it, we are justified in leaving it out of consideration. Fragments also exist in which an early date has been forged for commercial purposes.

The present copy, therefore, although it would probably not add much to our knowledge of the text, would be our earliest evidence for either recension of the Pentateuch if its age were really as stated. Such, however, is unfortunately not the case. The accompanying plate shows the manner in which the date is given. In the early chapters of Deuteronomy the scribe begins to divide the text into two columns. When he comes to a letter required for what would usually be the...
colophon, he moves it slightly to the left of its natural position in the
text, and writes it in the vacant space between the columns, thus
forming a sort of acrostic down the middle of the page. In the present
copy the date appears on a subsequent page, of which I have a
photograph, thus—[

\[\text{Ševit Ḥadas Ḥaṭat Ṣm[alat] yit [mūn]a][\]

written, of

course, perpendicularly. It is evident that, on the system described,
it cannot be forged, because the letters composing it belong to the text
and must fit into the adjacent words. The only question is, how are
we to interpret it? If it were read in the Hebrew manner (though
even in Hebrew the letters would not be in this order, except for special reasons), no doubt it would mean 115 or 116 (according as the dots mean that the נ is to be deleted or not) of the Hejra, i.e., 733 (4) A.D. But it is not the Samaritan custom to express dates in this way. The scribe speaks Arabic, and naturally thinks of the number in the most usual Arabic order, which is the precise reverse of our own. For example, in a Pentateuch at Cambridge (MS. Add. 1846), in a colophon written in the ordinary way, and not acrostically as here, the date is

If the scribe had chosen to write כ for כוֹן (as he would have done in the acrostic form, to save trouble), דַּמֵּהוּ would be an exact parallel to דַּמֵּהו. Similarly in another Cambridge Pentateuch (MS. Add. 714), using the words instead of the numeral letters, in the same order שְׁנַה תֶּלְשֵׁה רֶשֶׁת רְשֵׁי מַאוֹד, שְׁנַה שֶבֶט רֶשֶׁת רְשֵׁי מַאוֹד = 737, and again, שְׁנַה שֶבֶט רֶשֶׁת רְשֵׁי מַאוֹד = 763. A different order is sometimes used, but this is the most common. We must, therefore, read the אֲבָנָיִם (the dots are of no significance) as אֲבָנָיִם = 1495 (6) A.D., a date which is not sensational, but which agrees with the character of the writing.

Dr. Baroody informs us that the scribe's name, as given in the acrostic, is Jacob ben Joseph ben Meshalmah (!). Without further detail it is impossible to identify him with certainty, but he may possibly be the same Jacob b. Joseph who in 874 A.H. = 1469 A.D., bought the British Museum Pentateuch described by Mr. G. Margoliouth in the *Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. xv, p. 637. If so, he lived at Damascus, and probably made the present copy from the British Museum MS. for the High Priest, Eleazar, who died in 914 A.H. = 1508 A.D.

The variants said to occur in the text are simply those found in all Samaritan copies. Hence the volume unfortunately turns out to be nothing but an ordinary, though well written, MS. of the end of the fifteenth century, of no special importance.