

But why Mered? It cannot imply that Mered was the first to adopt the emblem, for Mered's grandfather, Memshath, used it on his jar-handles; and, so far, no archæological evidence connecting Mered with the scarabæus has come to light. I would suggest that what was here originally was something like אשר לקחו במרד "which they adopted *in contumacy*" (an expression of disapproval natural to the Chronicler), and that a copyist who misunderstood the kenning and was deceived by the occurrence of the proper name Mered a line or two before, ventured on an emendation. Omitting the bracketed letters, he transformed, like some magician of the Arabian Nights, a beetle into an Egyptian princess, who, in later Jewish folklore, became the foster-mother of Moses, and was translated in reward for her services to him to Heaven without dying.

(To be concluded.)

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## FURTHER OBSERVATIONS ON THE OSSUARY OF NICANOR OF ALEXANDRIA.

By R. A. STEWART MACALISTER, M.A., F.S.A.

It is a fate which has befallen all noteworthy archæological discoveries, from the Moabite Stone downwards, that as soon as they have attracted attention someone is sure to raise the cry of "forgery." This, perhaps, is not altogether a disadvantage, as it leads to a re-examination of the evidence on which the authenticity of the monument rests. In the case of the Nicanor ossuary the inevitable blow has fallen in an article entitled "Un monument douteux," by Lazare Belléli, Docteur en Philologie, published in *Corriere Israelitico*, xliii, No. 9 (Trieste, 1905). A copy of this has just come into my hands, and as one who was acquainted at the time with the circumstances of the discovery, and who has on numerous occasions examined the inscription itself, I may be allowed to offer a reply.

First let me remark that Dr. Belléli is not first in the field. At the time of the discovery, and before anything regarding it was published, I was told by a gentleman in high position in Jerusalem

that he had private information (the source of which he did not see his way to communicate to me) that the inscription was a forgery. I believe that he informed Miss Dickson to the same effect. That my informant told me this in good faith, and with the desire to save me from being taken in, I, of course, make no doubt whatever; but that *his* informant (whoever he may have been) either wilfully or unintentionally misled him, I was then, and am still, convinced. I mention this at the outset to show that the idea of a possible forgery was in my mind, and was (after weighing the evidence) deliberately rejected by me, while I was engaged in doing whatever little work I may have done in assisting to have the monument brought to public notice.

Secondly, let me state the circumstances of the discovery. The tomb is situated in a field that Mr. (now Sir John) Gray Hill had acquired just north of his winter residence on the Mount of Olives. The field was being laid out by Sir John Gray Hill's dragoman (who lives as caretaker of the house and property throughout the year) when the tombs were first discovered and opened. This was early in October, 1902. The dragoman informed Mr. Consul Dickson of the discovery, and Miss Dickson took an early opportunity of visiting the site. On her first visit her attention was entirely taken up by the complicated system of tomb-chambers, and she did not pay special attention to the ossuaries; on or about the 12th November (as I gather from her notes, which she has kindly put at my disposal) she revisited the site expressly to examine these, and then found the inscription. The ossuaries by this time had been placed as ornaments in the garden attached to the house. Three days later I arrived in Jerusalem, having been obliged to suspend the Gezer excavations on account of the cholera epidemic, and on the following day visited and examined the tomb and inscription. The ossuary was, therefore, not discovered more than a month before the inscription was noticed, and the forgery, if forgery there were, must have been executed within that month. The letters ought therefore to have been still perfectly fresh when I first saw the inscription, which they certainly were not.

Thirdly, let us consider the interesting personality of the unknown forger. He is clever enough to deceive Professor Clermont-Ganneau, a scholar who, if he had done nothing else in his life, would still have earned a permanent reputation by his brilliant exposure of Jerusalem frauds. He is also a man of original mind.

As a rule, Jerusalem forgers content themselves with meaningless gibberish in badly-made Old-Hebrew letters, or with more or less inaccurate copies of standard inscriptions. When they strike out into independent lines they choose some well-known Biblical characters to play with, such as David or Isaiah, whose names appeal to the public. Our "forger," however, is not only capable of writing grammatical, if uncouth, Greek, in the proper script of the period, but he adopts as his hero an individual known to scholars only. Personally, I cannot quite appreciate the psychological condition of a forger knowing enough to write of Nicanor of Alexandria who yet alludes to him so obscurely that the inscription passed through the hands of several distinguished scholars before he was identified. A forger would surely have said *what gates* Nicanor had made; a contemporary of Nicanor would not have considered it necessary. And as no one profited by the forgery—and it is not easy to see how, under the circumstances, anyone could profit by it—it is reasonable to ask, *cui bono*? If the inscription be a forgery, there is only one possible theory of its origin: that someone belonging to the household of the property where it was found was astute enough to engage and pay an unknown person with sufficient scholarship to design and cut the inscription (there are few in Jerusalem both capable and willing to undertake such a task, and these certainly would not do it for nothing) in order to increase the saleable value of the ossuary; and at the same time so incredibly foolish as to leave it about where it might be discovered at any moment and so brought to Sir John Gray Hill's notice. Such a hypothesis is obviously absurd. Had the tomb been in public ground and open to all comers, it might be supposed that a silly practical joke had been perpetrated, but as the ossuary was in private property, and no one could obtain access to it without the knowledge of Sir John Gray Hill's caretaker, this theory is also ruled out.

Fourthly, let us see on what grounds Dr. Belléli attacks the inscription. First of all, he is vexed that its Greek is not up to the standard of Classical Attic Greek, or even of that of Josephus. Of course, the Greek is queer, as any intelligent fifth-form schoolboy could see; but I venture to claim that this is no reason for impugning the authenticity of the legend. When we find one of the Wady er-Rababi inscriptions commencing **MNHMA ΔΙΑΦΕΡΟΤΗΝ**, and that, not a graffito to be scratched and

hidden away, but a formal public inscription placed over the door for everyone to read, we may be prepared for anything in Palestinian Greek epigraphy. Had I had a *Corpus* of Palestinian inscriptions at hand, I have no doubt I could find many far worse departures from "*les convenances du style*" than the trifling peccadilloes (the sequence of τῶν τοῦ in line 1 and the omission of the article before Ἀλεξανδρέως and ποιήσαντος) to which Dr. Belléli seems to attach grave importance. The first of these is got rid of by my reading ὀστατῶν, "ossuary" (see *Quarterly Statement*, April, 1903, p. 131).

Next, Dr. Belléli attacks the word אֵלֶנְסָא as impossible. Professor Clermont-Ganneau (*Quarterly Statement*, April, 1903, p. 128) notes it as perhaps "a popular abbreviation" for the more normal אֵלֶנְסָאֵרִי. I am inclined to think it merely an abbreviation that the engraver himself has happened to improvise on the ossuary. I have pointed out already (*loc. cit.*) that the writing shows marks of a growing haste and carelessness almost from the first. Weariness, hurry, laziness, interruption, apoplexy—there are fifty possible reasons why the scribe may have left off in the middle of the last word, which he evidently erroneously conceived of as אֵלֶנְסָאֵרִי, as might well be, seeing that a foreign proper name, and not a native word, is in question.

Thirdly, Dr. Belléli takes up the palæography of the inscription. His points are altogether unimportant, and no one accustomed to ossuary inscriptions would be troubled by them. He claims, for instance, to discover four different sorts of Σ in the Greek "which nothing can justify," and is disturbed by a right-angled γ in the Hebrew. There are only two kinds of Σ; the second letter of ὀστατῶν, which is of the monumental C form, and all the others, which are of a more cursive type (C). This is merely one example of the general change of character which the whole writing displays as the inscription proceeds. The contemporary inscriptions from Tell Sandahannah and Gezer show analogous differences in the formation of various characters. The diphthong in Νεικάνορος is exactly parallel to νείκη for νίκη on the Eunelos altar from Gezer. The angled γ is a natural result of scratching rather carelessly with a metal point, as anyone who tries to form curved lines in this manner will understand. There are parallels (*e.g.*, the boundary inscriptions of Gezer) to the mixing up of medial and final forms of the Hebrew letters in inscriptions of this period.

Last, Dr. Belléli considers the ornament on the ossuary too commonplace for so distinguished a man as Nicanor. If he had seen as many ossuaries as I have he would have realised that the ornamentation on these receptacles, though displaying many varieties, is almost always commonplace. It is a little unfortunate for his argument that of the only two ossuaries I have seen showing evidence of genuine artistic taste and originality, as well as an eye for symmetry and a trained and skilful hand, one (now in the possession of St. Anne's Monastery at Jerusalem) should come from Sha'fât, and the other (decorated with acanthus leaves) from this very tomb of Nicanor. It will be found illustrated in a paper by Miss Dickson, published in the *Reliquary* for July, 1904. And apart from this, the argument is counterbalanced by the costliness and elaboration of the tomb itself, of which a glance at the plans illustrating Miss Dickson's paper (*Quarterly Statement*, October, 1903, 328, 329) will be sufficient to convince the most prejudiced. No doubt it was originally covered by a mausoleum, which would add to its magnificence.

The position of the tomb ought to be noticed. It is so situated on the summit of the Mount of Olives that the ceremonies of interment would take place in full view of the famous gates whereby the name of the family had been immortalised. This can scarcely be an accident.

On these grounds I feel that no special importance need be attached to this attempt to discredit an important discovery, the lady to whom it is due, or the distinguished scholar to whom we owe its full elucidation.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [Mr. Macalister's full reply should settle finally any lingering doubts that may be felt regarding the authenticity of this "monument douteux." It is unfortunate that Dr. Belléli should attack the word נכנור, which is a well-known Jewish name (see Dr. H. Z. Chajes, *Beiträge zur nordsemilischen Onomatologie*, Vienna, 1900, p. 9). As for the Hebrew palæography, the forms of the letters do not differ at all essentially from those found on Jewish ossuaries and other remains of about the same period, as a glance at Euting's table will show. — Ed.]