

ON A REMARKABLE GROUP OF CULT-OBJECTS
FROM THE OPHEL EXCAVATION.

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THE purpose of this paper is to draw especial attention to a series of carved stones found in the current excavation south of Jerusalem, which seem to have some importance in the history of Palestinian religion.

I. The first of these is the upper part of a plano-convex plaque of soft limestone (fig. 1). The present dimensions are as follows:



FIG. 1.--Cult-object from Ophel.

breadth, at base $3\frac{1}{4}$ ins., at top $1\frac{3}{4}$ ins., maximum thickness $\frac{7}{8}$ in. The convex face bears an unwieldy headdress, resembling those which distinguish certain of the Egyptian deities, such as Hathor

or Chnum. In the centre of the design are two concentric circles, drawn with a compass; above them is a long triangular cutting, flanked by two horns; below is a very un-Egyptian serrated fern-frond. The plaque is broken just at the beginning of the *face* of the figure that wore the headdress: very probably it was a projecting animal snout, perhaps a cowhead, for there are two horns, ending spirally, that rise from the edge of the fracture, one on each side. The back of the plaque was hollowed to correspond with the projection of this snout, as though in imitation of a metal plate with repoussé ornament. No doubt this treatment has introduced the element of weakness which caused the plaque to break at just this critical point. Otherwise the back of the plaque is perfectly plain.

The design is clearly founded on an Egyptian model; but as clearly it is not a specimen of true Egyptian art. It is rather a composite form, with borrowings from Semitic and from Classical sources. The triangle at the top is suggestive of a cone, an adaptation of a hand-idol or baetyl (primarily a fallen meteorite): this looks to a Semitic source of inspiration. The "fern-frond," as we may call it, is vaguely Classical in character. The object cannot be of very high antiquity, although it was found at a fair depth in the ground. The technique of the compass-drawn circles also points to a late date.

II. Exactly the same *ensemble* appears on the second specimen, although the technique of the execution is different. This is a block of limestone, which in its present imperfect state measures $6\frac{1}{2}$ ins. by 5 ins. by 3 ins. high. All three dimensions are short of what they originally were. The top of the block is smooth, and but for some injury at the fractured end is unmarked. It shows no trace of any design. Up the one surviving vertical corner there runs a roll-moulding. Beside this, on the remaining fragment of the long side, there is a square panel containing a rosette; after which there comes the end of another panel, which analogy suggests contained a pattern founded on the swastika or Greek fret (fig. 2). The surviving end (fig. 3) contains a single panel, upon which was incised a figure of which only the headdress remains. This headdress exactly reproduces that on the plaque above described; there is the same central triangle, with a disc at its base, flanked with horns. In this example the space between the cone and the triangle is filled with petal-shaped figures, which

do not appear on the plaque. The top of a head, which had a face of a Gorgonian appearance, survives, on each side of which is the volute of a horn.



FIG. 2.—Cult-object from Ophel.

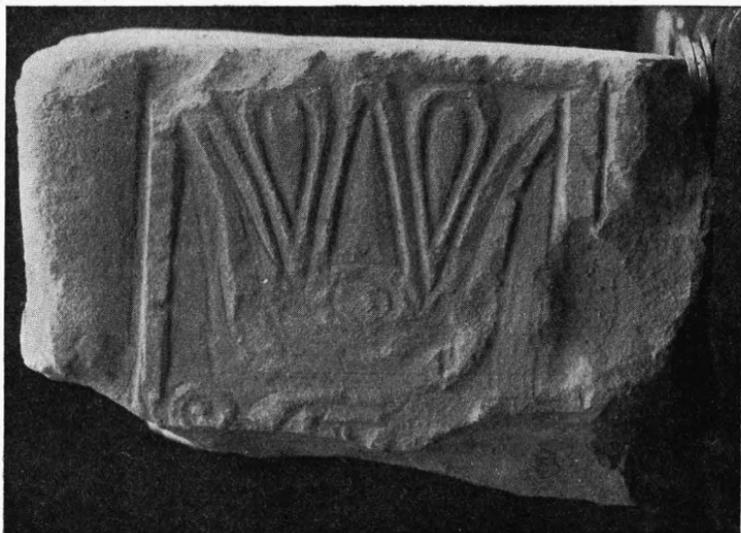


FIG. 3.—Cult-object from Ophel.

This object has been broken just below the top of the face. It seems to have been afterwards adapted as a building stone, for the broken surface is trimmed smooth from about $1\frac{1}{2}$ ins. from the face bearing the figure, with a comb pick, an instrument not used elsewhere in shaping the object.

III. Another fragment of a similar object shows identical ornament, but it clearly does not belong to the fragment just described. The surviving portion is 1 ft. long and 6 ins. broad. It is $3\frac{1}{2}$ ins. thick at one end, $2\frac{1}{2}$ ins. at the other. This again seems to be the result of later modification; for though both faces are smooth, the lower face has here likewise been trimmed with a comb pick. The pick in the former example has made long strokes, in the specimen before us, short pocking marks. As in the former example, there is a roll-moulding at the surviving corner, besides which there is a square panel containing a rosette, now almost entirely lost by a fracture of the stone. Beside the rosette there is a long panel containing a Greek fret (fig. 4). The end of the stone bears two panels.¹

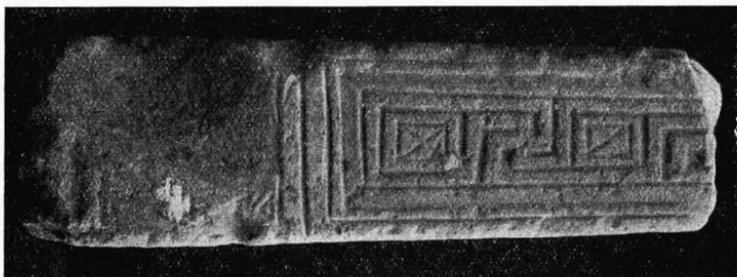


FIG. 4.—Cult-object from Ophel.

They are worn almost to unintelligibility, but with the help of the former example we can identify the same horned headdress in the panel at the angle (right-hand side). The other panel is much broken as well as worn, and as no specimen for comparison has come to light as yet, we are unable to suggest any restoration.

IV. Yet another fragment (fig. 5), measuring 5 ins. by 4 ins. by 3 ins. thick, bears the rosette panel and the Greek fret panel side by side. The end is in this case lost, but presumably it had also the

¹ The photograph has not been reproduced, but can be seen at the Office of the Fund.

horned headdress upon it. Here again there is comb-picking on the underside, but again the technique is a little different, the strokes of the tool being shorter than in the first specimen and longer than in the second. The stone is of a limestone differing in colour and in texture from the other two, and certainly does not belong to either of them.

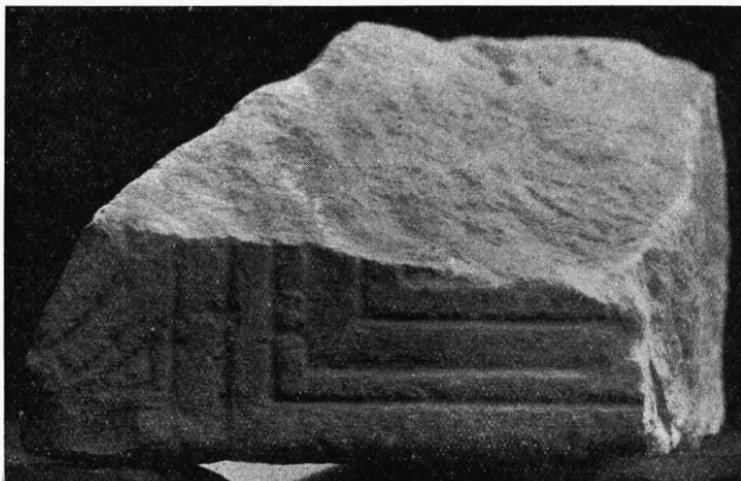


FIG. 5.—Cult-object from Ophel.

V. A fourth fragment not here illustrated showed once more the rosette and Greek fret on the long side. The ends were lost.

The first of these five stones was found outside the east side of the gate tower of the inner city wall. The second was in field No. 7, the others in field No. 5. The date indicated by their stratification and by the general style of their art was in the Ptolemaic period.

VI. Another fragment, belonging to the same class of objects, though differing in design, was found in field No. 7. This is now $5\frac{3}{4}$ ins. long by 4 ins. broad by $2\frac{1}{4}$ ins. high, but none of these dimensions are complete. The stone bears a fragment of a panel surrounded by a bead and reel frame; it contains an obscure device which seems to resolve itself into a tree with two serpents, one on each side (the serpents are represented as vertical and head downwards, but this may be simply an effect of faulty perspective, the intention being to show them as on the ground and moving toward

the spectator). Outside there are meandering lines (fig. 6). If we venture to suggest that this may be an attempt to realise the scenery of the Garden of Eden, with the Tree of Life, the cherubim, and the rivers, it must be understood that this is but a tentative guess to which we do not wish to commit ourselves.



FIG. 6.—Cult-object from Ophel.

Similar objects have been found by Weill (see *La Cité de David*, Plate XXV, B), but with different designs and without the horned headdress. So far as I am aware, they have been found nowhere else. Until some more perfect example comes to light it would be premature to speculate upon their form when complete and their purpose.

MODEL OF A COLUMBARIUM.

AN ALLEGED MODEL OF A SANCTUARY FROM THE
GARDEN-TOMB GROUNDS.

THE Rev. Canon Hanauer has been good enough to send us some notes and photographs regarding an alleged discovery which has caused no little interest in certain circles. Fig. 1 represents what

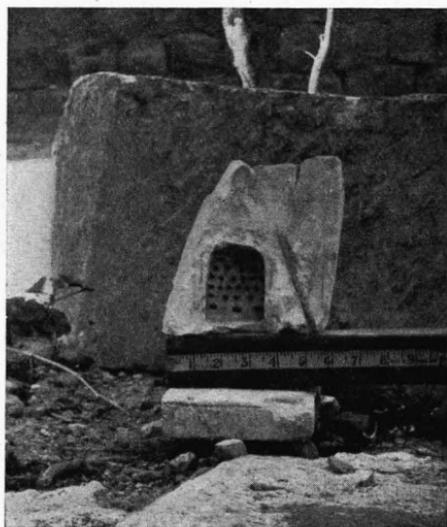


FIG. 1.—Object in soft “kakouli” limestone dug up on site of “Asnerie.”

was evidently intended as the model of a columbarium, which was recently dug up in the “Garden-Tomb Grounds,” and, on the authority of a German archaeologist, was declared to be no other than a model of a sanctuary of Cybele. Cybele, *i.e.*, Venus or Rhea, like Mithras, is said to have been worshipped in caves around which were receptacles for images, etc., etc. The column shown at the side of the rock-chamber and the tree scratched on its surface

are stated to be well-known symbols of the Phrygian goddess. Accordingly the model has been taken as proof that the Temple of Venus erected over the Holy Sepulchre was, in fact, in what is now called "Gordon's Garden," and we understand that it has been shown to tourists as evidence that no other site is genuine.

Prof. Macalister agrees with Canon Hanauer that the object is no other than the model of a columbarium, and also with his view that it is only another of the various objects carved by mediaeval pilgrims. In this connexion Canon Hanauer recalls that similar objects were dug up in the neighbourhood some twenty years ago by Beckholt, the Swedish caretaker. Unfortunately they have all disappeared, "having, so it is said, been taken away by a 'Turkish' German officer during the War." They included the objects shown in Figs. 2 and 3, together with two or three carved blocks, evidently

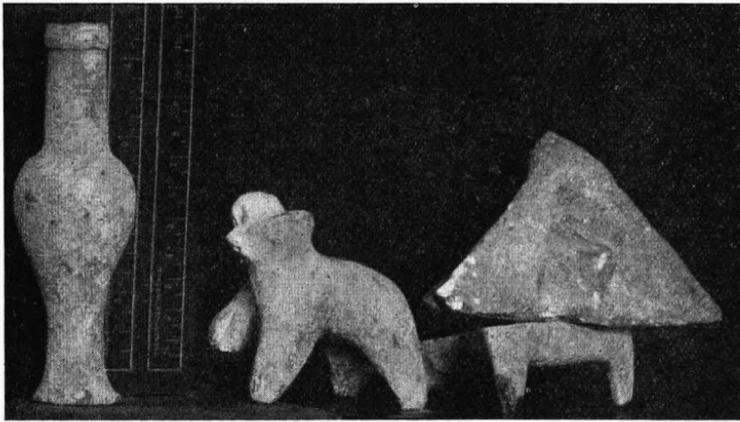


FIG. 2.—Pottery objects dug up on site of "Asnerie."

models of Absalom's tomb. One of these showed the peculiar "cable-moulding" on that monument. Canon Hanauer reports that, unfortunately, he did not photograph the carved blocks in question, but he succeeded in photographing the others, on both sides, and the *Q.S.* is indebted to him for what now seems to be the only surviving record of these curious objects.

Canon Hanauer observes that the models were evidently the work of Norman pilgrims who amused themselves whilst awaiting an opportunity of entering the Holy City (Robinson, *Researches*,

Vol. I, p. 397 *sq.*; Conder, *Latin Kingdom*, Chap. I, p. 1 *sq.*). With this Prof. Macalister agrees; he observes that the Crusader's *Asnerie* was somewhere there where the objects were found, and they have doubtless been made by the ass-tenders and loafers hanging around the stables.

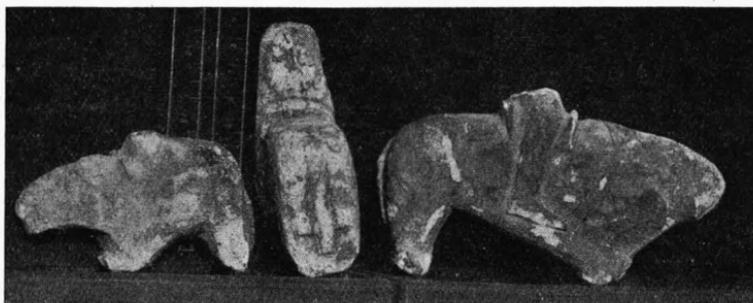


FIG. 3.—Objects in white "kakouli" limestone dug up on site of "Asnerie."

The complete set of the photographs kindly sent by Canon Hanauer can be seen at the Office.