

A JEWISH TOMB-STONE.

By A. E. COWLEY, D.Litt., F.B.A.

A JEWISH tomb-stone with an Aramaic inscription was found at the S.E. end of the Dead Sea by Mr. H. St. J. B. Philby during his recent travels. I cannot do better than quote the account he sent me in a letter dated May 5, 1925:—

“The stone (I think sandstone), on which the inscription was engraved, was shown to me by the people of Ghor al-Safi, a small agricultural community living in tents, but permanently settled in a small area lying to the south and south-east of the Dead Sea on the Wadi Hasa (? the brook Zered) at the point where the latter debouches from the hills of Moab and runs down into the Dead Sea. They told me it was found among the masonry ruins of Qasr al-Tuba, the remnants of a small settlement at the base of the hills and close to the left bank of Wadi Hasa as it issues therefrom. They also told me that before the war a Turkish officer, Yuzbashi Muhammad Effendi, did some digging (of a very amateurish character, I suppose) among these ruins, but they did not know if he had found anything of interest. That, I am afraid, is all I can tell you about the place, except that Qasr al-Tuba is obviously the site of a former settlement of no great size, and that a permanent flow of water in Wadi Hasa has doubtless been utilized in early times, as it is now, to irrigate the area immediately surrounding the site. Zuwaira (Zoar, the city of palm trees) is about ten miles distant north of Jabal Usdum and south of Masada (Al Sabba).”

Dr. Albright, who was in the neighbourhood at the same time as Mr. Philby, also wrote to me on June 7, 1925, as follows:

“Before we left ⁷Ammân for the Ghôr eş-Şâfieh a year ago last February, Mr. Philby told us that the Ghôrânî sheikh at that point had shown him an interesting inscription, apparently in some Semitic script. He looked for his rubbing, but could not find it. Thinking that it was Nabataean, we inquired carefully

at Ghôr es-Şâfiêh, but could find no trace of the inscription in question. Later, while at Ghôr el-Mezra'ah, Na'im Effendi Maḥḥûleh, Deputy Inspector of Antiquities, who was with us, discovered that the inscription had been sent to Bâb ed-Drâ' for safe keeping, but the local sheikh denied that he had it with him, so we were unable to see it."

Mr. Philby afterwards found his rubbing, which he very kindly sent to me. Of this I give (Plate I) a reduced photographic reproduction, but as the result is not very distinct, I have added a copy (Plate II) from a photograph on which I outlined the letters as far as possible. Too much reliance, however, must not be placed on the shapes of the letters as shown in Plate II, since in some places the stone is evidently a good deal weathered, and I may not always have traced them correctly. It is only by the help of the context that such parts can be read. At the same time, with a little good will, one can make out the whole text, with the exception of the name of the father of the deceased.

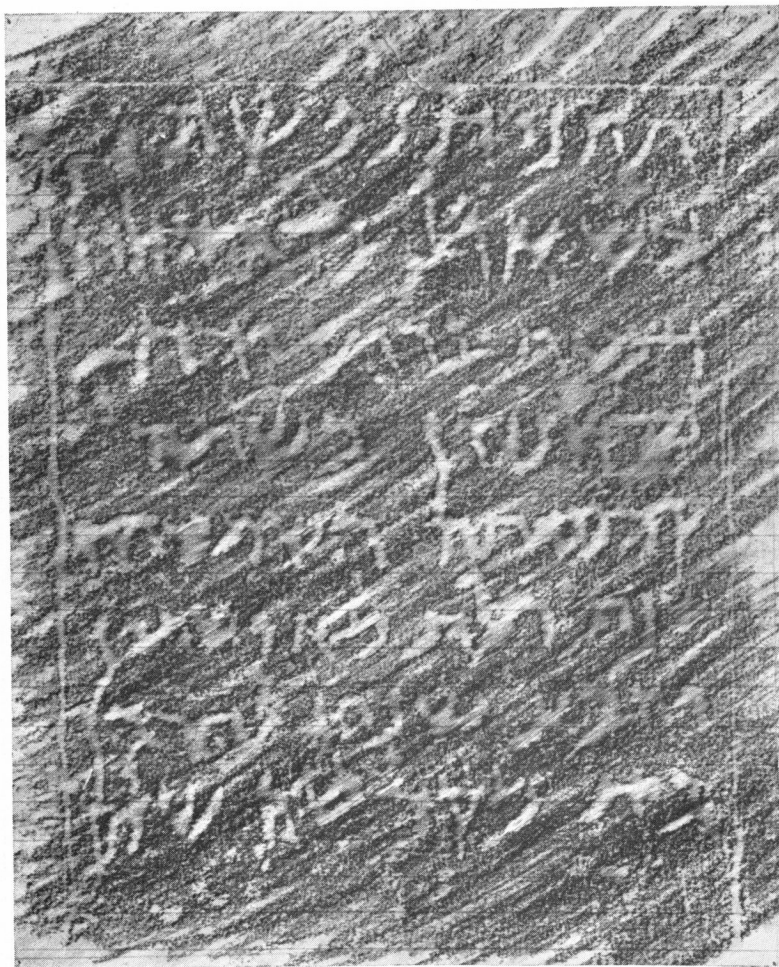
The dimensions of the inscribed part of the stone, as shown by the rubbing, are $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches high by 6 broad.

The text is as follows :—

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|------------------|----|---------------------------------------|
| תתניה נפשה | 1. | Rested be the soul |
| רשאל בר | 2. | of Saul, son of |
| דמית בריש ירח | 3. | who died on the first of the month |
| מרחשון משתה | 4. | Marḥeshwan of the year |
| קדמיתה דשמטתה | 5. | the first of the shemiṭṭa |
| שנת תלת מא ושתין | 6. | the year three hundred and sixty |
| ורבע שנין לחרבן | 7. | and four years after the destruction |
| בית מקדשה שלם | 8. | of the house of the sanctuary. Peace! |

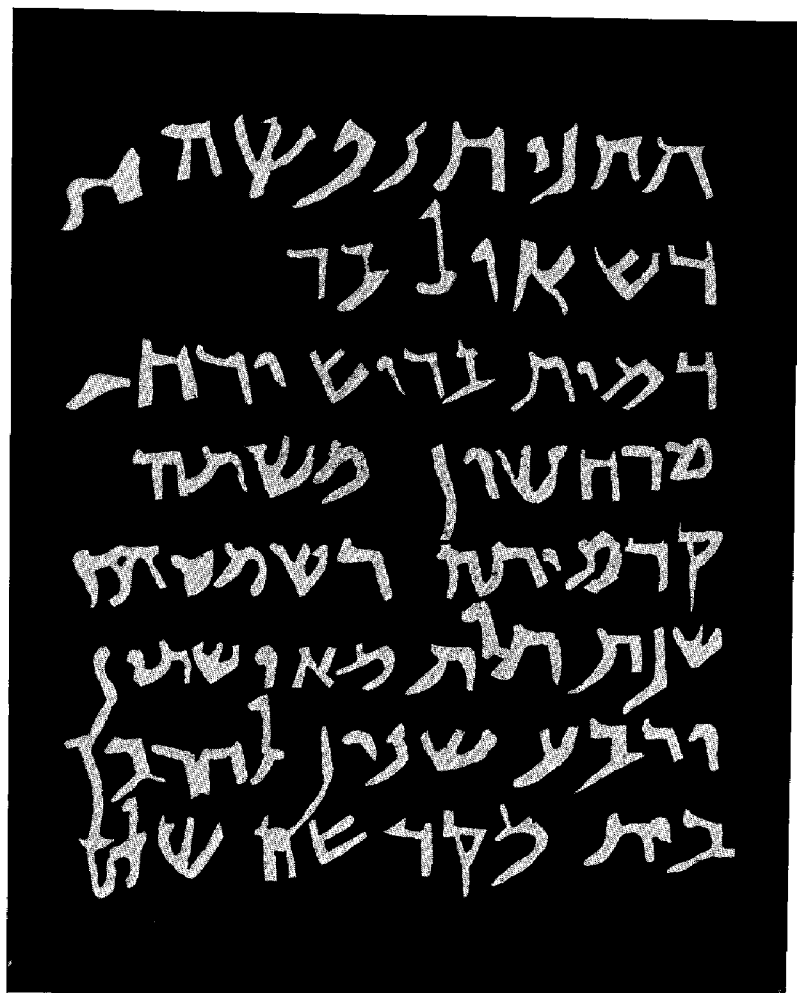
1. תתניה is unusual. The common formula is נה נפש .

2. I cannot guess the second name. Of the first two (?) letters only the smallest traces remain. The third letter would naturally be read as ה, but it is unlike the ה elsewhere in the inscription. The fourth letter is ך or possibly י. The fifth is apparently ן. As I cannot think of any name ending in חה—or חזי—I wondered whether the whole could be ר אחי זל (by a Hebraism), the ל being squeezed nearly out of the line. This is not very probable and, moreover, I do not know that the abbreviation זל ("may his memory be for a blessing," used of the dead) was in use so early.



1. Rubbing of an Ancient Jewish Tomb-stone.

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2. Copy of the Inscription on the Tomb-stone.

5. The Shemittā is properly the "remission" of debts, which took place (in Palestine) in the Sabbatical year (Lev. xxv, 4). It was afterwards used to denote the period of seven years ending with the Sabbatical year.

In קדמייתה the letters דמי are badly made. The word might be read קדשתה, "the holy year." I think, however, it is קדמייתה, the first of a new period of seven years. This agrees with the Talmudical rule (*B.T. 'Aboda Zara, f. 9^b*) for finding the year of the Shemittā: take the number of years since the destruction of the Temple (here 364), add 1 (= 365), divide by 7, and the remainder (= 1) gives you the number of the year in the Shemittā.

6, 7. The date is certain, though there are two mistakes in it: מ"א for מ"א and ורבע for ורבע. If these are not mere slips, they may represent a popular pronunciation which neglected the shewa.

7. The era of the destruction of the Temple dates from 69 A.D., and the date of the death is therefore 433 A.D..

Although it gives no important information, the inscription is of considerable interest for the development of the alphabet, because it belongs to a time and place of which we know very little palaeographically. The forms of the letters, though roughly cut and not very consistent, are in general what we should expect at this date. They are very like the square characters found in the mosaic at 'Ain ed-Dok, allowing for the difference of material. Clermont-Ganneau, in his article in the *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions*, 1919, pp. 87 *sqq.*, with his usual brilliant insight, dates the mosaic in the 4th or 5th century A.D., though an earlier date has been proposed by Father Vincent (*Revue Biblique*, 1919, pp. 532 *sqq.* and 1921, pp. 579 *sqq.*). The ס is of an ordinary square form. The כ has a sharply sloping lower stroke. ד and ר, as far as the forms are certain, are clearly distinguished. So are ה and ה, the latter approximating in shape to ת. Apparently ו is rather larger than ו and is upright, while ו slopes slightly to the right. The ל in l. 2 is well formed, but in l. 8 it has become almost a straight line, perhaps owing to lack of space. מ varies in form a good deal, but the lower stroke always slopes, nearly parallel to the upper side-stroke. Final ם has the long, narrow, early shape. Note the two forms of ן in l. 1. Final ן is simply a line with a bend in the middle. ם occurs only in l. 1, where it has an almost final form. ק has the head closed. Note the various forms of ש, e.g., in l. 1 (with a tail?) and l. 8.

ג, כ, ס, צ do not occur, ך is doubtful and ם defaced.

A feature of the writing is the way in which the letters are run into one another, *e.g.*, תלת, קרמיתה. This is not due to lack of space only, but seems to me to imitate a cursive pen-hand. It gives a vague general impression of Nabataean influence.

As to Saul, the son of . . . , I can say nothing. I hope Dr. Albright may tell us what is known of Jewish settlements in the neighbourhood of the Dead Sea.

THE INSCRIPTION OF AHIRAM, KING OF BYBLUS.

By STANLEY A. COOK, Litt.D.

THE inscription of Ahiiram, king of Byblus, has been described, and without exaggeration, as perhaps the most important monument of its kind since the discovery of the Moabite stone in 1868. As its date has been confidently fixed at the 13th century B.C., it is by far the oldest specimen of Phœnician epigraphy, and it is of far-reaching importance as it carries back our evidence for the introduction of the North Semitic alphabet, and links up with the strange writing from the Sinaitic Peninsula (Serabit el-Khadim) which seems to come between Egyptian hieroglyphs and the linear Phœnician alphabet. It has already attracted wide attention and some account of it may be of interest to readers of the *Q.S.*

In the course of the French excavations of Byblus, M. Pierre Montet discovered graves going back to the XIIth dynasty of Egypt. Among them was one of the 13th century B.C. containing a sarcophagus with the inscription in question. After a brief statement by M. Montet in December, 1923, a full and admirable