ג, כ, ם, צ do not occur, ז is doubtful and ש defaced.

A feature of the writing is the way in which the letters are run into one another, *e.g.*, קדמיתה, תלת. 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 AḤIRAM, KING OF BYBLUS.

By Stanley A. Cook, Litt.D.

The inscription of Aḥiram, 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 Phoenician 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 Phoenician 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

account was given by M. René Dussaud in the French archaeological journal *Syria* (1924, part ii, pp. 135–157). Since then there have been discussions by Lidzbarski, Gressmann and Bauer, and, more recently, Father Vincent has contributed a valuable account of the excavations at Byblus to the *Revue Biblique* (1925, April, pp. 161–193). It is upon these discussions that the present hasty summary is based.[1]

The inscription reads as follows—doubtful letters are surmounted by a dot :—

(1) ארן | ז פעל | ·תבעל | בן אחרם | מלך גבל | לאחרם |
אבה | כשתה | בעלם |
(2) ואל | מלך | במלכם | וסכן בסנם | ותמא | מחנת |
עלי | גבל | ויגל | ארן | זן | תחתסף | חטר | משפטה
תחתפך | כסא | מלכה | ונחת | תברח | על | גבל |
והא | ימח | ספר ז | לפפ | שרל

Father Vincent's translation runs: (1) Sarcophage qu'a fait Ithoba'al fils d'Aḥiram, roi de Gébal pour Aḥiram son père comme sa demeure pour l'éternité. (2) Et si quelque roi parmi les rois ou gouverneur entre les gouverneurs venait à dresser un camp devant Gébel, et qu'il découvre ce sarcophage, que se brise le sceptre de sa justice, que s'effondre le trône de son pouvoir royal et que la paix plane sur Gébal ! Quant à celui qui effacerait cette inscription, que soit anéanti pour lui [tout] rejeton.

The general sense is clear; "this sarcophagus" is that which "—baal, son of Aḥiram, king of Gebal, made for Aḥiram his father," and a warning is uttered against anyone who destroys tomb and inscription—though the exact wording of the second line is obscure. The words are, with few exceptions, separated by a short line; the script differs in some noticeable respects both from that which is familiar in the Phoenician inscriptions (of very similar style) of the 4th century, and from the Moabite and other inscriptions of the 9th and 8th centuries. On this account, and for the various obscure phrases in it, the inscription of Aḥiram stands in a class by itself.

[1] The references are to Dussaud and to Vincent as cited, also to Lidzbarski (Göttingen, *Nachrichten*, 1924, pp. 43–48), Gressmann (*Zeit. f. d. Alttest. Wissenschaft*, 1924, p. 349 *sq.*, with contributions from Georg Hoffmann), H. Bauer (*Orient. Lit.zeitung*, March, 1925, col. 129–140).

The name of Aḥiram's father is read אפסבעל by Dussaud (and Hoffmann); Gressmann compares the Babylonian compounds of the verb *ipuš* (*i.e.*, Baalmade); in later times we find Baal-pa'al (B made, Punic), and Hebrew El-pa'al (1 Chron. viii, 11), El-asah (אלעשה). It is to be noted that the name Athaliah has been plausibly explained through the Assyrian *etellu* (Yah is high), and that at Byblus Montet found names of native princes written in hieroglyphs, which Gressmann interprets as *Ipush-shum-abi* and *Abi-shumu*, and these were in tombs of the XIIth dynasty.

Vincent retains the original view of Montet and Dussaud that the name should be read Ithobaal (א]תבעל[). Both this and Aḥiram (in the form Hiram) are familiar later, and this only throws into stronger relief the Babylonian character of the names which, as just mentioned, appear to be found in the hieroglyphic form. It must, however, be recognized that on general grounds there is no reason why Babylonian influence should not have reached the Phoenician coast as early as the XIIth dynasty; the fact that Babylonian was the language of diplomacy and intercourse in the time of the Amarna letters points to the depth of Babylonian culture at an earlier period.

The suffix in "his father" agrees with Hebrew and Moabite against later usage at Byblus itself (viz., in the inscription of Yekhaw-melek, last line), and of Phoenician in general.

The close of line 1 is uncertain. If we render "when he placed him" (בשתה), the following can hardly mean "in (the) eternal (place)." The rendering "here he placed him" (כה שָׂתָה, Lidzbarski) seems difficult because of the abbreviation implied.

With the opening of the second line the difficulties multiply: "and if . ." (Dussaud, Vincent) involves a very late word for "if" (אִלוּ), and Lidzbarski's "bei Gott" seems too distinctively Arabic. Phoenician usage suggests the negative "do not" (so Prof. Bevan remarks to the present writer), which in Hebrew at least need not be followed by a verb (*see* Isa. lxi, 6; Ps. lxxxiii, 1—in both cases in direct address). Here *al* (אל) would be the natural particle of dissuasion or prohibition, and is addressed to every king among kings and every officer among officers. The fact that "officers" is misspelt (for בסכנם) is a warning that the brief inscription is not letter-perfect. The word תמא eludes explanation. The reference may be to leading (?) camps or rather campaigns or

armies against Gebal (Byblus). This use of "camps" is found in the old Aramaean inscriptions of Zakir, king of Hamath, and of Panammu, king of Ya'di. If a prohibition stands at the beginning of the line the word תמא may be in the 2nd sing. imperfect, in which case it may not be from the root תמא (Vincent thinks of תם "perfect," complete; "achever l'investissement"). But I have nothing to suggest. The spelling of the preposition "against" (עלי, but Heb. על) has suggested to Father Lagrange a special nuance, "auprès"; it is at least curious that we find the usual short form in line 2, and that Phoenician also uses a feminine form (עלת).

M. Dussaud continues "[et s'il est un roi . . . . qui dresse le camp contre Gebal] et qui découvre ce sarcophage sous la dallage . . . . ." The familiar Hebrew idiom (ויגל, imperfect with ו consecut.) is of interest; Hoffmann, however, starts a new hypothetical sentence: "and if anyone lay bare this sarcophagus . . . . ." There follow two threats relating to the "sceptre of his judgement" and "the throne of his kingdom." The parallelism is obvious, and it has suggested to Gressmann a brilliant emendation in Ps. lxxxix, 44 ("Thou hast made his sceptre to cease, and his throne thou hast cast down to the earth").[1] It seems clear that the nouns are treated as feminine, and that the verbs (חסף and הפך) have a form (a sort of Hiphta'al) more familiar in Moabite, Assyrian and Arabic. As regards the gender, the use of the feminine causes no particular difficulty, and in the later Byblus inscription referred to above (*C.I.S.*, i, 5) the feminine *form* "kingdom" (ממלכת) simply means "king." In Akkadian the word for "throne" itself is feminine, as also is the ordinary word for sceptre (Gressmann). The root חסף can mean "to strip" (Heb. חשף), "pluck" (after the Ass.), or, if we assume a metathesis, "to overthrow" (so Bauer = סחף).

The question now arises concerning the peace or ease (נחת). Is it part of the threats against the sacrilegious king or officer who should lay bare the sarcophagus—is the city itself to suffer, and is peace to flee *from* the city? Lidzbarski gives reasons why the preposition might have this nuance, and in any event it must be admitted that the prepositions in Phoenician have noteworthy forms and usages. On the other hand, is it the *return* of peace to the unfortunate city? Dussaud ("la destruction fondra sur

[1] Reading חטרו for מטהרו (? read instead מטהו).

Gebal") and Vincent (above) postulate meanings for the verb (ברח), which, however, are not easy to justify.

The fate of the guilty is quite obscure: "whoso blots out this writing . . . . ." But in view of what has gone before we might have expected as a climax to the threats: "and may he be blotted out *from* this book" (Ex. xxxii, 32). As it is, we have to assume a second threat. The first refers to the usurper who has taken the city and exposed the sarcophagus, the second to "him who shall blot out this writing . . ." The rest seems hopeless, and Lidzbarski leaves it untranslated. Bauer conjectures that the inscription originally ceased with the words "and let him be blotted out"—an excellent ending. The remaining words—"this writing . . ." whatever they mean, elude him; but he notes that the Phoenician inscription of Nora (*C.I.S.*, i, 144), archaic as regards both script and language, ends in a partly similar way, which suggests to him that the conclusion perhaps referred to the engraver. This is a practice which can be illustrated, *e.g.*, from the Nabataean inscriptions; but whether we are to understand that "this writing is by Pepi (an Egyptian, or some Asia Minor Papas, or the like)" must be left open.

It is at all events noteworthy that the inscription has not the more formal and recognizable style of other inscriptions of this class which utter threats against those who disturb their repose; and also, that it has certainly *one* mistake, and that however we take the opening of line 2 the syntactical construction is not clear. Father Vincent, for his part, is impressed by linguistic points of contact with the "Canaanite" language of the Amarna period; it might be worth while to see whether there is anything in the staccato and often elusive style of the Amarna letters from Byblus which would throw light upon the style adopted in the inscription, for certainly it may be said to stand in contrast to the easier language of the Moabite and of the later Phoenician inscriptions.

So far as the palaeographical details are concerned, one is frankly surprised to learn that the inscription must be of the 13th century B.C. It is difficult to avoid what may seem pure subjectivity and scepticism; one must loyally accept the evidence. It has forms (א,  , ב, ) which stand apart both from those usual in North Semitic, and from the "ox-head" and "bent hand" which have been so plausibly discerned in the old inscriptions from the Sinaitic peninsula. If, as seems probable, we may regard

the type as one that stands apart from the usual old North Semitic type which we find in North Syria and equally in Moab (9th–8th centuries B.C.), we must be ready to assume that there were various local types, and that the striking monumental form of the 9th–8th centuries came into use and extended over so wide an area through specific historical circumstances of which, however, we are ignorant.

It is true that M. Montet was not the first to discover the tomb; fragments of Cypriote ware indicate that somewhere about the 7th century B.C. the tomb had been discovered and plundered. The question will naturally occur whether this lower date is not rather that of the burial of Aḥiram. The question has been raised by all who have examined the tomb and the inscription, and they agree that there is no occasion to go below the age of Ramses II. Moreover, not only was there a graffito in the grave in characters similar to those of the Aḥiram inscription,[1] but nearly thirty years ago there was found in Byblus a Phoenician inscription of a king Abibaal, which had been carved upon the base of a statuette of Shishak I (*c.* 947–925 B.C.); here, too, there are virtually the same characteristic types.[2]

It must suffice to refer further to the admirable articles by MM. Dussaud and Vincent in *Syria* and the *Revue Biblique*, and to look forward to the publication by M. Montet of the results of his excavations at Byblus. For while these Phoenician inscriptions are of extraordinary interest for the problem of the alphabet, there were other discoveries of a less epigraphical and more archaeological nature which no less give us new ideas of the interrelations between Egypt, South-west Asia and the Aegean.[3]

[1] They are read לדעת ? | הני בדלכ | תחת ז | M. Dussaud translates: "Avis! Voici! Ta perte (est) ci-dessous." M. Vincent reads הניפד לך and renders "prends garde à toi."

[2] It runs:—

[. . . . אש ימנ[א | אבבעל | מלך | [גבל . . . .

. . .]ש גבלי | במצרם | לבעל[. . . . . בזעל גבל

[3] On revising these paragraphs I have only to add that I do not see that the inscription of Aḥiram has brought the solution of the problem of the alphabet a step nearer, or that it makes the *Phœnician* invention of the alphabet more probable; the differences between the new type and that of the inscriptions of the 9th–8th centuries constitute in my opinion the more interesting problem, and the way in which the later monumental type came into existence is a problem of not less significance than that of the origin of the alphabet itself.