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Moses and the New Sinai Inscriptions.

BY THE REVEREND J. W. JACK, M.A., GLENFARG.

THE well-known Egyptologist, Professor Grimme, of Munster University, in his *Althebräische Inschriften vom Sinai* (Hannover, 1923), has given us what he regards as the probable solution of the hitherto undecipherable inscriptions in the peninsula of Sinai. These ancient inscriptions, discovered by Sir Flinders Petrie in the course of his expedition there in 1904-1905, appear at first sight to consist of roughly-graven Egyptian hieroglyphics, but on closer inspection they are seen not to belong to any known form of Egyptian writing. They must not be confused with the ordinary Sinai graffiti which are to be found in large numbers in the Wady Mokatteb and elsewhere, and which belong to the first three centuries of the Christian era. The ones we refer to are many centuries older, probably dating, as Petrie thinks, from the reign of Thothmes III. (c. 1501-1447 B.C.), or, as Gardiner and others hold, from about the end of the XIIth Dynasty (c. 2000 B.C.). Some of them appear on small votive offerings of peculiar style, exhumed from the ruins of the Egyptian temple at Serâbit el-Khâdim, while the more important ones, eight in number, are carved in the rock on the plateau a mile and a half west of the temple. The alphabet is the same as that described by Palmer and Weill on a rock in the Wady Maghâra, another mining district of Sinai. After prolonged study, Grimme has come to the conclusion that the inscriptions are engraved in an ancient Semitic alphabet, probably Israelitic, and that one of them at least is from the hand of Moses. This one, consisting of seven lines, written horizontally, is the longest of them. He translates it as follows :

1. I am M[oses] (=adopted son) of Hatshepsut the partner of Amon . . .
2. Overseer of the mining workmen (of Sinai),
3. The head of the temple of Ma'ana and of Jahu in Sinai.
4. Thou, the beloved of Ba'alat Hatshepsut, the partner of Amon,
5. Thou hast been good to me, thou hast withdrawn me from the Nile,
6. And thou hast established me on the pronaos of M . . .
7. Which (is on) Sinai.

This solution of the inscriptions, if correct to any degree of probability, would lead to conclusions of profound importance. Such questions as the epoch during which Moses lived, the authenticity of the Nile legend which recent research has traced to Sargon, the route of the Exodus, and many others which have been the subject of keen debate among scholars, would be definitely settled. But however much one would like to see such a result, it is very questionable whether Grimme's conclusions on this matter are sound. Even though we accept the alphabet as a Semitic one, which it probably is, an impartial examination of the text does not warrant the translation which he gives.

Apart from the Wady Maghâra one, the inscriptions number fifteen. Seven of these are found on the votive offerings presented to the two great Egyptian gods, Hathor and Sopdu. These offerings consist of a sphinx, statuettes, squatting figures, and similar objects, all of small size, crudely executed, and bearing signs or inscriptions in vertical lines. The other eight are carved in a rough fashion on the rock adjoining one of the mines at Serâbit el-Khâdim, each inscription being surrounded by a deeply cut line. In one case the right-hand portion of the field is occupied by a representation of the Egyptian god Ptah, while the lines of inscription are placed to the left. In one or two instances the lettering is horizontal, in all other cases vertical. This and other peculiarities show that the inscriptions cannot have been the work of native bedouins, for in this case they would have been more numerous and more widely scattered, but must be attributed to foreigners from Canaan and Syria who accompanied the Egyptians in their expeditions to the Sinai mines. Owing to the nature of the stone, the surface has become detached in the form of slabs, and some of these have broken into fragments or crumbled away. Unfortunately, the lettering in many cases has disappeared, and in some of the others it is very doubtful owing to the confusion of the markings, and the want of division strokes between the lines. In the case of the supposed Mosaic inscription, the stone is considerably worn away at the bottom to the left, so that nothing remains below the seventh line except a single sign. This is typical of most of the inscriptions, which are

so decayed that it is impossible to identify some of the signs.

Various scholars besides Grimme have attempted the solution of these ancient markings. A. H. Gardiner, in 1916 (*Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, pp. 1-16), was the first to offer some clue to their interpretation by giving to the various letters certain identifications which have since been adopted by other scholars, and which go to show that we have here the earliest Semitic alphabet, much earlier than the Phœnician, and having its origin in Egyptian hieroglyphics. Starting from the acrophonic principle, *i.e.* that the names of objects represented supplied the letters (thus *bêt* being the word for 'house,' the miniature picture of a house supplied the letter *b*), and comparing them with the Egyptian and later Semitic alphabets, he suggested the identification of fifteen of the signs. In a group of four letters which occurred six times, he discovered the word בעלת (the goddess Ba'alat, or female Baal), written twice horizontally (from left to right, unlike the ordinary Semitic writing) and four times vertically. This goddess, who is believed to have been identical with the Egyptian Hathor, the local goddess of Sinai, was closely connected with Byblos (or Gebal, modern *Jebel*, on the Phœnician coast), where she was worshipped by the Semites.¹ This mention of her at Sinai under her Semitic name is sufficient to prove that the strange script is of Semitic origin. A. E. Cowley at the same time (*ib.* p. 17) added to Gardiner's identification, and gave the reading of a new word תנת, believed by some to be the name of the great Punic and Phœnician goddess Tanith of later times. These researches were carried further in 1917 by Kurt Sethe, who adopted sixteen letters as certain, and dated the inscriptions somewhere between 1850 and 1500 B.C.² Hans Bauer, however, in 1918, refused to accept the conclusions of these scholars, holding that the signs had no connexion whatever with Egyptian hieroglyphics, and denying that their meaning could be deduced from objects they were supposed to represent.³ R. Eisler, in 1919, took up

¹ Cf. בעלת נבל in the inscription of יהוה (Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum, T. i. pars. 1, No. 1, ll. 2, 3, 7 and 8, p. 4) and the Greek Βααλτις, Βήλθης, Βήλτις.

² Sethe, *Die neuentdeckte Sinaischrift und die Entstehung der semitischen Schrift* (published in the Memoranda of the Göttingen Academy, N.G.G., 1917, pp. 437-475).

³ Bauer, *Zur Entzifferung der neuentdeckten Sinaischrift*.

much the same attitude, though agreeing generally with Gardiner and Sethe as to the interpretation of the signs.⁴ He attempted a translation of the texts, which was strongly criticised by Littmann, and later by Bruston, who in 1921 issued a version of his own (*Revue Archéologique*, 1921, ii. pp. 49-78), containing some extraordinary and impossible results. Schneider, who does not consider the inscriptions older than 1000 B.C., attributes them to the Philistines, and believes them to be of the same nature as the undeciphered Cretan graffiti.⁵ Grimme connects the unknown alphabet, not with the Egyptian hieroglyphics, but with the hieratic ideograms which were in use in Egypt about 1500 B.C. Out of 200 signs or thereabouts found in the inscriptions, he has formed on the acrophonic principle an alphabet of 27 consonants, which he regards as the most primitive Semitic one known to us, and corresponding somewhat to the southern Semitic alphabets which have from 27 to 29 consonants.

These differences among scholars as to the origin and interpretation of these Sinai markings lead us to pause before accepting Grimme's astonishing conclusions. It must be admitted, with Littmann, Lidzbarski, and other eminent leaders in Semitic epigraphics, that the alphabet is early Semitic, but to any one who studies the lettering with an impartial mind, free from the flights of imagination, several of Grimme's conclusions appear far too venturesome, being indeed fantastic and improbable. The face of the stone is extremely worn with age, and many of the signs for which he gives identifications are quite illegible. This may be seen from the fact that Gardiner's copy of the supposed Mosaic inscription contains less than 30 letters, while Grimme believes he can find 82! This discrepancy alone is evidence of the difficulties of decipherment, and leaves us doubtful as to the translation arrived at by Grimme. It is not known, moreover, whether this particular inscription should be read from left to right or right to left. In ancient times there was no fixed rule for the direction of writing. Generally it was placed in vertical columns, but when horizontal it read in the direction of the faces (as Meroitic did), either from right to left or left to right. It is difficult to assert which way this inscrip-

⁴ Eisler, *Die Kenitischen Wehinschriften der Hyksoszeit im Bergengebiet der Sinaitalbinsel* (Friburg, 1919).

⁵ Schneider, *Orient. Lit. Zeitg.*, 1921, pp. 241-246.

tion reads. It is the writer's conviction, based upon a comparison with other two (Nos. 350, 351, Gardiner), that it reads from right to left, though if one uses a sufficiency of imagination it may be read either way. Lately Völter has entered the lists with a new translation of this inscription, containing several notable divergencies from Grimme's. He makes the first three letters in line 1, for instance, to be **בפי**, while Grimme takes them to be **אנה**. At the end of the line Völter sees ('somewhat doubtfully,' he admits) the name Manasseh (MNSH, a form of Moses (?), Jg 18³⁰), whereas Grimme sees only the letter M, which he attaches to the preceding word and translates it 'Moses.' Both, strange to say, agree in finding the name of Hatshepsut, the famous queen (c. 1501-1479 B.C.) in this line, but not in the same signs! Grimme believes that he has found the name Sinai in lines 2, 3, and 7, but it needs to be said that in not one of these places is the word written clearly or fully. How he succeeds in finding the interesting and important word Jahu (יהו or יהוה) in the third line is a marvel. Any one who candidly examines the signs will be inclined to attribute such a conclusion to mere supposition. He regards the reading on the stone as יהי, but for reasons which are far from satisfactory places the *yod* at the front, thus making the word יהו. Völter only finds two letters יה, but concludes also that this must be meant for יהו. Such an unscientific *modus operandi*, in which supposition plays so great a rôle, can only leave careful scholars sceptical and rather amused, and lead them to wait until greater certainty is forthcoming. This is the case not only with the particular inscription referred to, but with several others, such as No. 11B (352, Gardiner), which Grimme translates, 'My tomb is on the top of Sinai, among those who rest.' It may be said that scholars in general are only sure so far of the identification of the words בעלה, חנה, and a few others. The reading of all the rest, including the supposed words for Hatshepsut, Sinai, Jahu, and Moses, is extremely doubtful, to say the least, and in some cases indeed, such as that of Moses, purely imaginary. To identify isolated words in this way, on such slender basis, is always dangerous. The writer ventures to say that, on the same plan as Grimme adopts, the name of Salatis, the first Hyksos king, or of Gebal in Phœnicia, could be much easier found than that of Moses.

It should be remembered, too, that there is good

reason for the view that the Israelites did not encamp in these regions after leaving Egypt. This site of Sinai, more than 150 miles south of Kadesh, and about as far from Edom and Midian, does not go back beyond the Middle Ages, and seems to have little authenticity. It would imply that the Israelites marched from Egypt into what was virtually an Egyptian province, visited frequently by armed expeditions in connexion with the mines. Mount Sinai seems rather to have been in the *Jébel el-Makrah* group of Edomite hills, south-east of 'Ain Kudeis. It is possible, of course, that companies of Israelites may have been drafted from Egypt during the reign of Thothmes III., many years before the Exodus, to work at the mines in the peninsula, and the carvings may have come from their hand. It is even possible that Moses may have been their overseer there, if he was contemporary with Thothmes III. and Hatshepsut, as many scholars believe. But that the script contains any such names is a conclusion based on mere assumption.

It is evident that before one can build any chronological or other argument on the study of the Sinai script, there must be more certainty regarding the lettering and its translation. For if neither Moses nor Hatshepsut figures in the text, the chronological argument falls, however much we would like to have it confirmed by such means, and along with it fall many of the striking conclusions put forward by Grimme. It deserves to be said, however, that this learned Egyptologist has suggested many new ideas which will considerably aid in the interpretation of the script, and with further archaeological discoveries our knowledge of it will tend to become clearer. We are now fairly sure of the alphabetical character of the script, its connexion with the Egyptian hieroglyphics or hieratics, its early Semitic origin, and the meaning of certain words, though these are few in number. But the question is not solved as to whether the alphabet used is the primitive Semitic one, dating from before the other two types already known to us, namely, the Phœnician in the north, and the Sabæan, Thamûdenic, Safâitic, and others in the south. If it be the primitive one from which the other two developed, the Sinai inscriptions must be dated as far back as the end of the XIIth Dynasty at least (c. 1900 B.C.), for the Phœnician alphabet, according to the discoveries of M. Montet at Byblos, was in such a perfect condition by the XIIIth century B.C., that several hundred years must be allowed for its

development from any other. This, if correct, would place the inscriptions many centuries prior to the birth of Moses. It would also accord with history, for on the hieroglyphic steles of the reign of Amenemmes III., as far back probably as 1900 B.C., we read of Semites from Palestine (Rethenu people or 'A'amu) taking part in Egyptian expeditions. It may be that Semites from Phœnicia formed part of them, and were among the workers at the Sinai mines, which would account for the mention of Ba'alat, who was known as 'the lady of Byblos.' This solution of the origin of the inscriptions seems much more satisfactory than Grimme's. At the same time, the writer would suggest another field of investigation, namely, the mysterious land of Midian. It is possible that some elucidation of the script may be found in those regions, which are as yet so little known to explorers. The Semitic inscriptions of the Thamûd people, for example,

are written vertically or from left to right like most of the Sinai script, and have other resemblances to it. According to Savignac, most of the graffiti found in the region of el-'Ela, on the rocks of Hešem Sana between Dâr el-Hamrà and el-Mo'azzam, and also in Harrah to the east of Tebouk, on the borders of Midian, are written vertically or from left to right.¹ The Sinai inscriptions by themselves are too few and too fragmentary to lead to any consecutive reading of them, but if similar script could be found in the regions mentioned, the whole question of translation would be simplified. Until something can be done in this line, it seems to the writer that further speculation as to the origin and meaning of the inscriptions is hardly likely to produce any more fruitful results than we have at present.

¹ Cf. Jaussen et Savignac, *Mission en Arabie*, I. pl. xxxii. ff. ; II. pl. cxi. f., cl., clii., etc.

The Resurrection Faith.

BY THE REVEREND PROFESSOR G. S. DUNCAN, B.D., ST. ANDREWS.

I.

'JESUS CHRIST has risen from the dead; he has burst death's prison-door, and is alive for evermore.' In that conviction Christianity was born; by that conviction it has in age after age brought hope to a despairing world, and illumined the course of human history with the light of life eternal.

A few days before this assurance came to the first disciples He whom they called their Lord had been nailed to a cross; His body had been laid in a rock-tomb; and, as so often happens when love and devotion stand helpless before death's robbery, it was not merely the body of their Lord which had been buried there, but all the glorious hopes that had been formed around Him had been laid in the grave beside Him. Then the wonderful thing happened. It was not simply that they rallied from the blow, setting themselves again with quiet fortitude to face life's duties and demands, and struggling to keep alive in their souls the glimmering light of hope. Rather we see them bursting with an explosive energy of enthusiasm and conviction, which staggered those who beheld it at

the time as it has staggered the world ever since. Moreover, they did not for a moment imagine that in regard to possible developments the initiative in any real sense lay with themselves. When Moses died on Pisgah, Joshua accepted the Divine commission to be his successor. We never read that the Word of the Lord came to Simon Peter, saying: 'Jesus my servant is dead; now therefore arise thou.' The word of the Lord did assuredly come to Peter and his fellow-disciples, but for them 'the Lord' who thus addressed them was none other than Jesus Himself—His was the Voice they heard, His the Presence they recognized in their midst. Further, their message, once it was formulated, was not limited to a general religious appeal; at the heart of it there was the proclamation that through this same Jesus, who by His resurrection had been vindicated by God as Lord and Christ, a new world order had been inaugurated: they themselves had been caught up in it, and it behoved all men who wished to be 'saved' to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and to throw their lives open to His gracious influences.

Nothing is plainer, then, than that the new move-