

THE SILOAM INSCRIPTION.

BY THE EDITOR.

BOYS playing in the pool of Siloam at Jerusalem crawled into the ancient aqueduct, and one of them, a native, slipped and fell into the water. On rising, he noticed in the gloom of the tunnel a tablet bearing an inscription. He told his teacher, Dr. Schick, a German architect residing at Jerusalem who on investigation discovered characters of the Phœnician alphabet which was used in Palestine before the Babylonian captivity. This happened in 1880, and when Professor Sayce came to Jerusalem in 1881 he entered the conduit and copied the inscription by the dim light of a candle. Six weeks later, Dr. Guthe removed the deposit of lime and other sediment of the water and obtained an exact copy of the inscription. A cast was taken and squeezes made from the cast which now could be studied at leisure and in good light.

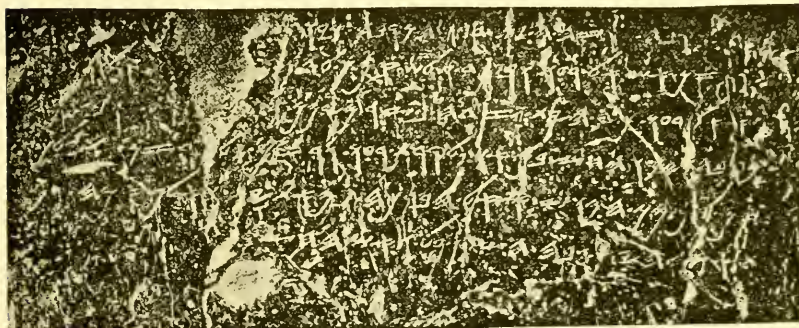
The inscription is situated on the right side of the wall of the conduit, nineteen feet from the exit that opens upon the Pool of Siloam. At that place the tunnel is very high, but it grows smaller and smaller and is in places not higher than two feet. It leads the water down from the Virgin Spring and measures 1708 yards in length. It does not run down in a straight line, and in the center there are two blind alleys which originated by mistaken measurements. The inscription runs thus:

1. Lo, the tunnel (הַנִּקְבָּה) piercing through)! Now this is the history of the tunnel. Whilst yet [the miners were plying]
2. The pick each toward his fellow and while there were yet three cubits to be cut, there was heard the voice of a man
3. Calling to his fellow, for there was a misdirection (זָדָה)¹ in the rock on the right hand and, on the day

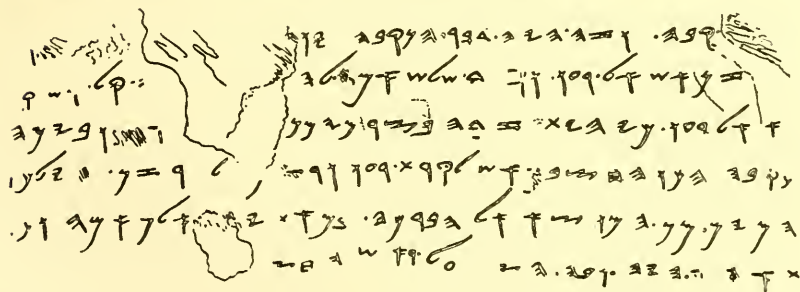
¹The word *zadah* (זָדָה) is otherwise unknown in Hebrew. Professor Sayce translates it (*Records of the Past*, New Version, Vol. I., p. 173) by "excess" or "obstacle." At the same time he suggests that the obliterated part contains a statement beginning with the words "and on the left." Rev. Stanley A. Cook, in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, p. 883, suggests the meaning "fissure,"



The original, now in the Museum at Constantinople.



A squeeze taken from the original.



A tracing made from the squeeze.

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which he thinks the context seems to require. While we believe that Professor Sayce's judgment the situation is correct, we think that he missed the true meaning of the word, which can only mean the opposite of excess, viz., a deficit; a manco; a shortage.

4. Of tunnelling through, the cutters smote pick against pick, and there flowed
5. The water from the channel to the pool, 12,000 cubits and
6. Cubits was the height of the rock over the heads of the excavators."

We translate the doubtful word זרה , by "misdirection," for we believe that it is connected with זל , "haughty, impudent, sinful," and with זרין , "haughtiness of heart." These words presuppose, according to Gesenius,² the root $\text{זרה} = \text{זר}$, which can only mean "to sin against, to trespass, to err." Thus the word *zadah* should mean an error, or a miscalculation which if referred to the tunnelling indicates that the miners who began at the two ends missed their connection. There was a *manco*, as the Italians say. The two parties of excavators missed each other on the right. But the miners came so close to each other that the workers on one side could hear the voices of their fellows on the other side, and the noise of their picks. Then they broke through the rock sideways and met. Hence the two blind alleys in the tunnel! They are still left as indications of both the difficulties which the ancient mining engineers (probably Phœnicians) had to encounter, and the correctness of this interpretation of the questionable word "zadah."

The lacuna must have contained the word "They turned," i. e., the miners changed the direction of tunnelling and turned toward each other.

The water conduit has been assigned to the reign of Hezekiah, because in 2 Kings xx. 30 it is stated that this king made a pool and a conduit and brought water into the city, and in 2 Chronicles xxxii. 30 we read that he "stopped the upper water course of Gihon and brought it straight down to the west side of the city of David," but the conduit of our inscription seems to be of older date. The work was made by engineers whose knowledge was very incomplete, and a passage in Isaiah viii. 6 speaks of the waters of Shiloah that flow gently, implying that an aqueduct must have been in existence at his time. Thus all we know about the tunnel is the statement of the inscription and further that it is older than Isaiah; but Isaiah uttered his prophecy while Ahaz the father of Hezekiah was still reigning over Israel.³

¹ The word here, which begins with *m* and ends with *t*, is doubtful, and Sayce suggests some word like "part" or "portion." The rock above the excavators at the exit of the tunnel is only about ten feet, while toward the north it is one hundred and seventy feet. Mr. Cook suggests that it may mean the average thickness of the rock above the tunnel.

² German edition, I., p. 530.

³ Sayce, *Fresh Light from the Ancient Monuments*, p. 104.

There is another ancient aqueduct which is straight and we may assume that this latter one was built by Hezekiah, while the tunnel, referred to in our inscription, may date back to the reign of Solomon.

The alphabet in which the inscription is written is the so called Phœnician script. It is the same as the alphabet used by Moab in the Moabite stone. Says Professor Sayce:¹

“They are characterised by a peculiarity which shows not only that writing was common, but also that the usual writing material was papyrus or parchment, and not stone or metal. The ‘tails’ attached to certain letters are not straight as on the Moabite Stone or in Phœnician inscriptions, but rounded.”

The Hebrew characters which are now used are the more elegant Chaldæan script which the Jews adopted during their sojourn in the Babylonian captivity.

The inscription of Shiloah is very important because it is the oldest Hebrew inscription extant.

¹*R. of the P.*, second series, I., p. 173.