III.

THE DATE OF THE SILOAM INSCRIPTION.

Professor Sayce has, I believe, overlooked certain considerations which bear on the date to be assigned to the Siloam inscription.

On p. 145, he gives it as his opinion that it represents an earlier stage of the Semitic alphabet than the Moabite Stone, and he assigns it with some confidence to the time of Solomon. On p. 152, however, with his usual candour, he draws attention to an historical argument of great weight, brought forward by Dr. Neubauer, which would bring the date down to the reign of Ahaz. But the palaeographical evidence, he argues, is "wholly" in favour of the earlier date.

On the other hand, I think that it may be maintained that the palaeographical probabilities, as well as the historical evidence, are in favour of the later date.

The Moabite stone belongs to the beginning of the 9th century B.C. If the Siloam inscription is of the time of Solomon, it would belong to the beginning of the 10th century, if to the time of Ahaz to the middle of the 8th. Here then is a very definite issue. To the practised eye of the palaeographer, there ought to be no great difficulty in deciding whether the inscription is either a century older, or more than a century later than the reign of Mesha.

The sole argument urged by Professor Sayce in favour of the earlier date is that three of the Siloam letters, tsadhe, waw, and zayin, seem to him of more archaic forms than on the Moabite Stone. At the same time he admits that several other letters belong to the more recent type which is used in the legends on the ancient Hebrew seals.

Now even if we admit the assumption as to the antiquity of the forms of the three letters, the conclusion by no means follows. It may be laid down as a palaeographic canon, that the date of an inscription is to be determined by reference to the most recent rather than to the most archaic forms which it contains. The presence of one or two late forms is decisive evidence of the late date of a whole inscription, while the presence of one or two early forms is of no very great significance, as they can be accounted for as local survivals. For example, in Athenian inscriptions of the 5th century, we find the archaic form of the lambda, υ, whereas the new form λ has already made its appearance in the Greek alphabet in the 7th century, as is evidenced by the Abu Simbel inscription. The old form of the lambda at Athens is clearly a mere survival, and it would be preposterous on such a ground to argue that an inscription such as the Erechtheum survey must be antedated by three centuries, and assigned to a time earlier than the reign of Psammetichus. But this is in fact what Professor Sayce has done, when he ante-dates his inscription on the sole evidence of two or three letters which seem to exhibit exceptionally early forms.

It must be contended that such a mode of argument is illegitimate, and
that the Siloam inscription, like all other inscriptions, must have its date
determined by reference to the age of the most recent of the forms which
it exhibits.

Now at least half of the Siloam letters appear in forms which are
unmistakably later than those on the Moabite Stone. The curvature to
the left of the tails of the tailed letters, viz., bet, kaph, mim, nun, and pe is
more pronounced than on the Moabite Stone. Here we see in operation one
of the chief causes which ultimately transformed the old Semitic alphabet.
The cheth with three bars is also later than the Moabite form with two bars,
and so is qoph, whose head is partly opened, while the earlier form is
completely closed.

But an argument to which still greater weight must be assigned is
derived from the variant forms in which the letters aleph, waw, mim, and
resh are written. The old Moabite forms of these four letters are used in
the Siloam inscription side by side with the later forms, which subsequently
supplanted them. These letters establish decisively the fact that the Siloam
alphabet is a transition alphabet, belonging to a period intermediate
between the Moabite alphabet of the 9th century, and the newer forms by
which in the 6th century they were replaced.

Referring to the Siloam alphabet given by Professor Sayce on p. 144,
the first aleph is the form on the Moabite Stone, while the second is the
6th century form which is found in the Gebal and the Nora inscriptions,
and also on the early Hebrew shekels, which are ascribed by de Saulcy
and Lenormant to the times of Ezra and Nehemiah. Again, the first form
of resh approximates to the Moabite form, while the second is later. The
same is the case with waw. The second form in Professor Sayce's table
is Moabite, while the first, instead of being earlier, as Professor Sayce
alleges, is decisively later, as is proved by its being used on the early
shekels of the time of Ezra.

The two forms of mim, however, yield an argument so conclusive that
they would by themselves suffice to settle the controversy. We actually
have in the Siloam inscription, side by side, the two forms of this letter
which are commonly used as the most convenient test to distinguish
between the first and second epochs of the Semitic alphabet. The earlier,
or zigzag form, is essentially the same as the Moabite form, and occurs
twelve times. In the form which it had during the second epoch, with
the horizontal bar and the cross stroke, the letter occurs twice, in lines
3 and 5. Now this later form is not found on the Moabite Stone, or in
the earlier Phoenician inscriptions, or on the Assyrian Lion weights
which belong to the beginning of the 8th century. On the other hand,
it is found on the Eschmunazar sarcophagus, in the Gebal inscription, in
the second Sidonian, and many other inscriptions from the 6th century
downwards. On the Assyrian contract tablets, however, which belong
to the 7th century, it is usually found, but occasionally approxi-
mates to the earlier form. Now in the Siloam inscription, the Moabite,
or 9th century form appears twelve times, and the Sidonian or 6th
century form appears twice. In the 7th century, as we learn from
the contract tablets, the old form had nearly disappeared; while at the
time when the Siloam inscription was engraved, the new form was just
beginning to come in. The evidence furnished by this letter alone might
enable us with considerable confidence to assign the Siloam inscription to
the middle of the 8th century, the exact date of the reign of Ahaz.

Professor Sayce bases his sole argument for the early date on the
assumption that the forms of the three letters, \( \text{waw} \), \( \text{zayin} \) and \( \text{tsadhe} \) are
older than those on the Moabite Stone. Even if this were the case, his
conclusion would by no means follow, the later forms of \( \text{mim} \) and other
letters affording decisive proof that the more archaic forms must be
regarded only as survivals.

But I cannot even admit that the forms of these three letters have
the antiquity that is claimed for them. Much, no doubt, may be said in
favour of the archaism of the forms of \( \text{tsadhe} \) and \( \text{zayin} \), but with regard
to \( \text{waw} \), the very form which Professor Sayce considers to be so ancient is
actually the later Hebrew form, exactly as found on the shekels of the time
of Ezra, and manifestly the transition form from which the Asmonean
letter was obtained. Both \( \text{zayin} \) and \( \text{tsadhe} \) are letters of comparatively
rare occurrence, and the evidence as to their history is therefore scanty.
The letter \( \text{zayin} \) does not happen to be met with on any of the early
shekels, but the looped form, which Professor Sayce considers to be so
early, is found on the coinage of Bar Cochba, which was imitated from the
earlier shekels, and has actually been transmitted to the modern
Samaritan alphabet.

As to the very peculiar shape of \( \text{tsadhe} \), it seems impossible that it can
have been the parent of the Moabite form, but on the other hand it can be
connected without much difficulty with the form on one of the early
shekels. On the whole, it may be affirmed that the weight of the evidence
tends to show that Professor Sayce's three archaic letters are merely local
Hebrew forms, and decidedly posterior to the Moabite letters.

The conclusion, therefore, is that out of the twenty letters in the
Siloam inscription eleven or twelve exhibit forms later than the Moabite
Stone, that not one is decisively earlier, and that even if this were the case,
it would not affect the argument. Indeed, if it were not for the early
forms of \( \text{he} \) and \( \text{lamed} \), it would not be impossible to bring the inscription
down almost to the time of the Captivity. The palaeographic proba-
bilities tend, however, very strongly to support the ingenious conjecture of
Dr. Neubauer that the conduit was excavated in the reign of Ahaz, that is
about the middle of the 8th century.

It may be noted in conclusion that the Siloam inscription throws
valuable light on the date and affiliation of the South Semitic alphabets.
The peculiar double-looped form of \( \text{tsadhe} \) connects itself with the double-
looped forms of this letter, which characterize the South Semitic alphabets,
e.g., the Himyaritic \( \mathbb{H} \), the Harra \( \Theta \), and the Thugga \( \& \). So again the
looped \( \text{zayin} \) is connected with the Himyaritic form of the letter
\( \mathbb{X} \) which is also looped.

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