

THE AMMAN THEATER FRAGMENT

(PL. XXXIX)

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On May 1961, this fragment of stone was discovered by the Department of Antiquities in Jordan, under at the direction of the writer at a depth of 2.60 m. in the west side of the Roman Theatre/Amman. It is of grey black basalt stone, triangular in shape and 26 cm. long and 17 cm. wide from one side and 5 cm. wide from the other. The surface of the fragment is not smooth or polished as that of the Kerak fragment. The engraver has employed word-dividers in the form of little upright strokes placed in the midst of the line. The fragment is inscribed in two horizontal lines in Early Phoenician script.

I had the first opportunity to study the inscription at the Museum, when I was Curator in 1959. I called the attention of Dr. Honeyman, who had been in Jordan in 1961, to this fragment.

The writer in cooperation with Prof. Honeyman has reached the following conclusion on the reading and dating of the script.

Beal, Abneh

Ben Ammi

Text

The first line text consists of two words. The restoration of the first one **B)** 'L (**Baal**) is apparently very clear, where parts of the letter (B) are still remaining and similar words have been found in the Mesha Stele in association with some place-names: **Baal Meon**¹ **Baal Peor**². **Baal** means «Lord» or «owner» and designates the male deity who owns land and controls its fertility.

(1) Antiquities of Jordan. P. 42. Mesha stele Line 12.

(2) Numbers XXII - XXIII

The second word in the first line has two possibilities of reading (A) either the L before A as a preposition before a noun as it appears in Hebrew before place-names (cf. e.g. L. Mispal «at Mizpah» in Hos. 1:.), or (B) the L is nearly a word-divider «a storke» similar to the word-divider on many stele such as; the Ben Hadad inscription¹, the Cyprus (Honeyman) inscription², the Sardinia inscription of Nora³, and Bosa⁴ and others, and the possible reading in both cases **Labneh** or **Abenh**, while probably the latter reading is most favourable since the word **Baal** in many cases is found associated with a place-name and the preposition L does occur occasionally in Hebrew before place- names. Labneh or Labo'neh (Honeyman's reading) should be a place-name in Amman where Baal was worshipped.

In the second (lower) line two words are apparently clear for reading. The first word reads as Bn (son) and the second one reads with the restoration of (M) and (I) at the end of the word **Ammi**. Ben Ammi is the ancestor of the Ammonites and the Ammonites are called after him Beni Ammi.

(parallel and dating)

The letter Ain «O» in the Amman script is not a complete circle as it is found in the Mesha Stele. It is opened from the upper end (See pl. XXXIX). Similarities to this letter are found in Tell el-Khaleifeh (Elath) Ostracon No. 6043 (BASOR 82. 1941 p. 3-24. fig. 2) dated ca. 6th Cent B.C. and the Ashur Ostracon dated ca. 6th cent. B.C.

The letters **B**, **L**, **A**, **M** in this fragment are very similar to the Mesha Stele (835, B. C.) while the letter **N** has two literal parallel strokes upward and downward which has similarities in the Nora and Bosa inscription (Sardinia) dated ca. 8th - 7th century B.C. and in the Cyprus inscription (BASOR, 83. 1941. p. 15).

It is apparently the use of the letter **Ain** in an enclosed circle, opened from upward, after the Mesha Stele period and its use appears to be between the 7th and the middle of the 6th century which may coincide with the period of the script on the Amman fragment.

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- (1) BASOR, 87, 1942. P. 23.
(2) BASOR, 83, 1941. P. 15. Fig. 1.
(3) BASOR, 83, 1941. P. 18. Fig. 2.
(4) BASOR, 83, 1941. P. 20. Fig. (a) and (b)

CONCLUSION

The discovery of this fragment in the Roman Theatre at Amman is important. It indicates that the Theatre before it was built by the Greeks and the Romans, was an Ammonite place. It is not improbable that the place before the Greeks and Romans, was an Ammonite place-name after Labneh or Laboneh where Baal was worshipped by the Ammonites side by side with Malcom, the chief deity or Chemosh who was worshipped later by them.

If **Abneh** is a place-name, it should be added to the lists of the Ammonite sites near Rabbath Ammon. Probably it was a high place or an altar where Baal was worshipped, similar to the Moabite sites as Baal Meon or Baal Peor. Rabbath Ammon was the capital of the Ammonites and was on the Kings Highway which crossed the country from the north to the south and the culture was influenced through this caravan route and trade from the north. The Early Phoenician script continued to be used in writing up to this period of time in Ammon as well as in the other parts of the country.