

ON—ANU, HELIÓPOLIS IN A SEMITIC INSCRIPTION;
AND THE GILGALS AND MASSEBAHS OF PALESTINE.

By JOSEPH OFFORD, M.R.A.S.

ANY complete Dictionary or Encyclopaedia of the Bible will give the correct explanation that the Egyptian city named On in Gen. xli, 45 and 50, is the northern Nile town of Rā-worship known to the Greeks as Heliopolis and to the Egyptians, as spelt in their hieroglyphic script, as Anu.¹ It is only three or four years ago that the site of a necropolis of the priests of On was discovered and a number of the mummy coffins from thence placed in the Cairo Museum. Ezekiel, as manuscript evidence shows, wrote the name Aven (𐀀𐀓) by a play upon the spelling to represent "idolatry." This he did doubtless because of the place being one of the Egyptian seats of pagan sun-worship, and that near to the Syrio-Palestine frontier.² The Egyptians had another sacred city, in hieroglyphs spelt Anu, higher up the Nile, called Hermonthis by the classics. The identification of On was facilitated by the LXX MSS. giving Heliopolis, and certified by the Coptic Old Testament translators, who were personally acquainted with Egyptian geography, adhering to the title as On.

It is not so generally known that we now have from Egypt a Semitic inscription of about the fourth century B.C., which confirms the Hebrew transliteration of Egyptian Anu with the On of Genesis.

This valuable record may be found in the Rev. G. A. Cooke's *North Semitic Inscriptions*, p. 91, whose translation of it is as follows:—

¹ The Hebrew name is given as 𐤀𐤍 and 𐤀𐤏; the LXX "ὄν", and also sometimes Heliopolis Ἡλιοπόλις.

² The plain of Aven of Amos (i, 5) is most likely to have been Coele-Syria, so called because of idolatrous sun-worship at Baalbec or other shrines; Amos therefore for some reason calls the Syrian Heliopolis, or On, Aven. Perhaps because he knew the veracity of the tradition, Macrobius quoted later that priests from Egyptian Heliopolis came to Baalbec and introduced sun-worship there.

“I am Pa‘ala-ubast, son of Sed-yathan, son of Ger-sed the Tyrian dwelling here (?) in On of Egypt, after (the) departure of Bod-Mnqsth, the man of On.”

The important words of the text for our present purpose read thus: **באן מצרם בפטרת ברמנקצת ה(א)נ(א)**, the last words having been emended by the editors of the *Corpus Semiticarum* to read “man of On.”

It should be noted that the record was engraved on behalf of a person from Tyre and so a Phoenician or Aramean. This epitaph therefore proves that, at a date of about a thousand years later than Joseph's marriage to the daughter of one of the hierarchy of the Heliopolis holy place, a representative of almost identical race to that of the writer of Genesis (xlii, 20) still entitled the Egyptian Anu, as Semiticised by On, or his scribe did so for him. But the inscription was found at the Egyptian religious temple of Abydos, which fact carries with it the confirmation that the priests of Osiris at that shrine also accepted On as representing Anu = Heliopolis, for no literary composition or epitaph could be engraved, or set up, in such a sacred edifice without being submitted to the censorship of the temple custodians. There is another agreement, for these similarities are not merely coincidences but the result of the composition of the Old Testament writings being nearly contemporary with the events which they describe, which historians of the Hebrews in Palestine and their neighbours must not omit to notice in this connection: this is that Jeremiah (xliii, 13) when naming On as a Beth-Shemesh was directly transferring the sacred name of the Egyptian Heliopolitan temple into Hebrew. For the shrine-name was *Pe-Rā*, “House of Rā” (the Sun-god). In the verse wherein he so appositely uses Beth Shemesh as a designation he also speaks of the “erect images,” *massebah* (**מַצֵּבָה**) as a speciality at Heliopolis.¹ Other uses of this word in the Old Testament prove its being adopted for a memorial pillar, which could sometimes be of large dimensions: Such pillars in some Semitic cults appear to have had their head anointed with oil (Gen. xxviii, 18; xxxi, 13, and xxxv, 14).

Now On was especially famous for its obelisks; one of these is still standing, solemn but not silent—for Egyptian piety has elabo-

¹ For *massebah*, see Gen. xxxv, 20; 2 Sam. xviii, 18; Exod. xxiv, 4; and Hosea iii, 4.

rately emblazoned it with hieroglyphs—at Matarieh. Others have been carried away to great European cities. These massebahs had their pointed summits gilded to reflect the sun's rays, and upon the days when the Sun-god Rā was at its zenith, almost directly above Heliopolis so that for a few minutes even the loftiest obelisk cast scarcely a shadow, there were great festivals. The mental conceptions causing this religious rejoicing to be enacted upon the regular recurrence of physical phenomena are not so alien to Christian religion as one might perhaps think, for James (i, 17), speaking of good gifts from above, terms them as bestowed by the "Father of Lights" who is neither characterised by shadow nor turning.

How much an educated Hebrew knew concerning Egyptian cults and customs before the Captivity we shall probably never appreciate; but an item in connection with this massebah-pillar or obelisk symbolism at On throws an unexpected light upon Jeremiah's information.¹ We must however remember that he resided for a time in Egypt and doubtless had seen the cluster of obelisks at Heliopolis himself. But he seems to have been aware, from the fact of his specially mentioning the massebah at Beth-Shemesh, that An was a name of Osiris, and that the hieroglyphic rendering of the word was a pictograph of a pillar . When this sign An is used for the deity

it has the determinative hieroglyph , and is read "the god An."

This hieroglyph has not the precise shape of an obelisk, but . If the central line is removed it becomes , leaving the form which some scholars have recently shown was assumed by the funerary massebah stele erected among the Semites at the tombs of women.

The central vertical line is, in Egyptian imagery, probably intended to point direct to the sun when vertical above the pillar; the cross bar being added to give warning of any deflection from a perfectly upright position.

There is a philological reason for assigning such meaning to it, which is that An was specially the name of Osiris when connected with or dwelling in the moon. An had, then, as well as at other times also, the meaning of "bow," or "crescent."

¹ The word massebah occurs (as מצבת) three times in inscriptions found at Kition (Cyprus); see Cooke, *North Semitic Inscriptions*, pp. 60, 62, 64; see also *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology*, 1895, pp. 37, 38.

A line drawn at right angles to the bow formed by the lunar crescent, if prolonged into space, would pierce the sun, and the Egyptians were aware of this. In the same way the central line of the peculiarly outlined pillar of this hieroglyph would at midday, of course only in the tropics, when the sun was vertical, come in contact with the solar disk.

This is not a suitable place in which to enlarge upon the information, chiefly from Semitic sources, which has accumulated concerning the massebah. Jacob erected such, and said this stone he had erected should "be for him an abode (or house) of God." In Gen. xxiii the verb shows, scholars say, that the word מצבה originally there has been changed to מזבה (altar). This massebah the patriarch called El  l h  Israel.¹

These two citations appear to indicate an idea that Jehovah in some mysterious manner dwelt in a stone massebah. The pagan inhabitants of Palestine certainly held that view, and because of this the Hebrew writers dropped the word for any object of Jahveh-worship, substituting "altar," except that Jeremiah, speaking of the pillar on the Egyptian border at Syene (Elephantine), uses it for Jahveh's shrine there. May that not be because it was in Egypt. The massebahs were familiar to the Prophet. They must not be confounded with *Khammamim*, "Sun Pillars," nor with Betyls, or sacred vertical or conical stones.

Whilst, previous to the partial occupation of Palestine, some of the patriarchs, including as we shall see Moses himself, appear to have entertained certain ideas connecting the possible presence of Jahveh in or about a massebah, it would seem that with only a few exceptions after entering the Promised Land such views were deemed to be dangerous, and ultimately all such shrines were considered as quite unorthodox. There cannot be any doubt but that this aversion arose from the presence in Palestine of stone circles or cromlechs with massebahs, whereat the inhabitants had practised idolatrous rites.

Strange to say, however, there are a few such instances as that of Joshua near the Jordan in which these Stonehenges of Syria were apparently taken over and sanctified to Jahveh-worship. Knowing what we do now about these primitive open air shrines, it is consistent to connect any statement of an early Old Testament

¹ Max O. Richter, *Kypros*, Plates 50-55, gives a Cypriote text found on an obelisk in Cyprus, reading "this massebah."

book as to a holy place or gilgal site, where the writer speaks of twelve stones and of a single or pair of others denominated a massebah, with the possible utilisation for Jahveh-worship of one of the ancient cromlechs, with its circle of twelve stones representing the twelve stations of the zodiac and its one or more central pillars.¹

Now we have, apparently, several Old Testament accounts of such places for sun-worship, and M. Maurice Vernes has only recently been treating of these from what may be termed the critical point of view. Those in Palestine have a special Hebrew name, accompanied by the article, of the gilgal גִּלְגָּל. Joshua (v, 9), where an explanation of the word is given, omits the article. This word is closely allied with that for a wheel, and so proves that a gilgal was a circular row of stones, or cromlech. There were at least three Palestine gilgal sites, two of them, in addition to the meaning of their name, being definitely associated with sacred stones. The most important one, that between the Jordan and

¹ That the twelve tribes were mystically connected with the zodiacal signs is not a modern idea. This is shown by their symbolic animals. See Dr. J. Lepsius, in the *Expositor*, 1910, p. 223, who writes: "In the hieratic arrangement of the people of Israel, the Zodiac signs were allotted to the twelve tribes. Josephus (*Bell. Jud.* V, 5, 5) describing the temple, writes that the twelve showbreads, symbols of the twelve tribes, signify the twelve signs of the Zodiac. Similar symbolism underlies pseudo-Jonathan's Aramaic Pentateuchal Targum, which describes the Camp in the Wilderness. There the arrangement of the tribes around the Tabernacle in the form of a wheel with twelve spokes, a Gilgal, is brought into connection with zodiac symbolism." Joseph's dream (*Gen.* xxxvii, 9) shows there was some connecting link between Jacob's twelve sons and the twelve stars. Joseph with his bow may have been Sagittarius.

Four of the signs were considered specially important as marking the equinoxes and solstices, see *Ezek.* i, 10, and *Rev.* iv, viz.: the Lion, Judah, Sardinus; Reuben, Ox, Emerald; Ephraim, Youth (Aquarius), Ligure; Dan, Basilisk (Scorpio, a fantastic animal in *Gen.* i, a serpent), Chrysolite. For the counterpart tribal stones, see the high-priest's breast-plate and Ezekiel's list of the twelve precious stones of the king of Tyre, whose wisdom, magic, and astrology, are described in *xxviii*, 11-17. In the *LXX* he has the twelve stones of *Exod.* *xxviii*. To the Phoenicians these symbolised no tribal dodecarchy, but he seems to have adored, like Moses and Elijah, a summit deity, for "he was upon the holy Mount of God," there "he walked in the midst of the stones of fire." This difficult passage seems to point to a gilgal of the Tyrians, whose twelve circling stones of the solar mansions represented the sun's fiery rays from his twelve stellar stations. In a certain sense the Tyrian mount was apparently Jahveh's home, for verse 16 speaks of "the Lord casting him out of the Mount of God, and from the midst of the stones of fire."

Jericho (see Josh. v), appears from Judges iii, 19, to have had an adjacent quarry from which its stele could have been easily obtained.¹

There was a second near Shechem, apparently in the "plains" or at the terebinth of Moreh, and so at the bases of Ebal and Gerizim,² Deut. xi, 29 and 30. Now the writer of Deuteronomy seems to have, to some extent, confused this Gebal with the one upon the western side of Jordan, at Joshua's crossing place, because in xxvii, 4-6, he speaks of setting up great stones when they should pass over Jordan, not at the Jericho track Gebal, but upon Mount Ebal. This gilgal, near to Moreh and Shechem, apparently had some link with the altar of stones Abraham erected, as recorded in Gen. xi, 6 and 7. Of much greater import are the statements of Josh. xxiv, 26, and Judg. ix, 6, which speak of the massebah pillar there, thus proving the consistent association of the terms massebah and gilgal.

A third gilgal seems to have been situated in Phoenician territory ruled by the king of Dor (Josh. xii, 23; see also Josh. xv, 7, and Neh. xii, 29). The Gezer excavations have perhaps also revealed yet another. Although the title of gilgal is not applied to it, there can be but little doubt that the story in Exod. xxix, where Moses erected twelve pillars (*massebah*) and an altar, is a further instance of a gilgal; we have here again the zodiacal number of the circle stones. We may compare also the statement assigning the selection of this number to the fact of there being twelve Israelite tribes.³

But these assimilations may not be the whole facts of the case. It may be that a cromlech of twelve outer stones may have had

¹ Some scholars read verses 19 and 26 as "standing images" (*pesilim*), which would, if this is correct, be intended for the cromlech stones, or the two central massebah ones. The Hebrew words apparently point to "hewn," or "carved" images in contradistinction to those of other massebah stones, which were directed to be unhewn by metal.

² The Samaritan Pentateuch reads Gerizim here for Ebal. A new-found manuscript from Egypt, now at Giessen, apparently a translation from the Samaritan, reads here ἐν Ἀργαρίζιμ. This is the *har*, "mount," of the Samaritan version and of their Targums. It also is Eupolemus' reading. Cf. the Ἀργαρίζιμ of Alexander Polyhistor. See *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, 1911, II, p. 269.

³ Massebah here is in the singular, as if it applied to the central stone of a series beside, or identical with, the altar. Maspero, in *Struggle of the Nations*, p. 108, gives a picture of a cromlech in Moab.

that precise number for pagan solar cult purposes, and therefore was selected as suitable for Jahveh-worship as being an appropriate sacred site for the twelve tribes for ceremonial purposes.

If we look at the duplicate accounts of the gilgal near Jordan, which Joshua is stated to have erected, we shall see that although describing the same event, they are quite discordant. According to one story, twelve stones taken (it would appear from the description) from somewhere upon the eastern shore of Jordan, were to be erected in the temporarily dry, or easily fordable, river-bed. But the other narrative says that twelve stones selected from the river's bed were to be set up at their first halting-place for the night upon the Palestine side. This bivouac we know from other texts was at Gilgal near Jericho. The difficulty of reconciling these two accounts is well nigh insurmountable, but from information derivable from the other Biblical historic books it would appear certain that this gilgal was an instance of a pre-Israel cromlech holy place. Thus in Josh. v, 15, when the tribes were encamped at Gilgal, Joshua there in front of Jericho, was commanded to remove his shoes because of the site's sanctity. Until the tribes permanently captured and occupied Uru-salim with Mount Zion, and the rest of Jebus, which, it must be remembered, was not until David's time, Gilgal appears to have been a place held in special veneration in connexion with Jahveh's direction of his people. It was selected as the spot at which to inaugurate the Jewish kingship, and was one of the three judicial circuit sites together with Bethel and Mizpeh (1 Sam. vii, 16). Thereat, before Jahveh, Agag was executed, and to Jahveh at Gilgal were sacrifices offered (*ibid.* xv, 21), and it was a special resort of the orthodox early seers or prophets.

When the Hebrew writers refer to twelve stones being erected, or built into some object, they always proclaim them as representatives of the twelve tribes. If Joshua did set up twelve stones in the Jordan, in that case it probably was so, but in regard to the same number stated to have been at the neighbouring holy position known as Gilgal, and those at Sinai in the Exodus narrative, it does seem reasonable to consider that the peoples' leaders took over to utilise for Jahveh-worship old cromlechs, sites of the solar cult. The one with which the Jericho Gilgal was associated, points to its having been deemed a holy place as far back as man, at that time, had any record of.

In the Moses massebah, or gilgal, episode near Sinai the existence

of the twelve canonical solar stones appears to have become mixed up with the building of an altar.¹ This confusion may have arisen if the writer of Exodus was copying some old record, perhaps as M. Naville argues, in the cuneiform script, from some mingling of the dozen cromlech stones with the words about the altar. The scribal error may have been in the primary text, or have been perpetrated by the later hand that utilised it. There would seem to be somewhat of a similar "mystery" about the Jericho gilgal stones. For, curiously enough, in the Moab Madeba mosaic map, there is depicted the gilgal, near Jericho, as a building with two vertical rows of six stones each. Further, the descriptive text of the mosaic reads: *γαλγολα το και δωδεκάλιθον*, but whether the twelve upright stones had ever been built into an edifice we do not know.²

If a sacred building was sometimes erected, not as a circular Gilgal, but by arranging twelve special stones in piles as moieties of six, there would appear to be a mystical connection between this practice and the statement in Deut. xxvii, 12 and 13, setting forth the blessing and cursing of sets of six each of the tribes, and with the placing of the showbread: "set in two rows, six in a row, upon the table before the Lord, these betokened the covenant children of Israel" (Lev. xxiv, 5-9). The Jerusalem Talmud explains it as tribal symbols. The showbread, "before the face of Jahveh on the pure table," was parallel to the twelve stones in two assemblies of six, built into the massebah dwelling place of Jahveh, or into some altar beside the massebah pillar.

We have wandered far from the massebah stela to the gilgals, and have said but little about some of these latter, also less as to massebahs, in discussing them, but these two were frequently if not

¹ Elijah built at Carmel an altar of twelve stones. This was the site of a high-place of Baal, but it, as the gilgals appear to have been, was also a sacred place of Jahveh, for Elijah "repaired the altar of the Lord" (1 Kings xviii, 30). This may actually have been the gilgal coming next to "the coast of Dor, the kingdom of the nations of Gilgal" (Judges xii, 23); cf. also Hosea xii, 3, "They sacrifice bullocks in Gilgal"; also the "*mazzaloth*," of 2 Kings xxiii, 5.

² The Madeba designer seems to have been interested in sites of pagan cults, for he depicts a place east of the Dead Sea, and styles it *Βητομαρσα ή και Μαίουμας*—Beth-Marzeah, house (of) the Maioumas fête. This was an orgiastic function, and of pagan character. Probably it is the site whereat evil acts were performed, as given in Num. xxv, 1. Jeremiah xvi, 5, may refer to a Beit Marzeah, and the Beth Yesimoth of Num. xxxiii, 49, was close by. A מרזה *lête* was carried on also near Gaza, part of which was called Maioumas.

always associated together.¹ Thus at the Shechem—Ebal—Gerizim gilgal (Deut. xxvii, 4, and Josh. viii, 32), Joshua dedicated a *massebah*, for it was doubtless that “pillar (*massebah*) which is in the plain that was in Shechem.” Probably Joshua utilised for his purpose the central stone of the gilgal. That he should use a piece of a primitive pagan memorial is in consonance with what we are told about the matter, and with further evidence of the anthropomorphic religious status of the bulk of the Israelites at this period. Whilst there is not any suggestion that the pillar was inscribed with any record of converse with the Deity, the old warrior told the people it would henceforth be a memorial or witness, because this stone “had heard all the words of the Lord which He spake.”²

As has been shown, a *massebah* stone, if it were part of a group of an ancient solar shrine, should be associated with twelve others. Now this Shechem was near Gebal where Joshua (chapter viii), we are told, had built an altar of whitened stones, uncarven by metal. But the details as to this, as in other cases, seem to vary because these would appear to be the same as “the great stones plastered with plaster,” to be set up after passing Jordan at the same Ebal and Gerizim in the Shechem district (Deut. xxvii, 4). In the earlier book nothing is said about inserting the stones into any altar. Moreover, on the contrary, the building of such a piece for sacrifice is referred to separately in verse 6. We are therefore faced here with a similar literary discrepancy as in the other Old Testament statement about gilgals and *massebahs*, and it looks as if a solar

¹ See Judges ix, 1-7, where Shechem, Gerizim, and the *massebah* occur together as usual.

² That this Shechem, Ebal, Gebal was once a pagan shrine, and so a site at which the Israelites were tempted to the worship of strange gods seems clear from Amos v, 5. It is there associated with a Beersheba, not the well-known Beersheba in the south, but one north of Jerusalem, contiguous to Dan and Samaria, see Amos viii, 14. 1 Kings xix, 3, differentiates the Beersheba there as that of Judah, because there was another of the same name. Amos's complaint of Gilgal and Bethel, because of non-Jahveh cults there, doubtless referred to stellar ones. Beersheba may mean “well of the seven” (stars) Pjeides, or planets.

Amos viii, 14, perhaps, specifies the alien deities, for Dussaud (following Winckler) reads in part of the verse: “Live thy Dod, O Beersheba,” and Dod, according to Meshah, was adored by Israelites at Ataroth, and three Hebrews in the Old Testament are named Dod. Hommel, in part of the verse, reads: “They that swear by Ashimat of Samaria.” This is one of the deities honoured by the Elephantine people, and by some also in Palestine, see 2 Kings, xvii, 30.

cromlech shrine was appropriated as a proper place for a witness or memorial to Jahveh, and that some endeavour to avoid admitting this is made by the writers. If this view is correct, is there valid reason for surprise?

The Israelites were placed to a certain extent isolated in Palestine, somewhat as an historical experiment and probably also as an example. Guided by prophets and the Jahveh orthodox priests they were warned to abhor all the native polytheistic idolatry. But they were in an early stage of civilisation and their conceptions as to a deity were at a low level of development of the religious faculty of the human mind. Therefore, for their mental capacity the thunder-cloud pall surmounting Sinai and its lightnings, and the mighty wind rushing downwards towards the heated plain, were used to demonstrate to them the existence of God and the sacred sites of the land, in some cases taken over for Jahveh's meeting places.

To promote a pure monotheism, one sole shrine for the only Deity, was more proper and significant, and for that purpose Zion was in course of time selected as Jahveh's single earthly meeting-place. This unique holy place may have been made a *sine quâ non*, because it became patent that so attractive to the Israelites were the immoral rites of the various races scattered in Palestine, that if they associated in any way with the pre-Hebrew religious places, the temptation to become idolators was irresistible. Even when all that could be done by way of warning, and by ceasing even to admit that such sites had been used for offerings to, or memorials of, Jahveh, it in some cases proved ineffective, for of Bethel itself, which, before it received that title, may have been a Beth-Shemesh, it was said that the people went there not as adorers of Jahveh, but "to transgress."

Such a history of misdoing, so far from diminishing our belief in the antiquity and truthfulness of the record, should augment it. What Teuton writers call a tendency writer, would have concealed such failures. We see, because of these admitted facts, that a progressive revelation was being unrolled. Moses, at the beginning of the Hebrew literature, likewise never minced matters. He was not put forth to write a panegyric of the patriarchs. Had that been his aim, and were he an ordinary pagan mythographer, his Abraham would have been a *rara avis*, a Mesopotamian monotheist. But he tells his people frankly that their ancestors, when beyond the river, worshipped other gods. Even when the Promised Land

became their possession, many persisted in so doing. It needed the cruelties of the Captivities and the atrocities of Antiochus to drive the loyal remnant of the Jewish race into permanent faith in the one Jehovah, who was also their old Elohim, and thus prepare the way for the coming of Messiah.¹

ARCHAEOLOGICA.

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THE excellent work of Dr. Camden M. Cobern upon *The Bearing of New Archaeological Discoveries upon New Testament Times and History* will so certainly be called for in a second edition, that some suggestions as to references to further matters at present omitted may be welcome.

The Nabatean inscription in the Epigraphical Volume of the Princeton Expedition to Syria, referring to Philip Tetrarch of Ituraea and Tracoonitis, is not quoted, neither are the coins which substantiate his reign. The manuscripts derived from Egypt giving very early copies of portions of the New Testament and also many concerning the Old Testament are enumerated, but the epigraphical quotations from Scripture receive but little attention, although their early textual value is very considerable. They may be found, as far as those discovered up to ten years ago, in the article "Citations" in the *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne*, edited by Dom Cabrol.

Some important ones concerning the Gospels are to be read in an essay by M. Lefebvre in the *Annales of the Musée du Caire*. Though so much is related by Dr. Cobern pertaining to primitive Egyptian Christian literature as found in manuscripts and papyri, the important *Prayer Book of Serapion*, edited by Dr. Wordsworth, is not referred to. Neither also is the early Syriac book—the

¹ In reference to Josh. v, 9, "This day have I rolled away the reproach from off you, wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal," M. Vernes notes the play upon the word *gallôthi* (גללתי), from the root *gālal*, the "rolling away" of the Egyptian reproach, and the name *gilgal*, "rolling." He also connects the word with the *gal*, "heap," or tumulus of Genesis xxxi, 47.