THE ALPHABET — ITS INVENTION AND LETTER NAMES

Much has been written about the alphabet its letters, meaning and inventors; yet general agreement on this subject has so far eluded investigators. Most Greek and Latin writers in antiquity ascribed its invention to the Phoenicians; Herodotus, followed by Lucan, Pliny, Pomponius Mela, Clement of Alexandria and Diodorus Siculus present this belief. Eusebius quotes a fragment from Sanchoniathon who claims that "Thoth the Egyptian was the teacher of the Phoenicians in the art of writing". This belief is accepted by Plato, Plutarch. And Diodorus Siculus. Tacitus[1] notes that the alphabetic letters were brought to Phoenicia from Egypt. Herodotus (V. 58 – 60), claims that the Alphabet was brought to Greece by a Phoenician named Kadmos, and that the Greek Alphabetic letters were therefore called Kadmea Grammata, or Kadmon Tipoi. He himself refers to them as Phoinikea Grammata. In fact, although the belief that the Phoenicians invented the alphabet is common to most Greek and Latin writers in antiquity some quote traditions which were understood to refer its invention variously to Orpheus, Hermes, Linus etc.[2] According to Diodorus Siculus: "...when Kadmos brought from Phoenicia the letters, as they are called, Linus was again the first to transfer them into the Greek language, to give a name to each character, and to fix its shape."[3] Another tradition ascribed the invention of the Greek script to Palamedes and says of him that he adapted the Phoenician letters to the needs of the Greek language. Some of the ancient critics tend to mediate between the different versions by stating that the first alphabet of Kadmos contained only sixteen letters and that Palamedes added new ones[4].

Tacitus[5] states: "...the tradition runs that it was Cadmus arriving with a phoenician fleet, who taught the art to the still uncivilized Greek people. Others relate that Cecrops of Athens (or Linus of Thebes) and in the Trojan era, Palamedes of Argos, invented sixteen letters, the rest being added by

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1   Annals, XI, 14.
2   Cohen, La Grande Invention de L'ecriture et son Evolution, p. 144.
     Diringer, The Alphabet a Key To History of Mankind, pp. 450 – 451
     Lenormant, Alphabetum In, Dictionnaire Des Antiquitès etc. pp. 188 – 218.
3   Diod. Sic. III – 67.
4   Lenormant, ibid. p. 206.
5   Tacitus, Annals, XI–14, Loeb Classical Library.

different authors, particularly Simonides.". Pliny[6] writes: "Gellinus hold that it was invented in Egypt by Mercury, while others think it was discovered in Syria, both schools of thought believe that Cadmus imported an alphabeth of sixteen letters into Greece from Phoenicia and that to these Palamedes at the time of the Trojan war added the four characters Z, ψ, Φ, X, and after him Simonides the Lyric poet added another four Υ, Ξ, Ω, θ".

Caius Julius Higginus[7] records "that the fates invented the seven letters Alpha (onicron), Upsilon, Eta, Iota, Beta, and Tau, or alternatively that Mercury invented them after watching the flight of cranes which make letters as they fly. That Palamedes, son of Nauplius, invented eleven others, that Epicharmos of Sicily added Theta and Chi (or Psi and Pi). That Simonides added: Omega, Epsilon, Zeta and Phi."

On the face of it these traditions seem to contradict each other but according to Higginus Mercury invented the letters "after watching the flight of cranes which make letters as they fly"; obviously this means that he is referring to the form of the letters only, that is, to their signs and not to their names. Accordingly all the different traditions must be taken as referring to the invention of the letter signs and their modification but not the invention of the alphabet itself nor to its letter names. This is also to be understood from Herodotus who notes[8]: "And originally they shaped their letters exactly like all the other Phoenicians, but afterwards, in course of time, they changed by degrees their language, and together with it the form likewise of their characters...the Phoenician letters were accordingly adopted by them, but with some variation in the shape of a few.". He does not refer to any change whatsoever in the letter names. This is to be understood also from the Tacitus and Pliny references cited above. Lenormant reached the same conclusion by another route and writes; "All such traditions do not refer to the prime introduction of the Phoenician alphabet to the Greeks, but to the work of modifcation that the Greek inhabitants did to the alphabet brought by the Canaanite sailors, so to adapt it to their language and pronunciation."[9]

In modern times various theories concerning the origin of the alphabet have been advanced[10]; one general theory connects the origin of the alphabet

6   Pliny, Natural History, VII – 56 (192).
7   Hygini Fabulae 277. H. I. Rose, Lvgdvni Batavorum, 1933, Leyden. Translation quoted from R. Graves, The White Goddess, p. 224.
8   V– 58, Translation G. Rawlinson, The History of Herodotus, New York, 1947. p. 284.
9   Lenormant, ibid. p. 205."Toute cette categorie de traditions se rapporte non a la premiere introduction de L'Alphabet Phénicienne chez les habitants de la Grece, mais au travaille de modification que ces habitants firent subir a l'Alphabet apporte' par les navigateurs Chananeen pour l'appliquer a leur langue et a leur organe."
10   See: Em. de Rougé, Memoire sur L'origine Égyptienne De L'alphabet Phénicien.

with Egyptian writing, and this theory may be divided into three sub – theories according to whichever stage in the development of this script scholars took as their starting – point.

Hieroglyphic–advanced by Champollion, Salvolini, Lenormant, Halevi etc.

Hieratic–Luzato, De – Rougé, Taylor, Kiele, Mallon, Montet, Ronzevale, and others.

Demotic – Bauer.

Other theories try to connect the invention of the alphabet with the cuneiform script (Sumeric, Babylonian, Assyrian etc.)

Evans (in 1909)[11] followed by Reinach, Dussaud and Macalister, developed the theory that the alphabet was taken from Crete to Canaan by the Philistines (believed to be natives of Crete) and from them borrowed by the Phoenicians who in their turn diffused it. This theory is referred to by Gardiner as "mere paradox.[12]

Within the context of the Greek language no explanation for the names of the individual letters could be found, whereas it was possible to explain most of them in the Hebrew language, for this reason scholars were inclined to look for the alphabet origin in semitic languages and in the area of former Canaan.[13]

In 1905 several inscriptions written in an alphabetic script with strong hieroglyphic leanings were found by Petrie in the region of Serabit el Khadem in Sinai. These inscriptions were ascribed by him to the period of Thotmes III and Queen Hatsepsut (c. 1500 B. C.)[14]. A few years later other inscriptions of this type were found in the same region (by Lake and Blake of Harvard University).[15] These inscriptions, eventually called by Leibovitz Proto–Sinaitic, were studied by the Egyptologist Alan Gardiner. At a meeting of the British Archaeological Society held in Manchester in 1915, Gardiner first advanced the theory that the Sinai inscriptions should be considered an intermediate form of writing between the Egyptian hieroglyphs and the Semitic alphabet. In his view, the Sinai script showed clear evidence of its derivation from the Egyptian hieratic, and at the same time represented the Greco–Phoenician alphabet at a stage when its individual characters still

Dunand, Byblia Grammata, Tome II, p. 173.
Diringer, The Origins of The Alphabet, Antiquity, 1943, pp. 77–90.
 – The Alphabet, A Key to History Of Mankind, pp. 195 –197.
MacAlister, The Philistines etc. pp. 126–130.

11   Evans, Scripta Minoa. p. 2.
12   Gardiner, The Egyptian Origin of The Semitic Alphabet, JEA. 1916, p. 14.
13   Atkinson, Alphabet, EB. 1929, 14th Edit. p. 679b
14   Petrie, Researces In Sinai pp. 130–131. Gardiner, ibid. p. 13.
     Cowley, The Origin of The Semitic Alphabet, JEA. 1916. p. 17.
15   In the course of time, some inscriptions were found also in Israel

showed a close resemblance to the objects signified by their Semitic letter–names.[16]

Thus Gardiner came to regard the alphabetic script as originating from the Proto–Sinaitic writing, and moreover, he followed Nöldeke and Gesenius, in maintaining that the names of the alphabetic letters were derived acrophonically, i. e., "The forms of the letters originally represent the rude outlines of perceptible objects, the names of which, respectively, begin with the consonant represented "thus the sign of the letter Alpha (Aleph) (𐤀) is regarded as representing the form of an ox's head (in Hebrew Ox = אלוף Aluph); from here the name Alpha (or Aleph), where the first consonant A (א) is the one represented by the sign. The form of the sign of the letter Beta (or Bet.) (𐤁) is considered to resemble a house in Hebrew Bait – (בית), hence the name that begins with the consonant represented ב (B). Gamma (𐤂) Gammal = Camel; Delta (Δ) Delet=door. The same applies to all the other letters[17]). Gardiner published his views in 1916 (in the Journal of Egyptian Archaeology), at the same time with the views of Sayce and Cowley (1916), followed by Sethe (1917), Buttin (1928) and others.

The theory which sees the proto–Sinaitic Script as the origin of the phonetic alphabet and its letters as acrophonically derived is the most widely accepted and popular today.[18]

It is mostly Gesenius who gave this theory its widespread and enlarged popularity. However, it should be noted that there were scholars who strongly disagreed with it, including Lenormant, Dunand, Bauer Halevi and Diringer.[19]

On the other hand, many of the letters cannot be explained in this way, and for some of them the existing explanations are more imaginative than real. The form of the letter Gamma (𐤂) (Gimel), supposed to signify a Camel, does not resemble either the outlines of a Camel, or its hump. May be the ancients were primitive, but we can assume that at least they knew how to draw a camel. As Halevi writes: "Aleph ne rappelle en rien une tete de boeuf; Bet ne resemble pas a une maison, pas meme a une tente; Gimmel n'est pas plus un chameau que Daleth n'est une porte, etc. ("Aleph does not remind

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16   Gardiner, The Sinai Script And The Origin of The Alphabet, PEQ. 1929, pp. 48–55.
      The Egyptian Origin of The Semitic Alphabet, JEA, 1916, pp. 1–16.
17   See: Gesenius, The Hebrew Grammar, pp. 27–28.
      Lidzbarski, Alphabet–The Hebrew, The Jewish Encyclopedia. 1916, p. 439
      The reference is to the ancient forms of the letters. For the forms and names of letters see Pl. x.
18   However Dunand claims that the Proto–Sinaitic inscriptions are not proved to be either Semitic nor Alphabetic. Dunand, Byblia Grammata, p. 172.
19   Diringer, The Story of The Alephbeth, p. 39.
      – The Alephbeth – A Key To History of Mankind, pp. 200; 219–220.
      Montet, L'origine Égyptienne De L'alphabeth Phénicien, pp. 294–305.

one at all of an ox's head; Bet bears no resemblance to a house or even a tent; Gimmel is no more a Camel than Daleth is a door").[20]

Yeivin notes[21]: "We cannot disregard the fact that for many letters it is difficult to find a pictorial resemblance even if we extend our imagination to its limits".

Acceptance of the acrophonic principle thus logically involves accepting the proposition that the letter–name is derived in each case from an object–name whose ideogram also stands as sign for the initial sound of this same object–name. However in the heat of the discussion on the merits and demerits of acrophony, scholars have tended to lose sight of the main point, namely that in their very nature these initial sounds are designed to reflect and convey the basic natural sounds which anatomically a human being is capable of producing; and that in the formation of the alphabet these sounds preceded both the letter–names and the object–names from which, in the acrophonic theory, the letters are said to be derived. In other words: one should never forget that the natural anatomic sounds came first– and that the phonetic script intended to perpetuate and convey these sounds and not their names. This proposition constitutes the fundamental basis and in it abides the uniqueness of any phonetic script designed to cover the whole gamut of anatomo – phonetic possibilities.

Accordingly, the anatomic sounds which make the initial consonant of the letter– names inevitably had to be the nuclear and key elements in the formation of the phonetic alphabet and they had to precede the formation of the letter– names and of their signs – and not the other way round. It is the anatomic sounds that were expressed by the names, and not the names by the sounds. Yet if the acrophonic principle is to remain valid, the object–names would have to form the basis for the determination of the initial sound (consonant) and its adaptation to the object–names and not the reverse. This, of course, contradicts all logic.

The champions of the acrophonic principle attempt to offer explanations for the letter–names, yet they do not give reasons why these specific names were chosen to represent the basic anatomic sounds, why, for instance, the name Aleph (or Alpha) and not Adam or Abir etc. – after all, the latter two

20 Halevi, Nouvelles Considerations Sur L'origine De L'alphabeth, RS. 1904 (IX), p. 366.
21 Yeivin, On Problems of The Origin of The Alphabeth Leshonenu, 17, B–C, p. 69. (Heb.)
    See also: Jean, Les Hyksos Sont Ils Les Inventeurs De L'alphabeth?, SY. IX, 1928, pp. 278–299.
    Garbini, The question of the Alphabet, in 'The Phoenicians', Bompiani, pp101–102.
    Sabatino Moscati, The world of the Phoenicians. p. 90. weidenfeld & nicolson 1968.
    They express a similar belief.

also articulate the basic anatomic sound A (א) Yet suppose one grants the acrophonic principle, one still will be puzzled why there should be a difference between the letter–names and the object– names, from which the latter are said to be derived. Why were the letter–names not straightaway Aluph, Baith, Gammal, Delet, etc., i. e. congruent with the object–names said to be contained in the symbols? Why the need to change these names to Alpha, Beta, Gamma, etc. or Aleph, Beth, Gimmel etc.? If an identity between the letter–names and the object–names existed, not only would the acrophonic principle be unaffected, but from the mnemotechnic viewpoint it would be much easier to memorize the letters because of the lack of duplication. And if it be claimed that such an identity existed in the past but was lost with the passage of time, how then explain that the working of time did not disturb the order of the letters yet completely changed their names?

One may also note Tur–Sinai's claim that the acrophonic principle is incapable of explaining why the order of the letters is the same in different languages.

What arises from the preceding is that even if we admit the acrophonic principle for the letter–names, it is evident that acrophony could have been established only after the letter– names already existed. At most one may regard the object– names as having been adapted to the corresponding letter–names, and not vice cersa, as the accepted version of the acrophonic theory would have it; hence, the explanation for the letter – names must be sought in some other principle than acrophony.

The Talmud explains the alphabetic letters by connecting them not with pictures (ideograms) but with a mnemonic verse: "The Rabbis told R. Joshua, R. Levi: Children have come to the Beth Hamidrash (Rabbinic school – N. G.) and said things (in the original Milei = words. N. G) the like of which was not said even in the days of Joshua son of Nun (thus) alef beth, (means) learn wisdom (alef Binah), gimmel daleth, show kindness to the poor (gemol dalim) etc."[22]

The phrase "the like of which was not said even in the days of Joshua son of Nun" warrants the inference, made by Tur– Sinai that already at that early stage in the history of Israel, in the days of Joshua, the alphabet was also taught by means of a mnemonic verse, though it went differently. The mnemonic method of teaching the alphabet is known amongst yemenite and Italian Jews as among many peoples. Tur–Sinai maintains that "the alphabetic letters are not connected with any pictures (Ideograms) but they were combined into a mnemonic verse which allowed the order, form and names of the letters to be learned and memorized; and eventually the whole alphabet– the letters, their names and order– passed into the Greek language sphere . It is thus

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22   Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shabbat, Ch. 12 "Ha–Boneh" (Soncino translation)

pointless to look for an explanation of this or that specific letter but one must endeavour to find an answer to the general question of the constituent whole of the verse, of which each letter forms only a small phonetic unit. After all, for the purpose of learning and memorizing the alphabeth it was unnecessary that there should be a series of intelligible names with objects represented, since any device will serve that facilitates memorizing, such as the juxtaposing of syllables which in isolation are quite meaningless but read together simulate a meaningful sentence whose alliterative and assonantal qualities make it stay in the memory."[23] As Tur–Sinai states: "Only by postulating a verse embracing all the alphabetic letters, which Later would be repeated simply PHONETICALLY, is one able to explain the otherwise perplexing fact that the alphabeth retained its Canaanite letter– names and sequence when it was transmitted to Greece. Along with the written list of characters, THE GREEKS LEARNT BY ROTE FASHION ALSO THE MNEMONIC VERSE, WHICH LATER SEEMED TO THEM A LIST OF REAL NAMES – ESPECIALLY AS IN THE NEW LANGUAGE SPHERE THE MEANING OF THE ORIGINAL VERSE WAS NO LONGER UNDERSTOOD."[24]

Tur–Sinai basing himself on the Talmud, Yemenite tradition, Testimony of the fathers of the Church (Hieronymus, Eusebius, St. Ambrose and others), attempted to reconstruct this verse, (in Hebrew) as follows: Aleph Binah, Gomel Dalim Hu Vehu Zan Khai Tov Yado, Kaph Lemad Mimenu, Smokh Ani Pi Tzedek Kaph Rosh Sim Tav.[25]. According to him, "even with all the doubts as to details, it is evident even from the words maintained in the variety of this tradition, that we have here not an exclusive mnemonic verse, but as in the Talmudic and Yemenite traditions, a verse that summarizes and teaches religious and moral doctrines...accordingly the Alphabetic tablet that passed to the Canaanite cities, was a religious document summarizing the principal moral attributes of the one and only God, a document which is difficult to detach from a major event."

The ideas of Tur–Sinai prompted me to think along similar lines. His theory is very plausible and I essentially agree with it; yet it seems to me that it is not without contradictions in its details. According to Tur–Sinai the alphabet was nothing other than mnemonic hebrew verse, which was meaningful in its original language, and in this form was passed on to the Greeks and other peoples, WHO LEARNT IT IN ROTE FASHION ENTIRELY BY

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23   ur– Sinai article Alphabet in Encyclopedia Mikrait, I. 1955, Jerusalem, pp. 402, 404 (Hebrew). He expresses the same view in a somewhat different form in the chapter "Mereshit Torat Yisrael bemasoret haalephbet", Halashon Vehasefer" Vol. Hasefer, Jerusalem, 1959, pp. 150–190 (Hebrew).

24   Mereshit Torat Yisrael bemasoret Haalephbet, Vol Hasefer, pp. 170–171. (Hebrew)

25   Tur–Sinai ibid. p. 186.

ITS SOUND, so that eventually it "seemed to them a list of real names – ESPECIALLY AS IN THE NEW LANGUAGE SPHERE THE MEANING OF THE ORIGINAL VERSE WAS NO LONGER UNDERSTOOD". Now if one accepts this theory, it inevitably follows that the Greek alphabet names phonetically represent complete or fragmentary Hebrew words from a mnemonic Hebrew verse; this means that any Greek letter–names, such as Beta or Delta, must necessarily form elements of this same verse (unless these names were subject to change over the ages). Or in other words, it is required that the phonemes making up the Greek letter– names, Alpha, Beta, Gamma, etc. should be identified with the original mnemonic Hebrew verse. Yet in the version offered by Tur–Sinai no sounds equivalent to Alpha, Beta, etc. can be discovered; instead we have "Binah", "Dalim", etc. which have nothing in common with the corresponding letters in the Greek alphabet.

To summarize thus far: Tur– Sinai theory that the alphabet was learnt as a mnemonic Hebrew verse (as also inferred from the Talmud), should be considered plausible in its essentials; yet, his suggested reconstruction of this verse does not correspond to his theory and thus must be rejected.

With this theory as our guide, we shall now attempt to reconstruct the mnemonic Hebrew verse as it must have been originally.

As already stated, it is inferred by Tur Sinai in the wake of the Talmud, that even in the days of Joshua son of Nun the alphabet was originally taught as a mnemonic Hebrew verse, that in this form it passed on to the Greeks who learnt it in rote fashion entirely by its sound, "so that eventually it seemed to them a list of real names". It follows from this that the Greek alphabetic names must necessarily be elements of a Hebrew verse, that is to say, these elements phonetically represent complete or fragmentary Hebrew words which, juxtaposed, form a meaningful Hebrew sentence.

Insofar as we are aware, the Greek letter names did not undergo any significant changes at any time in their history, and this is also confirmed by the findings of most scholars in the field.[26] According to Halevi, Diringer

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26 Dunand, Byblia Grammata, p. 170.
    S. E. Loewenstamm, New Light On The History of The Alphabet, IES., 16, 1951–52, 3–4, pp. 32–36, (Hebrew)
    D. Diringer, The Alphabet, New York, 2nd edit. 1953, pp. 218–219
    Lenormant, article "Alphabetum" in Dictionnaire des Antiquités etc. Ed, Daremberg et Saglio,
    Paris, 1877.
    Th. Gaster, The Chronology of Palestinian Epigraphy, PEQ. 1937, pp. 43–58.
    Albright, Some Important Recent Discoveries – Alphabetic Origins, BASOR, 118, 1949, pp. 12–13
    F. Moore Cross Jr., The Origin and Early Evolution of The Alphabet, in: Western Galilee and Coast of Galilee. Jerusalem, 1965, p. 17 (Hebrew).
    Atkinson and Whatmough, article "Alphabet", in EB. ed. 1968, p. 664.
    Atkinson, Article, "Alphabet", EB. ed. 1929.

and others, the alphabetic letter–names existed already in the 2nd Millenium B. C.[27]

Herodotus mentions (V–58) that "as time went on the sound and the form of the letters were changed", but he does not refer to any changes in the letter– names. Indeed, as noted at the outset, the ancient traditions which speak of changes in the Greek alphabet are really concerned with changes in its signs and not in its names. Admittedly Herodotus also mentions that "the letter Sigma was called San by the Dorians", and that "The Ionian dialect, in contrast to the Dorian, included the additional letters Upsilon, Phi, Khi, Psi, Omega". Yet this is not to be seen as a reference to any changes in letter–names, rather it points to a difference between two dialects Similarly when it is said about Linus that he determined the letter– names, this does not imply that he changed them in any way. Moreover, the answer of how linus came to determine the letter– names is implied in our acceptance of Tur–Sinai's theory, since it is exceedingly plausible that this determination was made in the way the theory states, viz. that the letter–names were derived from the existing mnemonic Hebrew verse. Nor does this import any contradiction with the ancient tradition; for it must always be remembered that our arguments are not concerned with the Greek letter– signs, which in fact did undergo certain changes, but solely with the Greek letter–names.

In contrast to the Greek alphabet, the Hebrew letters did undergo certain changes (e. g. the substitution of the script by Ezra); we cannot exclude the possibiity that some letters were added or changed by this substitution. Thus in view of the greater continuity of the Greek letter–names, it would seem more logical to use that alphabet as the basis for reconstructing the original mnemonic verse, rather than the existing Hebrew alphabet on which Tur–Sinai based his attempted restoration.

In keeping with our preceding argument, all that is required of us to arrive at the original mnemonic verse (supposed Hebrew) is to supply the Hebrew completions to the Greek alphabetic names that is, to supply the missing syllables needed to turn the fragmentary Hebrew words represented by the Greek names into complete Hebrew words.

Two implications, to be regarded as inescapable principles, follow inevitably from the above:

1. If it is assumed that the Greeks learned the alphabet from a mnemonic Hebrew verse in rote fashion entirely by its sound, hence each Greek letter– name phonetically represents a complete or fragmentary word from the Hebrew verse, it necessarily follows that these letter–names will be

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27   Diringer, Op. cit., p. 219. See also: Gardiner, The Egyptian Origin of The Semitic Alphabet, JEA.
      1916, p. 5.
      Albright, BASOR. 118., 1950, p. 12 ; BASOR. 119, pp. 23–24.

rediscovered IN THEIR ENTIRETY in the original Hebrew verse we are trying to reconstruct. For instance, the letter– name "Beta" is a fragment of a word from the original Hebrew verse which also included the other alphabetic names, and hence it must appear unchanged in that verse, viz."beta", and not "Beti", "Ba'it", etc. and the completion of the looked– for word must supply the final sound of the Greek letter– name. For instance, the word fragment "Beta" along with its complementary part can appear in Hebrew only as – בֵּיתָךְ Beta–kh, —— בֵּיתָה beta, or –בֵּיתָם beta – m; otherwise its phonetic agreement with the Greek letter– name will be lacking.

For practical purpose it here is taken for granted that the Greek letter–names represented only fragmentary hebrew words and not complete ones

2. It has been assumed that the alphabet was taught as a mnemonic Hebrew verse, and in this form it passed on to the Greeks etc. ; and this requires that each Greek letter–name is a fragment of a Hebrew word which, in its reconstructed form, must begin with the corresponding Hebrew letter represented in the Greek alphabet. Alpha corresponds to the Hebrew letter Aleph, and accordingly the letter Alpha, in the reconstructed Hebrew verse, will form part of a word beginning with the Hebrew letter א (Aleph); the Greek Eta corresponds in the alphabet sequence to the Hebrew letter Ḥeth, and in the reconstruction will thus form part of a word beginning with the Hebrew letter ח; (Ḥeth) similarly the letter Omicron, in the reconstructed verse will form part of a word beginning with the letter – ע Ayin; and so forth.

It is noteworthy that many of the Greek letter– names end with the vowel "a" (Alpha, Beta, Gamma, etc.) and this terminal vowel is considered by many scholars either a Greek addition unrelated to the original name, or a vestigial Aramaic root. Likewise the letters Omicron and Omega are often thought to be Greek words signifying small–O and big–O respectively.[28] As these are purely theoretical notions, lacking any epigraphical basis, we shall postpone commenting on them until after we have reconstructed the mnemonic verse; in the interim, we shall treat the Greek alphabet sequence as an integral

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28   Diringer, ibid, pp. 218–219.
      Gardiner, ibid. p. 5
      Contenau, La Civilisation Phénicienne, p. 258.
      Cohen, La Grande Invention De L'écriture etc. p. 136.
      Atkinson, Alphabet, EB. 1929 edit.
      Atkinson and Whatmough, Alphabet, EB. 1968 edit. p. 664
      Taylor, History Of The Alphabet, 1883, II, p. 27, quoted by Atkinson in EB. Alphabet.
      Petrie, The Formation of The Alphabeth, p. 19.
      Tur–Sinai "Mereshit Torat Israel Bemasoret Haalephbet", Halashon Vehasefer, Vol. Hasefer, p. 184(Hebrew). See also note 7, p. 153
      Garbini, The Question of The Alphabet, p. 102 in'The Phoenicians' Bompiani, 1988

unit. The Greek alphabet we shall be concerned with is the Ionic, which is considered more ancient and widespread than either the Doric or Aeolic; and this is also confirmed by Herodotus: "...it was the Ionians who first learnt the alphabet from the Phoenicians" (V– 58).

The sequence of letters in the Ionic alphabet is as follows: Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, Epsilon, Zeta, Eta, Teta, Iota, Kappa, Lambda, Mu, Nu, Ksi, Omicron, Pi, Ro, Sigma, Tau, Upsilon, Phi, Khi, Psi, Omega.[29]

The first letter of this sequence is Alpha, and in accordance with our basic principles, the Hebrew reconstructed verse must preserve these phonemes and begin with the corresponding letter in the Hebrew alphabet viz. א (Aleph). We must thus get the word fragment אַלְפָ... (Alpha). Now in Hebrew there is only one word to which this fragment can be connected, and that is the verb אַלֵף (Aleph), which means "to teach[30]. However, since the sound we require is alpha and the verb (אלף Aleph) assumes this sound only in its second person singular imperative form אַלְפָה (Alpha), it follows that our word fragment can be completed only as אַלְפָה (Alpha), meaning: "Teach thou"

The next letter Beta, in keeping with the same basic principles, will appear in the Hebrew reconstruction as בֵּיתָ (Beta). Immediately one is struck by the resemblance of this word fragment to the Hebrew word בַּיִת (Bayit = house), which makes it plausible to assume that the former was derived from the latter. However, the word בית (Bayit) assumes the sound of BETA in the third person singular feminine form בֵּיתָה (Beta – her house): plural בֵּיתָם (Betam – their house–masculine) בֵּיתָן; (Betan – their house–feminine); in the second person singular feminine or in the archaic second person singular masculine בֵּיתָךְ, (Betakh – your house)[31]. As the word before this letter name is Alpha ("Teach thou") which grammatically is second person singular masculine, it would seem appropriate to complete the word fragment to בֵּיתָךְ (Betakh) which is also a second person singular masculine form.

The third letter is Gamma, transcribes in Hebrew... גְמָ (gamma) The corresponding letter is called in Hebrew Gimmel, in syro – Aramaic, Gammal, and in Ethiopian Gamml. As we can see, in each of these languages there is an additional final "L" (Lamed), thus making it reasonable to assume that the original form of the letter– name was as in Syro – Aramaic גְמָל (Gammal). The meaning of this name will be dealt with further on. Passing on to the next

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29 An aspirative letter, Digamma, representing the w sound (vau), is supposed to have existed in the Greek alphabet But its origin is obscure, and it disappeared entirely in Attic and Ionic at an early period therefore we did not refer to it.

30 Cf. Pr. 22: 24– 25, "Make no friendship with a man that is given to anger; and with a wrathful man thou shalt not go; lest thou learn (Hebrew – Te ELAPH) his ways. Job. 33: 33.
    "Hold thy peace, and I shall teach thee (Hebrew–Va–Aalephkha) wisdom".

31 See Gesenius, op. cit. p. 156. par. 58g. cf. Gen. 6: 18–19 "with thee" (Hebrew – Itakh) ; See also: Lev. 25: 39.

letter Delta, which in Hebrew transcription yields the word fragment...)דָלֶת
Delta), we discover that the only Hebrew word that can be accommodated phonetically to this is דלת (Delet = door). We recall that the first word of our reconstructed verse, ALPHA (teach thou), is in the second person singular, and correspondingly also its second word BETAKH. With this in mind, we can now complete the word fragment דלת (Delta) to דלתָךָ (DELTAKH – your door), also an archaic second singular form. Writing these four Hebrew words together, we now get the following: ALPHA BETAKH GAMMAL DELTAKH...If this passage is read with a mind to its phonetic values only, it will be apparent that the word גֶמָל (Gammal) is really only a compound of the two Hebrew words גַם עַל (Gam – Al = also on). The letter ם (M–mem), which is vowelless in Hebrew, took its vowel from the succeeding ע (Ain); and in consequence the Ayin was elided in speaking and reading. The beginning of our mnemonic verse now reads as follows: "ALPHA BETAKH GAM–AL DELTAKH..."

Continuing with the next letter Epsilon, we obtain in Hebrew transcription the word fragment... הפסילונ (Epsilon). Admittedly no such word exists in the Hebrew language, but the Greek alphabet includes a very similar letter – name, viz. Upsilon. These two words differ only in their respective first letters, U(ו) and E, (ה) whereas the main part of the word is the same in both: Psilon. We are thus safe in assuming that the two letters E and U were added to the original word. Moreover there is a remarkable phonetic resemblance between Psilon and the Hebrew word פסל (PESEL=idol–figurine), in its plural form פְסִילִים (PSILIM), or in the Aramaicized plural (פסילין PSILIN).[32] Accordingly we consider that the name Epsilon should be regarded as a part of the Hebrew word (plural form) הפסילונים (HE–PSILONIM – The idols)[33], where the letter ה (Heh) is the Heh of the definite article; similarly the letter–name Upsilon should be regarded as a part of the Hebrewופסילונים (U–Psilonim) where the "mutated" letter (waw=u) represents the conjunction "and ."

We now arrive at the letter Zeta, which in Hebrew transcription can appear either as. זת (Zeta with Tav –weak "t"), or) זט Zetta – with Tet – strong "t"). The latter can not be reconstructed in Hebrew, whether as an independent word or as a word fragment that may be completed, whereas the form... זת (ZETA) phonetically resembles only two Hebrew words זית (:Zayit –olive) and זאת (ZOT–this).

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32   Cf."But he himself turned back from the idols (Hebrew–Ha–PSILIM) " (Jud. 3: 19); and "And served their graven images (Hebrew– PSILEHEM)". (2Kn. 17: 41) See also (the Hebrew text)
      Is. 30: 22 ; Ho. 11: 2; Deut. 7: 5.

33   The suffix ון (on) is encountered in the Bible, like Zelem–Zalmon ; Talmon; Kedem–Kadmon; Sahar– Saharon, Adom–Admon; Hazor– Hezron etc.

ZAYIT can in no way be made to fit the context of our reconstructed verse, and thus we are left with the word זאת (ZOT), which in keeping with Greek phonetics will appear זֹאתָ (ZOTA)

The next letter ETA corresponds in the alphabet sequence to the Hebrew letter ח (ḤETH), and accordingly in its Hebrew transcription it must begin with this letter, while its second letter may be either ת (Tav – weak "t") or ט (Tet– strong "t"). This means that the original Hebrew word fragment could have been either ...חֵתָ...(ḤETA) or... חֵטָ (ḤETTA). Now the fragment חת... (HETA) cannot be fitted meaningfully into the context of the reconstructed verse; on the other hand the form חֵטָ (ḤETTA) phonetically resembles the word חֵטא (ḤETT = sin), in its archaic Hebrew form חטאָה (ḤeTTAA) or חטאה (ḤATTAA)[34] This word logically connects in our context with the word הפסילונים (HE–PSILONIM = the idols) which preceeds it, thus making it a safe assumption that originally the complete word was חטאה (ḤETTAA). The reconstruction of our mnemonic verse thus far reads: ALPHA BETAKH GAM–AL DELTAKH HE–PSILONIM ZOTA ḤETAA...

If we read this fragment of the mnemonic verse, paying attention only to its phonetical values, (for it is assumed that the Greeks learned the Alphabet in rote fashion entirely by its sound), It will be immediately apparent that the word ...זֹאתָ (ZOTA) is a combination of זאת־ה (ZOT – A), where the final Syllable TA got its vowel from the definite article ה (Heh = the) which belongs to the following word חטאה (ḤETTAA) but which came to be elided in speaking and reading.

The next letter Teta, in keeping with our basic principles, produces the Hebrew word fragment... תֹתָ (TTETA) or תֹטָ... (TTETTA). Again the first of these alternative syllables ...תת (TTETA) cannot be accommodated to any Hebrew word, but taking the second alternative תט... (TTETTA) we are justified, in view of a general drift of the mnemonic verse so far, "HE–PSILONIM ZOT–A ḤETTAA ...(= the idols this sin. .), in reading the original word as טְטַהֵר (TTETTAHER – "thou shalt purify")[35]. With this

34   Cf. for instance, "And let his prayer be turned into sin (Hebrew: Le–ḤETTAA) (Ps. 109: 7) ; and "For she hath sinned (Heb. ḤETTAA) against the Lord., (JE. 50: 14); Gesenius notes also "Ḥatiaa" (after C. I. S. 2–224).

35   In certain cases there is a interchange of the letters ת (Tav) and ט (Teth) as: נטש־נתש (Natosh = abandon) תפל־טפל;(Tafel = Lacking flavour, תעה־טעה; (Taoh = err) חרת־חרט; (Kharot=engrave) רתת־רטט, Rettet = Tremble); See: Hoshea 13: 1; Je. 49: 24. See these words רתת־רטט in Gesenius, Hebrew And English Lexicon of The Old Testament; Hebräisches Und Chaldäisches Handwörterbuch., Hebrew Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament.

In the Book of Daniel (3: 7; 3: 10) we find "Psantherin" in both Tav and Teth פסנתרין; פסנטרין In Mesha inscription we find Attarott עטרט (with Teth) instead of Attarot עטרת (with Tav); See Gibson, textbook of Syrian semitic inscriptions, p. 75. L. 11. Possibly the substitution of the Tav by the Teth may be explained by the principle of assimilation, where the Teth from the preceding Ḥettaa was

word added our verse now reads: ALPHA BETAKH GAM – AL DELTAKH
HE– PSILONIM ZOT HA – ḤETAA TETTAHER...

Iota, the next letter in the Greek alphabet corresponds to the Hebrew
letter יוד (Yod), which is phoneticaly identical with the first part of Iota (In
the Slavonic languages pronounced YOT). Hence we may assume that the
original Hebrew word was... יוֹדַ (YODA).

After the Iota comes Kapa which transcribes... כַּפּ (Kappa). Its
corresponding Hebrew letter–name is – כף (Kaph), which may be construed
"palm (of the hand)". Kaph (palm) in its plural form is כפיים KAPPAIM. Here
the initial Syllables Kappa are phonetically identical with the Greek letter–
name, thus making it reasonable to assume that this name is a fragment
of the word כַּפּיים(KAPPAIM) The next letter Lambda (pronounced Lahm–
thah) appears in its Hebrew transcription as... לַמְדָ (LAMDA...). The obvious
origin of this word fragment is the verb למד (LAMED – "to teach"). Already
at the beginning of our reconstruction we saw that its first word ALPHA
("teach thou") is in the second person masculine, and evidently its other
verbs will have to be in the same grammatical form. We may thus complete
our fragment to – לַמְדָה (Lamda = Learn thou), which is also in the second
person masculine.

Lamda is followed by... מוּ (MU). We recall that a common expression in
Hebrew is לְלַמֵּד מוּסָר (LE – LAMED MUSAR = "to teach morals") ; it is thus
reasonable to suppose that the two letter names.

Lambda and Mu are really a truncated form of לַמְדָה מוּסָר (LAMDA
MUSAR). If we join these two words to what has gone before, we now get
the phrase יוֹדַ... כַּפּיים לַמְדָה מוּסָר. (YOD–A KAPPAIM LAMDA MUSAR). in
amended form יודע כפיים למדה מוסר (YODA KAPPAIM LAMDA MUSAR).
We shall deal with the meaning of this phrase further on.

The next letter Nu transcribes into the word fragment ...נוּ (NU), its
corresponding letter in Hebrew, Arabic and Syriac alphabets is נוּן (NUN).
one observes that these two letter–names, Nu and NUN, not only occupy
the same place in the alphabet sequence but are also identical phonetically;
and it is thus a safe assumption that the final N – sound of this letter–name
existed originally in Greek as well. As it happens the only Hebrew word
that starts with the sound NUN is the word נוּן (NUN) itself, of which the
meaning is "to flourish, to grow up".[36]

The next letter in the Greek alphabet is Ksi, which is supposed to represent
the Hebrew letter name Samekh, but for some reason starts with another
consonant, as also happens with the word – חטאה (HETTAA), and its initial

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attracted to the next word. (see Gesenius, p. 149. par. 54), or perhaps this also
started with another letter, namely Heh.

36   Compare "his name shall be continued (in Hebrew Yinon – N. G) as long as the
sun"; ps. 72: 17.

and determining sound "S", follows in the second place. Though lacking an explanation of this phenomenon, we are safe in transcribing this name as... כ סִי (with Kaph, i. e. weak "k") or – קסי ...(with Koph, i. e. strong "k"). In its second spelling, (with Koph), this fragment cannot be accommodated to any Hebrew word, but the first spelling ...כסִי (Ksi with kaph) recalls the word כסיל (Ksil – witless, fool, simpleton). Since this word makes sense in the context of the verse, it has been incorporated in this form.

Following the Ksi is the letter Omicron, which in the alphabet sequence corresponds to the Hebrew letter ע (AYIN). Transcribed into Hebrew this name will appear as עוֹמִיכרוֹן (OMICRON – with Kaph) or עוֹמִיקרוֹן (OMIKRON – with Koph). No word of either spelling or with this initial sounds exists in the Hebrew language, but the first two syllables עוֹמִי (OMI) recall the word עֲמִי (AMI). Bearing in mind the original assumption that the mnemonic verse was learnt in rote fashion by its sound only, it appears plausible that the syllable cluster עומיכרון – עומיקרון (OMICRON – OMIKRON) is really a compound of two separate words, namely עמי (OMI – AMI) and קרון(KRON – with Koph) or כרון (CRON, with Kaph). Since each word in the mnemonic verse designates a specific letter and we assert that the letter name Omicron is really a compound of two Hebrew words, it follows that the Greek alphabet will be lacking the Hebrew letter whose name is incorporated in Omicron. In other words, Omicron must be found to contain two letter–names from the original Hebrew alphabet. Since the letter Koph does not exist in Greek, one may assume that in the original mnemonic verse this letter was denoted by the word KRON קרון Accordingly one must start with this letter (Koph). On the other hand, the fragment (CRON – with Kaph) by itself is meaningless; its meaning in the alternative spelling (KRON – with Koph) will emerge after we shall have dealt with the next letter PI, which transcribes ... פִּי (Pi) it is immediately apparent that this is a grammatically modified form of the word פֶּה (PE = mouth). Yet as we saw earlier, the whole of our verse is in the second person masculine form, and hence this name will have to appear in the Hebrew restoration as פִּיך (PI– KHA = thy mouth.)

We are now in a position to elucidate the meaning of קרון(KRON), for by joining the two words togethe ,we get קרון פִיך (KRON PI – KHA) which is very similar to the Hebrew expression קרוא ־ פִיך KRO PI–KHA) ="proclaim (call) it with thy mouth" . Accordingly it may be surmised that originally the word קרון (KRON) included the letter א (Aleph), which being vowelless, was however elided in speech, and in this form passed on to the Greeks. Yet there can be no doubt that the original form of the word was – קרואן (KRO–HON), which may be translated "Do thou proclaim–call".[37]

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37   Cf."...and his mouth calleth for strokes", (Pr. 18: 6) "And they tell him...call thou with thy mouth" (Yoma, 1: 3). See also the book of Ruth, 1: 9; 12; 20; (in the hebrew text) Metzen; Lekhn; Kren Instead of Metzena; Lekhna; Krena.,

After Pi we come to the letter RO, which transcribes... רו (RO). Its corresponding letter in Hebrew and Aramaic is RESH, and in Ethiopian RES. As can be seen, in each of these languages a final S or SH sound is added. We shall therefore complete our word fragment RO in the same way; this gives us ROSH, i. e. – ראש = רוש (="head, summit").

Ro is succeeded by Sigma, of which the corresponding Hebrew letter is SHIN (שׁ), As we know the letters Shin (שׁ) and SIN (שׂ) were interchangeable in archaic Hebrew, and hence in its Hebrew restoration Sigma will have to start with the letter Shin. We thus obtain the phonetically equivalent שׁקמה (SHIKMA), which is a proper Hebrew word (=Sycamore). Here one may recall that in the preceding word ראש (ROSH) the final SH sound (or S – Sin) was assimilated by the Greeks to the initial sound of שׁקמה (SIGMA–SHIKMA), and accordingly these two words came to be pronounced as RO and SIGMA (SHIKMA) respectively.

The next letter–name in the Greek alphabet is Tau, which transcribed into Hebrew should start with the letter – ת (Tav). Its phonetics strongly suggest that the second letter of the original Hebrew word or word fragment must have been one of the vowels: א (Aleph), or ע (Ayin) or ה (Heh); and its third letter U – ו (waw); that is, the original word must have read …תאו (TAU, with Aleph), or תעו (TAU, with Ayin), or תהו (TAHU, with Heh). the first two spellings are meaningless In the context of the mnemonic verse, but the third spelling – תהו (TAHU) appears to be a slight corruption of the word תהו ("TOHU=vain", "worthless"). Accordingly we shall transcribe this letter–name as תהו(TOHU)[38].

Upsilon, the letter following on Tau, was discussed already in connection with the letter Epsilon. It was found that this letter – name should appear in its Hebrew restoration as ופסילונים (U–PSILONIM). Continuing now the mnemonic verse from where we left off, one gets the following: NUN KSIL AMI KROHON PIKHA ROSH SHIKMA TOHU UPSILONIM...

The next letter–name is Phi, which transcribes... פי Though in itself meaningless, this word fragment may now be added to the preceding: (NUN KSIL AMI KROHON PIKHA ROSH SHIKMA TOHU U–PSILONIM PHI...). The fact that in this sequence the conjunction U– (waw) = "and" comes before פסילונים(PSILONIM) clearly indicates that this word is linked conceptually with the beginning of the passage: (ROSH SHIKMA TOHU U... PSILONIM PHI...) which implies that the completed and restored form of the word fragment (PHI) must be a synonym or an antonym of the word תהו(TOHU). To our mind, the only feasible word in the Hebrew language

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38   Cf."They that make a graven image are all of them vanity" (Heb. Tohu). (Is. 44: 9); "Yet turn not aside from following the Lord...for then should ye go after vain things (Heb. Ha–TOHU), which cannot profit or deliver; for they are vain (Heb. Tohu)." (1Sam. 12: 20–21).

in this case is פיגול(PHIGUL=stench, filth), which also fits the context of the phrase: ROSH SHIKMA TOHU UPSILONIM PHIGUL.[39]

The remaining letters of the Greek alphabet are: Khi, Psi, and Omega . Khi is difficult to transcribe into Hebrew, but it is obvious that the Hebrew word represented in this letter– name must start with the letter כ (Kaph). Ḥeth ח will not do here, because being a guttural, it is pronounced in non– Semitic languages like the letter Heh ה as ,e. g ., in the case of the Greek letter Eta (=ḤETTAA).[40]

The letter Psi transcribes... פסי (PSI.)

The final letter in the Greek alphabet is Omega, which transcribes אומג. (OMEGA – with Aleph) or... עומג (OMEGA with Ayin). However there is no word in the Hebrew language which begins with either of these two syllables. At first blush it might be thought that here also, as in the case of Omicron, we have a compound of two separate Hebrew words. Of course, the initial letters... או (O) make a proper Hebrew word (= or); and it is thus reasonable to assume that אומג ... really consists of the two words או (O = or) and מג ...(MEGA). Yet when these last three letter–names are written together they yield no meaning: KHI. . PSI...O MEGA . .As to the word fragment פסי ... (PSI) we recall that the word פסילונים (PSILONIM) already appeared in our verse, and accordingly we suggest that in this instance also Psilonim is the acceptable completion. We now read... כ ...פסילונים או מג KHI...PSILONIM O MEGA... It should be noted that in the Hebrew Bible the verb לגדע – (Le–GADEA=hew down) is often met in conjunction with the word פסילים (PSILIM = idols), quite a few times in the imperative mood: e. g. ופסילי אלהיהם תגדעון (UPSILEI ELOHEHEM TEGADEUN) – "you shall hew down the graven images of their gods"[41]; and thus, just as before it was assumed that Psi completes PSILONIM, it is reasonable to assume that the fragment ... מג (MEGA...) should be completed מגדע (MEGADEA = hew down.)

The last three letter–names now transcribe as follows: פסילונים או מגדע . . כ (KHI. . PSILONIM O MEGADEA. .). The presence of the word או (O=or) in this passage clearly indicates that the completed Hebrew word represented in the word KHI must either be a synonym of MEGADEA or its complete antonym. A second requirement is, as we saw above, that the word must start with the letter Khaph כ. Since the only synonym of the verb – לגדע LeGADEA starting with this letter is כרות (KHROT= cut down)[42]. we may

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39   Cf. Ez. 4: 14 "abominable flesh" (Heb. Basar phigul); Is. 65: 4" and broth of abominable (Heb. phigulim) things is in their vessels". Lev. 7: 18"it shall be an abomination" (Heb. Phigul yihye).

40   For the Greek pronunciation of the letter Ḥeth as Heh, see also Harris, A Grammar of The Phoenician Language, New Haven, 1936, p. 16.

41   For instance, Deut. 12: 3 ; Deut. 7: 5.

42   Cf. Mi. 5: 12; Deut. 12: 3 ; Ex. 34: 13.

assume that this is the looked – for word, and the passage (in emended form – to keep in line with the plural of Psilonim) now reads: כרות פסילונים או מגדעם (KHROT PSILONIM O MEGADEAM = cut idols or hew them down.) Our reconstruction completed, the original mnemonic Hebrew verse of the alphabet now reads from beginning to end:

אַלְפָּה בֵּיתָ(ךְ) גַּם־עַ(ל) דלתָ(ךְ) הַפְּסִילוֹנִ(ים) זֹאת־הַחֵטָאָה טַטַ(הר).

יוֹדַ(ע) כַּפַּ(ים) לַמְדָה מוּ(סָר) ;נוּ(ן) כְּסִי(ל) עַמִי־קְרוֹאנָ(ה) פִּי(ךְ) רֹא(שׁ)

שֶׁקְמָה תֹהוּ וּפְסִילוֹנִ(ים) פִּי(גוּל) כ(רוֹת) פְּסִי(לוֹנִים) אוֹ מְגַ(דעָם).

ALPHA BETA(kh) GAM A(l) DELTA(kh) EPSILON(im) ZOT–A ḤETTA(a) TETTA(her) IODA KAPPA (yim) LAMDA MU(sar) NU(n) KSI(l) AMI – KROHN(a) PI(kha) RO(sh) SHIKMA TOHU UPSILON(im) PHI(gul) KH(rot) PSI(lonim) O –MEGA(deam).

This restored mnemonic verse may be construed word for word: ALPHA BETAKH – "teach (thou) thy household"; GAM AL DELTAKH – "also upon thy door (write thou)"[43]; EPSILONIM ZOT A ḤETAA TETTAHER – "the idols, this sin purify (thou)" (this phrase you shall teach your household and– write upon your door – post); YODA KAPPAYIM – "those who know the hands" (i. e."young children still in their mothers' arms"); LAMDA MUSAR– "teach (thou) morals"; And what morals are you going to teach them? NUN KSIL AMI KROHN PIKHA–"grow up simpleton (witless) in my nation, to apprehend say with your mouth "ROSH SHIKMA TOHU UPSILONIM PHIGUL – "the tree– top of a Sycamore is vanity and idols (are) filth (abomination)" (i. e. the worship of the Ashera is vanity and the adoration of the idols is abomination); KHROT PSILONIM O MEGADEAM – "cut down the idols or hew them down" (i. e. smash them).

As can be seen, the initial assumption that the Greek letter–names are merely fragmentary words from an original mnemonic Hebrew verse has been confirmed. The danger that this might be a mere haphazrd stringing together of Hebrew words is reduced to almost a vanishing point by limitations imposed through our basic principles, one of which required that each word (letter–name) should begin with the corresponding Hebrew character; and the other that the phonetics of the Greek letter–names should be preserved in the Hebrew reconstruction. That the Greek alphabet HAS NOT BEEN TAMPERED WITH IN ANY WAY is confirmed by the reconstruction itself where the Greek letter–names appear unchanged. Yet, the Hebrew verse

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43   Cf. The Jewish custom of affixing an inscribed scrollet (MEZUZAH) on the door–frame, and also the Biblical verses And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates". (Deut. 11: 21); and "Behind the doors also and the posts hast thou set thy remembrance" (Is. 57: 7–8): See also the Lachish letters letter 4: "And I wrote upon the door all that your lordship sent to me". As these quotations show, It was customary in ancient times to write anything one wished to remember on one's door–frame.

that emerged in the reconstruction is entirely plausible and meaningful homogenously throughout.

The mnemonic verse established, we can now return to the discussion of the two letter–names Omicron and Omega, deferred at an earlier stage. As mentioned, some scholars think that these two names are Greek words meaning small –O and big –O, i. e. Omicron and Omega denote the short and long vowel O respectively. Yet if this is so, the question inevitably arises why we should have this form of letter–names only for the O; after all, there are other long and short vowels in the alphabet where this form could apply. Why are ETA and EPSILON, which also denote a long and short vowel, not called E– Mega and E–Micron analogously to O–Mega and O–Micron (granted we accept the reading MICRON and MEGA) and similarly to such designations in other languages, e. g. Hebrew: QAMATZ GADOL ("big Qamatz"), QAMATZ KATAN ("small Qamatz"); PATAKH GADOL ("big Patakh"), PATAKH KATAN ("small Patakh")? Why should different names be required to designate the same functions? After all, it would only be logical, once the principle of the long and short vowels was understood, that this would apply to all the vowels and not merely to the O.

Yet to us it seems that the contrary of what is asserted about Omicron and Omega is true. Reading the mnemonic Hebrew verse it is obvious that from the phonetic view point the o–sound in the two words עומי־קרואן (Omi–Krohn) and מגדעם–או (O–Megadeam) is short in the first case (Omi) and long in the second (O–Megadeam). In accordance with this perception, the first sound came to be regarded in the course of time as a short vowel and the second as a long vowel; furthermore, the following syllables of each word were construed, due to phonetic resemblance, as meaning "small" and "big" respectively, i. e. Mi–krohn – small and Mega – big[44]. the same long–short vowel distinction can be observed in the letter–words EPSILONIM (Epsilon) and HE– TTAA (Eta).

Confirmation of our argument may be seen in a passage from Higginus[45]: "Simonides, a native of Ceos, introduced into Athens...where he was domiciled, the double consonants Psi and Xi, the distinction between the vowels Omicron and Omega (short and long O) and distinction between the vowels Eta and Epsilon (long and short E). These changes were not, however, publicly adopted there until the Archonship of Euclides – (403 B. C.)"

With regard to the notion that the final "a" sound of the letter–names Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, Lamda, Kappa, Iota, Teta, Eta, Zeta, Omega, was not originally part of these words but a later Greek addition, or a vestigial Aramaic root, it is now possible from the evidence of the reconstructed verse

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44   In a similar way the letter Delta, whose derivation from the word Delet (door) is not in dispute, came to mean a "Delta" i. e. a river estuary.

45   The English translation is cited from Graves, op. cit. p. 226.

to perceive that this sound represented the most suitable breaking off place, from the phonetic viewpoint, within the words meant to be turned into letter–names. Confirmation of this is found in the later development of the Greek alphabet and in the way it was taken over by other languages. When we examine the letter–names in languages, where we know that they are derived from the Greek alphabet we discover that in these instances the names became A, Be, De etc. and did not become, for instance, Al, Del, Eps, Ep, Yo, Lam, Om, etc., but that they were derived (i. e. cut from the Greek alphabet) mainly at a vowel segment, in the way best suited to the character and phonetics of the particular language. The same principle that obtained when the Greek alphabet was taken over by other peoples must also have obtained when the original Hebrew verse was taken over by the Greeks.

From its context in the mnemonic verse it is apparent that the "Phoenicians" must be identified as the Israelites. For the "Phoenicians" are said to be the inventors of the alphabet whereas the verse reads: "Epsilonim Zot Ha–Ḥettaa Tettaher" (the idols this sin purify (thou) etc. – an idea exclusive to the Israelite nation and to the monotheistic belief it held. Moreover, from the words "Gam Al Deltakh" – "also upon thy door", it is also evident that the phrase: "Epsilonim Zot HaḤettaa Tettaher" (the idols this sin purify) was written on the door posts, And here we encounter a surprising fact; to this day it is customary for the Jews to fix to their door–frames a small wooden or metal case (Mezuzah) containing a parchment scroll inscribed with two passages from Deuteronomy:

"Hear o Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: AND THOU SHALT TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY UNTO THY CHILDREN, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shalt be as frontlets between thine eyes. AND THOU SHALT WRITE THEM UPON THE POSTS OF THY HOUSE, AND ON THY GATES."[46] (emphasis–N. G.).

"And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, that I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine and thine oil. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full. Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside AND SERVE OTHER GODS, AND WORSHIP THEM; and then the Lord's

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46   Deut. 6: 4–9.

wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the Lord giveth you. Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. AND YE SHALL TEACH THEM YOUR CHILDREN, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. AND THOU SHALT WRITE THEM UPON THE DOOR POSTS OF THINE HOUSE, AND UPON THY GATES: that your days may be multiplied and the days of your children, in the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth."[47] (My emphasis–N. G.)

The content of these passages is almost identical with the reconstructed verse; both texts include several parallel commands, though they are phrased somewhat differently. the one states: "And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children...and thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house and on thy gate", while the other reads: "ALPHA BETAKH GAM AL DELTAKH" ("teach thy household and also on thy door"– write it). or "YODA KAPAYIM LAMDA MUSAR" ("those still carried on the arms – i. e. the young children– teach them morals"). In one case we read: "EPSILONIM ZOT HaHETTAA TETTAHER" or "KHROT PSILONIM O MEGADEAM" ("the idols this sin purify, cut down the idols or hew them down."), while in the other: "Beware you shalt not forget the Lord...Ye shall not go after other gods".

It is easy to see that the Biblical passages on the Mezuzah scroll are concerned with the same ideas as the alphabetic verse; viz., do not worship idols and other gods, and teach this also to your household, and also write it on your door–posts.

In the light of the alphabetic verse it is worthwhile mentioning the following sentences in the book of Jeremiah (31: 31–34): "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord; But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying know the Lord, for they shall know me from the least of them unto the greatest of them..."

It is deducible from the content of these sentences, that in the old

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47   Deut. 11: 13–22.

covenant existed the command to teach one's neighbour and one's brother, to know the Lord, a command which is identical to that of the passsages in the Mezuzah.

The same command is also encountered in the book of Psalms: "For he established a testimony in Jacob and a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments;" (Ps. 78: 5–8).

The similarity between these sentences, the reconstructed alphabetic verse and the passages in the Mezuzah, is quite evident. But what is this covenant that has been established between God and the nation of Israel? It is generally accepted that the covenant refers to the Decalogue (The tables of the covenant). But in Exodus (24: 7–8), we read: "And he took the BOOK of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people; and they said, all that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient." This is FOLLOWED by a description of Moses going up the mountain of Sinai (Horeb) and bringing the tables of the covenant (Ex. 24: 12). We learn therefore of two different episodes in the life of the nation of Israel; the first – a covenant between God and the nation. It is linked with the reading of the BOOK of the COVENANT; and the second which FOLLOWS, is the giving of the TABLES of the covenant.

The contents of the book of the covenant is presented to us in two passages in Deuteronomy: "Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life; AND TEACH THEM THY SONS AND THY SON'S SONS; specially the day that thou stoodest before the Lord thy God in HOREB, when the Lord said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, THAT THEY MAY LEARN TO FEAR ME all the days that they shall live upon the earth, AND THAT THEY MAY TEACH THEIR CHILDREN." (Deut. 4: 9–11). We learn therefore that what was said on the mount of Horeb is mainly: fear God and teach thy sons and thy son's sons to fear him. This same idea is expressed in the book of Jeremiah and in the Alphabetic verse.

Accordingly I am inclined to surmise that the book of the covenant which PRECEDED the Tables of the covenant refers to the receiving of the Alphabetic script, and thus it is quite simple to understand the passage: ". if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my COVENANT, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure (Hebrew–Segula) unto me above all people". (Ex. 19: 5). The Israelites became the chosen (treasured) nation because with the acceptance of the book of the covenant, namely – the Alphabeth – they became the sole nation in the world to use a phonetic script.

It is worthwhile noting the verses in the Book of Isaiah: "Thus saith the Lord, the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of Hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and besides me there is no God, and who, as I, shall call and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people (Heb. Am Olam – = עם־עולם = eternal; everlasting people) and the things that are coming (Heb. Otiot אתיות) and shall come, let them shew unto them." (Is. 44: 6–7). In Hebrew:

כה־אמר יהוה מלך־ ישראל וגאלו יהוה צבאות אני ראשון ואני אחרון ומבלעדי אין אלהים: ״ומי־כמוני יקרא ויגידה ויערכה לי משומי עם־עולם ואתיות ואשר תבאנה יגידו למו:״

"Thus said the Lord, the holy one of Israel and his maker (Heb. veyozro), Ask me of things to come (Heb. Ha–Otiot האתיות) concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me." (Is. 45: 11). In Hebrew:

״כה־אמר יהוה קדוש ישראל ויצרו האתיות שאלוני על־בני ועל־פעל ידי תצוני:״

In these verses the words אתיות(Otiot) were understood and translated as אתות(Otot) meaning signs – miracles – things to come. It must be borne in mind that in Hebrew the word אות (Ot) in singular has a double meaning; sign – (figuratively also miracle) and letter (alphabetic). But in the plural form the first one – sign– miracle, becomes Otot אתות– while the second – letter – becomes Otiot אתיות as in the above verses.

The reasons for the above translations and interpretations are various and we shall not discuss them here[48]. We would only like to suggest that if we examine these verses literally we can see and interpret them as relating to the creation of the Alphabetic letters. namely: "Since I appointed the eternal (everlasting)[49] people (Israel) and the letters (alphabetic)"etc. and "thus saith the Lord the Holy One of Israel and the creator (Heb. Veyozro) of the letters" The ending ...ו (o) in the word (Veyozro) is not to be regarded as third person genitive attached to the Preceding word Israel but must be regarded as a stylistic form and attached to the following word "Ha–Otiot".[50]

Let us not forget that in antiquity the formation of writing was attributed to God: "And the Tables were the work of God. and the writing was the writing of God." (Ex. 32: 16). The Egyptians attributed it to their god Thoth. The Babylonians attributed it to the godess Nisaba and the Greeks – to Mercury.

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48   They are mainly based on: 1. The Septuagint translation. 2. The interpretation of the word Otiot in Is. 41: 23; 3. Yehuda ben Quraysh (c. 900 B. C.) ; The Risala, part 1; (22)

49   Erroneously translated "ancient people".

50   Like: Maayno Mayim – מעינו מים (Ps. 114: 8): Hayto Eret –חיתו ארץ – z(Gen. 1: 24): Yarho Asif ירחו אסיף – (calendar of Gezer): Bno Zipor –בנו ציפור – (Nu. 23: 18): Beno Beor –בנו בעור – (Nu. 24: 315 –): and others. See also Gesenius p. 254 § 90–o.

The Bible ascribes to Moses the writing of the Tables of the covenant. the writing of the journeys of the Israelites in the desert[51] and "all the words of the Lord".[52]

As pointed out in the preface. the phonetic alphabetic script was first thought to have originated around the year 1000 B. C. From here arose the inevitable tendency of Wellhausen, Alt and others to see biblical literature as the result of oral transmissions. But new epigraphical discoveries made investigators advance the origins of phonetic script to about 1500 B. C. Therefore, there is no reason whatsoever to deny the biblical text which ascribes to Moses the writing of events and the laws of the nation of Israel Nevertheless. with the change of attitude towards the script. there was no parallel change towards the biblical text. still considered to be a collection of orally transmitted sayings.

We must assume that Moses wrote in Hebrew (perhaps not in the language used in a later period. but still Hebrew). for the culture that follows is based on his teachings and is written in Hebrew. This assumption is supported by what is written in the Talmud[53]: "In the beginning the Torah (O. T.) was given to Israel in the Hebrew script and in the Holy language..." etc Namely the Talmud ascribes to Moses the writing in the Hebrew script. As already stated. Moses was brought up on Egyptian culture. therefore two possibilities arise:

1. Moses learned the Hebrew script from the Hebrews.
2. The Hebrews learned the Hebrew script from Moses

The first possibility seems implausible. as it is illogical that the Hebrews, who before leaving Egypt were on a very low cultural level, would have used an alphabetical script – an integral part of a higher culture. It is more logical to assume that the Hebrews learned the script from Moses, and again. two possibilities arise: either Moses borrowed the script from another nation and transferred it to the Hebrews. or, secondly, that he himself invented it.

The first possibility does not seem valid. for when a nation borrows a script from another. it adjusts it to its own needs and necessarily there are certain anachronisms. Letters or syllables appropriate to one language do not necessarily suit the other. An example of this is the borrowing of the Greek script from the "Phoenicians". The Greeks adapted the script to their needs but the letter order and names remained "Phoenician". We are not aware of such an anachronism in the Hebrew script. Though the belief exists that the Hebrews copied their alphabet from the "Phoenicians". In the light of this book, there is no basis for such a belief.

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51   Nu. 33: 2.
52   Ex. 4: 4.
53   Talmud Bavli. Sanhedrin 21.

Berger[54] states that "the Phoenician language belongs to the Semitic family of languages and maintains its place between the Aramaic and Hebrew. It is closer to Hebrew than Aramaic. The points of agreement with Hebrew are more numerous and so much deeper that we must assume that one nation borrowed the dialect from the other. This does not mean that there are no evident differences between the two languages. but it seems that the Phoenician language stopped at an earlier stage of development.".

consequently there remains the other possibility that Moses invented the Hebrew script. and together with a new religion he gave the Israelites a new script. This supposition is supported by the Talmud:[55]

"Rabi Yosi says: It was fitting for Ezra to have given the Torah (Tables of the Covenant). if Moses had not anticipated him. It was said about Moses that he ascended (Mount Sinai): so it was said about Ezra that he ascended (to Israel). and despite the fact that he did not give the Torah. he did change the script. and also he received (gave) a script and language". Namely, ALSO HE Ezra, gave script and language. The emphasis of "also he" indicates that one must deduce that Moses also gave a script and a language. This Talmudic evidence strengthens our conclusion that the Israelites (Moses) invented the alphabetic script.

This supposition is not new. The jews Artapanos and Eupolemos (1st century B. C.). the Samaritan Margali (4th century A. C.). Isidore of Seville (6th century A. C.), and others have already maintained that Moses invented the phonetic alphabet. I would here like to mention an article[56] whose writer comes to the same conclusion on the supposition that as the consonants are not pronounced by themselves but are always linked with vowels. It is only the stutterer who pronounces them in their "chemical" elementary form: therefore. Moses, who according to the Bible was a stammerer. was naturally qualified to understand the development and the formation of phonetics and invent a phonetic script.

Renan[57], Sir Charles Marston,[58] and Tur–Sinai maintain also that the Israelites invented the phonetic script, but, to exclude Tur–Sinai whose theory we cited above, the beliefs of the other two are based solely on suppositon.

It is self–evident that Moses based the writing on his own culture which was the Egyptian Culture. This explains the Egyptian influence on the Alphabetic script.

To sum up: Moses invented the Hebrew phonetic script and the Israelites were the first to use it, therefore they were called by the Greeks "Phoenicians".

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54   Berger. Phénicie, La Grande Encyclopedie: pp. 620–621.
55   Tosefta, Sanhedrin 4. 7: Jerushalmi. Megila. 8.
56   Kraus. La tribune de Geneve. 6. July. 1949.
57   Renan, Histoire Du Peuples D'isreal.
58   Marston, The Bible Comes Alive, 1938, ch. 8 (the story of the Alephbeth).

a name which may be explained "Phonicians"= Syllable Possessors, namely – possessors of a phonetic script, for it was an innovation and exception to the other nations of the world then. While in the region of Canaan (Israel) they were called the nation of Israel namely, the nation of "Asera El", for their worship of the Ashera.

Different names for one nation are not exception. The Greeks, for example, called themselves "Hellenes" and their country "Hellas". In Hebrew "Yevanim" and "Yavan". The Romans called them "Graeci"and their country – "Graecia".

The Germans were called "Germani" by the Romans. whereas the French call them "Allemands", the Italians –"Tedesci"; the Slavons –"Niemci", while the Germans call themselves"Deutsche".

The Romans referred to France and the French as "Gallia" and "Galli". In Hebrew the name of the country is "Zarfat" and the people "Zarfatim", and in English –"France" and "French".

The same is true with many other nations.