

## Proto-Sinaitic Sinai 527 - A Rejoinder

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In 1983 and 1984, M. DIJKSTRA<sup>1</sup> and E.A. KNAUF<sup>2</sup> independently suggested that the inscription Sinai 527<sup>3</sup> be read as Proto-Sinaitic of Proto-Canaanite. Both read the inscription *l<sup>c</sup>nt*: "(dedicated) to <sup>c</sup>Anat", although whereas KNAUF interpreted the three dots at the bottom of the vertical column as a number, DIJKSTRA saw them as a sign which might indicate the end of the inscription. B. SASS, however, rejected their discovery for a number of epigraphical reasons. He claimed that the shapes of the letters simply do not fit those of alphabetic letters of any given period, and that the inscription is fragmentary and seemingly incomplete or unfinished<sup>4</sup>.

SASS had the advantage of photographing and studying the original, which is still located on the rock lying in front of the inscribed cliff of Wadi Roḡ el-<sup>c</sup>Air. DIJKSTRA and seemingly also KNAUF had based their initial suggestions only on DE BUCK's drawing which, as we discovered later, is somewhat inaccurate. In November 1986, the authors of this note had the opportunity to examine the original and decided to write this rejoinder to SASS's note, accompanied by a facsimile made on the basis of the photographs and transparencies taken by the third member of our expedition, D. TUNNICLIFFE<sup>5</sup>.

The shortness or possibly incomplete state of the inscription in question is certainly no argument to deny its Proto-Sinaitic or Proto-Canaanite character. Otherwise, SASS should have been more cautious when he published his own discovery, Sass no. 1, as Proto-Sinaitic<sup>6</sup>. This inscription has one sign fewer than Sinai 527, and two of its signs (nos. 2 and 4) are at the least variants from the shape that *yod* and *he* usually have at Šerabit el-Khadim.

1 UF 15 (1983), 37; accepted in IDG Biggs, *The Proto-Sinaitic Inscriptions* (unpublished thesis), Dept. of Archaeology, Univ. of Sydney, 1985.

2 GM 70 (1984), 33-36.

3 A.H. GARDINER and T.E. PEET (ed. J. ČERNÝ), *The Inscriptions of Sinai 1* (2nd ed.), London, 1952, pl. 94, no. 527.

4 BN 26 (1985), 19f.

5 The authors wish to thank D. Tunnicliffe, staff photographer in Cairo with the Egypt Exploration Society, for his assistance.

6 Tel Aviv 5 (1978), 183-187.

Nevertheless, we give him the benefit of the doubt.

Some of the characters of Sinai 527 are indeed of a form unexpected at this stage of the alphabet's development. A major obstacle in our previous interpretation was undoubtedly the very modern *lamed* written separately from the main inscription. Closer inspection of the stela revealed, however, that this *lamed* does not exist. What seems to be a letter is in fact the right arm of a standing figure facing the inscription. Unfortunately, this figure, in particular the lower part of it, is much eroded. In general, the left side of the steliform panel is more weatherbeaten than the right. Furthermore, the letters themselves seem to be more deeply engraved than the rest of the panel<sup>7</sup>. The poor condition of this standing figure prevents any further conclusions being drawn about its character - for instance, whether it represents the worshipper or a divinity. The parallel with Sinai 351, however, favours the latter possibility.

This means that the inscription itself is on the right side only. Of the four well-engraved signs, the *ayin* is complete and has parallels in other inscriptions from Şerabit, as SASS acknowledged<sup>8</sup>. The *nun* is comparatively "modern" and a predecessor of the *nun* of the 13th-12th century Proto-Canaanite inscriptions, but not unparalleled at Şerabit. The *taw* needs no further comment. The three (or four?) "pock marks" are rather indistinct, compared to the preceding signs, and certainly not written on one line as DE BUCK's copy suggested. This rules out the Egyptian plural sign. Very probably, the dots are no sign at all, but the result of erosion of the rock surface. The same little holes are found elsewhere - for instance, to the right of the *nun*<sup>9</sup>.

The first sign, though well engraved, is very indistinct. If our interpretation *cnt* for the remaining three signs is acceptable - their independently identical interpretation by two epigraphists is suggestive enough! - KNAUF may have been right after all when he saw in it a poorly-executed *lamed*<sup>10</sup>. There is indeed a very slight bend at the left end of the sign. If so, such a horizontal *lamed* goes well with the other *lameds* written in a lying position in vertical inscriptions. It also confirms the Proto-Sinaitic

7 cf. in particular the photograph by B. SASS, BN 26 (1985), 21.

8 BN 26 (1985), 21.

9 cf. our photograph.

10 GM 70 (1984), 34.

character of the inscription.

It remains to decide whether  $l(?)^{C}nt$  is a votive inscription or just the graffito of a Semitic name. Our main reason for preferring the first possibility is the steliform panel with the standing (or walking?) figure facing the inscription. Though personal names on stelae or steliform panels are sometimes found at Şerabit (Sinai 359(?); 362(?); 364(?); 367(!)), the originally fine workmanship of this panel suggest a dedicatory inscription to the goddess  $^{C}Anat$ , who in all probability is also mentioned in other inscriptions at Şerabit (Sinai 346<sup>11</sup>; middle column of Sinai 353(?)).

The authors are preparing for publication a comprehensive edition of the corpus of Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions, conforming to current epigraphical principles.

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11 M. DIJKSTRA, 'The Statue Sinai 346 and the Tribe of the Kenites', in *Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des Antiken Judentums* 13, Frankfurt/Main - Bern - New York - Nancy, 1987.

