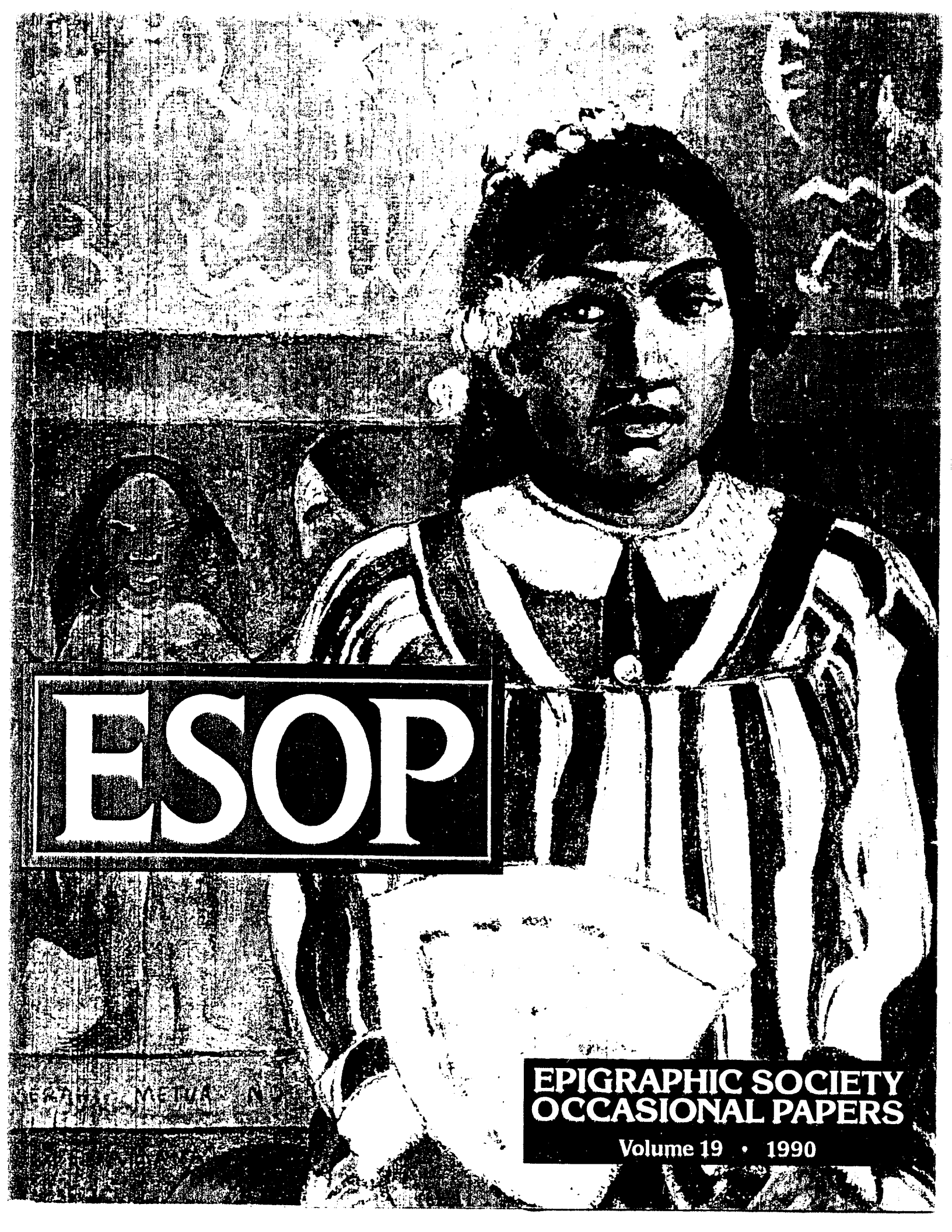

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The Newark, Ohio Inscribed Head – A New Translation

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Five stones with Hebrew inscriptions were found in and around Newark, Ohio between 1860 and 1867. The most interesting of these were the first two, found by David Wyrick in 1860, and currently in the collections of the Johnson-Humrickhouse Museum in Coshocton, Ohio.[1]

The first, or "Keystone," contains four brief religious formulas in distinctive, yet clearly recognizable, Hebrew letters.[2] Wyrick found this in Newark proper, 12 to 14 inches underground, at the bottom of a depression among the Newark earthworks.[3] The second, or "Decalogue" came from deep within an earth mound that had been under the "Great Stone Stack" near Jacksontown, a few miles south of Newark. It contains a bas-relief of a robed man identified as Moses, along with a version of the Ten Commandments in Hebrew language. This is written in letters that are so peculiar that they do not at first even appear to be Hebrew.[4]

The third and fourth stones, the "Inscribed Head" and the "Cooper Stone," both came from a single mound on the farm of George A. Wilson, east of Newark, in 1865. The fifth, or "Johnson-Bradner Stone" was discovered in 1867, through the combined efforts of David M. Johnson, a banker, and Dr. N. Roe Bradner, a physician. It came from deeper within the same mound in which Wyrick had found the Decalogue stone, and uses many of the peculiar characters that appear on the Decalogue. These last three stones have been lost, and survive only in illustrations and/or photographs.

Robert W. Alrutz, a biologist at Denison University, has written an exhaustive article on the history of these finds (1980), which provides illustrations of all five stones. Through a remarkable piece of detective work, he was actually able to find a photograph of the long-forgotten Cooper stone. Also, Joseph Schenck (1982) has compiled the complete text of many of the early documents discussing these finds, and provides a good illustration of the text on the Decalogue stone.[5]

In an 1881 article pertaining primarily to the Johnson-Bradner stone, Charles Whittlesey reported in passing that:

> In a written statement, which Judge S. Buckingham, of Newark, Ohio, has furnished me, it appears that Dr. Nichols and John Haines, of that place, had stated to him that they were two of the persons present when Wyrick found Moses and the ten commandments. Dr. Nichols discredited the antiquity of the inscribed stone and the box, and stated that Wyrick had been there alone, before he invited the party to go with him.
>
> At Newark more credit was given to the statements of Wyrick than of Nichols, which so much annoyed the latter, that he fabricated two or more specimens, to show how easily people could be deceived. He said that two of them were afterwards found in a mound on the land of Mr. S.A. Wilson, in Madison township, Licking county. (p. 132).

This "Dr. Nichol" is identified by Alrutz as Dr. John Nicol, a local dentist. The two stones found on the Wilson farm are the Inscribed Head and Cooper Stone, so these would be the two artifacts Nicol referred to here as having been forged by himself and subsequently found.[6]

The Inscribed Head was found on May 10, 1865 by a party composed of J.M. Dennis, Abram Flory, Harmon Forry, Thomas K. Sutton, and a hired laborer. In Dennis's report (quoted in Alrutz, p. 32)[7], he states that this party was "*accompanied by* J. H. Nicol" (emphasis added), as if to say that Nicol was not a true member of the party, but had somehow just invited himself along. The stone came from deep within the mound, six to eight feet from any previous disturbance of the mound, and about a foot from an undisturbed skeleton "about the breast of which were twenty or thirty arrowheads all pointing together forming a star." Although the head was not exactly found *in situ*, Dennis was careful to document the chain of custody of the evidence: The soil containing the head was pitched up by Forry from

Fig. 1. The Inscribed Head. 1865 Drawing by J.S. Unzicker. Reproduced from Alrutz (1980), but reversed. Original drawing in Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, MSS 3359.

the bottom of the excavation to a terrace half way up, whence Dennis pitched it up to Sutton and Flory on the surface. Dennis alerted Sutton and Flory to the presence of a stone in the soil he had just pitched up, and Sutton discovered the head, embedded in a clod, and nicked by Dennis's shovel, in this soil. It is thus clear from Dennis's report that the stone did actually come out of the mound, and, by omission, that Nicol or Nichol had no actual part in its "discovery."

The stone itself has long been lost, but an illustration of it, drawn by J.S. Unzicker in 1865 and reproduced by Alrutz (p. 33), survives, and is shown in Figure 1.[8] The inscription contains five apparently Hebrew letters, and two hyphen-like marks. It is not totally clear what the letters are, but from Unzicker's illustration, these appear to be:

yod – heth – nun caph lamed,

the apparent *caph* having a dot in its center.

Alrutz and Schenck report on the many attempts that were made to interpret this inscription in the Hebrew language. In order to interpret it as Hebrew, however, all these authors have had to make one or more modifications to the apparent identity of the letters.

According to an 1866 article by Rev. Mathew R. Miller quoted by Alrutz (p. 32), for example, a Dr. Illowy translated the full inscription as "*Yerachamehu Adonai Nephel*," or "May the Lord have mercy on him, an untimely birth," which Miller explains may refer to an abortion. Illowy is thus reading the fourth letter as an un-dotted *pe* (ph), while concurring with the above identification of the other letters. An un-dotted *pe* is quite similar to a dotted *caph*, but the latter is distinctly what appears to be present.[9] According to Schenck (p. 53), a Nathan Malzer of Cincinnati read the last three letters instead as "*Nabal*", meaning to decay, to wither, to fall an unnatural death. Malzer thus read the fourth letter as a dotted *beth*, instead of *caph* or *pe*. Again, although *beth* is also very similar to *caph*, and although Unzicker's sketch is not necessarily perfectly accurate, in the sketch the letter does distinctly look more like *caph* than *beth*.

In what was perhaps the most learned exposition on the text of the inscribed head, Wyrick's friend and supporter, the Rev. John W. McCarty, argued that a terminal *lamed* sometimes stands in for a terminal *resh*, and that the last word therefore could be read as "Nachar", which has a subtle meaning of to look upon without truly recognizing or knowing.[10] McCarty was thus reading the fourth letter as *caph*, but was nevertheless ignoring the conspicuous dot, without which its value is a Scottish ch sound as in McCulloch, Nichol or *Nachar*, but with which it is just a hard c or k sound, as in Nicol.

If my transcription is indeed correct, then I believe that all of the above authors were wrong to have at-

tempted to read the inscription as ancient Hebrew. In fact, I argue, the text can more easily be read as modern English!

I propose that the *yod* here stands not for Y, but for another of its English counterparts, J.[11] *Heth* is a guttural *Ach-laut* that does not appear in modern English. However, its closest counterpart is H. The sequence *nun caph lamed* is simply NCL. In Hebrew, short vowels are not represented by letters, and only optionally by extra dots under the letters. The entire inscription may thus be read in English as

J – H – Nicol !

The inscription itself is therefore striking confirmation of Nicol's claim to have forged the Inscribed Head!

Nicol made two minor errors in transcribing his name into Hebrew: First, he wrote the *yod* backwards. However, this is just a little apostrophe of a letter, so that reversing it is an easy enough mistake for a non-speaker of Hebrew to have made. And second, Nicol should, phonetically speaking, have used the Hebrew letter *he* rather than *heth* for his middle initial. However, for historical reasons, *heth*, instead of *he*, is identified in nineteenth century letter charts as H, whereas the letter *he* is identified in these charts as E.[12] It is therefore quite understandable that Nicol would have used *heth* in place of *he*.

These two errors suggest that Nicol did not have a deep understanding of Hebrew, but was merely transcibing blindly from a letter chart.

There is, nevertheless, one interesting distinction that Nicol makes in spelling his name in Hebrew letters: although Alrutz insists that the good dentist's name should be spelled Nicol, most of his contemporaries spelled it Nichol or Nichols instead. By having deliberately placed a dot in the *caph* so as to change its value from Scottish ch to hard c, Nicol was therefore telling us that Alrutz is indeed correct about the spelling of his name!

Given that the stone seemed to have actually come from deep within an undisturbed portion of the mound, and that Nicol did not himself handle the soil in which it was found, it is not obvious how he could have pulled off this deception. My only guess is that he may have simply squeezed some fresh soil from the excavation onto his stone, and then tossed it surreptitiously into loose earth at the bottom of the pit while the others were taking a break.

The Cooper Stone was found the following day, according to Alrutz, by a Mr. Cooper, in the loose earth that had been dug out when the Inscribed Head was found. It was packed with earth from higher up in the mound, above a distinctive layer of hard yellow clay. Since Nicol claimed to have forged this also, and left hard evidence that he actually inscribed the Head, the Cooper Stone is also probably spurious. This is a great shame, since it is a most unusual little piece of sculpture.

The letters on the Cooper Stone are not as clear as those on the Inscribed Head. However, Dr. Bradley Lepper has called it to my attention that the middle three letters on the main inscription of the Cooper Stone are essentially the same as those on the Head. Furthermore, these are followed by an indistinct letter that could be the *lamed* of the Head, and are preceded by a *yod*, albeit attached to some other lines that create some confusion. It therefore appears that Nicol actually signed both these stones!

There is, however, no reason to reject the Keystone, Decalogue, or Johnson-Bradner Stone simply on the basis of Nicol's probable forgery of the Inscribed Head and the Cooper Stone. Nicol's professed motive was, according to Judge Buckingham, to show how easily Wyrick might have been deceived when he found the first two stones. As quoted by Buckingham, he did not claim to have forged these himself. Whittlesey admits that "our information does not allow an answer" to the question of whether the Johnson-Bradner Stone was also forged by Nicol.[13]

The 1889 discovery in Tennessee by the Smithsonian Institution of an inscribed stone, accompanied by wood that radiocarbon dates to 32 A.D. - 769 A.D. and by brass bracelets that could only have come from the Old World in that time frame, confirms the existence of pre-Viking Old World contacts with the New World. Furthermore, the letters on the stone have been identified by Dr. Cyrus Gordon, a Semitic languages specialist, as being Paleo-Hebrew characters of the style of the first or second century A.D. This find thus confirms the existence of Roman-era Hebrew contacts with the New World.[14] There is, therefore, no reason to dismiss out of hand the possibility that the Keystone, Decalogue, and Johnson-Bradner Stone are genuine ancient Hebrew artifacts.

The only serious cause for concern this translation raises with respect to the other stones is that according to Wyrick's own testimony, "Dr. Nichols" was not just present, but was actually sitting nearby when Wyrick discovered the Decalogue! (See Alrutz, p. 20.) He may even have suggested at one point that he could easily have forged the Decalogue itself,

as one might infer from the following 1868 statement by Wyrick's staunch supporter, Israel Dille. Dille's statement (quoted by Alrutz, p. 45) speaks eloquently concerning Nicol's character and credibility (emphasis added):

> As to John Nicol's last story, for he had several versions before I left, I think it about as probable, as if he claims to produce our meteoric showers by throwing stones into space, which ignite as they fall back to the earth. The fabrication of that stone [the Decalogue, evidently] is as much above John Nicol's capacity as the composition of the Iliad.
>
> I will not say that all those stones are all impositions, but I will say, that I never knew a man in Ohio or elsewhere, who had the learning and skill combined, the hand and the head to construct them who was so base at heart as to labor so long & so well to impose. The cryptogram [of the Decalogue's script] is a hard achievement requiring learning, ingenuity, & persistent thought and labor. *John Nicol I conceive to be a greater imposition than all the stones combined.* ESOP

[1]The museum, at 300 Whitewoman Street in Roscoe Village, has recently put the stones back on display.

[2]In fact, the "Keystone" is too rounded to have really served as a keystone. It acquired this nickname from enthusiastic Freemasons soon after it was found. It is more properly thought of as a prayer stone.

[3]Dr. Bradley Lepper reports that he has uncovered documentation as to precisely where Wyrick found this stone.

[4]Bloom and Polansky (1980), among others, have translated this inscription. They report that it is an intelligible condensation of the Exodus version of the ten commandments. This would suggest it was made by someone with a working knowledge of Hebrew.

[5]See also McCulloch (1989). William Rudersdorf is preparing an in-depth analysis of the text and script of the Decalogue inscription.

[6]Schenck (pp. 81, 117) insists that this "Dr. John Nichols" was killed in the Civil War at Perryville, Ky, on Oct. 8, 1862, and buried in Cedar Hill Cemetery in Newark, and therefore that he could not possibly have claimed to have forged the Wilson mound stones, found in 1865. This, however, was a John *N.* Nichols, rather than John *H.*, and must have been a different individual, since Buckingham and Dennis (below) both claim to have seen him after 1862. I assume that "George A." and "S.A." Wilson are the same person, or at least that this is the same farm.

[7]The two paragraphs at the foot of p. 32 in Alrutz's article apparently belong at the top of the page, as they are a continuation of Dennis's report, begun on p. 31, rather than of the Miller quotation that immediately precedes them.

[8]In Alrutz's illustration, four of the five Hebrew letters face the wrong direction, the only exception being yod, a simple letter whose orientation is in any event indistinct. Alrutz has confirmed that his typesetter has inadvertently reversed the negative of this illustration, and I have accordingly reversed Alrutz's copy of it. In the original, the profile is on the left, and faces left. Having made this inversion, I read the letters Hebrew-style, from right to left, and report them here English-style, from left to right.

[9]Illowy was obviously extrapolating quite a bit to read "Yerachamehu Adonai" from just the first two letters. In 1870 Orson Pratt, a Mormon scholar, read this inscription instead as "May the Lord have mercy on me a Nephite " (Alrutz, p. 32). The Nephites are a group whose existence is attested in the *Book of Mormon*, but not elsewhere.

[10]Quoted in Schenk, p. 52. McCarty identifies the fourth letter as "CLI," by which I interpret him to mean *caph* with some sort of indication that it is dotted. The second letter he identifies as TH, by which he must mean *taw* rather than *teth*. *Taw* looks very much like *heth*, though *teth* does not.

[11]*Yod* is the letter that begins many Hebrew words which have an initial J in English, such as Jerusalem, Jehovah, Jonathan, etc.

[12]See, e.g. the chart in Webster's [First] Unabridged Dictionary, 1872 or 1875. This is too late for 1865, but the same identification probably appeared in earlier charts. *Heth* is identified as H because it stands in the position of H, and is the actual ancestor (in its Canaanite form) of H. Similarly, the letter *he* stands in the position of E and is the actual ancestor of E.

[13]The Johnson-Bradner Stone is in the shape of a miniature coffin with a rounded side, about 3" long. The 1875 French lithograph Alrutz reproduces shows its lid (bottom left), top (bottom right), and side (top). The latter is shown ex-

tended so as to lay out flat, even though it actually wraps around the stone.

[14]See Thomas (1984: 392-4), McCulloch (1988). Gordon was not aware at the time of his identification of the script of either the radiocarbon date or of the composition of the bracelets.

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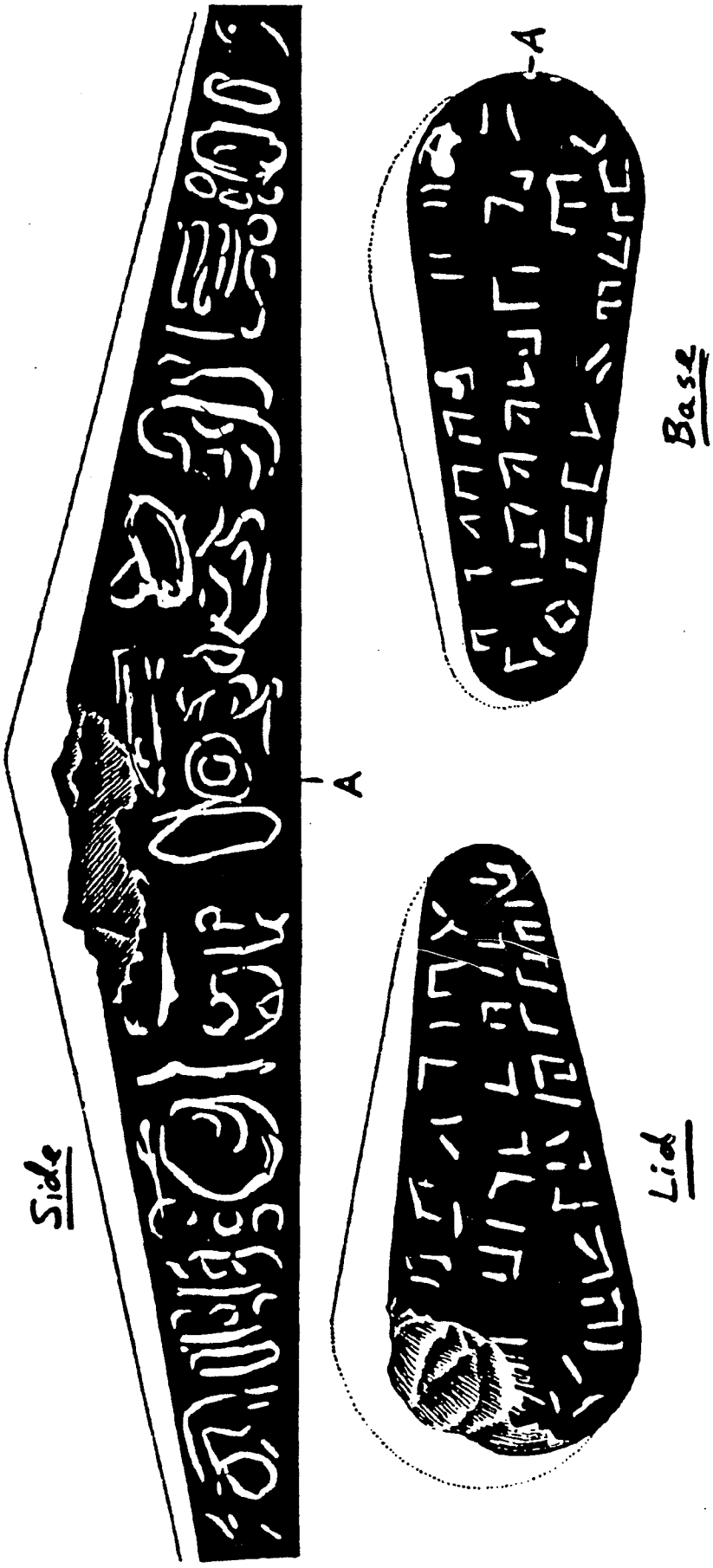
Kit for a Model of the Johnson-Bradner Stone

1. Photocopy the following page.
2. For a rigid model, glue the three pieces to light cardboard (optional).
3. Cut out the solid black portions of the three pieces, including the hatched blemish. Ignore the dotted lines.
4. Tape point A on the Base to point A on the Side.
5. Continue taping these edges together, bending the Side to follow the Base. This is most easily done by first turning the Base-Side assembly upside down (blank side up) and attaching several pieces of tape to the printed surface of the Base (sticky side up). Then tip the Side up perpendicular to the Base and bend it to follow the Base.
6. Tape the two ends of the Side together so that the two identical markings at the end overlap and so that it stands at a right angle to the Base the whole way around.
7. Tape the lid onto the upper edge of the Side, so the blemishes align.

Size of the artifact is about 3" in length. This model is approximately 125% actual size.

Source: N. Roe Bradner, Jr. "A History of a Stone Bearing Hebrew Inscriptions, Found in an American Mound." *Congrès international des Américanistes*, Nancy (1875), 2:191-7.



INSCRIPTION DE NEWARK

(Congrès international des Américanistes, T 2. p.192.

Lith. J. Royer à Nancy.