CORRESPONDENCE

The Correspondence Section provides a means of updating our readers about on-going epigraphic studies—in the broad sense of the word defined on our Information for Authors page (inside the back cover). It can include exchanges with new members, new findings, and comments on articles published here and elsewhere, by amateurs as well as professionals. —Ed.

Richard Bishop (see his article in this issue) was very kind to send an entry for the Correspondence Section with this note dated 17 August 2009: “Dear Mr. Buchanan: I really enjoyed your editorial on pp 7-8 of ESOP #26. Can you use this? Dick Bishop.” Dick, I certainly can! —Ed.

The Awesome Dedication Required


Just how does one become a dilettante? By initially pursuing a hobby until it becomes practically an obsession. I first started chasing down inscriptions back in the early 1980’s; first it was one or two inscriptions, then the building of a home-made Phoenician Dictionary which just “grew and grew.” Phoenician interested me more than any other language, but don’t ask me why. Perhaps it was their habit of traveling and trading for a living which had a sort of Romantic lilt to it—but it was also the Phoenician alphabet that attracted me. Their language was alphabetic very early in history (13th Century B.C.) and not nearly as difficult for the scribe as making Cuneiform tablets. It lasted a long time—2 millennia or until about the beginning of the 7th Century AD. There were lots of inscriptions around the Middle East and the Western Mediterranean area and there were plenty of transcriptions to examine in the archives.

The Dictionary was begun with one inscription that I had sweated over endlessly; and which I then disassembled and recorded in a notebook where one page equaled one Phoenician alphabetic letter. The words became spread among the notebook pages according to the first letter of each word. Page 1 contained words starting with the letter aleph (A), Page 2 words starting with the letter beth (B), Page 3 words starting with the letter gimel (G), Page 4 words starting with the letter dalet (D) and so on for a total of 22 pages. I recorded the Phoenician words in right to Left format but already converted to Latin (Roman) letters. That first inscription already had been translated into English and German by two different Experts. In the next couple of years, much of my spare time was used in visiting libraries to locate and transcribe inscriptions and their Expert translations. Often, I would run across a Glossary or a Vocabulary or a dictionary of Phoenician hidden away in some dusty archive and I started adding these to my Dictionary. Also, 56 more inscriptions joined the original to become a hand-written Phoenician Notebook & Dictionary of several hundred Phoenician words.

Some of the more important documents consulted were:

Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum , Part I (CIS)
Ephemeris für semitische Epigraphik (Eph.)
Repertoire d’epigraphie sémitique (RES)
Handbuch der nordsemitischen Epigraphik (NE)

and many others. The experts (and all of a sudden, my personal tutors) were famous names such as W. F. Albright, J.-B. Chabot, J. Friedrich, Z. S. Harris, M. Lidzbarski, T. Nödeke, J. B. Peckham, F. Rosenthal, and S. Segert. The names of some of the inscriptions were milestones of translation such as Ahiram, Amrit Stelae, King Azitawadda (Karatepe, Turkey—a bilingual), Kiton, Kilamuwa, Massinissa, Mesha Stone, the Paraiba Stone (now lost), Milkyaton, Shipitbaal, Yehawmilk and 46 others.

In 1984, using my newly purchased Commodore 64, I started entering the data into my Computer—a massive typing job for a “two-finger” typist. It was done part-time and it took weeks. The Phoenician words and their English counterparts (less of course, any duplicates that dropped out during the alphabetic sorting process) were stored on a “Floppy Disk.” I also wrote a simple program in assembly (machine) language to retrieve the Phoenician word from the Dictionary (and the English meaning) whenever I encountered it in a new inscription. Eventually, the file got too big (3,621 records—or words—and 60,163 bytes) for the C-64’s Memory (38,911 bytes free). So I had to buy a 1764 Ram Expansion Unit (262,144 bytes free) or sometimes use a S More Cartridge (61,183 bytes free) just to sort the file alphabetically again after adding newly found words. These painfully tiny amounts of memory would be a laugh now in our world of Gigabytes (one Gigabyte = 1,024,000,000 bytes).
My output really picked up steam with this Computer aid(e). I was able to translate a fresh inscription "on-the-wing" so to speak (it was usually encountered without an accompanying translation by an Expert), then I could compare it to the Expert's "Solution" later wherever and whenever I found it a library. The best part was the accuracy. On most inscriptions it was better than I am now getting on a couple of modern German-English/English-German computer translation programs!

The file was now so big and unhandy to update with a small computer, I decided to cut it down to basic Phoenician word "stems" by dropping out many of the variations that caused extra words; i.e., words with a prefix such as "L" (to) and a suffix such as "Y" (possessive), etc. By this "streamlining," and also by using the "one best word" technique to select the English meaning, the file shrank to 42,869 bytes (c.29% smaller in memory space) and 3,014 Phoenician records/words (about 17% less words). Regrettably, the retrieval time did not become any faster with the smaller file—I was already using a machine language "search" program.

I now use a PC Notebook with Windows Home XP. The 3,014 word Phoenician Dictionary program from my old Commodore -64 (1 MHz) is not portable to the newer Notebook PC (2.4 GHz) because of timing differences. Also, Microsoft’s MS-DOS follow-on language and Commodore’s Basic language do not understand one another. But, the C-64 Dictionary still works, ploddingly!

You may ask, "Well, why didn’t you publish something?" First off, it was just a hobby for me. I got my "kicks" just handling the material—like a person "hooked" on doing cross-word puzzles or an explorer who just has to know what is around the next bend of the river or over the next hill. The Germans have a saying that fits: "Der Weg ist das Ziel" meaning [the goal is to travel—the destination is not important. Besides, "Publish or Perish" went with my regular teaching job and not with my hobby. Also, I was just a little bit intimidated because there were plenty of mainstream institutional Epigraphic Experts out there doing a fine job already for scores of years on the well-researched Phoenician language.

You ask, "Well, what was that first inscription that got you so interested in Phoenician?" Sorry that I left you having to guess it, but it was the Phoenician Gold Plate found 18 years earlier in Pyrgi, Italy. When I first encountered it, it was printed in text form, and I had two translations to cope with; one in English and one in German. And imagine my great joy when I actually saw the plate in a full-page Photograph for the first time a couple of years later. I copied every letter by hand and it was like "coming back to the old home town" after several years’ absence. As I eagerly translated "my" inscription once more, this time using my trusty C-64 "Brotkasten" [breadbox] Computer. I said to myself: "That’s about ‘as good as it gets’ fora dilettante. Before, I couldn’t even spell dilettante, now I am one.

—Richard E Bishop

Scott Wolter’s article on the Hooked X in 26 has drawn a good deal of attention (see elsewhere in this issue). Below we are pleased to provide the views of an excellent professional linguist in Texas. —Ed.

Response to Scott Wolter

"The Hooked X." ESOP 26, 2008 (17-19)

In response to the article by Scott Wolter in the most recent volume of ESOP I would comment as follows. First, I recognize that the author, by his own acknowledgement, is presenting ideas of a "highly speculative" and "controversial nature." (17) Prefacing his remarks in this way does not, however, abnegate the author’s responsibility in writing for a professional journal to substantiate his claims with historically sound evidence. Such evidence is lacking in Wolter’s article. His supposition that the hook on the X rune symbolically represents a child (the daughter of Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalene) is based on unproven and tenuous assumptions. He claims that the upper half of the X rune ("V") “represent(s) the chalice, vessel, womb, or the pubic triangle of the female…” and has been interpreted in this way “for thousands of years by many different cultures.” (18) Yet he provides no factual basis for this interpretation. If so many cultures interpret the X rune this way, why does he not provide at least one example? Similarly, the author provides no evidence for his interpretation of the bottom half of the X rune ("Λ") merely stating that it "represents the phallus, penis, or the sword." (18) Even if one were inclined to agree with this claim, supporting evidence still needs to be presented. According to Wolter the convergence of these two symbols ("V" and "Λ") into one rune represents the union of male and female, based on the fact that "some cultures" believe this. Which cultures? Finally, we come to the crux of his reading of the X rune: the hook. Here, Wolter demonstrates his ignorance of the basic rules of academic protocol, as evidenced by his failure to research his topic and his failure to reference recent articles from ESOP in which the hooked X (X) is discussed.1 He provides other evidence to support his interpretation of the hook, although it is of the sort that leads one to question whether this is a scientific article or a religious tract.
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Wolter confesses that he truly did not know how to interpret the hook, when on April 26, 2006 he lectured on this subject to the St. Paul Freemasons. During the post-lecture discussion it was revealed to him by a symbolologist in the crowd, that the hook inside the “V” (chalice, vessel, womb, etc…) might represent a child. Wolter’s wife Janet connected the dots for him by tacitly communicating to him —in a leap of faith— that the hook represented “the daughter,” in other words: the union of Christ and Mary Magdalene. (18) Clearly, this sort of argumentation and conjecture has no place in a professional and scientific journal, and is not what one expects from a scholar/scientist. For Wolter to conclude in his summary of findings, that “the hook or little chalice in the X…is symbolic of a child,” (bold, mine) completely misrepresents the quality of the evidence presented, and reveals the author’s tendency to conflate personal belief with reality.

When Wolter attempts to produce proof for his assertions, it is either tainted with controversy or manipulated to suit his purpose. As a prime example of the latter, one need only examine his claim that the first evidence for the use of an X in medieval times can be attributed to a 15th century alphabetic code based on Cistercian ciphers. He refers to a series of four alphabetic codes discovered by David King in a Latin text from Germany, one of which is identified by King as being based on Cistercian ciphers. Wolter finds an X in the first two alphabetic codes and presents these codes in his article, leaving off half of the document. But it is only the fourth code in David King’s document which is a Cistercian cipher and this has no X in its alphabet. 2 As a further example, Wolter claims to have “discovered” the four examples of the hooked X on the Narragansett and Spirit Pond inscriptions, all of which, he suggests have “…connection(s) to secret societies.” 3 He fails to mention that the hooked X was known to other authors and has been discussed by scholars for over fifty years. Wolter makes no mention of the controversy behind the Spirit Pond inscriptions, nor the fact that their authenticity as medieval artifacts has yet to be ascertained. 4 Similarly, the Narragansett Stone has yet to be authenticated as a runic inscription from the Middle Ages. 5 The provenance of the Larsen Rune Rows has been called into question and it has been suggested that it was derived at least partially from the Kensington Runestone. 6 Wolter cites the 15th century sigil of Christopher Columbus as a later source for the hooked X (=X), but no consensus has yet been reached on Columbus’ intent in using this symbol. In spite of this, Wolter finds in the hook on Columbus’ X possible evidence of his “allegiance to the Knights of Christ.” 7 He references the work of John Dyson 8 and Paul Chapman 9 for source material to support this supposition, yet neither scholar makes mention of the Knights of Christ in their works. This does not deter Wolter from concluding that, Columbus’ “probable association with the Knights of Christ goes a long way towards explaining his mysterious activities…”(17). In a recent book which he coauthored with Dr. Richard Nielsen, Wolter supported a different and more plausible interpretation of the hooked X as a symbol for the Greek “ch” (i.e. Christopher). 10 Finally, Wolter’s attempt to make a connection between the hooked X (A) and the sarcophagus of Tutankhamen is completely unfounded and must be viewed as sheer speculation. The symbols of the crook and flail do not represent Osiris and Isis as Wolter claims, but rather the authority of the pharaohs. 11 That Wolter misconstrues the interpretation of such an important iconic symbol demonstrates only that the author has little or no understanding of ancient Egyptian culture.

(Endnotes)

1 Discussion of this linguistic phenomenon appears as early as 1951 in an article by William Thalbitzer, “Two Runic Stones from Greenland and Minnesota,” in Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections 116, pub. 4021 (1951): 1-71. Here: 56-57. See more recently, Richard Nielsen, “On Linguistic Aspects concerning the Kensington Rune Stone,” ESOP 23 (1998): 187-265 and by the same author, “Progress on the Kensington Runestone: Kensington Runestone Report 1998-2003,” ESOP 24 (2004): 68-98. In the second of these articles Nielsen argues that the hooked X is found in Latin manuscripts contemporary with the KRS, and thus, cannot be viewed as a special symbol used exclusively by Cistercians or Grael seekers. (here: Section VII. “The A-rune”, 82-86). Even in the book Wolter coauthored with Nielsen in 2006 it was concluded that, “(T)he hooked X appears to be an adaptation of the x-like rune for a.”(Nielsen/Wolter, 2006, 216). The fact that an article of Wolter’s appears in the same volume of the ESOP journal as other research regarding the same subject makes it unlikely the exclusion of this material could be a mere oversight on his part.


3 Nowhere in his paper does he substantiate this claim.

4 The fact that many of the runes from the Spirit Pond Stones would have been known to a modern-day forger familiar with the KRS and the publication of the Ukna Stone (1957) are indications of the possibility of modern day provenance. This position finds support from Dr. Henrik Williams, Professor of Scandinavian Languages at Uppsala University in Sweden, who in a private communication from February, 18, 2009, states “… I never believed much in the Spirit Pond. It was too obviously influenced by the KRS and the Vinland Map…. Of course this does not mean that the SPS inscription should not be studied further. Who made it and why. What is the thinking behind its inscription?” (quoted in Nielsen, 2009, 2).

See most recently: Richard Nielsen, “The Runes of the Spirit Pond Stones and the Narrangansett Inscription can be found in Modern Books.” *ESOP* 27 (2009) and by the same author, “The Larsson Rune-Row—A Post 1898 Product?” *ESOP* 27(2009). Both of these last two are forthcoming in the next volume of *ESOP*.


See the caption to the picture of Columbus’s signature. Wolter, 17. Presumably Wolter references Bellec here only for the photograph, since Bellec’s interpretation of the signature makes no mention of the Knight’s of Christ. He states only that it is found in the monastery of Rabad and that “there are several hypotheses as to the initials.” He provides two possible interpretations of the X: as “Xristobal” or “Xristus.” It may be the latter interpretation to which Wolter refers, although this is hardly evidence of Columbus’ membership in the Knight’s of Christ. François Bellec, *Unknown Lands: the Log Book of the Great Explorers*. (Woodstock: Overland, 2002) 87.

John Dyson, *For Gold, God and Glory*, (Toronto: Madison Press, 1991) here: 19. Wolter’s reference to Dyson’s work contains no mention of the Knights of Christ. The clear position of the author is that there is no consensus in the scholarship regarding any secret meaning in the signature of Columbus. He states that it is an issue, which “historians have never resolved with certainty,” and concludes only that Columbus had an exaggerated sense of his own self-importance. (19)

Wolter gives an incomplete reference here, without a page number. After an extensive search through the Chapman materials, I was unable to verify Wolter’s reference. See Paul H. Chapman, *Discovering Columbus*. (Columbus, GA: The Institute for the Study of American Cultures, 1991.)

Richard Nielsen, and Scott F. Wolter. *The Kensington Rune Stone: Compelling New Evidence*. (Chanhassen, MN: Lake Superior Agate, 2006) 85. It had been suggested earlier by Nielsen that the origin of the hook may hark back to the use of X as the Roman numeral 10 ([A] in manuscripts) since it is the 10th letter of the runic alphabet. Support for this is found in the fact that the X-like ã has a hook on the letter a (ý) that was used in the manuscript tradition in the 14th century. See Nielsen, *Progress*, (2004), Appendix A, 90-92 and Appendix C, 93-94. This same idea is listed as one of the conclusions in Wolter’s 2006 book with Richard Nielsen, on p. 216, number 4: “The hooked X appears to be an adaptation of the X-like rune for a.” Does Wolter now reject this idea?

Beryl Dhanjal has recently described the crook as “a shepherd’s staff... echoed in the croziers carried by bishops and archbishops. The bishop is a good shepherd to his flock, with his crook to pull sheep back into the fold. His rod and staff are to punish and lead the flock and to guide them toward the right path.” Beryl Dhanjal, *Signs and Symbols*. (Edison, NJ: Chartwell, 2008.) 92-93. See also Lorna Oakes, and Lucia Gahlen, *Ancient Egypt: An Illustrated Reference to the Myths, Religions, Pyramids and Temples of the Land of the Pharaohs*. (London: Hermes, 2002). According to Oakes, “Two of the most important (royal regalia) were the ‘crook’ symbolizing government and the flail, perhaps deriving from a fly whisk.” Further: Patricia Turner and Charles Russel Coulter, *Dictionary of Ancient Deities*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000). here “Osiris.” 367.

**Select Bibliography**


—James L. Frankki
Dept. of Foreign Languages
AB-4, Rm. 333
Sam Houston State Univ.
Huntsville, TX 77341
Correspondence

The Venus Alignments in the Newport Tower of Rhode Island, Wolter in ESOP Vol. 26

Wolter proposed that a hole in the east wall of the tower and a niche on the west inner wall gave an angle of about 23 degrees and that Venus could be sighted during 20-21 December in the hole niche alignment (about 120 degrees on the drawing provided).

It is always suspicious when an author speaks of an alignment and does not give the azimuth of the alignment or the time of day that such an alignment is reached. Neither is the height of eye and the latitude and longitude of the tower given. Obviously no calculation for Venus had been made for his proposal.

Wolter did add a caveat with, “Future research into the Venus alignments by qualified researchers may provide validation to their existence.”

While in the U.S. Coast Guard I have circumnavigated around North America, across the Atlantic three times, and across the Pacific, both below and above the equator, twice always using Venus both as a morning star and an evening star. I have made over 2000 sights on this star.

My calculation shows that Venus is 30 degrees south of the aperture of the east wall when it reaches 22 degrees altitude on 21 December 2007. Wolter claimed that clouds obscured Venus when he tried to find it during December 20-22 in 2007, otherwise he would have observed his error.

Wolter stated, “This paper proposes that Venus alignments are captured in the Newport Tower which provide evidence consistent with medieval Templar construction practices. Regarding the claim that Cistercian structures in Europe had such alignments with Venus, Wolter gives not one example of such a Cistercian structure or any proof that the Cistercians ever captured this alignment.

Obviously Wolter’s paper is a work in progress, but no claim for a Venus alignment in the Newport Tower can be made by him until he proves it by celestial calculations.

—Richard Nielsen
The Huron Stone: In December 2006 Chris Patenaude made our Society aware by e-mail of an inscribed stone found on a small beach on the shores of Lake Huron, Michigan. It could have been washed ashore or eroded out of associated slope. It is known that within recent memory (the last decade) the water covered that part of the shoreline. The stone is shown above approximately life size (5¼” in height). I also heard about it from John White III of the Midwestern Epigraphic Society. Finally, in early 2007, I heard from Kevin Callaghan, the finder of the stone, who sent me several pictures of it over the next couple of years. Kevin also sent an excellent Power Point presentation concerning the stone. Various persons have come up with suggestions concerning the inscription, seeing similarities in individual letters to Syriac, Lydian, Hebrew, and Arabic, but no kind of decipherment has been obtained. It has even been suggested that it is a form of shorthand. What do you Readers think?—Ye Editor