

# *An Annotated Transcription of the Ohio Decalogue Stone*

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The Ohio Decalogue stone was found in 1860 by David Wyrick in an ancient burial mound 10 miles south of Newark, Ohio. A few months earlier, Wyrick had found another Hebrew-inscribed stone, known as the "Keystone," among the ancient earthworks in Newark itself. For the history of these finds, see Robert Alritz, "The Newark Holy Stones: The History of an Archaeological Tragedy," and the 194 [sic!] primary and secondary references he cites.

The inscription on the Decalogue stone has been translated by McCarty (1860), Bloom & Polansky (1980), Naveh (1982a), and others as containing an intelligible abridgment of the Exodus 20 version of the Ten Commandments or Decalogue. The shaded passages indicated in Figure 1 are those omitted from the Ohio text. This is a substantially different abridgment than that which appears in the Los Lunas, New Mexico Decalogue inscription (Skupin 1989).

The text begins at the top of the arch over the head of the robed and bearded figure identified in large letters as Moses, runs down the left side of the front, winds around every available space on the back and sides, and then comes back up the right side of the front to finish exactly where it began without stretching or squeezing the letters. In itself, this represents a considerable feat of planning. Note that the last five verses are completely intact, and have not been cut to fit the available space. Two letters from the last word on line 12 were, however, unnecessarily repeated at the beginning of line 13, perhaps in the interests of spacing.

In the transcription, I have numbered the lines according to the generally-agreed-upon order, the only possible exception being line 6, which tends to get overlooked. In 3 dimensions, the line order is quite logical.

Note that in the Ohio text, "I am the Lord your God" appears at the end of verse 2, rather than at its beginning, so that the arrangement seems to imply that it was Moses, not God, "who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of Slavery."

Within each line, I have numbered the letters from right to left, so that they may be referred to by line and letter. I count 258 symbols in all, including the non-alphabetic symbols 2.1 and 9.11. The text is run on, with no spaces or word dividers. No terminal letter forms, consonant points, or vowel points are used. Words are often broken at the end of a line and in one instance, mentioned above, the continuation is partly repeated.

I have added the standard Masoretic Hebrew text from *The NIV Interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testament* for the reader's convenience, along with single marks under the line of text to indicate word divisions and double marks to indicate verse divisions. Omissions from the Masoretic text are indicated by ellipses. The translation shown is the NIV translation of the Masoretic text, not of the Ohio text per se. The reader is left to identify and interpret the discrepancies between the two texts.

Although the Ohio text does not completely agree with the Masoretic, on one key word (ZKWR rather than ShMWR for "remember" at the beginning of verse 8) it agrees with the Masoretic where the Samaritan is different (von Gall, 1914). It is therefore more in the Masoretic than the Samaritan tradition.

The transcription was made from the original inscription with the aid of a magnifying glass and strong flashlight. No attempt was made in the transcription to reconstruct what was intended; all such

## Exodus

<sup>23</sup>So Moses went down to the people and told them.

## The Ten Commandments

**20** And God spoke all these words:

<sup>2</sup>"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

<sup>3</sup>"You shall have no other gods before <sup>n</sup> me.

<sup>4</sup>"You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. <sup>5</sup>You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup>but showing love to thousands who love me and keep my commandments.

<sup>7</sup>"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

<sup>8</sup>"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. <sup>9</sup>Six days you shall labor and do all your work, <sup>10</sup>but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. <sup>11</sup>For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath and made it holy.

<sup>12</sup>"Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

<sup>13</sup>"You shall not murder.

<sup>14</sup>"You shall not commit adultery.

<sup>15</sup>"You shall not steal.

<sup>16</sup>"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

<sup>17</sup>"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

<sup>n</sup>3 Or besides

Figure 1

speculation is in the accompanying notes. Dotted lines indicate worn lines that are actually, but faintly, present. All deviations from the standard text were double checked for wear or possible misreadings, as indicated in the notes.

## The Ohio Decalogue alphabet

The Ohio Decalogue is written in a distinctive variant of the standard or "square Hebrew" alphabet that has been in use since the time of Ezra, and in almost its present form for approximately 2000 years. These alphabets are compared in Figure 2. Many of the Ohio letters are squared off, sans-serif, unshaded versions of the standard letters,

while others are so peculiar that many readers of Hebrew initially do not believe the inscription is Hebrew at all.

Each letter has been compressed or expanded, as necessary, to exactly fit the height of the line. Thus, yod has been stretched out to the height of a full line, while qoph has been curled up on itself so as not to hang down below the base line. This desire for uniformity of height may explain why terminal letters (most of which extend below the base line) were not employed.

In some letters (e.g. zayin), details have been exaggerated so as to make the letters more easily distinguishable from one another.

In others (e.g. waw, resh, caph), non-standard short lines have been added to achieve this end. These lines are not decorative serifs, but rather are essential parts of the letters. Shin is the only letter that has ornamental lines, and I can find no particular pattern that governs when these appear. In particular, the scribe made no attempt to differentiate "shin" from "sin" by these marks.

The linear, unshaded, sans-serif look of the Decalogue alphabet is reminiscent of certain modern Israeli type fonts. However, these modern Hebrew fonts were inspired by the 1920s Bauhaus, and the first of them was not introduced until 1924 (Avrin 1988). They therefore cannot have been used as the model for this stone, found in 1860. In recent decades, these fonts have evolved further, under the influence of archaeological finds which date to the Second Temple period. The "modern" look of these fonts, and therefore also of the Decalogue alphabet, is thus in part quite ancient.

It has been observed by Theodore Dwight (1861) that although in the Ohio Decalogue alphabet ayin and lamed do not look at all like their standard prototypes, they instead favor the Paleo-Hebrew alphabet that was used on coins of the 2nd century B.C. - 2nd century A.D. (lamed, however, being backwards). Otherwise, there are no Paleo-Hebrew affinities in the Ohio Decalogue alphabet. The New Mexico Decalogue alphabet, on the other hand, is almost entirely Paleo-Hebrew, with a few Greek letters, notably delta, zeta, eta, and tau, in place of their Paleo-Hebrew counterparts, dalet, zayin, heth, and taw. The Smithsonian's Bat Creek inscription from Tennessee is likewise Paleo-Hebrew, though a clearly different style of Paleo-Hebrew than the New Mexico variety.

The Ohio pe is upside-down relative to its standard Square Hebrew stance, but interestingly enough, this is the way it stands in modern *cursive* Hebrew (Naveh 1982b).


The Ohio aleph and mem look nothing like either their Square Hebrew or Paleo-Hebrew counterparts. They could, however, pass for their Greek cousins alpha and mu. In

particular, the second aleph shown in the chart is essentially the manuscript form of Greek alpha that serves as the first letter, "alpha," of the Hellenistic Coptic alphabet, and survives as our own lowercase typeset "a." The Ohio mem is just a squared off Greek mu. Curiously, precisely the same M/mu, complete with detached center bar, appears in the logo of the Ford Mustang, but again this could not have been a model for this inscription, found in 1860.

A Hellenistic Greek influence could also help explain yod (which has become iota), ayin (which has become omicron, itself descended from the Paleo-Hebrew/Phoenician ayin), and perhaps even the appearance of a graven image of Moses on the stone. Such an image is considered by many to be a strictly modern corruption, yet complaints of "modern corruption" have abounded since at least the Alexandrian conquest.


Professor Amnon Zipin, curator of the Judaica collection at the Ohio State University Libraries, has noted that traditionally Moses is depicted in art as having rays of light emerging from his head as he descends from the mountain with the Decalogue. Thus Michaelangelo's famous sculpture of Moses appears to have two horns (in fact light beams) emerging from his head. Zipin suggests that this may be why on the Ohio Decalogue tablet, Moses' name is made to fan out over his head. How far back before Michaelangelo this tradition goes, I would not venture to guess.

The second form of aleph shown in the chart is also identical to he as it appears on most of the Hasmonaean coins. However, the Ohio Decalogue he is simply a squared-off rendition of the standard form, and is never confused with aleph, so this is presumably a mere coincidence.

The most perplexing Ohio letter is sadhe, which has the standard head, but an unusual, square base. The only precedents for this base on sadhe that I have been able to turn up are the ancient Sabaeen form, , circa 1000 B.C. (Naveh 1982b), and the modern

THE DECALOGUE ALPHABET			
letter	name	Standard Hebrew	Decalogue Alphabet
·	aleph	א	א, א
B	beth	ב	ב
G	gimel	ג	ג
D	daleth	ד	ד
H	he	ה	ה
W	waw	ו	ו
Z	zayin	ז	ז
Ḥ	heth	ח	ח
Ṭ	teth	ט	(not used)
Y	yod	י	י
K	kaph	כ, ק	כ
L	lamed	ל	ל
M	mem	מ, מ	מ
N	nun	נ, נ	נ
S	samekh	ס	ס
·	ayin	ע	ע
P	pe	פ, פ	פ
Ts	sadhe	צ, צ	צ
Q	qoph	ק	ק
R	resh	ר	ר
Sh	shin	ש	ש, ש
T	taw	ת	ת, ת

Figure 2

Ethiopian "zayde," , itself derived from ancient Sabaeen or a kindred alphabet. Although the South Arabian alphabet is ultimately akin to the Canaanite/Hebrew system, this split goes back far before the adoption of the square Hebrew alphabet, so it is a mystery why such a letter would turn up in an otherwise apparently Second Temple or later context.

### The language of the inscription

I personally know next to nothing about the Hebrew language. I will, however, recount what others have said about the language of the inscription.

Rev. John W. McCarty (1860) noted that the Ohio inscription substitutes heth for the expected *taw* at 7.1, 7.13, and 10.17. Unlike 12.17, these substitutions cannot be attributed to wear. According to McCarty, substituting he for *taw* at these three points would turn the second person singular into the third person singular (i.e. "one must not" instead of "thou shalt not"), and he proposes that this is what was intended. However, what is present is clearly heth, not he, as would strictly be required for McCarty's reading. Nevertheless, Mayer Sulzberger (1868: 527) noted that the stone's frequent confusion of he and heth elsewhere "recalls the Talmud's information that the Galileans confounded their gutturals, a vicious pronunciation of which the Samaritans, according to the best authorities, were likewise guilty." What we have here therefore appears to be a grammatical substitution of he for *taw*, coupled with a dialectical substitution of heth for he.

Cyrus Gordon, in discussion at the June 1991 ISAC meetings in Columbus, Ga., noted that the substitution of *waw*-heth for the expected *yod*-*taw* at 10.9-10 would convert the standard second person imperative of "to do" into a construction known as the absolute infinitive, a perfectly good Hebrew construction which nevertheless does not appear in any of the Hebrew texts of the Decalogue. This effectively replaces, "In six days you shall do all your work" with, "In six days your

work must be done." Gordon regards this unusual, yet valid, phrasing as support for the stone's authenticity. As in the preceding paragraph, in order for Gordon's reading to strictly work, the actual heth at 10.10 must be read as he.

According to Zipin, the omission of the expected *yod* between 2.18 and 2.19 in the word for Egypt is a permissible alternative spelling of this word, and need not be construed as an error.

The above three considerations would argue that the author of the stone was someone who was conversant in a dialect of Hebrew and wrote down the Decalogue text from memory, giving the essential sense of it, if not the exact wording. On the other hand, a few other discrepancies point instead to someone's having slavishly copied a standard Hebrew text without understanding all the words.

The chief of these is at 12.2, where *caph* appears in place of the expected *daleth* at the end of "you shall [not] covet". Professor Joseph Galron-Goldschlager, who is also on the staff of the Ohio State University Libraries, has pointed out that this makes no sense as written, but would have been a very easy transcription error for someone to have made from a text written with the standard terminal letter forms, since *daleth* and terminal *caph* are identical, except that the latter's vertical stroke is a little longer. (In Figure 2, the standard Hebrew terminal forms are the second form shown, when more than one is given.) Interestingly, this is not merely an error of ignorance of terminal distinctions, as would explain the substitution of *daleth* for terminal *caph*, since this is just the opposite substitution: the intrusion of a terminal *caph* for an original *daleth*. This word therefore must have been mistranscribed, somewhere along the line, from a text that was written in standard Hebrew letters, complete with terminal letter forms. In itself this is not particularly diagnostic as to age, since terminal letter forms appear in both ancient (Dead Sea) manuscripts and in modern typeset Hebrew.



Fig. 3 Ohio Decalogue stone in the stone box in which it was found, with stone lid removed. Front, with lines 1, 13. Photos: Johnson-Humrickhouse Museum.

Fig. 4. Rear of Ohio Decalogue stone, with lines 4, 7-9.

Fig. 5. Left side, with beginning of lines 10-12.

Another error of the same sort may be at 2.6, where daletth appears in place of the expected waw. According to Zipin and Galron, this makes no sense, except as a transcription error by someone who took waw for daletth and did not understand what was

being copied. Again, this error could only have been made when the text was written in standard Hebrew letters, where waw and daletth look very much alike, and not in the Ohio Decalogue alphabet, where these letters cannot be confused.

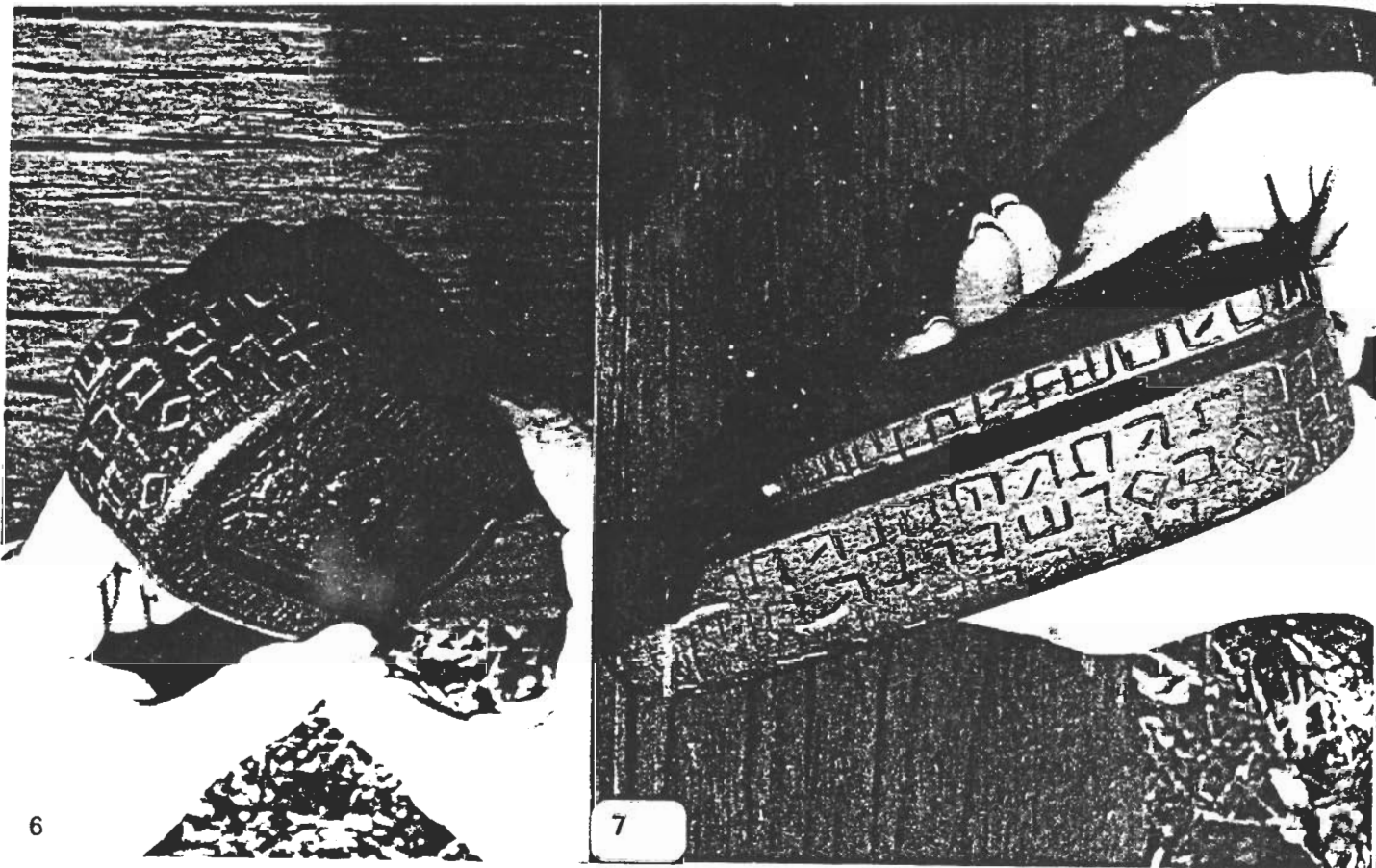


Fig. 6. Top side, with middle of lines 10-12.

Fig. 7. Right side, with end of lines 10-2. Beginning of line 5 also appears, inverted, on side platform.

A third place where such an error may have been made is at 11.1, where ayin is substituted for the expected sadhe in "murder." Although these letters are very distinct in the Ohio alphabet, Galron points out that in standard Hebrew they look very much

alike, and believes that this is the source of the discrepancy.

According to McCarty, on the other hand, "there are two verbs in Hebrew Rngng (resh-ayin-ayin) and Rtzhh [resh-sad-he-heth] both

meaning the same thing. The Hebrew text uses the latter in the 2 sing. imp. of Kal and the grammarian of the stone seems to use the 2. sing. per. Hiphil of the former. The meaning would be the same precisely. The most able lexicographers [sic] of Hebrew we have had, Gesenius has both these words in his lexicon marked with an asterisk denoting *doubtful orthography*. This most certainly is an important item. Here, an able scholar, who never dreamed of our stone, marks a word doubtful; and now, eighteen years after his demise, there rises from the dust a *dead*, but *speaking* witness, to verify the accuracy of the scholar; and in so doing, to vindicate its own claims to antiquity and truth."

Galron and Zipin do not agree with McCarty's reading, and attribute the substitution of *taw* for *heth* at 11.2 to an additional transcription error. I will leave it to others to resolve this dispute.

McCarty also noted that *lamed* is repeatedly substituted for *nun*, at 11.6, 11.13, and 11.19. These cannot be attributed either to wear (at least not at these particular points), or to misreadings from a standard text, and therefore appear to constitute a significant pattern. McCarty proposed that this may be a dialectical consonant shift analogous to the R/L shift that occurs in many languages, and concludes that "such consistency amid so much diversity from the received Hebrew text, would argue the utter impossibility of counterfeit." Again, I will leave it to others more informed than myself to pass judgment on this point.

The above considerations together seem to indicate that two separate layers of deviation from the standard text occurred. In the first step, a person rather fluent in Hebrew wrote the substance of the Decalogue down from memory, abridging it and paraphrasing it, but using standard square Hebrew letters, complete with terminal forms. In the second step, another person who knew the standard Hebrew alphabet, but who had very imperfect knowledge of the Hebrew language, transcribed this text into the unique Ohio Decalogue alphabet, introducing a few outright orthographic errors in the process.

## Charges of forgery

Charles Whittlesey (1872) accused David Wyrick of having personally forged the inscription, copying it from a Hebrew Bible he reportedly had in his possession at his death. Bradley T. Lepper, Jr., Curator of the Newark Moundbuilders Museum, and the semiofficial voice of the archaeological establishment on the issue today, endorses Whittlesey's view (1990).

However, in 1861 Wyrick published a pamphlet on the Decalogue and his earlier "Keystone" find, in which he included a woodcut he had painstakingly made of the stone and all the lettering on it. A careful comparison of my transcription to Wyrick's woodcut shows that Wyrick made no less than 38 significant errors, in which he either made a legible letter illegible, or turned a legible letter into a different letter. This is a 14.8% error rate. Wyrick routinely confuses *daleth* with *resh*, *taw* with *heth*, and *waw* with *yod*, not realizing that the marks that differentiate these letters are not just decorative serifs. He even inverts several letters. In only one of these 38 cases (letter 10.9, which he read as Y instead of the actual W, an error he frequently makes elsewhere) does his woodcut give the expected letter where the stone gives an unexpected letter. Yet the pamphlet in which this garbled transcription appeared was Wyrick's best attempt at convincing the world that the stone was a genuine Hebrew artifact. Wyrick clearly did not even understand the inscription's peculiar, yet consistently applied, alphabet, and therefore could not have been its author. Joseph Schenck (1982: 87-97) first noted this impossibility, but identified only 18 of the 38 errors actually present in Wyrick's woodcut.

Beverley H. Moseley, Jr., retired Art Director of the Ohio Historical Center, has compared the bas-relief of Moses on the stone with the woodcut in Wyrick's pamphlet. It is his opinion as a professional artist, based on the execution of the figure and the treatment of the garments, that the same person could not have made these two images, and therefore that it could not have been Wyrick who carved the Decalogue stone.



EXODUS 20

3 2 1  
 ה ש ה (1)

מֹשֶׁה  
 Moses

19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1  
 ה ש ה ר א ה ר א ה ר א ה ר א ה ר א ה י (2)  
 (no yod) sic sic

מִצְרַיִם  
 Egypt

מֵאֶרֶץ  
 from-land-of

וְיָצֵאתִיךָ  
 I-brought-you

אֲשֶׁר  
 who

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1  
 ה כ ו ת כ ו ת ה (3)  
 sic -sic-

עֲבָדִים:  
 slaveries

מִבֵּית  
 from-house-of

15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1  
 ה נ ה ו ה ג ה ו ה ג ה ל א (4)

לֹא  
 not

(3)

אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
 God-of-you

יְהוָה  
 Yahweh

אֲנִי (2)  
 I

20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1  
 ← וְהוּא יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לְאֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְעַל-פְּנֵי  
 || -worn- | -sic- | | | -sic- |

פְּנֵי face-of-me  
 עַל- before  
 אֲחֵרִים other-ones  
 אֱלֹהִים gods  
 לְךָ לְיְהוָה to-you he-shall-be

31 30 29 28 27 26 25 24 23 22 21  
 וְגַם תִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לְאִדֹלָה (continuation)  
 | -worn- | | sic | | |

פְּסִלָּה לְךָ תַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ לֹא  
 idol for-yourself you-shall-make not (4)

5 4 3 2 1  
 וְגַם יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לְאִדֹלָה  
 | worn | || sic sic | (6)  
 וְכָל-... לֹא-  
 not (5) or-any-of

17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1  
 חַשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לְהֵמָּוָה וְלֹא תִעֲבֹדֵם  
 || sic | worn? | | sic | | sic | (7)

... תִּעֲבֹדֵם you-shall-worship-them  
 וְלֹא and-not  
 לָהֶם to-them  
 תִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה you-shall-bow

18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

← נַגַּתְּ שָׂגַתְּ גַּתְּ שָׂמַחְתָּ וְהוֹהֵבְתָּ הוֹהֵבְתָּ הוֹהֵבְתָּ

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18

אֱלֹהֶיךָ      יְהוָה      שֵׁם-      אֶת-      תִּשָּׂא      לֹא

God-of-you      Yahweh      name-of      ...      you-shall-take      not (7)

29 28 27 26 25 24 23 22 21 20 19

נֶשְׂוַהְיָה יָמֵיךָ וְיָמֵיךָ

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29

יָמֵיךָ      אֶת-      זָכוֹר      לְשׂוֹא

day-of      ...      to-remember (8) for-the-misuse

11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

וְהוֹמַחְתָּ שַׁבְּתֵיךָ וְשַׁבְּתָהּ

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11

יָמֵיךָ      שַׁבְּתָהּ      לְקַדְּשׁוֹ

to-keep-holy-him      the-Sabbath      day-of

18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

← שֵׁשַׁת יָמֵי בְּעָמְלְךָ וְשֵׁשַׁת יָמֵי בְּעָמְלְךָ וְשֵׁשַׁת יָמֵי בְּעָמְלְךָ

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18

שֵׁשַׁת יָמֵי      וְשֵׁשַׁת יָמֵי      וְשֵׁשַׁת יָמֵי      מְלַאכְתְּךָ      כָּל-      וְעָשִׂיתָ      יָמֵי      שֵׁשַׁת

work-of-you      all-of      and-you-shall-do      days      six-of (9)

34 33 32 31 30 29 28 27 26 25 24 23 22 21 20 19

הַכָּרְתָּהּ כְּבָרְךָ וְכָרְתָּהּ וְכָרְתָּהּ

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | 32 | 33 | 34

כָּרְתָהּ      לֹא      אִמְךָ      וְאֶת-      אָבִיךָ      כְּבָרְךָ

you-shall-murder      not (13) mother-of-you      and      father-of-you      honor! (12)



Around 1970, George F. Carter took the Decalogue stone to the Johns Hopkins University Department of Oriental Studies for comment. Faculty members there (he does not recall who they were) told him that "the form of the letters showed that they had been copied from a nineteenth century printed source," and that the stone was therefore a fraud. Carter diligently related this opinion in a published article (1971). In a telephone conversation with Prof. Carter in 1990, however, he indicated that he now regards the Johns Hopkins examination as superficial and no longer places any credence in it. My own limited investigations have been unable to turn up any single source, modern or ancient, for the peculiar alphabet on the stone. If there is indeed a "nineteenth century printed source" for the inscription, it should not be difficult for someone to find a copy of it.

Stephen Williams (1991: 174) dismisses the Decalogue stone, along with the "Keystone," on the grounds that "the forms [of the letters] are not epigraphically correct for the time period." I wrote him on Sept. 16, 1991 that "I would very much appreciate it if you could tell me, a) what time period you have in mind as being appropriate for the context of each inscription, and b) what period, if any, you believe would be correct for the letters on each of these two inscriptions." At this writing, I have not heard back from him.

In 1865, two additional Hebrew-inscribed stones, the "inscribed head" and the "Cooper

stone," were planted in a mound excavation near Newark by Dr. J.H. Nicol, a local dentist, in an effort to discredit Wyrick's Decalogue stone and his earlier "Keystone" find. Nicol confessed to their fabrication, but only after numerous investigators had wasted their talents attempting to translate them as Hebrew. These stones were actually signed "J.H. Nicol" in Hebrew letters, and do not in any way resemble the Decalogue stone. The Nicol affair did, however, dampen interest in the two Wyrick stones. A fifth stone, inscribed with some of the peculiar Ohio Decalogue characters, was found in 1867 by David M. Johnson and Dr. N. Roe Bradner in the same mound group in which Wyrick had found the Decalogue. This fifth stone is probably genuine, but unfortunately the original of it has been lost. (See McCulloch 1989, 1990.)

The Decalogue stone itself, along with the "Keystone," is in the Johnson-Humrickhouse Museum at 300 N. Whitewoman Street in Roscoe Village, Coshocton, Ohio 43812, (614) 622-8710. Alrutz's pamphlet is available from the museum, as are clear, sunlit photographs of the stones.

### Acknowledgments

The author is indebted to Amnon Zipin and Joseph Galron for many helpful comments, and to Beverley H. Moseley, Jr., for preparing the alphabet chart. Neither Zipin nor Galron endorses either the authenticity or the antiquity of the Decalogue stone.

### Notes

Line 1: On face, in large letters, above the robed and bearded figure.

Line 2: Down the left side of the face, from the top.

2.1. This non-alphabetic symbol, over the head of "Moses," appears to begin and end the text.

2.6. This is clearly a  $\lrcorner$  (D), not the

expected  $\lrcorner$  (W).



2.18-19. The expected  $\lrcorner$  (Y) is not present.

Line 3: At the base of the back, facing handle. 3.1 is immediately beneath 2.19 on the face. It is therefore the closest letter on the back to the end of line 2, and a logical place to continue.


3.2 and 3.3 are connected at the base by a confusing dark line that may be ink or a flaw in the stone, but which is not inscribed, and

transcriptions erroneously show these connected.

3.6. The upper leg is a little shorter than the lower, but this appears to be just the

expected  (B), not an  (N).

3.7. The curlicue is present, but is presumably just an engraver's slip. This is



just the expected  (D), but is a little narrow for reasons of space. The last 3 letters of line 3 are squeezed together.





Line 4: Runs up the right side of the back. 4.1 is next to 3.1, but turned 90°.

4.1. The foot extends on both sides of the diagonal. 4.9 is similar. These are the only two alephs drawn like this.

4.3. A dot in the center of this shows up in some photos, but is not inscribed. It may just be pencil. There are no dots inscribed in or on any of the letters.

Line 5: Wraps around the edge of the platform. Line 5 is directly below line 4, when the tablet is tipped toward the reader, and is therefore the natural continuation of it. (See Alrutz, photo, p. 25) The top of line 5 is in the angle between the platform and the base, and therefore the tops of some of its letters are hard to read, e.g. 5.2-3, 5.28. The bottoms of the letters in line 5 are at the edge of the platform, and therefore are exposed to wear in places.

5.2-5.3. McCarty misread  as  In fact, they are not connected.

5.9 - 5.10. This is clearly  , though this could merely be an engraver's error for the expected  .

5.12. This crossbar distinctly overhangs to the left on this letter, though this does not appear to be an essential part of the letter form. I have nevertheless attempted to show this feature whenever it appears.


5.16. This letter, at the very top of the stone, and at the platform edge, is a little worn.

5.17. The foot is present, but barely visible.


5.20 has a small dot-like head that appears to be inconsequential.

5.20-21. The text continues here without a break. I have arbitrarily broken the line at the end of a verse.

5.28. The top bar needed for the expected




 (K) is missing, but could be represented

by the angle between the platform and the back, as shown by the dotted line. The uptick

is present, but weak, making  (L) a

possibility, though I think the expected K is what was intended.

5.29-31. This is probably the expected

  , as suggested by Bloom and

Polansky. Note that the visible wear on 5.31 is right next to the portion of 5.30 that is then hypothetically missing, as though the completion of 5.30 was taken off by the same abrasion, and that 5.29 is also badly worn. As it stands, however, 5.30 looks just like a K. If 5.30 is indeed an S, it is the only use of this letter in the entire inscription. Its reconstruction in the letter chart, proposed by Bloom and Polansky, is therefore hypothetical.


Line 6 is just the continuation of line 5, across the base edge of the platform, in the same orientation. Thus 6.1 immediately follows 5.31, but around the corner. This line tends to get overlooked.


6.3-6.4 could be  , with the top bars

blending into the convex angle, but the

expected   is more likely.

Line 7: Across the base of the back and up the left side. 7.1 is directly above 6.5, but is turned 180°.

7.1. Not the expected .

7.6. Not the expected .

7.11. Foot area is highly exposed to wear. Foot is almost entirely missing, but given spacing and the vestige of a foot, this must be

the expected .

7.13. Could be a worn , but unlikely.

Line 8: Platform, up the right side, around top, and down the left side.

8.7. Slightly open.

8.8. The engraver appears to have been indecisive as to where he wanted the serifs to go.


8.12. Not the expected ! The foot area is

not exposed to wear. The bases of these letters are crowded together, as the text rounds the bend, but a short foot could easily have been added afterwards even if the engraver omitted it the first time around. Note that the same name is spelled correctly in line 4.

8.21. This letter has a small vestige of a foot, making it the expected W.

Line 9: Platform, up the center. 9.1 is directly below 8.29, but turned 180°.


9.3. Not .

9.7-8. The expected  (Q) is missing altogether.

9.10. The expected foot is weak, but present.

9.11. Non-alphabetic symbol that means "You are now done with the back. Next, tip the stone away from you, and resume reading on the side, leaving the stone oriented as you find it."

Line 10: First line on the side. Note that the text on the side (lines 10-12) is oriented opposite that on the edge of the platform (lines 5-6), so that the one does not lead to the other.

10.9. A very short foot is present, but this could have been intended to be the expected  (Y).

10.10. Foot is not exposed to wear. Not .


10.17. Definitely not .


10.22-24. Sic.

10.24. The bottom foot is unusually short.

This seems to be a  (B), not a  (K), however.

Line 11: Second line on the side. Letter 11.1 is directly below 10.1.


11.14-15. The expected , intentionally ligated.


11.19. Lightly worn, but no trace of the upper leg that would make this the expected  (N).

11.20. Not .

Line 12: Third line on the side. The bottom of this line is relatively exposed to wear.

12.4-6. Not the expected .

12.10. What is present is a perfect  (D).


However, this could be a worn , as

suggested already by Mayer Sulzberger (1868), particularly given the badly worn state of 12.11. Nevertheless, there is no trace of the expected diagonal line.

12.11. Looks like a worn .

12.14. Cp. 12.2

12.17. The small area indicated, where the

foot of a  would be, is actually ground off the

stone. This could be either  or .

12.18. Cp. 12.6.

12.25. The foot is short, but present.

12.30-31. This is the only suggestion of an interword space.

Line 13: Runs up the right side of the face, terminating at symbol 2.1.

13.2-3. The expected  is absent.

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