

SILOAM INSCRIPTION. The Siloam inscription is an inscription of six lines written in archaic Hebrew dating from the 8th century B.C. This inscription, which was discovered in 1880 and since its removal in 1890 has been on deposit in the Imperial Museum in Istanbul, was carved on the E wall 10 m inside the S end of the tunnel that conducts the waters of the Gihon spring in the valley E of the City of David to the Pool of Siloam at its SE corner. The tunnel was dug from both ends at once; the joining at midpoint was an engineering feat. The inscription describes the event which demonstrated the head engineer's skill and success.

1. *]hnqbh.wzh.hyh.dbr.hnqbh.b>wd[.hh\s\bm.mnqm.]*
2. *hgrzn.<s□.<l.r>w.wb>wd.s□ls□.<mt.lhn[qb.wys□m]>.ql.<s□.q*
3. *r<.<l.r>w.ky.hyt.zdh.bs\r.mymn.[wms□m]<l.wbym.h*
4. *nqbh.hkw.hh\s\bm.<s□.lqrt.r>w.grzn.>l.[g]rzn.wylkw[.]*
5. *hmym.mn.hymws\<.<l.hbrkh.bm<tym.w<lp.<mh.wm[<]*
6. *t.<mh.hyh.gbh.hs\r.>l.r<s□.hh\s\bm[.]*

1. [] the tunneling, and this was how the tunneling was completed: as [the stonecutters wielded]
2. their picks, each crew toward the other, and while there were still three cubits to g[o], the voices of the men calling
3. each other [could be hear]d, since there was an increase (in sound) on the right [and lef]t. The day the
4. breach was made, the stonecutters hacked toward each other, pick against pick, and the water
5. flowed from the source to the pool [twel]ve hundred cubits, even though the
6. height of the rock above the heads of the stonecutte[rs] was a hundred cubits!

It is the nearly unanimous view of historians that the Siloam tunnel is Hezekiah's conduit, and that the inscription in it was written shortly before 701 B.C.E. The form of its script agrees with this dating. According to the Deuteronomist and the Chronicler, Hezekiah had the waters of the Gihon spring outside the city walls diverted to a reservoir inside the walls by means of a conduit, as part of his

fortification of Jerusalem to withstand the anticipated siege by Sennacherib in 701 B.C.E. (2 Kgs 20:20; 2 Chr 32:30; cf. Isa 22:11; Sir 48:17). The construction of the tunnel from both ends at once, multiplying the difficulties in engineering, reflects the haste forced upon Hezekiah by the threat of Sennacherib.

The word translated "increase (in sound)" in line 3 (*zdh*) is regarded by most scholars as obscure. Since the well attested Hebrew and Arabic meaning "increase" has not seemed fitting, other suggestions have been made from context: crack, fissure, overlap, excitement, meeting, and others. These guesses are not necessary. The jumble of directional changes in the tunnels during the last few meters substantiates the inscription's point that it was their voices that finally brought the crews together, while those same changes also attest to the difficulty of locating the direction of sounds coming through the rock seemingly from all sides.

However, the remarkable achievement was not that the crews met over the last meter and a half, but that they ever came that close to each other in the first place. The tunnel follows not a straight line but a ragged s-shaped curve. See Fig. DAV.04 and Fig. JER.09. Whatever the purpose of this intentionally winding path - long a puzzle to investigators - it vastly complicated the survey required by the head engineer, and hence magnifies his accomplishment. When each crew was between 40 and 45 m from the eventual meeting-point, the engineer initiated a series of at least four highly accurate corresponding corrections in both tunnels that brought the crews within shouting distance. Evidence suggests these corrections were performed by use of a method similar to "plane table surveying" as developed by the Romans. The successful joining of the tunnels demonstrated the engineer's proficiency with the primitive means at his disposal. The satisfaction evinced by the inscription may reflect as well the realization that if the crews had not met, the engineer's life would doubtless have been forfeit.

The success of the moment enabled and induced the engineer to commemorate the event by an inscription. It appears that his commemoration was more private than public, as it was clearly not intended for public notice and makes no mention of the ruler of the city or its god, the political crisis that necessitated the construction, nor even of the master excavator himself, at least in the present form of the inscription. The inscription occupied the lower half of a prepared surface; it is probable that the upper half was intended for a relief showing the joining of the tunnels, with possibly the name of the engineer inscribed thereon. Suggestions that the inscription was written by the stonecutters themselves or that it records an excerpt from annals have not found wide acceptance.

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