



From Dr David Diringer

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ALPHABET MUSEUM AND SEMINAR

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20th February, 1960

Dear Mr. Bennett,

Thank you very much for your last letter - I may assure you that I am very grateful, indeed, for your observations, which certainly are not foolish or offensive.

Your statement that you were aware, of course, that I "do not think much of Gell's syllabification of the Phoenician alphabet" is rather euphemistic. I certainly do not think much of Gell's theory, which does not admit a "syllabification of the Phoenician alphabet"; as a matter of fact, it does not admit a "Phoenician alphabet" at all. And to try to prove that the Greeks were the first to have an alphabet - ~~it~~ is simply ridiculous. Even the term "alphabet" is North-Semitic. Whatever phonetic value we, nowadays, give to the letters, the great majority of them are of Semitic origin. People often forget the Karniiana Tablet, with its 22 North-Semitic letters (in the exact order of the North-Semitic alphabet) and only four Greek letters (the additional ones, and quite superfluous for a Semitic alphabet). Of course, no scholar can deny the Greek improvements - but improvements, however paramount, do not mean a new creation. I certainly will reconsider my paragraphs on "What is an Alphabet?", on "Absence of Vowels", and so on, though I have dealt with these problems. (Do not forget that Gell's book is later than mine, and that his theory has not been accepted by any expert on



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on the history of the Alphabet. I do not think we should admit a "Semitic point of view" and "a more general" one. Otherwise, to-morrow some scholar may assert that from the "general point of view" there is no "English alphabet," but from the "English point of view" there is an "English alphabet." In my opinion, the "English alphabet" is much less alphabetic (if we may use this term) than the North-Semitic alphabet. Of course (and I am repeating what I wrote in The Alphabet), the North-Semitic alphabet is not perfect - let us call it "consonantal alphabet," and let us call the Greek alphabet a "fully-developed alphabet," but to assume that the Semitic alphabets were (and still are) non-alphabets is a contradiction in term.

At any rate, any suggestion of yours will be very much appreciated and taken into consideration!

Once more, very many thanks, & with kindest regards,

Yours v. sincerely,
David D. D.