

Alphabet stone found near Jerusalem

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Archaeologists digging at a site near Jerusalem report finding a stone containing the letters of the Hebrew alphabet in the wall of an ancient building.

After analyzing the ruins, archaeologists concluded the 40-pound stone bears the oldest reliably dated example of an abecedary -- the letters of the alphabet written in their traditional sequence -- the New York Times reported.

Experts say the find shows that as of the 10th century B.C., the Hebrew alphabet was still in transition from its Phoenician roots, but recognizably Hebrew.

The discovery is to be reported in detail next week in Philadelphia during the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature. It was described during New York Times interviews with Ron Tappy, the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary archaeologist who directed the dig.

The discovery is expected to stir the already contentious debate between biblical skeptics and proponents, who disagree on the extent to which the Bible represents historical truth.

Proponents of a written biblical history see the find as validating their contentions that the Israelites could have written down biblical stories, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette said.

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