

## V.

### RELIGION.

UP to a certain point the Moabite religion was henotheistic ; there might be many gods, but Moab worshipped Chemosh as its national deity much as Israel worshipped Yahweh. The relation of Moab to Chemosh as indicated by our inscription is similar to that of Israel to Yahweh as it may be gathered from the earlier portions of the Old Testament. The name of Mesha's father is a compound of Chemosh, as the names of Israelite kings are compounds of Yahweh, *e.g.* Jehoram, Ahaziah. Chemosh is angry with his people ; abandons them to their enemy, and in his own good time saves them ; just as Yahweh is angry with Israel,

## THE MOABITE STONE

punishes them by foreign invasions, and delivers them. Chemosh bids Mesha, "Go, take Nebo from Israel," l. 14; "Go down, fight against Horonaim," l. 32, and Mesha obeys and is rewarded with victory; just as Yahweh said to David, "Go up: for I will certainly deliver the Philistines into thy hand";<sup>1</sup> and David obeyed and was victorious. Mesha massacres the population of captured cities in honour of Chemosh, just as Joshua massacred the inhabitants of Jericho in honour of Yahweh. The savage rite of the *herem* or ban was common to both peoples. In fact, in these and other respects the inscription reads like a chapter from *Samuel* or *Kings*. In 2 Kings 3<sup>27</sup> we read that Mesha offered his firstborn as a burnt-offering—doubtless to Chemosh; as Abraham proposed to offer Isaac to Yahweh.

Chemosh obviously had his temples, priests, oracles, sacrifices, and offerings;

<sup>1</sup> 2 Sam. 5<sup>19</sup>.

## RELIGION

and it is possible that a traveller visiting Moab, Israel, and Judah would not have noted any striking differences in character and quality between the religious practices in these neighbouring States.

The etymology of Chemosh is unknown. On the strength of a winged sun-disk on a gem containing the name *Chemoshyeḥi*, Baethgen<sup>1</sup> regards Chemosh as God of the Sunshine, and a manifestation of Molech. The Greeks seem to have identified Chemosh with Ares or Mars.

The occurrence on the Stone of a deity, Ashtar-Chemosh, does not weaken the parallel with Israel. It may be merely a title of Chemosh ; similarly the Old Testament uses El Shaddai, El Elyon, Yahweh Sabaoth for Yahweh. According to Baethgen, Ashtar-Chemosh is a name which claims for Chemosh the attributes of the Ishtar, the Babylonian Aphrodite, the prototype of the Canaanite Ashtoreth or

<sup>1</sup> *Beiträge*, 13 ff.

## THE MOABITE STONE

Astarte. It is possible, however, in view of the conjunction with Chemosh, that 'ShTR here is a male counterpart of Ashtoreth. Even if Ashtar-Chemosh is a distinct deity associated with Chemosh, the latter would still remain the special national deity. In Israel also other deities were worshipped besides Yahweh. The worship of the "Queen of Heaven," probably Ishtar, was a favourite cult in the time of Jeremiah.

Then as the name Baal-meon, l. 9,<sup>1</sup> occurs on the Stone, so names of the same type are found in Israel. In both cases they indicate that at some time deities were worshipped at these places under the title Baal, "Lord." This title was used for Yahweh in early Israel, and may have been used in Moab for Chemosh.

But neither on the Stone nor elsewhere is there any extant evidence that any Moabites regarded Chemosh as *the* one.

<sup>1</sup> Beth-baal-meon, l. 30.

## RELIGION

God, in a strictly monotheistic sense ; or that there was any attempt by priestly legislation to purify the ritual from superstition and immorality ; or that there was any ethical or spiritual movement parallel to the ministry of the prophets in Israel. But we must remember that, apart from the Stone and a few slight references in inscriptions, all we know of Moab is derived from the Old Testament. Israel might not have appeared to much advantage if it had been known only from an inscription of Omri and the literature of Moab.

As to the religion of Israel, we learn that the inhabitants of Ataroth worshipped a deity Dawdoh,<sup>1</sup> and that there was a sanctuary of Yahweh at Nebo ; and that at one or both of these sanctuaries, *'arels* or altar-hearths <sup>2</sup> formed part of the Temple furniture.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 55.