Cun

Cun (Heb. כון; Vg.: Chun). According to 1 Chr 18:8, Cun is a Syrian town from which David seized a large amount of bronze which Solomon later used for the temple. Josephus took the name of the town to be Μὺκυν, that is, reading the mem in Hebrew mḵwn as part of the name rather than the preposition "from" (Ant. 7.105). The town is perhaps to be identified with Berothai in 2Sam 8:8.

Cheon-Leong Seow

Cuneiform

The term “cuneiform” literally means “wedge-shaped” (from Lat. cuneus, “wedge”). First used around 1700, the term originally denoted the characters used in inscriptions at Persepolis, which, at that time, were known in Europe through copies. Subsequently, engraved characters of the same appearance were discovered in Mesopotamia, on monuments, bricks, and clay tablets. The word “cuneiform” is thus a descriptive term which qualified the writings of the ancient Near East before they were even deciphered. In ancient times, the Sumerian name for these signs was santak, which was adopted into Akkadian in the form santakkum. Literally, that means “triangle,” and this is in fact not very far from the modern term “cuneiform.”

When this system of writing first emerged in Mesopotamia, at the end of the 4th millennium BCE (Uruk period), it was not actually “cuneiform.” The signs engraved or printed on the most ancient tablets resemble pictograms, some of which were figurative, others not. From the beginning of the 3rd millennium BCE, they adopted an increasingly angled form. Scientifically, this evolution is explained by the fact that scribes wrote on clay tablets using a reed stylus as their main writing tool: the chiseled tip of the reed leaves a triangular mark on the crude clay, and one of the cusps of the triangle can be slightly prolonged. This is how the signs began to look more and more like “wedges.” Even if their notation kept changing, they maintained their “cuneiform” appearance for almost three millennia, until, at the end of the 1st century CE, the writing on clay tablets came to an end and the Akkadian language ceased to be used. Clay tablets carrying cuneiform writings have been found all over the Near East, from Syria and Palestine to Iran, Turkey, and southern Iraq, as well as in regions which enjoyed close political and commercial relations with this area, e.g., Bahrain and Amarna in Egypt. The “wedge-shaped” signs were used to write in different languages, in accordance with the different systems.

In the beginning of the 3rd millennium BCE, these signs were used to note down the Sumerian language (an isolated language), according to a system of ideograms and logograms where every sign represents an object or an idea. However, the signs could also be used with phonetic value, e.g., to help choose the correct reading of the word and indicate its pronunciation (phonetic complement), or as a grammatical element helping to conjugate a verb or decline a noun.

From the first half of the 3rd millennium BCE, when writing Akkadian (a Semitic language), the scribes maintained the cuneiform signs used in Sumerian, but retained only their phonetic value which generally corresponded to one syllable. For instance, the sign denoting “earth,” ki in Sumerian, was used in Akkadian to note down the sound ki in all the words which contained it (like kitum, “justice,” which was written using the signs ki, it, and tum). At the same time, the Akkadian language conservated those ideograms inherited from Sumerian which stand for commonly used terms like names of professions, denominations of kinship, or for determinatives which, preceding or following a word, indicate the category it belongs to (e.g., wooden object, metallic object, geographical name, bird, fish, etc.).

The syllabic signs used for writing Akkadian constitute a relatively simple system, which was adopted by neighboring populations of Mesopotamia or by newly arrived groups for noting down their own language, even if that was not at all related to Akkadian itself. Thus, in the 2nd millennium BCE, the Hurrian, Hittite, and Elamite languages were written with the aid of this syllabary, as was the language of Urartu in the 1st millennium BCE.

The use of a cuneiform sign to denote a letter is attested for the first time in the 13th century BCE, in Ugarit (Syria), where the local Semitic language was written by means of an alphabet of thirty signs. This alphabet, however, did not survive the destruction of the site in the early 12th century BCE. During the Achaemenid era (6th–4th cents. BCE), a mixed system of about forty alphabetic and syllabic signs was used for royal monumental inscriptions in Persian.

At the beginning of the 19th century, this Old Persian writing was the first cuneiform writing to be deciphered by G. Grotefend and H. Rawlinson. It provided the key for understanding the other systems and enabled experts to decipher Akkadian writings in the mid-19th century, thanks to the existence in Persia of trilingual texts, written in Old Persian, Elamite, and Akkadian. Subsequently, the majority of the other languages could also be deciphered, on the basis of bilingual documents (Sumerian – Akkadian; Hittite – Hurrian).

From the mid-19th century, it has been an established and well-known fact that the civilizations which employed cuneiform writing are of great importance for the study of the Bible. In fact, epigraphists quickly deciphered the names of kings.
known from the Bible (for instance Sargon and Sennacherib) on monuments and objects excavated in the Assyrian capitals. Certain documents refer to events, places, or personalities mentioned in the Bible, such as the Black Obelisk of Shalmanesar III (which recalls the tribute offered by Jehu of Israel) or the tablets of Babylonia (recording the distribution of oil to Jehoiachin of Judah and his family during the exile). In 2007, a mention of Nebo-Sarsekim (a high official of Nebuchadrezzar II, who was present during the conquest of Jerusalem in 586 BCE; Jer 39:3) was identified on a tablet from Sippar. Cuneiform writing was used in Palestine in the 2nd millennium BCE, until it was supplanted by the use of alphabets in the 1st millennium BCE. Throughout the entire 1st millennium BCE, the region and its inhabitants maintained close political, economic, and cultural relations (sometimes peaceful, sometimes not) with their eastern neighbors, the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians.


II. New Testament

New Testament authors built upon a rich set of traditions when they refashioned metaphors involving the word “cup” (Gk. *ποτήριον*). As a feature in religious practices, an ornamental vessel, or simply a plain container necessary for quenching thirst, *ποτήριον* became both a central literary metaphor and a key item in community worship.

The earliest NT reference to a ceremonial cup employed in Christian assemblies is found in 1 Corinthians. Paul reminds the Corinthians that they share a “cup of blessing” (Gk. τοῦ ποτήριον τῆς εὐλογίας) at their meals, which, he clarifies, amounts to partaking in the blood of Christ (1 Cor 10:16). Having shared the “cup of the Lord” (Gk. ποτήριον τῆς Ιησοῦν) he argues, they must not then share in a “cup of demons” (Gk. ποτήριον δαιμονίων; 1 Cor 10:21), an instruction that interprets an established community practice as a rationale for both unity and firm community boundaries. As participants in a ceremonial meal, the Corinthians must avoid comparable meals dedicated to “idols,” a reference to the widespread Greco-Roman practice of eating a common meal in the presence of a patron god. It is Christ’s presence that must be exclusively celebrated, Paul insists. He then invokes the Last Supper (1 Cor 11:23–26), further encouraging propriety during communal gatherings. Here his emphasis is on the cup as a symbol of the “new covenant” (Gk. *καινῆς διαθήκης*), sealed with Christ’s blood, a gloss that adds a sacrificial and memorial meaning to the term. Partaking in a common cup is a memorial act that recalls the sacrificial death of the Lord (1 Cor 11:26), in which a spilling of blood initiates a covenant between God and God’s faithful people (cf. Exod 24; Jer 31:31 [LXX]).

This association of cup, blood and covenant appears in the Gospels as well, when Jesus instructs his followers to drink from a cup he identifies as

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**Cup**

I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

II. New Testament

The most common Hebrew word for “cup” in the HB/OT is *kôs* (see also *gâbîa*). Artisans across the ancient Near East made cups from clay, stone, bronze or copper, silver, and gold. Pottery assemblages from Iron I contain an abundance of shallow stemless vessels, many red-slipped and burnished, likely used for drinking as well as eating.

Cups had ritual functions as well as common uses. Jeremiah refers to the “cup of consolation” (Jer 16:17), suggesting a pouring ritual involving a meal. A cup can also hold a worshipper’s offering or sacrifice of thanksgiving to YHWH (Ps 116:13, “the cup of salvation”). Joseph indicates that he uses his silver cup for divination (Gen 44:5). Finally the lampstand in the tabernacle is described as having three “cups” on each of its six branches (Exod 25). Each cup is shaped like an almond blossom, which is consistent with other decorations compared with flora and fauna and may be symbolic of the flowers that bloom on the tree of life.

In the Psalter, the cup refers figuratively to that which is portioned or measured out. While the cup can hold God’s allotted blessing (Ps 16:5; 23:5), the predominant figurative use of cup indicates divine judgment (Ps 11:6; 19:9; Jer 25:17; 49:12; Hab 2:15–16; Obad 16; Lam 4:21). In Jeremiah, Babylon is referred to as “a golden cup in YHWH’s hand,” which makes the nations go mad (Jer 51:7). Being compelled to drink of the cup from YHWH’s hand, which is filled with a justly determined amount of punishment, results in drunkenness (Ezek 23:33), staggering (Isa 51:17, 22; Jer 25:16), reeling (Zech 12:2), and vomiting (Jer 25:27). The image of drinking judgment from a cup suggests that although YHWH’s retribution is unavoidable, the guilty must concede to drink from the cup, thereby participating in their punishment (Jer 25:28).

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