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KEEPING UP TO DATE ABOUT THE PAST

By D. J. WISEMAN, O.B.E., M.A.

THERE is today a widespread interest in the past, in history and its handmaid, the younger archaeological sciences. For the Bible student there is the fascinating, if more restricted, field of biblical archaeology in which evidence which relates to the Bible is culled from wider spheres of study. The obvious relevance of many recent discoveries to the history and setting of the biblical narratives has led many enthusiasts to popularize them with the aim of proving that the Bible is (or was) right. Others, adopting what they feel to be a more judicious course, believe that while archaeological studies may illustrate the Bible story they can have little bearing on its authenticity. The views of the former, unfortunately often untrained in the subject, sometimes dominate their selection and presentation of the material. The latter in their caution sometimes minimize the coincidence of historical fact between the Bible and contemporary evidence which is true confirmation of both sources.

The two works noticed here have much matter in common. Both lead us through the biblical history and seek to show its contemporary setting; to do this both draw on the thousands of clay documents, papyri and other materials discovered in the last hundred years; and both, though reflecting the author's individual training, outlook and selection, are valid approaches to the subject. It is perhaps of interest too that both books reflect the modern trend which is an attempted synthesis of the two approaches to biblical archaeology described above.

The Christian graduate, especially when responsible for teaching or explaining the Bible narrative, is here faced with a difficulty. In such a subject as biblical archaeology he must first read a general work which will introduce him to the subject in its widest setting and then find out how to keep up to date with the discoveries announced after each expedition in Bible lands and subsequent researches. Such reliable general summaries are rare, and, like all books on this subject, restricted by their date of publication. Millar Burrows' *What mean these stones?* (1941) and W. F. Albright's *Recent Discoveries in Bible Lands* (1955) cover the whole field with special emphasis on the previous fifteen years. Also, the last few months have seen the publication of a number of influential books. Professor E. Wright, an archaeologist and Old Testament theologian, who is widely reputed as Editor of the excellent quarterly, *The Biblical Archaeologist*,¹ has now produced a large volume. It is a useful collection of the main discoveries and facts which sets out to 'summarize the archaeological discoveries which directly illumine biblical history, in order that the Bible's setting in the ancient world and its relation to its environment may be more readily comprehended'. To do this comprehensively would have required the writing of a still much needed history of the ancient Near East, and this is not the purpose of his book. The book is already highly commended for its impartial scholarship. According to many this is best shown by its willingness to show the Bible to be wrong where this is necessary. Unfortunately the points usually chosen to illustrate² this are themselves controversial. For example, the reference to camels in Genesis, we are told, is evidence of a late date since, according to the archaeological sources, camels were not domesticated until

¹ Published by the *American Schools of Oriental Research* 7s. 6d. p.a. (Blackwells).

² *Times Literary Supplement*, 12th April, 1956.

the late twelfth century B.C. But this statement is only true of Egypt and ignores published documentary and illustrative material which shows camels in use elsewhere (e.g. Mesopotamia, Arabia) as early as in the twentieth century. Again the 'anachronism' of any reference to the Philistines before the twelfth century (e.g. Genesis x. 14) disappears in the light of recent excavations at Enkomi, Cyprus which show a flourishing settlement there in the fourteenth century. There is no reason to doubt the possibility of a similar colony in southern Palestine at the same early date — enlarged by further incursions in the eleventh century. Wright's book is a useful and scholarly production. Its bibliographical reading notes make it both an introduction to the subject, and a reference work. Some of the illustrations are, unfortunately, of poor quality in a book where the main disadvantage is its price (four guineas).

Another book covers much the same ground but with less authority; an English translation of a German book by a journalist W. Keller, *The Bible as History* (Sub-title *Archæology confirms the Book of Books*; Hodder and Stoughton, 25s.), is the result of several years of travel and study. Numerous minor inaccuracies can perhaps be forgiven or overlooked since a mass of information is given in a most readable manner. There are, however, some journalistic exaggerations. Thus 'scholars swarming impetuously into the lands of the ancient East about the middle of the last century' describes a mere handful of travellers and pioneers of all nations whose arduous labours laid the foundation of the modern sciences of archæology and Assyriology! Keller's book is an introduction for the non-specialist, but it should be always remembered that he generally selects his incidents and evidence to support his main demonstration that 'the Bible is Right'. Thus we are told of the difficulties resulting from Woolley's identification of the clay deposit he found at Ur as the biblical Flood. Many problems are raised when this evidence is compared with 'flood-levels' at other sites.³ He could have mentioned the stronger evidence for this flood in the Sumerian historical texts of the nineteenth century B.C. and earlier. Indeed Keller and Wright omit almost all reference to these texts which afford the earliest written secular and religious histories and 'myths'. Keller omits, for example, reference to the seemingly negative results of the Ai excavations. He does, however, give an excellent summary of the Jericho evidence, reminding us that the veteran archæologist Vincent still maintains that the fallen walls there, dated by Garstang c. 1400 B.C., are more likely to be of the period of the Conquest i.e. c. 1250-1200 B.C. (p. 160). This is in keeping with the later date for the Exodus for which there is increasing evidence. Miss Kenyon's current work at Jericho is mainly directed to the prehistoric levels and she thinks these same walls should be dated earlier. She reports that the traces of the 'insignificant city' of Joshua's time are not likely to be found. The last word on Jericho has certainly not been spoken or written yet.

Keller incorporates many interesting theories and notes not usually available in such a handy form. To a few readers some of these may seem to remove the idea of miracle from the Old Testament, but they should be studied carefully. The route of the Exodus, the provision of water and manna are given credible explanations. Some of his ideas are questionable. There is no possible comparison between the monotheism of Israel and a supremacy of 'the Babylonian god Ninurta!' 'Samson's mighty deeds and his pranks are legendary tales but there are hard facts behind them.' The statement that the Egyptian troops marched 'against Assyria' (2 Kings xxiii. 29, AV) is considered a 'historical slip of the pen' (p. 271) in the light of contemporary evidence. He seems unaware that the alternative translation 'on behalf of Assyria' has long been generally accepted. The wise

³ This is well shown in A. Parrot, *The Flood and Noah's Ark* (1955).

men from the East lead us into a detailed explanation of the star of Bethlehem as a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in 7 B.C. Another chapter (37) on the Flight into Egypt to Matarai (near Cairo) is based on slender evidence and, like a following section on the grave of St. Peter, described as 'the most important find in archaeology', is unusually biased. There is no identity possible for the few bones discovered or certainty that the structure is part of a Christian burial. The fairest comment is perhaps that 'if Peter's grave has not been found this does not prove that he did not come to Rome. If it has been found it does not in the slightest degree support any papal theory.'⁴ Keller devotes a chapter (44) to a summary of the edict by Pino XII on 'Modern Science and Creation'. This seems an insufficient and unnecessary way of disposing of Bishop Ussher's estimate (in 1654) for the day of creation (9 a.m. Oct. 26th. 4004 B.C.). At this point Ussher's work has been long outdated.

Perhaps all this has stressed the weaknesses of this popular work. It remains, however, a book which all experienced Christian workers will read with profit — and should do so with an eye to those points where the less discriminating will bring them questions or quotations.

The ease with which books on biblical archaeology are outdated can be shown by the statement (Keller, p. 272) to the effect that 'the Neo-Babylonian kings left no informative annals behind them'. Quite apart from the fact that this statement follows a description of one such piece of historical writing, additional clay tablets which describe the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadrezzar II on 16th March 597 B.C. were published while Keller's book was in the press!⁵

Keller's description of the Dead Sea or Qumran Scrolls is limited to a summary of the earliest finds (pp. 399-404). In view of the importance of these discoveries and all their implications for an understanding of the Old Testament text, the background of Judaism and the days of Christ's life in Palestine and of the Early Church, it is essential that an authoritative, up to date and reliable introduction to this subject be read. Amid a spate of books on the subject which include some excellent studies⁶ we are fortunate in having Professor F. F. Bruce's *Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Paternoster Press, 1956. 144pp. 10s. 6d.). His wide reading and balanced judgment result in a clear path for the non-specialist reader through the complexities of textual criticism, manuscript recensions (biblical and non-biblical), and the identification of the Qumran community. He does not regard the identity of the latter with the Essenes as proven 'in view of the variety of the baptist sects in the Judaism of those days' (p. 122).

Bruce shows how the oldest text of Isaiah (second century B.C.) confirms what we have always had good reason to believe — that the Jewish scribes copied the Hebrew text with the utmost fidelity. 'Their workmanship was much more accurate than the workmanship of the Christian scribes who copied and recopied the text of the Greek Bible' (pp. 61, 62). Other manuscripts indicate the concurrent use of popular, unofficial copies of the sacred text and translation akin to the Greek Septuagint. Recently some Jewish scholars have raised doubt about the indigenous nature of early Christianity. Their views have been boosted by the baseless remarks in a journalist's popular book.⁷ These maintain that the Teacher of Righteousness, mentioned in one of the scrolls, is none other than Jesus Himself. Allegro claims that this Teacher was crucified but other scholars interpret this passage far

⁴ *Times Literary Supplement*, 15th Feb. 1957.

⁵ *Chronicles of Chaldean Kings (626-556 B.C.)*. The British Museum, 1956, 25s.

⁶ e.g. Millar Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 1955, 30s. (includes selected translations).

⁷ E. Wilson, *The Scrolls from the Dead Sea*, and in J. Allegro, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, Pelican, 1955.

differently, and there are varied interpretations of his identity and of the wicked Priest who opposed him and of the significance of the *Kittim* (Greeks or Romans?) who are mentioned in the same scrolls. Professor Bruce examines these and many other theories impartially. In general he leads the reader to realize that many theories will require further evidence or study before they can be definitely accepted or rejected. These include the possible evidence for an earlier dating of John's Gospel because many expressions and views are already found in the Scrolls (pp. 133, 140). So swiftly advance the studies in this field that we shall do well to read this book and then await the author's third thoughts on the same subject in a few years' time. There is the same need for continuous reading if anyone is to keep up to date in biblical archaeology.

BOOK REVIEWS

Reformers in India

By K. Ingham. C.U.P. 150pp. 18s.

This account of the work of Christian missionaries on behalf of social reform between 1793 and 1833 is of considerable interest. It deals with a period of widespread Christian activity in India, and shows how in spite of difficulties with the East India Company, and other officials, the Christian missionaries pressed for social reforms as well as for the preaching and teaching of the Christian faith. Education, the overcoming of caste prejudice, the abolition of suttee, the raising of the status of women, were all part of the missionaries' work. Added to these were medical work and much patient

labour in Bible translation as well as in literature.

This is not only a valuable contribution to Indian history but also a testimony to the self-sacrificing endeavours of the early missionaries in India.

There is a good index to the work and some valuable appendices which include a list of the Governors General and of the Protestant Christian missionaries at work in India during the period, a bibliography, and a useful map.

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D.M.B.S.

Atlas of the Bible

By L. H. Grollenberg, O.P. Translated and edited by J. M. H. Reid and H. H. Rowley. Nelson. 1956. 165pp. 70s.

This is a useful book, containing a large amount of information, intelligently arranged. There are four parts: 37 maps, occupying eighteen pages and the end papers; 408 photographs interspersing the equivalent of about forty pages of text; and twenty-five pages occupied by an index of places and persons. It is therefore not solely an atlas in the usual sense of the term.

Comparison with the *Westminster Atlas* is inevitable, especially since both books adopt the method of a limited number of maps accompanied by text and photographs. Excluding the end papers, there are the same number of maps in each, the size of the pages being about the same. The *Westminster Atlas* shows its relief by shading, whereas Grollenberg has coloured layering, which

is perhaps the more satisfactory method. Grollenberg's maps are clearly and pleasantly printed, but could be criticized for a too liberal use of yellow and related colours, which are not always easy to distinguish. His maps follow the shifts in emphasis in Bible history more closely than do *Westminster's*, giving detailed treatment to the areas which were the foci of action, and are of more immediate use as companions to Bible study in this respect. Another feature, not used by *Westminster*, is the indication of the movements of peoples by arrows on the maps, and the inclusion of useful notes on sites, overprinted in red ink.

The photographs form a large part of the book, and include many excellent oblique aerial views, which give a very