

The Evangelical Quarterly

OCTOBER, 1929

ARCHÆOLOGY AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

ARCHÆOLOGY is a science of very modern growth. Its founders may be said to have been Schliemann and Petrie. With a very few exceptions, the older excavators were either amateur antiquarians, or diggers whose chief object was to discover monuments and similar antiquities for museums and collectors. But, notwithstanding its modernness, the science is already well advanced. Its methods have been perfected, its lines of evidence defined and a large body of scientifically established results has been obtained. Nowhere has this been more the case than in the Nearer East. For many reasons more work has been done here than in other parts of the world; the workers have been picked and trained men, and the material has been larger and better preserved. The earlier history of Babylonia, of Egypt and of Greek lands has been re-written and we have been brought face to face, as it were, with heroes and legislators whose very names were legendary.

The work has been accomplished during my own lifetime. It is interesting to look back upon the period when I had already finished my University education, and compare our outlook upon the past to-day, with what it then was. The early Victorian age was not only an age of mechanical progress, it was also an age of literary scepticism. The old unquestioning belief in the written record had given place to a belief in the superiority of "the new man" and his ability to solve all questions, past, present and future. The brain that could invent a new piece of machinery was held to be equally able to analyse an ancient document and reduce it to its original elements like a chemical product. Little more was needed than to count the words in it and treat it like the work of a modern European writer. "Man is the measure of all things," was the statement of a Greek philosopher; it was now qualified by the proviso, that it must be modern Victorian man.

A primary axiom of the new philosophy was necessarily that anything approaching the level of modern civilisation could not be of great antiquity and that consequently all claims in such a direction must be disproved. Sir George Cornewall Lewis told us that any such claims on behalf of the Babylonians and Egyptians were futile, and that consequently the attempts to decipher the cuneiform and hieroglyphic inscriptions were futile also. Grote begins his History of Greece with the seventh century before our era; what preceded it was either myth or indistinguishable from myth. The Old Testament critics assured us that the earlier historical books were a collection of heterogeneous materials redacted at a very late period and containing little except myth or fable; even in the Books of Kings the mention of "the kings of the Hittites" was quite sufficient to destroy the historical character of the narrative in which it occurs. As for Homer, the Iliad and Odyssey had been resolved into a badly compacted body of "lays" and the siege of Troy into a "solar myth."

In curious contrast with all this was a lecture by a distinguished archæologist of to-day which I heard a short time ago. The list of "Thalassokratixæ" or periods of maritime supremacy enjoyed by various nations in what Grote and his contemporaries would have called the mythical or semi-mythical age of Greece were not only accepted as history but an endeavour was made to fix the precise date of each of them. As for the siege of Troy, it has now taken its place as one of the important events in the early history of the world and more especially of the trading relations between the Greeks and the Black Sea. Mykenæ and its royal tombs have become as real as the Athens of Perikles and the tourist can now wander beside the frescoes which once adorned the palaces of Tiryns. So far as Greek history is concerned, the rout of the sceptics has been complete.

If we turn to the Nearer East it is much the same. In my younger days we were told that literature in the true sense of the word did not exist until long after the days of David, that a Code of Laws in the Mosaic epoch was inconceivable, and that the story of the Israelitish conquest of Palestine and still more the patriarchal narratives could not have been derived from contemporaneous documents.

We now know better. Babylonia and Egypt possessed an extensive literature, which included historical, legal and scientific

texts as well as novels, poems and theology, long before the age of Abraham. The cities of Babylonia had their libraries of clay tablets, each provided with its staff of librarians and facilities for the use of students, where the older texts were catalogued and re-edited from time to time. Similar libraries were established in Assyria and Asia Minor, and others were to be found in Egypt where the writing material was papyrus instead of clay. As far back as B.C. 2300, when the silver and copper mines of the Taurus were worked by Babylonian firms, the agents of the latter had their offices at a city called Ganis on the Halys, eighteen kilometres from the modern Kaisariyeh, where they kept their correspondence and commercial documents in clay "safes."

A code of laws had been compiled and promulgated long before the time of Moses by Ammurapi, the Amraphel of the fourteenth chapter of Genesis. The Babylonian empire at the time extended as far as Syria and Palestine, and the Code was in force throughout the whole of it, while a little later other Codes were compiled in imitation of it in Assyria and among the Hittites. Portions of the Assyrian and Hittite Codes are now in our possession; they are based upon the Code of Ammurapi, but like the Mosaic Code are in the main of a specifically national character. It is especially noteworthy that the laws presupposed in the narratives of Genesis are not those of the later Mosaic Code but of the Code of Ammurapi; Palestine was at the time a Babylonian province, and the fact, accordingly, is silently recognised in the narratives themselves. What better evidence can we have that they go back to the period which they profess to describe?

When the childless Abram proposed to adopt his slave Eliezer and constitute him his heir, it was in accordance with Babylonian custom and Babylonian law. When he refused the demand of Sarah that Hagar and Ishmael should be driven away and Ishmael deprived of his inheritance it was because Babylonian law had laid down that if the childless wife had given a concubine to her husband by whom he had had a son, neither concubine nor son might afterwards be enslaved, nor might the son be deprived of his share in his father's property. Or when, again, Judah threatened Tamar, his daughter-in-law, with death by burning it was because Babylonian law enacted that such should be the punishment of the unfaithful virgin. Such laws were naturally forgotten in the later days of Israelitish history; that the story of the patriarchs should retain a remembrance of them is a proof that

the documents upon which it rests must go back to pre-Mosaic times.

The discovery of the Tel-el-Amarna tablets in Egypt shattered the primary assumption upon which the assertion was based that there could have been no literary record of the Israelitish conquest of Canaan. It revealed the fact that the period of the conquest was one of great literary activity, that Canaan had been for more than a century a province of Egypt and that written communications were constantly passing backwards and forwards between Egypt and Palestine. Letters and other official documents were stored in the Government buildings of the Canaanitish cities, and along with them were to be found other documents of a purely literary character—Babylonian legends and poems as well as what may be termed school-books for learning the cuneiform script. And now excavation is beginning to trace the lines of advance followed by the Israelitish invaders themselves, one of the latest discoveries being that of the site of Kirjath-Sepher (at Tell Bêt el-Mirsîm) where the American excavators have found the remains of the earlier Canaanite city with its massive walls which at the beginning of the Iron Age—the period to which the Israelitish invasion of Canaan belongs—were overthrown by assailants whose subsequent settlement on the spot shows them to have been nomads from the desert rather than the cultured inhabitants of a city. The older civilised life of the town did not return to it until with the establishment of the monarchy peace and prosperity were restored to the land.

One of the most striking facts disclosed by the discovery of the Tel-el-Amarna tablets was that the literary and political medium of communication throughout the Nearer East in the Mosaic age was the cuneiform script and the Babylonian language which went along with it. Even Egypt had to conform to the general rule. The use of the cuneiform script implied also the use of the clay tablet and it was of clay tablets, therefore, that the libraries and other collections of books throughout the greater part of Western Asia mainly consisted. It is true that papyrus and parchment were also employed as writing materials, but it was only in Egypt that papyrus was used to the practical exclusion of clay. It is fortunate for us that such should have been the case, for it is only in the dry climate of Upper Egypt that papyrus has been preserved; in Babylonia or Palestine both papyrus and parchment have perished altogether. Hence it is that neither

in Palestine nor in Phœnicia, apart from the Tel-el-Amarna tablets, have early documents been found ; even inscriptions in stone are wanting since where the script is usually written in ink and the characters have rounded forms there is no temptation to write on stone. This absence of literary remains formed the basis of the axiom that no remains had ever existed and that consequently in Canaan there have been neither books nor history before the later days of the Jewish monarchy. A negative argument is always a dangerous one, and in archæology more especially it has been disproved again and again. The non-existence of early Hebrew documents merely shows that they were inscribed on papyrus and not on clay.

But we have proof that there were Hebrew libraries which were modelled after those of the rest of the civilised oriental world. As in the libraries of Babylonia and Assyria so too in the library of Jerusalem we learn that the older texts were re-edited from time to time. Certain proverbs of Solomon, we are told, were "copied out" by "the men of Hezekiah" (Prov. xxv. 1). The process has been made familiar to us by the Assyro-Babylonian tablets. In some cases we have an early Babylonian text which we can compare with a later edition of it made in an Assyrian library more than a thousand years later. The texts, we find, were usually copied very faithfully. At times where the original was obliterated or of doubtful reading the fact was noted ; occasionally (especially where the copy was made by a student who was learning how to write) mistakes were naturally made, resulting in an unintelligible or false reading ; here and there the text is intentionally altered or adapted to changed local and temporal circumstances, and more frequently additions are made in it. But on the whole, like the texts of classical authors found in early papyri, the copies and their originals are wonderfully uniform and alike. An older document, going back, it may be, for more than one thousand years, was transcribed with astonishing faithfulness from generation to generation and country to country. And what holds good of the Babylonian and Assyrian libraries we may assume to hold good also of the libraries which were modelled upon them in Palestine.

The sceptical attitude of the Victorian era towards the sources of our knowledge of the early history of the East, which was based upon ignorance, has thus been proved to have been altogether false. Literature, history and libraries did not

originate in the seventh century before our era, but had been already in existence for centuries previously; a code of laws instead of being "inconceivable" in the Mosaic age, had already long existed in the civilised Eastern world, and the only reason why early Phœnician or Hebrew books have not survived to us is that they were written upon papyrus instead of clay. The *a priori* assumptions formulated by scholars who had never travelled in the East have all proved to be baseless.

It does not follow, however, that because our documents can be traced back to the periods to which they profess to belong the historical statements contained in them are always trustworthy. We know that this is not always the case with narratives that record the events of our own time or even with the newspapers that give us the news of the day. Even contemporary documents need verification. And it is just here that archæology comes to our help. Excavation in Palestine and the adjoining lands has time after time shown that the Old Testament writer has been right and his modern critic wrong. Even the destruction of the Cities of the Plain has been confirmed in a remarkable way. The cities themselves are now under the floor of the Dead Sea, which has risen many feet since the age of Abraham and caused the water to cover a correspondingly large amount of land, but on the heights above Professors Albright and Kyle have discovered the remains of a city of the Bronze Age, possibly the Zoar of Scripture, which came to a sudden end in the very period to which Abraham belongs. As for the fourteenth chapter of Genesis, which had been pronounced by German scholars to be a Jewish fiction later than the Exilic period, it has long since been discovered to have been of Babylonian origin, and to describe a historical fact. When Abraham migrated from Ur, Babylonia still claimed authority over Palestine, which had been a province of the empire some centuries before, and Babylonian armies had made their way to the shores of the Mediterranean. At the moment it was itself, however, under Elamite domination; an Elamite dynasty reigned in Larsa, and its representative bore the name of Eriv-Aku, "the Servant of the Moon-god." Kudur-Lagamar was a typical Elamite name, and in "Tid'al king of Nations" we have the Hittite Tudkhuliyas, called Tudkhula in a Babylonian text, whose followers known as Umman Manda, "the Nations," to the Babylonian writers, had already penetrated to the southern part of the Babylonian territory. As for Amraphel "King of Shinar,"

his identification by the Assyriologists with Khammurabi was at first received with the usual unbelief of the Biblical "critic," quietly withdrawn, however, when it was subsequently discovered that even in cuneiform his name was also written Ammurapi.

During the last forty years archæological discoveries have been multiplying which bear more or less upon the historical truth of the Old Testament, and with very few exceptions they have been dead against the conclusions of sceptical criticism and on the side of tradition. The recent researches and excavations of Professor Garstang, for instance, have led him to the belief that in the book of Joshua we have extracts from what must have been a contemporaneous record of the Israelitish invasion of Canaan, and Dr. Blackman has found in the Papyrus Salt a reference to a certain "Mose" who, in the troublous times which saw the end of the nineteenth Egyptian dynasty, when, as we already knew, a certain "Syrian" (Arisu) had risen to power, was sufficiently powerful to cause the royal vizier to be dismissed in consequence of a punishment inflicted by the latter on a (foreign ?) workman. But perhaps the most sensational of recent discoveries is that of traces of the great flood on the sites of Ur and Kish. At Kish a considerable portion has been laid bare of the deep bed of silt which poured over the cities of the Babylonian plain, carrying with it the wreckage of temples, houses and their contents, as well as animal remains and even dead fish. Enough has already been found to justify the Babylonian tradition that the culture and art of the antediluvian world of Babylonia was equal to that of the later world, if not superior to it.

But the archæologist is only at the beginning of his discoveries. Fresh surprises are constantly awaiting him and new confirmations of discredited tradition. Civilised man is much older than was confidently supposed and the literary activity of the East reaches back far beyond the age of Abraham. The so-called "literary analysis" of our documents which has been the pastime of scholars and amateurs for so long a time is being superseded by the discovery and collection of objective facts. Long ago I protested against the waste of time and ingenuity which it involved and challenged its advocates to apply the same process to a modern newspaper. When they were able to refer the unsigned leading articles in it to their several authors we might give some credence to their attempts to slice up an ancient Oriental document, assigning each small fragment to some

imaginary author and date. If this cannot be done where the language is that of the critic and the mental outlook the same as his own, how can it be possible where he is dealing with a dead form of speech and an equally alien outlook upon the world? Those who have lived in the East of to-day know how impossible it is for the stay-at-home European to understand the mentality of the Oriental; still more impossible would it be if the Oriental were one who had lived and written more than two thousand years ago. Of one thing we may be certain: the literary and historical prepossessions and assumptions of the scholar in a European library will have little or nothing in common with the actual facts.

A. H. SAYCE.

Queen's College, Oxford.