

[p.153]

9. NEAR EASTERN LIGHT ON THE BIBLICAL TEXT

We now turn to see briefly how the Ancient Orient can further our understanding of the Old Testament by helping to clear up individual textual difficulties and by lending greater vividness to what is said in the biblical writings. For the purpose of the present work, I shall employ the following definitions:

1. 'Illumination' is here used of clarifying the meaning of what was previously obscure, or the full force of something imperfectly understood.
2. 'Illustration' is here taken as the use of parallels or other background information to underline, and to make more vivid, statements and lessons which are already clearly intelligible in the biblical text as it stands. Naturally, however, this distinction between the two terms is not absolutely rigid; much of what 'illuminates' provides illustration, while many 'illustrations' help also to 'illuminate'.
3. To this we may add the term 'confirmation', which may be defined as the use of extra-biblical data to illustrate or demonstrate the reliability and accuracy of the biblical writings or of their individual parts. Here also there is overlap, because the agreement between biblical data and material that illuminates or illustrates it also serves in some measure as confirmation. We shall deal mainly with illumination.

I. ANCIENT LEGAL CUSTOM AND THE PATRIARCHS

(a) *Laws of Inheritance*

The family customs of the Patriarchs in Genesis 15 to 31 are unfamiliar to modern readers, but their significance has been remarkably illumined by parallels from cuneiform tablets

[p.154]

found at Ur¹ and especially Nuzi,² in Mesopotamia. According to the usage in these documents a childless couple might adopt as heir one of their servants, just as in Genesis 15 Abraham adopted his servant Eliezer as heir.³ Or else the wife might produce an heir 'by proxy' (so to speak) by giving her handmaid to her husband. Thus was Ishmael born to Abraham by Hagar as a result of Sarah's initiative (Gn. 16). But if a couple did subsequently have a son of their own, then he automatically became chief heir in place of any servant or handmaid's son (so Isaac; cf. Gn. 15:4; 17:18-21). These documents also indicate that the handmaid and her son should not normally be

¹ D. J. Wiseman, *JTVI* 88 (1956), p. 124.

² C. H. Gordon, *BA* 3 (1940), pp. 1-12, reprinted in E. F. Campbell ante D. N. Freedman (eds.), *Biblical Archaeologist Reader*, II, 1964. Much brief accounts, cf. G. E. Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, 1957, pp. 43-44 or D. J., Wiseman, *Illustrations from Biblical Archaeology*, 1958, pp. 25-27.

³ A good parallel is Nuzi tablet H. 60 (E. A. Speiser in *AASOR* 10 (1930) p. 30); Ehel-teshup adopts Zigi as principal heir, unless he has a son of his own.

sent away after the birth of a true heir;⁴ thus Abraham needed divine direction on the matter before he could heed Sarah's irregular request to send away Hagar and Ishmael (Gn. 21:9-14). Esau was not the only person to sell his birthright to satisfy immediate material needs (Gn. 25:29-34); Tupkitilla of Nuzi sold his for three sheep!⁵ An oral blessing conferred by an aged or dying father (Gn. 27; 48) was valid at law.⁶

(b) Laws of Land Tenure

Through the death of Sarah (Gn. 23) Abraham had to acquire a family burial-place. He sought to buy the cave of Machpelah from Ephron the Hittite, but eventually bought not only the cave but also the plot of land in which it lay. The main facts are clear, but their implications were first made evident when Lehmann pointed out the relevance of the Hittite Laws (§§46,

[p.155]

47).⁷ These state that when a landholder disposes of only a part of his property to another person, the original (and principal) landholder must continue to pay all dues on the land. But if a landholder disposes of an entire property, then it is the new owner who must pay the dues. Thus, Abraham wanted only the cave, without complications; but Ephron knew that Abraham must buy quickly (to bury Sarah), and so he insisted that Abraham should acquire the *whole* plot of land (and so have to pay the dues as well). Abraham evidently shouldered this responsibility without complaint, for the sake of family needs - which still holds a lesson for us moderns. Recently, the narrative of Genesis 23 has been compared⁸ with the 'dialogue-document' type of contracts that are known from the late eighth century BC and principally in the Neo-Babylonian period, and the conclusions drawn that Genesis 23 is a late tradition and cannot be used as evidence for practices of the patriarchal periods.⁹ However, it should be noted that Genesis 23 is *not itself* a dialogue contract-document, but is simply the *report* of an agreement; it is hard to conceive of an agreement being drawn up between two parties without some discussion between them! Hence, comparisons with the late dialogue-contracts are basically irrelevant, since Genesis 23 is not an actual contract-document, and these contracts are not simply narrative descriptions of the making of agreements. Furthermore, the publication of dialogue-type contracts from, for example, the early second millennium BC could at any time shatter the 'negative evidence' argument from the date of this type of contract even if it were still held to be relevant. Finally, the fact that the question of land-dues is not explicitly mentioned in Genesis 23 does not automatically exclude the Hittite Laws or related data as background¹⁰ any more than the fact

[p.156]

⁴ Cf. Nuzi tablet H. 67 (Speiser, *op. cit.*, p. 32, *cf.* p. 22).

⁵ Gordon, *BA* 3 (1940), p. 5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8. The thorough realism of the patriarchal narratives could be illustrated at length. Pre-Nuzi data, *cf.* *THB* 17 (1966), p. 71, n. 26.

⁷ M. R. Lehmann, *BASOR* 129 (1953), pp. 15-18. Translations of the Laws, *cf.* A. Goetze, *ANET*, p. 191, and J. Friedrich, *Die Hethitischen Gesetze*, 1959, pp. 30-33, for the relevant paragraphs.

⁸ H. Petschow, *JCS* 19 (1965), 103-120, a valuable study of this class of document; G. M. Tucker, *JBL* 85 (1966), 77-84.

⁹ Cf. Petschow, *op. cit.*, p. 120, and esp. Tucker, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

¹⁰ As is asserted by Tucker, *op. cit.*, p. 79 (negative evidence again); that such dues are not uniquely Hittite is well known. That the reference to trees is not peculiarly Hittite is well shown by both Petschow, *op. cit.*, p. 119, n. 129, and Tucker, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-84.

that Genesis 23 lacks a whole series of features normally found in actual contracts would exclude its being the narrative, record of an agreement.¹¹

II. THE PERIOD OF MOSES

(a) *Bricks and Straw*

As a punishment for the request of Moses that Israel should be released from work to hold a feast to their God, the pharaoh commanded that henceforth the Hebrews must find their own: straw and yet still produce the same quota of bricks daily (Ex. 5:1-19). Why was the straw so necessary? The ancients had noticed that sun-dried mud bricks were stronger and kept their shape better if chopped straw or chaff was mixed with the clay. This is still done in the Near East today.¹² Investigation has shown that the straw yields organic acids that make the clay more plastic, and its presence also stops shrinkage.¹³ The same concerns that moved the Egyptians in Exodus 5 - quotas and straw - reappear in Egyptian documents of this period (thirteenth century BC), some long known. One official reports that his workmen 'are making their quota of bricks daily',¹⁴ while another bitterly complains: 'there are neither men to make bricks, nor straw in the neighbourhood.'¹⁵

(b) *Religious Feasts and Idleness*

In Exodus 5, the pharaoh charges the Israelites with laziness, and he refuses Moses' appeal to let them go and celebrate a

[p.157]

feast to their God because he claims that it is just an excuse for them to stop work and be idle. In Egypt, journals of work preserved on ostraca of this period from Deir el Medineh and the Valley of the Kings at Thebes show vividly how many days were claimed as 'days off', not least for religious purposes. One ostrakon (dated to Year 40 of Ramesses II) gives a full register of the working days and absences of fifty men;¹⁶ another (Year 6 of Sethos II)¹⁷ shows gangs of workmen idle for eight or fourteen days at a time, and several documents mention men who go 'to offer to their god',¹⁸ while another records four days of festivity enjoyed by the workmen of the royal necropolis at a local festival.¹⁹

¹¹ As is seen by Tucker, p. 84. His points on 'giving', etc., rather obscure the fact of common use of 'give' and 'take' for 'sell' and 'buy'. (Cf. Andersen, *JBL* 85 (1966), 48-49.)

¹² C. F. Nims, *BA* 13 (1950), pp. 24-28.

¹³ A. E. Lucas, *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Industries*³, 1948, pp. 62-63; (⁴1962, ed. J. R. Harris, pp. 48-50); A. A. MacRae, in *Modern Science and Christian Faith*, 1948, pp. 215-219.

¹⁴ Papyrus Anastasi III, verso 3: 2; translated, R. A. Caminos, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, 1954, p. 106.

¹⁵ Papyrus Anastasi IV, 12:6, in Caminos, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

¹⁶ Ostrakon firitish Museum 5634, published in J. Černý and Sir A. H. Gardiner, *Hieratic Ostraca I*, 1957, pp. 22-23, plates 83-84; noted by A. Erman, *Life in Ancient Egypt*, 1894, p. 124.

¹⁷ Ostrakon Cairo 25515, published in J. Černý, *Ostraca Hiératiques*, Catalogue du Musée du Caire, 1930-5, pp. 7, 11*-12*, plates 8-9; summarized by G. Daressy, *RT* 34 (1912), pp. 47-49.

¹⁸ S. Schott, *Altägyptische Festdaten*, 1950, p. 102 (No. 130).

¹⁹ Schott, *op. cit.*, p. 99 (No. 113).

(c) *The Plagues of Egypt*

Although the death of the firstborn, the tenth of the plagues that afflicted Egypt on the eve of the Exodus, is avowedly in the realm of miracle, the preceding nine demonstrate God's use of the created order for His own ends. A careful study by Greta Hort²⁰ strongly suggests that the first nine plagues form a sequence of unusually severe natural phenomena which began with an unusually *high* inundation of the Nile (not low, as often thought). The result of her investigation is to show that the narrative of Exodus 7 to 10 makes excellent sense as it stands and shows evidence of first-hand observation,²¹ thus enabling us to understand the course of events with greater clarity. Thus, the excessive inundation may have brought with it microcosms known as *flagellates* which would redden the river and also cause conditions that would kill the fish. Decompos-

[p.158]

ing fish floating inshore would drive the frogs ashore, having also infected them with *Bacillus anthracis*. The third plague would be mosquitoes, and the fourth a fly, *Stomoxys calcitrans*, both encouraged to breed freely in the conditions produced by a high inundation. The cattle-disease of the fifth plague would be anthrax contracted from the dead frogs, and the 'blains' on man and beast (sixth plague), a skin anthrax from the *Stomoxys* fly of the fourth plague. Hail and thunderstorms in February would destroy flax and barley, but leave the wheat and spelt for the locusts whose swarming would be favoured by the same Abyssinian rains which had ultimately caused the high inundation. The 'thick darkness' would be the masses of fine dust, *Roterde* (from mud deposited by the inundation), caught up by the *khamsin* wind in March.

III. EXAMPLES FROM LATER HEBREW HISTORY

(a) *The Instituting of Kingship in Israel*

In 1 Samuel 8, when Israel requested an earthly king 'like all the nations round about', Samuel the prophet warned them of what this would mean for them, *i.e.*, conscription of labour, requisitioning of property, and so on. Old Testament scholars have sought to interpret this passage as a *denunciation* of kingship in itself, as the embittered opinion of an historical epoch much later than Samuel. But a comparison of 1 Samuel 8 with documents from Alalakh and Ugarit²² indicates, rather, that Samuel was simply warning Israel about the *regular civil* powers (not abuses) that an earthly king would assume in order to govern them, showing them the cost of a monarchy. The Hebrews would have to put up with conscription for military and other state service and forced labour, with state requisitioning of private land and property, and with state taxation (*e.g.*, the royal tithe). These practices are all attested of Syrian kings in Alalakh and Ugarit centuries before Samuel, and so were of long standing in the region. Some of the techni-

[p.159]

²⁰ G. Hort, *ZAW* 69 (1957), pp. 84-103, and *ZAW* 70 (1958), pp. 48-59.

²¹ As noted above (p. 129), the hypothetical documents of conventional literary criticism fail to do so.

²² By I. Mendelsohn, *BASOR* 143 (1956), pp. 17-22.

cal terms in the tablets are identical with terms known in Hebrew.²³

(b) *The Sukkiim of 2 Chronicles*

In narrating how Shishak (Shoshenq I) of Egypt invaded Palestine in the fifth year of Rehoboam of Judah (c. 925 BC), the Chronicler includes the enigmatic Sukkiim among Shishak's forces along with the Libyans and Ethiopians (2 Ch. 12:3). These, in fact, are known from Egyptian texts (thirteenth century BC and later) as Tjuku, Tjukten, and were scouts or light-armed auxiliaries, perhaps of Libyan origin. This identification was first made by Spiegelberg in 1904,²⁴ but was largely forgotten until revived by Gardiner, Albright and Caminos²⁵ more recently. A broken stela of Shishak as re-edited by Grdseloff²⁶ suggests that the Egyptians used a border-incident as the official pretext for their invasion of Palestine.

(c) *Geshem the Arabian*

Among the three opponents of Nehemiah when he repaired the walls of Jerusalem, the least-known hitherto was Geshem or Gashmu the Arabian (Ne. 2:19; 6:1, 2, 6). Yet among the rumours said to be circulating about Nehemiah's activities in Nehemiah 6:6, the word of Gashmu is mentioned separately as if it were specially important. A recent discovery has revealed Geshem's real identity, and thus also his importance. Among silver bowls found in the ruins of a pagan shrine in the Egyptian north-east delta was one dedicated by Qaynu 'son of Geshem, king of Qedar'.²⁷ Qedar is in north-west Arabia, where a

[p.160]

graffito naming Jasm (=Gashmu) is also known,²⁸ and so Geshem was in fact the paramount Arab chief in control of the land-routes from Western Asia into Egypt. The Persian kings had always maintained good relations with the Arab rulers of this region ever since Cambyses had enlisted their aid for his invasion of Egypt in 525 BC²⁹ - so Geshem's word could well have endangered Nehemiah at the Persian court. Hence its separate mention.

IV. LIGHT ON OLD TESTAMENT HEBREW FROM LINGUISTIC STUDIES

(a) *Ugaritic and Old Testament Hebrew*

²³ E.g., the terms for tithe (cuneiform *ma'saru*, *mēšertu*, cf. Hebrew *ma'ašer*) and for corvée (Ugaritic *msm*, and *mazza* in Amarna Letters, cf. Hebrew *mas*), Mendelsohn, *op. cit.*, p. 20 and n. 16, p. 21.

²⁴ W. Spiegelberg, *Aegyptologische Randglossen zum Alten Testament*, 1904, pp. 30-31.

²⁵ A. H. Gardiner, *The Wilbour Papyrus, II: Commentary*, 1948, p. 81 n. 1; W. F. Albright in Rowley (ed.), *Old Testament and Modern Study*, 1951, p. 18; R. A. Caminos, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies*, 1954, pp. 176-177, 180.

²⁶ B. Grdseloff, *Revue de l'Histoire Juive en Égypte*, No. 1 (1947), pp. 95-97; first published by G. Legrain, *ASAE* 5 (1904), p. 38.

²⁷ I. Rabinowitz, *JNES* 15 (1956), pp. 2, 5-9, and plates 6, 7.

²⁸ Cf. Rabinowitz, *op. cit.*, p. 7; Albright in *Geschichte and Altes Testament (FS Alt)*, 1953, pp. 4, 6.

²⁹ Rabinowitz, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

This ancient West Semitic language and literature has been recovered from clay tablets in a unique alphabetic cuneiform script of the fourteenth to thirteenth centuries BC, and is named after its place of discovery, the ancient Canaanite seaport of Ugarit (now Ras Shamra) in northern Phoenicia.³⁰ It presents many affinities with the language and literary forms of the Old Testament. Study of Ugaritic has enabled scholars to rediscover grammatical forms and syntactical usages in biblical Hebrew which had gone unrecognized and so given rise to textual difficulties. Likewise, 'lost' words have been restored,

[p.161]

further examples of rarer words rediscovered, and lost additional meanings of still other words recovered.³¹

(b) Ugaritic Contributions to Grammar and Syntax

I. *Enclitic mêm*. The isolation of a particle consisting of *m* plus a vowel (-i or -a) in Ugaritic as a stylistic device has led to its rediscovery in biblical Hebrew. It is usually termed 'enclitic *mêm*'.³²

In many cases, recognition of enclitic *mêm* does not alter the meaning of a passage but simply removes a grammatical anomaly. What looks like a plural 'absolute' form (where the corresponding 'construct' form of a noun should occur) now turns out to be the 'construct' form plus an enclitic *mêm*. Thus, *hannāḥalīm ʾArnōn*, 'the wadies of the Arnon', in Numbers 21:14, can now be read better as *hannaḥālē-miʾ Arnōn* (same meaning).³³

In other cases, recognition of an enclitic *mêm* can clarify not only the grammatical form but also the meaning of the text. Thus, in Psalm 89:50 (Heb. 89:51), in parallel with:

³⁰ Excavations and texts, cf. reports by Schaeffer, Virolleaud and others in *Syria* since 1929 and in *Annales Archéologiques de Syrie* since 1951, plus *CRAIBL* and *AfO*. Definitive reports in *Mission de Ras Shamra* series (*Ugaritica I-V*, by Schaeffer *et al.*; *Palais Royal d'Ugarit*, II-VI, by Nougayrol and Virolleaud; *Légende phénicienne de Danel, Légende de Kéret, La Déesse Anat*, by Virolleaud; and now *Corpus des Tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques...*, 1929 à 1939, by Herdner). Schaeffer, *Ugaritica I*, and Herdner, *Corpus*, contain very extensive bibliographies, esp. for the texts. For English translations of texts, see C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Literature*, 1949; H. L. Ginsberg, *ANET*, 1950/55; G. R. Driver, *Canaanite Myths and Legends*, 1956, besides treatments of individual texts. For an extensive grammar, see C. H. Gordon, *UM*, 1955, revised as *Ugaritic Textbook*, 1965.

³¹ Useful books on Ugaritic and Old Testament studies include: R. de Langhe, *Les Textes de Ras Shamra - Ugarit et leurs Rapports avec le Milieu Biblique de l'Ancien Testament*, I-II, 1945; J. Gray, *The Legacy of Canaan* (=VTS, V), 1957 (2nd ed., 1965); briefer but useful as introductions are E. Jacob, *Ras Shamra et l'Ancien Testament*, 1960, and C. F. Pfeiffer, *Ras Shamra and the Bible*, 1962. A. S. Kapelrud, *The Ras Shamra Discoveries and the Old Testament*, 1965, pays too little heed to the linguistic help from Ugaritic, and too much heed to certain Scandinavian theories on kingship and cults. On Ugaritic and the Hebrew text, valuable are: W. F. Albright, *CBQ* 7 (1945), pp. 5-31; M. J. Dahood, *Biblica* 40 (1959), pp. 160-170; *idem*, *Gregorianum* 43 (1962), pp. 55-79; on the Psalms, cf. his *Anchor Bible* volumes on *Psalms 1-50*, 1966, and *Psalms 51-150* (forthcoming), also *Theological Studies* 14 (1953), 452-457. H. L. Ginsberg, *JBL* 62 (1943), pp. 109-115; older, wider-ranging surveys of value include W. Baumgartner, *Theologische Zeitschrift* 3 (1947), pp. 81-100, G. D. Young, *JKF* 2 (1952/53), pp. 225-245, and R. de Langhe in *L'Ancien Testament et l'Orient* (=OBL, I), 1957, pp. 65-87.

³² First isolated by Ginsberg in Ugaritic (*Tarbiz* 4 (1932), p. 388) and in Hebrew (*Kitve Ugarit*, 1936, pp. 20, 29, 63, 74, etc.), and fully studied by H. D. Hummel, *JBL* 76 (1957), pp. 85-107.

³³ After Hummel, *op. cit.*, p. 97 No. 1; for the definite article before a construct noun in Phoenician and Hebrew, cf. M. Dahood, *Orientalia* 34 (1965), pp. 170-172 (our passage, p. 172).

[p.162]

‘Remember, O Lord, the reproach of (*i.e.*, on) thy servants’, for he unhappy, ‘(How) I bear ... all the mighty, peoples’, one may substitute: ‘(How) I bear in my bosom all the content tions (*ribē-mi* for *rabbīm*) of (the) peoples.’³⁴

2. *Pleonastic waw*. Sometimes in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, the letter *w* - for the little word *w^e*, ‘and’ or ‘even yea’ - appears in unexpected places before words where its presence seems superfluous. In the past, this has often led scholars to excise the offending letter, or else to re-interpret the sentence with or without more drastic emendation. However, two recent studies³⁵ (starting from the discovery of a similar example in Ugaritic) have shown that this apparently superfluous or ‘pleonastic’ *w* is a stylistic device used for emphasizing a word or for variety in style. Thus, in job 4:6, one should probably read not as some ‘suggest: ‘Is not thy piety thy confidence, thy hope and thy perfect conduct?’’, but with some translators:

‘Is not thy piety thy confidence,
Thy hope, indeed, thy perfect conduct?’³⁶

3. *Some Prepositions*. The prepositions *l^e*, ‘to’, ‘for’, and *b^e*, ‘in’, ‘by’, ‘with’, can also mean ‘from’ as shown by examples in Ugaritic. Previously, scholars often sought to emend the Hebrew text when the hitherto accepted meanings of *l^e* or *b^e* failed to make sense, but recognition of the meaning ‘from’ renders such emendations superfluous.³⁷ This applies to passages such as Psalm 84:11 (Heb. 84:12), ‘He will not withhold good from (*l^e*) those who walk perfectly’,³⁸ and job 5:21, ‘From (*b^e*) the scourge of the tongue shalt thou be hidden.’³⁹ Not a few

[p.163]

other locutions are shared by Ugaritic and Hebrew, aiding in the interpretation of the latter.⁴⁰

(c) *Ugaritic Contributions to Vocabulary*⁴¹

1. In Proverbs 26:23, there occurs the crux *interpretatum*, ‘silver dross’ (*kesep-sigim*), in the context, ‘Silver dross overlaid upon an earthen pot are fervent lips and a wicked heart.’ This can now be read as *ke-sapsag-mi*,⁴² ‘Like glaze’, and the whole sentence be rendered:

³⁴ Hummel, *op. cit.*, p. 98 No. 7 (from Dahood). One could also read the last word as ‘*ammī-mi*, ‘my people’, with final enclitic *mēm*.

³⁵ By M. Pope, *JAOS* 73 (1953), pp. 95-98, and P. Wernberg-Meller, *JSS* 3 (1958) pp. 321-326.

³⁶ After Pope, *op. cit.*, p. 97b.

³⁷ See C. H. Gordon, *UM*, I, or *UT*, § 10:1; § 10:5; §10:11; and N. M. Sarna, *JBL* 78 (1959), pp. 310-316, for examples.

³⁸ After Gordon, *op. cit.*, § 10:1.

³⁹ After Sarna, *op. cit.*, pp. 314-315.

⁴⁰ For example, finite uses of the ‘infinitive absolute’, J. Huesman, *Biblica* 37 (1956), pp. 271-295, 410-434; emphatic *lamedh*, Gordon, *UM*, §9:12 (= *UT*, §9:16), cf. J. Mejia, *Estudios Biblicos* 22 (1963), 179-190, and Dahood, *Biblica* 37 (1956), pp. 338-340; double-duty suffixes, *ibid.*, and G. R. Driver, *JRAS*, 1948, pp. 164-176; vocative I, Dahood, *VT* 16 (1966), pp. 299-311.

⁴¹ Cf. (*e.g.*) M. Dahood, ‘Hebrew-Ugaritic Lexicography’, 1 ff., in *Biblica* 44 (1963), pp. 289-303, *ibid.* 45 (1964) pp. 393-412, *ibid.* 46 (1965), 311-332; *ibid.* 47 (1966), etc., and other studies; A. A. Wieder, *JBL* 84 (1965), pp. 160-164.

⁴² Treating *-m* as an enclitic *mēm* (Kitchen).

‘Like glaze coated upon an earthen pot,
Are fervent lips with a wicked heart.’

The word *sapsag* for ‘glaze’ first turned up in Ugaritic (*spsg*) and has received independent confirmation from Hittite documents (in the form, *zopzagai-*, and variants).⁴³

2. In Jeremiah 49:4, the word ‘*emeq*’ may now be taken not as the word for ‘valley’ but as a homonymous word for ‘strength’. Thus one may render, not:

‘Why dost thou boast of thy valley?
Thy valley flows away,
O faithless daughter’
Who trusted in her treasures...’,

but rather:

[p.164]

‘Why dost thou boast of thy strength?
Thy strength has ebbed away,
O faithless daughter
Who trusted in her treasures ...’⁴⁴

3. Newly detected examples of rarer words include several examples of II ‘*azab*’ ‘to place’, ‘arrange’, in Job, formerly interpreted as I ‘*azab*’ ‘to forsake’, ‘leave’. Good examples have been found in Job 9:27; 10:1; 18:4; and less certainly 20:19.⁴⁵ A possible example of interest is in Job 39:14 on the habits of the ostrich. Dahood suggests the text be rendered, not:

‘She abandons her eggs to the earth,
And lets them be warmed on the ground’

but rather:

‘She places her eggs in the ground,
And she warms (=hatches) them on the sand.’

This rendering may not only restore the meaning of the text but also the character of the ostrich! And it would agree with what is known of the habits of this bird.⁴⁶

⁴³ Discovered by Ginsberg, confirmed by Albright (*BASOR* 98 (1945), p. 21 n. 55, pp. 24-25; *VTS*, III, 1955, pp. 12-13; also J. Gray, *VTS*, V, 1957, pp. 207-208). *Zapzagai-* in Hittite, J. Friedrich, *Hethitisches Wörterbuch*, 1952, p. 260a, and *ibid.*, 2. *Ergänzungsheft*, 1961, p. 28a.

⁴⁴ After Dahood, *Biblica* 40 (1959), pp. 166-7; examples also in Jb. 39:21 and Je. 4:74.

⁴⁵ M. Dahood, *JBL* 78 (1959), pp. 303-9, esp. 304-7.

⁴⁶ Dahood, *op. cit.*, pp. 307-308; in Jb. 39:16, he further suggests taking *pāhad* as ‘flock’ rather than ‘fear’ (in J. L. McKenzie (ed.), *The Bible in Current Catholic Thought (FS Gruenthaner)*, 1962, p. 74).

4. A lost meaning is sometimes recovered for a well-known word. Bama is the common Hebrew word for a high place. In Ugaritic, it also means ‘back’, and this rendering would also fit very well in Deuteronomy 33:29, in the ancient Blessing of Moses:

‘Thine enemies shall submit to thee,
And thou shalt tread upon their backs’
(rather than: ‘on their high places’).⁴⁷

[p.165]

The idea expressed is then similar to that in Joshua 10:24. or in Psalm 110:1, and finds plastic expression in Egyptian reliefs and statuary.⁴⁸

(d) Illumination from other Languages

Other Semitic languages besides Ugaritic (*e.g.*, Akkadian) could be called on; but here we take two examples from a more distant source, namely Egypt.

I. Potiphar: was he an ‘officer’ or ‘eunuch’ of Pharaoh? The word used of Potiphar in Genesis (37:36; 39:1; 40:2, 7) is *sārīs* which elsewhere in the Old Testament usually means ‘eunuch’. Now this meaning creates difficulties in Genesis; not only was Potiphar a married man (Gn. 39:1), but eunuchs were not customary in ancient Egypt.⁴⁹

The answer to this question is a simple one. Hebrew *sārīs* is probably a loanword from the Akkadian (Assyro-Babylonian) *ša-rēš-šarri* or *ša-rēši* which itself shows a change of meaning during the time that it was in use. Thus, in the second millennium BC, *ša-rēši* usually meant simply ‘courtier’, ‘official’, but by the first millennium BC it had come to mean specifically ‘eunuch’. This is a valuable hint, for the same diachronic restriction of meaning can be seen to affect Hebrew *sārīs*. In the Joseph-story in Genesis, the early, general meaning of ‘official’, ‘courtier’, suits the context perfectly, and is also, therefore, a genuinely early usage preserved from the early second millennium BC. But all the other examples of *sārīs* in the Old Testament belong to books originating in the first millennium BC (Isaiah, Kings, Jeremiah, Daniel, Esther) and so they naturally show the later, narrower meaning of *sārīs*. The parallel development in meaning of these two related terms is not unique. In both Egypt and Mesopotamia, other and wholly unrelated

[p.166]

⁴⁷ Cf. J. Gray, *The Legacy of Canaan*¹ (=VTS, V), p. 189; E. Jacob, *Ras Shamra et l’Ancien Testament*, 1960, p. 63; C. F. Pfeiffer, *Ras Shamra and the Bible*, 1962, p. 60.

⁴⁸ The captives shown in P. Montet, *L’Égypte et la Bible*, 1959, plate VII, would originally be placed under the feet of a royal statue; captives are likewise shown on a royal footstool and a hassock (to come under the king’s feet) from Tutankhamun’s tomb (cf. P. Fox, *Tutankhamun’s Treasure*, 1951, plates 60, 61), and a scene shows the young Amenophis II with feet on foes (W. M. F. Petrie, *A History of Egypt*, II, (v.d.), fig. 96).

⁴⁹ See J. Vergote, *Joseph en Égypte*, 1959, pp. 40-42.

words for 'official', 'courtier' also show the same change of meaning. The old Egyptian word *sr*, 'official', became *siūr*, 'eunuch', in Coptic, while in Mesopotamia in the early second millennium BC the term *girsequm*, 'eunuch', had earlier meant 'courtier'.⁵⁰

2. In 2 Samuel 12:14, the Hebrew text describes David's sin (in his having taken Bathsheba) as having 'slighted the enemies of the Lord', usually altered in our modern versions to something like, 'Thou hast given occasion for the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.' But the literal rendering is no fault in the text, it is simply a euphemism to avoid saying 'having slighted the Lord...', by transferring the insult verbally to God's enemies. Remarkably enough, exactly the same euphemism has been noticed⁵¹ in an Egyptian decree of the seventeenth century BC (it having itself no direct link with the Old Testament), in which punishment is passed upon an Egyptian conspirator 'as is done to the likes of him who rebelled against (*sebi ħir*) the enemies of his god'. There is no question of emending the Egyptian text (an original document), and no need either to emend the Hebrew construction.⁵²

V. THE OLD TESTAMENT ILLUSTRATED

Illustration of the Old Testament comes from two main sources: the natural environment (and relevant sciences) and Ancient Oriental studies proper.

Today, there are excellent publications available which help us to visualize the natural setting of Old Testament history and daily life, whether it be, say, the mountains and cedars of Lebanon, or the 'wildernesses' that may vary in nature from

[p.167]

pasture to sand and rock desert, or the flora and fauna of the biblical world.⁵³

In the archaeological realm, two forms of pictorial illustration can make more vivid the circumstances of Old Testament people and events, and thus enliven our understanding of them.⁵⁴

First, the monuments of Egypt and Assyria in particular preserve - sometimes in vivid colour - painted or sculptured scenes of daily life, or of historical events or of religious practice. Details of

⁵⁰ Full references for this paragraph, cf. Kitchen, *JEA* 47 (1961), p. 160. In addition, for *siūr* see W. Spiegelberg, *Koptisches Handwörterbuch*, 1921, p. 122, and for *sr* A. Erman and H. Grapow, *Wörterbuch der Aegyptischen Sprache*, IV, pp. 188-189.

⁵¹ R. Yaron, *VT* 9 (1959) pp. 89-91.

⁵² For another striking linguistic parallel in Egyptian and Hebrew, see S. Morenz, *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 74 (1949), cols. 697-699.

⁵³ Compare, for example, the excellent photographs in works such as L. H. Grollenberg, *Atlas of the Bible*, 1957 (and *Shorter Atlas of the Bible*, 1959) and in Aharoni, etc. (next note). Archaeology and topography are variously combined in: G. E. Wright and F. V. Filson, *Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible*⁵, 1957 (selected maps in *idem*, *Westminster Smaller Bible Atlas*, 1947 and reprs.), E. G. Kraeling, *Rand McNally Bible Atlas*, 1956, and H. G. May, R. W. Hamilton, G. N. S. Hunt, *Oxford Bible Atlas*, 1962. There is still room for a proper atlas with large-scale maps, proper relief and routes, and detailed topographical study, rather than potted biblical archaeologies with rather diagrammatic maps in the current fashion.

⁵⁴ Cf. (e.g.) the classified corpus of photographs in J. B. Pritchard, *ANEP*, 1954 (and *idem*, *The Ancient Near East*, 1958), or in colour Y. Aharoni, B. Mazar et al., *Illustrated World of the Bible Library*, 5 vols., 1958-61 (and M. Avi-Yonah and E. G. Kraeling, *Our Living Bible*, 1962). An excellent brief introduction is D. J. Wiseman, *Illustrations from Biblical Archaeology*, 1958 (³1966).

dress, furniture and much else are all portrayed for us to see. In Egypt, white linen dress and clean-shaven face are customary in the tomb- and temple-scenes and are presupposed in Genesis 41:14, 42; while in Western Asia, the Semitic and other peoples appreciated fine beards and often multi-coloured garments - again, abundantly illustrated upon Egyptian and Assyrian monuments, and underlying various biblical references.⁵⁵ For beards, one may compare Psalm 133:1, 2, and the insult in 2 Samuel 10:4, 5; for coloured dress, compare the allusion to fine dyed stuffs in Judges 5:30.

Secondly, the actual objects and buildings revealed by excavation perform a like service. Thus, from the combined

[p.168]

study of Old Testament words for pottery and of pottery found in Palestinian excavations, one may gain a sharper understanding of many Old Testament allusions to various such vessels.⁵⁶ The layer of ashes a metre thick which lay over the ruined walls of the Israelite citadel at Hazor, with some of the stonework torn down right to the foundations-revealed by Yadin's excavations⁵⁷ - is a graphic illustration of the ferocity of the Assyrian attack on northern Israel by Tiglath-pileser III in the time of Pekah, recounted briefly in 2 Kings 15:29.

VI. THE ISSUE OF CONFIRMATION

Many of the correspondences between biblical and Ancient Near Eastern data that have been mentioned in the foregoing chapters not only illuminate or illustrate the Old Testament but also serve to indicate the reliability of many of its allusions to the world in which it was written; these are *indirect* confirmation.

Examples of *direct* confirmation - actual extra-biblical mentions of persons and events of the Old Testament - are not lacking but are necessarily much fewer. This is because (i) Old Testament history is quantitatively only quite a small part of Ancient Oriental history as a whole; (ii) the tasks of exploration and decipherment are but well begun;⁵⁸ (iii) in any case much information has perished irrevocably at the hands of time and man;⁵⁹ and (iv) some events are of such a kind as to leave no physical traces behind.

However, some examples of direct confirmation do occur; one need only mention one or two examples. Thus, Ahab, Menahem, Pekah and Hoshea, kings of Israel, are all mentioned in due order in the Assyrian annals along with the fall

[p.169]

⁵⁵ For example, *ANEP*, figs. 3, 26, 43, 47 (=Pritchard, *Ancient Near East*, figs. 2-5) or Wiseman, *op. cit.*, figs. 25, 27, 29, etc. Examples in colour, C. F. Nims, *Thebes of the Pharaohs*, 1965, figs. 60 and *passim*; fig. 81.

⁵⁶ See J. L. Kelso, *The Ceramic Vocabulary of the Old Testament*, 1948, and A. R. Millard, *NBD*, pp. 1012-1016.

⁵⁷ *E.g.*, Y. Yadin, *BA* 20 (1957), pp. 39-40.

⁵⁸ See above, p. 32, note 43.

⁵⁹ See above, p. 32, with notes 42, 44-45.

of Samaria in 722 BC,⁶⁰ and also Judaeen kings such as Ahaz, Hezekiah and Manasseh.⁶¹ The Babylonian chronicle-tablets in the British Museum confirm the capture of Jerusalem and the change of Judaeen kings effected by Nebuchadrezzar II in March 597 BC,⁶² while the actual presence of the Judaeen king Jehoiachin in Babylon as an exile is independently attested by the ration-tablets that were excavated by Koldewey at Babylon and published by Weidner.⁶³ One may also view the sudden destruction of several Late Bronze Age cities in Canaan in the thirteenth century BC as being at any rate partial confirmation of the Israelite invasion and the start of the settlement recorded in Joshua and Judges.⁶⁴ Where problems have been raised in Old Testament studies, the information available from Ancient Near Eastern sources can, as indicated earlier above, cut down the scope of these problems considerably and sometimes solve them outright or partially.

While we must always exercise great care in deciding what constitutes confirmation of this or that detail or episode in the Old Testament and in excluding illusory examples, I cannot agree with those who would condemn the quest for such confirmation as 'improper'.⁶⁵ It is every bit as legitimate to seek for

[p.170]

real confirmation of an ancient document⁶⁶ as it is to look for errors, and no less legitimate to seek soundly-based confirmation for biblical than for other ancient literary records.

⁶⁰ For this date see E. R. Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, (1951) pp. 122-128, and H. Tadmor, *JCS* 12 (1958), pp. 33-40. For Hebrew royal chronology, cf. works cited above, p. 76, notes 67-69.

⁶¹ Cf. standard histories (e.g., Bright); Assyrian references are mainly collected in *ANET* and *DOTT*.

⁶² Published in D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings*, 1956.

⁶³ E. F. Weidner, *Mélanges Syriens offerts à R. Dussaud*, II, 1939, pp. 923-935; see also W. F. Albright, *BA* 5 (1942), pp. 49-55 and A. L. Oppenheim in *ANET*, p. 308, or W. J. Martin, *DOTT*, pp. 84-86.

⁶⁴ It should be noted that the technical problems of detail in correlating stratigraphic/occupational evidence (often incomplete) with the site-histories known from biblical and other records are not any more significant than those found in relating site-occupations at (e.g.) Megiddo, Samaria, Hazor, or Lachish with the site-histories in biblical and other records during the Hebrew kingdoms. Cf. (e.g.) discussions by Y. Aharoni and R. Amiran, *IEJ* 8 (1958), pp. 171-184; G. E. Wright, *BASOR* 155 (1959), pp. 13-29; O. Tufnell, *PEQ* 91 (1959), pp. 90-105; Wright, *BANE*, 1961, pp. 98-100; latterly, K. M. Kenyon, *BIA/UL* 4 (1964), pp. 143-156.

⁶⁵ As done (e.g.) by M. Noth, *History of Israel*², 1960, p. 47; with his deprecation of 'over-hasty' use of parallels one must fully agree - but not with his erroneous inference (p. 48) that written records alone constitute evidence. If it were true, then non-literate archaeological material and written records should never be correlated! Cf. next note.

⁶⁶ Thus, in Mesopotamia, the palatial building excavated at Brak by M. E. L. Mallowan (*Iraq* 9 (1947), pp. 26 ff., 63 ff) gives direct confirmation of the tradition of Naram-Sin's campaigning far N.W. of Babylonia (cf. C. J. Gadd, *CAH*², I: 19, *Dynasty of Agade*...1963, p. 29). In Anatolia, Goetze (*JCS* 11 (1957), pp. 53-57 with 59-61) has no hesitation in using archaeological data from Boghazköy to confirm the evidence of the Hittite offering-lists and Telipinus Decree. In Egypt, S. Allam, *Beiträge zum Hathorkult (bis zum Ende des Mittleren Reiches)*, 1963, pp. 42-49, appropriately confirmed late Dendera temple tradition on the works of Pepi I, Amenemmes I, etc., there from monumental indications. There is no sufficient factual reason to treat the Old Testament differently from these.