

# NOTES ON THE TROGLODYTES IN PALESTINE

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## INTRODUCTION

DURING the great Ice age glaciers were formed on the heights of the Lebanon Mountains, northeast of Beirut. The glacier in the valley of the Kadisha extended down to the level of 5,000 feet, and the present grove of cedars of Lebanon stands upon the terminal moraine. Though there is no evidence of glaciers south of this point, there is evidence of the Glacial period in the abandoned shore lines of the Jordan, one of which is 1,400 feet above the Dead Sea, and a more prominent one at 650 feet. These evidently are the results of the cold and moist climatic conditions accompanying the Glacial period, during the last stage of which Palæolithic man appeared in Palestine as well as in Europe and America.<sup>1</sup> Scant knowledge on great problems still marks the study of prehistoric Asia. The next decade is one of promise. We are safe, however, in identifying the Palæolithic with the Glacial period. The late Neolithic period was still on in 2500 B.C. Tools were still of stone, metals are not yet known.<sup>2</sup>

## THE LAND

The basis of Palestine is a limestone plateau laid down millenniums past, and once all but submerged in prehistoric seas. At that time the Mediterranean extended far east to the crest of the Judean plateau; and southward the waters spread up the Nile, converting that valley for a thousand miles into an ocean floor. Likewise the Red

<sup>1</sup> See Wright's *Ice Age in North America*, p. 613; *Scientific Confirmations of Old Testament History*, p. 313; but especially his article in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 1911, pp. 18-28.

<sup>2</sup> Mesopotamian culture marked in Palestine, 2500 B.C. (Benzinger, p. 42).

Sea extended northward to the base of Lebanon, drowning the Jordan Valley and the chasm of the Dead Sea. Geologically Palestine belongs to Africa, and is at best only a hangnail of Eurasia. The entire country is volcanic. Earthquakes have constituted an ever-recurring phenomenon. Indeed, it is a local superstition that once in seventy years the dread experience is bound to recur; and as the time comes around, the natives, without waiting for the premonitions, abandon the villages and get out into the open hills. Devils seem to have gotten possession of the country in more ways than one. The pool which the angel troubled, for example, is now stirred by a sleeping dragon; jinns haunt every lonely roadside; and underneath the high table-land of Judah a huge dragon lies fitfully sleeping, his restless turnings creating the dread quakings of the earth above him.

But time has wrought wonders. The silting up of the Nile and the uplift of the ocean bed have created historic Egypt, "the gift of the Nile." Likewise the shoulder of Philistia has turned back the waters of the Mediterranean, and an upheaval of the height of land south of the Dead Sea has created a vast inland sea, of which there are now left only a series of lakes and the river between. Where ocean left off earthquakes began. The limestone platform has been riven, the gorge of Jordan and Arabah has been shattered, and the sides thereof have been tilted to various heights and angles. Thus the strata that show west of the Dead Sea appear on the plains of Moab also, but at an elevation greater by a thousand feet or more. Through great fissures in this floor molten volcanic rock poured, covering the limestone floor with a labyrinth of ridges and hills. Of such is the soil of Judah, pulverized and scattered through past ages by storms and frosts.

To-day great stretches of the land are so thickly covered with boulders as to make it difficult, if not impossible, for a horse to pick its way through. The limestone of varying hardness has been carved by frost and rain into numberless caves and hollows, of which one large enough to conceal a

thousand people was refuge for the persecuted countrymen of Mattathias. In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews we have one of many allusions to these natural hiding places.

In Palestine, as elsewhere, primitive man sought refuge in these natural hollows, contesting ownership with wild beasts. In a land honeycombed with caves, intervening walls would be broken through, and rooms would give place to apartments, including living and sleeping rooms, storerooms, and often larger rooms for community purposes.

#### THE FINDS

Over considerable stretches of the country are survivals of early occupation, dating back even to prehistoric times. They occur in the coast plain so far north as Carmel and beyond, in the desert lands south of Jerusalem, on the table-land east of the Dead Sea, and in the savage volcanic lands east of Galilee. These several finds may be classified as (1) caves with their yields of bones, crude implements of stone, and rude pictures sketched on the walls; (2) dolmens, table-shaped constructions; (3) cromlechs, great stones set up in a circle; (4) cairns; and (5) menhirs, monoliths set up as columns.<sup>1</sup>

The most complete record of life in Palestine is to be found on the site of ancient Gezer. On the road from Joppa to Jerusalem, about five miles<sup>2</sup> southeast of Ramleh, stands a low two-humped hill or ridge, bearing on its crest (an area one half mile by one eighth) the remains of this ancient city. The drainage maps show an elevation near Ramleh of 352 feet. Already one has left the coast plain, and the hills roll away toward the Shephelah. The story of Gezer antedates by far any record of Hebrew, Philistine, Hittite, Babylonian, or Egyptian (Pepi, 2500

<sup>1</sup> On the confusion in terms, see Kohn, Barton (chap. v.), and the Dictionaries.

<sup>2</sup> Macalister, *Excavation of Gezer*. Summary in *Bib. Sac.*, Jan. 1918.

B.C.<sup>1</sup>). There is evidence of a cave-dwelling race whose residence here covers a period of five centuries or more, easily dating back to 3000 B.C. In the fields around though not in the city itself, even palæolithic implements have been found. These caves were the abodes of Gezer's earliest dwellers. It may be added that some of these caves are still occupied; and, for that matter, the adaptation of caverns to the use of man has continued through all time. The custom of burning the bodies, or at least the bones, of the dead has gone far to destroy the means for studying these primitive dwellers. The spot is naturally defensible. Water is at hand. The rough nature of the country favors hunting. There is vegetation for flocks and herds, and there is rich soil in the vicinity. Being higher than the surrounding plains, the hill affords opportunity for observation and timely defense against hostile invasion. The remains of three walls indicate that the area of the city varied from date to date.

As long ago as 3000 B.C. a primitive people found here a location to their liking. Here were natural caves in a limestone rock so soft that it could be fashioned, if need be, by their crude tools. These irregular cave dwellings, eighteen to forty feet across and connected by narrow, winding passageways, were kept dry by wide surface trenches, reservoirs, or even by seepage through flaws in the rock. Entrance, generally, is by narrow staircases, with steps about twelve inches wide and six inches high, or by narrow ramps. Occasionally the depth is so slight that the entrant simply clammers in and out. There are no wall decorations. Only crude, hand-shaped pottery remains, sometimes rudely decorated with red or white lines. Flint knives, and polishing stones, were found, as were also stones for heating and stones for throwing. The defense of this troglodyte community consisted of a rounding earth<sup>2</sup> mound with a facing of rough, small stones set in mud. So primitive is this wall that it seems built against

<sup>1</sup> Paton, chap. 1.

<sup>2</sup> 6 ft. high; depth, 6½ ft. at base and 2 ft. at top.

beasts rather than men. The Semitic dwellers of Gezer buried their dead; the Troglodytes cremated. A large cave,<sup>1</sup> probably enlarged by later Semitic peoples who interred here, was devoted to the disposal of the dead. At the sill of a chimney opening which furnished the needed draught the body was burned, the ashes and parts of bones remaining being scattered over the floor of the cave. The ashes are burned most thoroughly at the point under the chimney opening, and the varying black and white strata of the ashes indicate that the use of the place as a crematorium covered some interval of time. With the single exception, so far as known, of the remains of the bones of a dog which may have been a stray, the bones are human and indicate a non-Semitic race, short in stature,<sup>2</sup> with thick skulls and the heavy muscular development of a primitive people living in savagery.

Macalister thus sums up Gezer:—

“Rude pottery, made without the use of the potter’s wheel, and ornamented with coarse moulding or roughly painted red lines; flint flakes, knives, and scrapers; millstones; rounded stone pebbles that could be used for a variety of purposes; hearth-stones; mills, polishers, perhaps an amulet or two of bone or of slate, perforated for suspension, these formed the furniture of the dwellings.”<sup>3</sup>

The site of Jerusalem was also a haunt for a group of these primitive folk. Geology bears witness also to life here in the succeeding period, one monolith at Gezer being referred to the bed rock in the Jerusalem area. The presence of these caves at a level below the present spring, and surviving fragments of pottery, suggest contemporaries of these early inhabitants of Gezer.

Rudely chipped implements, found along the maritime plain, among the hills of Judea, on the plain south of Jeru-

<sup>1</sup> 31 ft. by 24½ ft., and 2 ft. 5 in. high.

<sup>2</sup> 5½ ft. for the men.

<sup>3</sup> To a later (Canaanite) period belong the great reservoir, the High Place, with its pillars, and the sacred caves. Indeed, discrimination is not always possible.

salem, east of the Jordan, and around Petra are referred to the Chellean, Acheulian, and up to the Mousterian types. To this last-named group are referred, also, with one exception, the cave settlements of Phœnicia. The small fragments of human bones here discovered, bones of animals, and the scrapers of bone and flint are referred to the Magdalenian type, though much inferior to the finds in northern France. Accepting 3000 B.C., and earlier, for the Neolithic period, we find Blanckenhorn setting 10,000 B.C. as a date for Palæolithic man, and Kohn putting down this same date even for early Neolithic life.

Another reminder of Neolithic man is to be found in the dolmens beyond the Jordan. East of Lake Galilee the traveler finds himself in a region of one-time intense volcanic activity.<sup>1</sup> The floor has been disrupted and upturned and all overflowed with ancient lava streams. Here and there the lava flow met obstacles and there resulted upheavings of shivered masses of black basaltic rock. After ten miles of upland to the Nahr er Rukkad comes the Jaulan. Here stand hundreds of dolmens constructed of basalt slabs, some of them of huge size.<sup>2</sup> At Ain Dakkar there is a dolmen field covering thirty acres, with another near by of 120 acres. The general form is of a terrace of stones, sometimes 3 ft. 2 in. high. Above this is a row of upright slabs 3 ft. to 4 ft. 7 in. high, and 1 ft. to 1 ft. 8 in. thick. Within is a covered chamber 7 ft. to 13 ft. long, 4 ft. 6 in. at the western end, and 3 ft. 3 in. at the eastern end. The ends are closed with a single slab; the top often is formed of two slabs end to end, as are also the two sides. There does not appear to be any regular order of arrangement, though the structures are generally about 30 ft. apart. Schumacker has generalized:—

<sup>1</sup> In geologic times a lava stream five miles wide flowed down over what is now called the Jaulan. The occurrence of obstacles blocking the way accounts for the volcanic mounds.

<sup>2</sup> The dimensions are not uniform for all of the fields, e.g. 8 ft. 6 in. to 9 ft. 4 in. Often at a distance, e.g. 2 ft. 7 in., is a second wall, sometimes 3 ft. 3 in. high, surrounding the dolmen. One is reminded of the famous stones of Wiltshire and Brittany.

- “ (1) Circular terraces.  
 (2) Six upright, two covering slabs.  
 (3) Major axis east and west.  
 (4) Western end the broader, and marked headings on each corner of top slab.  
 (5) Length 7 ft. to 13 ft.  
 (6) Instances of circular openings (*c.* 2 ft.) in eastern end slab.  
 (7) Primitive sarcophagus.”

These dolmens have been the haunts of wild beasts, as the presence of animal bones attests. In numerous instances the slabs have been rearranged and used for sheep folds.

Another near-by phenomenon is a rectangle formed of basalt slabs with an average height of 3 ft.<sup>1</sup>

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Diagrammatic View

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Locality	Before 2500 B.C. <sup>2</sup>
Megiddo	Cave dwellings Oldest handmade pottery
Ta'annach	Scattering finds
Gezer	Earthen wall with glacis Cave dwellings Cremation Rude idols Oldest pottery
Lachish	Scattering finds
Phœnician coast plain	Palæolithic remains
Gezer to Ramleh Nahr Antelias Tell Sandahanna	Rock caves

<sup>1</sup> These date back (Benzinger) to Neolithic times, though in some cases copper is also found.

<sup>2</sup> On the Phœnician coast plain, some see Palæolithic remains (see Benzingcr).

The surviving Hebrew records do not carry back farther than to the days of Abraham, contemporary with Hammurapi (c. 2000 B.C.).<sup>1</sup> There is a dearth of inscriptions and monuments, though excavations may reveal much in the near future. The land is not physically fit for the development of great nations, being more a highway for commerce and travel than an arena for the evolution of settled life.

Arabia is now generally accepted as the land of Semitic beginnings; and as early as the days of Snefru (c. 2900 B.C.) the Sinaitic dwellers are represented with Semitic features. These Semitic peoples are from a common stock, and a stock that developed a state of culture in advance of the implements and utensils discovered at Gezer, and of other primitive monuments (menhirs, dolmens, cromlechs), largely east of the Jordan. Moreover, as over against the distinctive Semitic features, Egyptian monuments and traces in the Hebrew records reveal another and different race dwelling along the Mediterranean shore.

This primitive troglodyte folk, non-Semitic, must have been in western Syria prior to 3000 B.C., not necessarily before the fourth millennium.

What we have here is but a fragment of a larger problem. On the Downs of Wiltshire stand a group of monoliths and the surrounding barrows. On the plains of Brittany is an array of menhirs and dolmens concluding with the vast remains of Morbihan. Two thousand B.C. is approximately the date of Hammurapi and of Abraham,

<sup>1</sup> But the Hebrew records mention a swarm of names—the Hivites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Amalekites, Midianites, are claimed as Semites. The Emim, Zamzumim, Zuzim, Rephaim, Horites, and Nephilim are suggested as belonging among the primitive dwellers (Num. xiii. 33; cp. Gen. vi. 1-4).

Rephaim-Anakim (Deut. ii. 11), Amorites (Deut. i. 27), Zuzrim and Emim (Deut. ii. 11, 20), Emim, aboriginal inhabitants of the land of Moab (Deut. ii. 10, 20).

Zamzumim—Zuzim, aboriginal inhabitants of Ammon.

Horites (Gen. xiv. 6), predecessors of Edom (Deut. ii. 12, 22).

Horim may be interpreted as the cave dwellers (probably Egyptian Kharu); then not cave dwellers (see Paton, pp. 35 ff.).



and just antedates the Hyksos rule in Egypt. What is yet to be revealed in India, China, Japan, and far-away America is still only conjecture. To adapt a phrase, we have been playing along the shore while the great ocean of history lay all undiscovered before us.

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