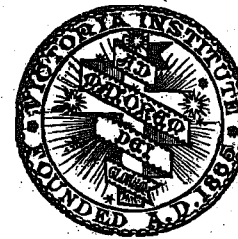


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## SECULAR RECORDS IN CONFIRMATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

By

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

(Gunning Prize Essay, 1954)

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# SECULAR RECORDS IN CONFIRMATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

D. J. WISEMAN, O.B.E., M.A., A.K.C.

## SYNOPSIS

THE comparative use of written records for the purpose of mutual illustration or confirmation is first discussed. This may result in "direct" or "indirect" proof of one or the other. The indirect relies on a comparison of general ideas, periods of history or customs. The principal instances of "direct" confirmation from contemporary documents are listed and include a new discussion or translation of a number of Akkadian texts, including those of Aššurnasirpal II, Tiglath-pileser III, Sargon II and Nebuchadrezzar found in the last five years. To illustrate the more "indirect" corroboration of Scripture a brief comparison of the early narratives of Genesis with Old Babylonian records is followed by a first translation of a Sargonid inscription compared with Isaiah 13.

THE Scriptures are a historical collection of writings on a sacred theme—the divine revelation in history. Their setting is largely in those places and periods of time otherwise known to us as the ancient Near East. Since it was in this very area that man first compiled records which have come down to us in great quantity from c. 3300 B.C., it is to be expected that, in accordance with the canons of true literary criticism, comparison can be made between those secular documents and the Biblical texts which have related subject matter. Where the subject matter is closely defined, as in historical texts, some direct comparison may be expected and fairly made whereby the accuracy of Holy Writ can be adjudged. Where it is less close, and the relation is confined to ideological, linguistic or ethnographical matters, comparison may only result in an indirect confirmation of the view, words or custom in question, though an accumulation of such comparisons can result in virtual proof of the Biblical narrative provided that they focus on a narrow enough subject or time. In addition there is the more indirect proof which is the result of influence, though in the case of the Bible this is largely confined to the spiritual sphere which is outside the scope of literary proof. Comparisons of a literary nature should not normally rest solely upon *identity* if they are to be considered conclusive proof of the veracity of the Scriptures. There is often external evidence, usually of an archaeological nature, which backs up the literary argument. For the purpose of this essay it is proposed to confine attention to those direct or indirect confirmations which are generally accepted by recent scholarship. It is, for the present purpose, assumed that the substantiation of the Biblical text itself is by sacred records since lower-critical studies have long had an abundance of material for comparison of the

Greek text and, more recently, with the Dead Sea finds, of the Old Testament as well. With the discovery of texts of all the Old Testament books, except Esther, a new era opens in these studies which have had but scant external textual or palaeographical material on which to work.

## I. "DIRECT" CONFIRMATION

### *Assyrian Records*

The expansion of the Hebrew kingdom under Solomon was made possible by the weakness of the neighbouring major powers of Egypt and Assyria. However the latter revived under the energetic Aššurnasirpal II who sought to emulate his predecessor Tiglath-pileser I (c. 1100 B.C.) by reopening the western trade routes to the Mediterranean. From the days of his successor Shalmaneser III (859–824) constant military pressure against Syria resulted in the first direct contact between Assyria and Israel. In his annals he claims the defeat of the coalition in which "Ahab of the land of Israel" was a partner (1 Kings 16: 29; B.M. 88) and had provided the largest contingent of chariots. In addition to its value in confirming the reign and existence of Ahab at this time, this Assyrian record is noteworthy in that it commences a series of references to kings of Israel and Judah in the Assyrian state records and provides us with the first chronological point in Hebrew history which can be unequivocally fixed by secular texts. From these we learn that the Hebrew text accurately preserves the spelling and order of reign of the Assyrian kings, while the Assyrian annals themselves confirm the spelling and order of the Hebrew kings' names they mention. The same accuracy can be proved from comparison with the Egyptian, Persian and Achaemenid names referred to in the Bible.<sup>1</sup> In each of the languages concerned it is customary for foreign names to be spelled out in full. For two hundred and fifty years Akkadian and Hebrew history is closely connected and yields many such comparisons.

Following his reference to Ahab at the Battle of Qarqar in 853 B.C., Shalmaneser III mentions "the tribute of Jehu (*Ia-u-a*) son of Omri (*Humri*)"—i.e. an Israelite—brought to him during the campaign of 841 B.C. (B.M. 118885). This text is illustrated and is the only known contemporary portrayal of a person mentioned in the Old Testament. Though the submission of Jehu is not directly mentioned elsewhere, it is confirmed by another (now lost) impression of an inscription once held in the British Museum. Among the defeated was "Hazael, king of Damascus" (1 Kings 19: 15).

The weak successors of Shalmaneser did not venture so far west and the next relevant documents are those of Tiglath-pileser III, called in Babylonian records and 2 Kings 15: 19 by his personal (non-royal) name of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. R. D. Wilson, *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament*, pp. 75ff.

Pul(u). The latter name occurs in the text B.M. 33332. A further tablet of the same king gives details of his expedition in 734 B.C. through Galilee and down the coast of Philistia in response to an appeal by Ahaz (also called Azariah—a dynastic name? for help. According to 2 Chron. 28: 16–21, he was oppressed both by the Philistines and by the Edomites, who cut Judah off from its iron-ore supplies at Elath by Akaba. The account of 2 Kings 16: 7–9 (cf. Isaiah 7–9) mentions the coercion of Judah by Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Damascus. In his annals Tiglath-pileser mentions both these opponents and by this tablet (ND. 400)<sup>1</sup> substantiates the historicity of the chronicler at this point and furnishes us with an explanation of 2 Chron. 28: 20. Following the account of the war he mentions the role of the prophets (*mahhe*) in the affairs of state. They are shown to intervene and render advice much as did their counterparts in Judah from the days of Samuel to Haggai. Further, Tiglath-pileser insists on the erection of Assyrian religious symbols, altars and golden royal images, as a mark of Assyrian domination over captured cities. The altar erected by Ahaz comes in the same category (2 Kings 16: 10f.). In other texts the Assyrian monarch tells how he overthrew Pekah and how Hoshea usurped the throne. Further details of Tiglath-pileser's control of Palestine after the campaign of 734 B.C. are now known from the excavations at Nimrud<sup>2</sup> and, when published shortly, will give a similar background picture of contemporary conditions there as we have from the earlier Tell el-Amarna letters for the Exodus period.

In an earlier campaign of 738 B.C. Tiglath-pileser describes the tribute received from Menahem (*Minihimmu*). Even the amount of 50 shekels of silver extorted from the leading Israelites to meet this demand is attested by contemporary Assyrian contracts. Each man was, in effect, required to pay his equivalent value as a slave to avoid deportation (2 Kings 15: 20).<sup>3</sup> When it is realized that the historical documents which survive for this Assyrian reign are the most incomplete and broken, the extent of these parallels in confirmation of Scripture is most instructive.

It was not long before insurrection in Syria brought Shalmaneser V to besiege Samaria in 724 B.C., but he died before the city fell, as is carefully recorded in 2 Kings 17: 4f., where it is implied that his successor Sargon II took over the operations. A recently discovered prism of Sargon gives variations from the earlier Assyrian accounts of the action at Samaria. The number of captives ([2]7,280) indicates that the figures were carefully compiled. In this connection records from the places to which the prisoners were carried (e.g. Guzana, Tell Halaf) confirm that Jews were later living there. Sargon further claims the capture of "the gods in whom they trusted", an interesting and corroborative allusion to the

<sup>1</sup> Published in *Iraq*, 13 (1951), pp. 21–26.

<sup>2</sup> See *Iraq* 16 (1954), p. 112.

<sup>3</sup> Published in *Iraq* 15 (1953), p. 135.

polytheism of Israel and Samaria at this time, which is the subject of much comment by the contemporary Hebrew prophets. Sargon also relates the resettlement of the city of Samaria with inhabitants from other parts of his empire, so 2 Kings 17: 26, etc.

With the disruption of Israel and its assimilation into the adjacent Assyrian provincial system Judah now faced the forces of Assyria alone. This was the inevitable consequence of her geographical position guarding the road to Egypt. Sennacherib, the son of Sargon, followed the successful subjugation of the Phoenicia-Philistia coast and the Arabs east of Syria and Jordan by an attack on Judah. The Taylor and Oriental Institute (Chicago) prisms agree with 2 Kings 18: 13f. (and Isaiah 36: 1f.) in reporting that many Judean cities were captured and that Hezekiah initially paid tribute. The variations in the weight of tribute agree when due account is taken of the twin system of measures then prevailing. Both accounts agree that Jerusalem was besieged, Sennacherib's claim being that he "shut up Hezekiah in his royal city like a bird in a cage." The absence of any claim or reference to success in the Assyrian history is acquiescence in the Judaeian claim to victory. There are some difficulties in aligning the Assyrian and Hebrew accounts chronologically, but this is largely due to the brevity of the former, which omits any reference to the defeat of the Assyrian army as recorded by the Hebrews and Herodotus. Sennacherib in person claimed the capture of Lachish in 701 B.C., according to both 2 Kings 18: 14 and B.M. text No. 28 (illustrated by a relief). The brevity of the Old Testament account, which avoids details of foreign affairs irrelevant to the main purpose of its history, may also contribute to our present inability to reconcile all points in the twin narratives. It records the murder of Sennacherib (681 B.C.) immediately following the relief of Jerusalem. His manner of death is exactly confirmed by the prism-inscription of his son Esarhaddon (B.M. 121005). Many of Sennacherib's efforts, according to his personal letters, were directed against the Chaldean rebel Marduk-apla-iddina II (Merodach-Baladan) whose emissaries sought the help of Hezekiah (Isaiah 39: 1ff.) in 703/2 B.C. during the brief period in which he held the Babylonian throne and when it therefore must have appeared that further war against Assyria would be successful.

#### *Babylonian Records*

The contacts with Akkadian records during the following years yield the same convincing picture of historical accuracy on the part of the Jewish historians. Some are indirect corroborations such as Josiah's clash with Necho at Megiddo. The movement of Egyptian troops to support the last stand of the Assyrians at Harran and Carchemish is told us in the Babylonian Chronicle. It will be observed that, as so often, the non-Hebrew text aids us in the historical interpretation of Scripture (2

Kings 23: 29 is an instance of 'al with the force of 'el). The fall of Nineveh (prophesied by Zephaniah), the battle of Carchemish which dominated the thoughts of Jeremiah, and even the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadrezzar II in 597 B.C. are specifically noted in the Babylonian Chronicle texts which, outside the Old Testament, are the most objective and accurate histories known from the ancient world. It is possible to check the Bible statements that the city of Judah fell "at the turn of the year" (2 Chron. 36: 10) and that Jehoiachin was carried captive to Babylon with the spoil from the palace and temples. Tablets from Babylon (VAT 16283 and 16378) show that Jehoiachin, his family, Jewish craftsmen, and even kings of countries whose fall to the Babylonians is predicted in the Old Testament prophecies, were prisoners there in the years 595-570 B.C., to which these documents are dated.<sup>1</sup> Such detailed reference to Judah in the extant Neo-Babylonian texts make it a fair assumption that should other chronicles of Nebuchadrezzar or Evil-Merodach (*Amel-Marduk*) be recovered we would find some direct reference to a major event like the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and to Evil-Merodach's change of heart towards Jehoiachin (Jeremiah 52: 31). Inscribed seals, important records of the past, attest Gedaliah in Judah; and Babylonian tablets explain the once controversial existence of Belshazzar, the co-regent with Nabonidus at the time of Cyrus' entry into Babylon in 539/8. That far-sighted Persian has left us details of his policy of religious toleration which encouraged the restoration of the holy places formerly destroyed or neglected by the Babylonians (B.M. 90,920).

#### *Ancient Historians*

For the period of history surveyed the Old Testament is supplemented and often confirmed by other secular records, notably the writings of Josephus. Since, however, his reliability has only recently been attested by those same texts which verify the Scriptures it would be perhaps out of place to examine his evidence in detail. Suffice it to say that if we can now accept his histories (*Antiq. Jud.* and *Bell. Jud.*), as scholars do increasingly,<sup>2</sup> we have a fruitful source of investigation, for even if he is basing his work on Hebrew manuscripts which underlie our own Biblical text, his notes and interpretations, not to mention addenda, are important. Another ancient historian who is being increasingly proved trustworthy is Herodotus, whose direct Biblical references are, however, fewer.<sup>3</sup>

#### *The New Testament Period*

Nor does the emphasis placed upon the Old Testament in the foregoing pages mean that a similar study of the New Testament would not produce

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Journal of Transactions of Victoria Institute*, 82 (1950), pp. 11f.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. C. J. Gadd, *The Fall of Nineveh*.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. O. E. Ravn, *Herodotus' Description of Babylon* (1942).

like confirmation of its historical reliability. Here the "purely historical" matter is less, for the main Gospel details have no place in secular records. At some points we find external help in checking chronology. Josephus names Herod Antipas as the ruler of Galilee in the days of Jesus Christ (Mark 6: 14-29). Light is thrown on the vexed question of the census at the time of our Lord's birth by the British Museum papyrus which indicates that a census for poll-tax took place in Egypt, and probably Palestine, every fourteen years. Taken with another naming P. Sulpicius Quirinius as legate in Syria in A.D. 6, we clearly have a census falling in the lifetime of Herod the Great. Similar cross-references can be made between Biblical and Greek texts (e.g. Lysanias, tetrarch of Abilene, later than the king of the same name who died in 34 B.C.). A study of the writings of Luke, who paid attention to historical detail, reveals specific confirmatory contacts with secular texts.<sup>1</sup> For example, Gallio's proconsulship of Achaea (Acts 18: 12) has been confirmed and dated by one inscription. The use of special terms, such as "politarch" at Thessalonica (Acts 17: 5ff.) and "asiarch" at Ephesus (Acts 19: 31), has been authenticated. Even inscribed Jewish and Roman coins are a testimony to the historical trustworthiness of the New Testament and its chronology.

#### II. "INDIRECT" CONFIRMATION

It has been my purpose thus far to lay some stress on those places where direct confirmation of the Scriptural narrative has been received. No allusion has been made to the places where it has not been possible to harmonize the Biblical with external evidence. Moreover, Sir Frederic Kenyon has reminded us that the discovery of Assyrian and Egyptian records aroused much criticism of the Old Testament narratives and gave occasion for attacks on religion in general (*The Bible and Archaeology*, p. 19). For this reason it is neither right nor logical to deduce that our present state of knowledge gives an over-all confirmation of the Scriptures. By far the largest part of the Bible is of such a nature (e.g. not confined to one historical setting or interpretation, and dealing with spiritual matters) that it will never be subject to what are called "scientific" correlations. However it still remains true to say that wherever the *facts* both of Scripture and of the related science are clearly understood there is no disagreement. Nor must we assume that most of the corroborations of the Bible are direct. Much of the mass of documents from the ancient Near East goes to build up our appreciation of the languages, customs and geographical backgrounds of the various races mentioned in the Bible. As a result it is increasingly possible to check the narratives with contemporary data and, where it is in keeping, we can deduce a general probability, often amounting to reasonable confirmation, of the veracity of the Bible itself. It is with this area of general or "indirect" confirmation that I now wish to deal.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (1951).

### *The Early Biblical Narratives*

The first eleven chapters of Genesis, despite internal indications that they claim to be early written "histories",<sup>1</sup> are often lightly dismissed as "fables" or "myths". There is, however, a modern school of thought which sees in any myth supported by early and widespread evidence a true, if slender, historical origin. Akkadian literature has a definite story of Creation (the *enuma elis* series) in several versions from c. 1800 B.C., but probably stemming from a Sumerian original, of which fragments survive.<sup>2</sup> In this they relate their view of the origin of the universe and man. The whole is permeated by a crude polytheism. For them the whole creation was a divine act *e nihilo*. The earth when first made was covered with a watery chaos; light is mentioned before the existence of the luminaries; heaven and earth are a clear cut division of the firmament; the luminaries precede the creation of plant and animal life. Finally comes the special and deliberate creation, made from the earth's clay and blood and called Man, whose primary duty is the service of the gods. These similarities with the Genesis account have to be rescued from a host of irrelevant matter which clutters up the ancient poem. They have led to the baseless assumption that the Biblical version is in some way dependent on the Babylonian. It could never have evolved from it, for the differences are too great. The similarities could well result from the clearer Genesis version and the Babylonian "myth" relating back to a common element—the historical fact.

The hall-mark of civilization for the earliest inhabitants of Mesopotamia was the use of language and literature and of the arts. This is abundantly revealed as a result of excavations in which civilization is found to spring "ready made" (c. 4000–4500 B.C.). In the earliest (Proto-literate and pre-Agade) texts we already find reference to animal husbandry (cf. Genesis 2: 19–20; 4: 3), city construction (4: 17; 10: 11), musical instruments (4: 21) and the working of iron and copper (4: 22). Even the Genesis list of ten pre-flood patriarchs is paralleled by a document from Kish written c. 2000 B.C. (W.B. 444). The ten antediluvians are accepted, on the basis of their extant inscriptions, as historical by most authorities,<sup>3</sup> though the ages to which they lived, totalling reigns of 431,000 years, are not! Similar traditions of longevity survive in Berossus' account of the same period and even in the Bible, though with more moderate figures. In our ignorance of the reason for the great individual ages, we must not overlook the historical support given to Genesis 5. For the seventh in the Babylonian list has a name which can be translated "the shepherd raised up to the heavens"—a reminder of Enoch, the seventh in the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. P. J. Wiseman, *New Discoveries in Babylonia about Genesis*, chapters v–vi.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. A. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* (1951).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. S. N. Kramer, *Emmerkar and the Lord of Aratta* (1952).

Biblical list, who was taken up to God. Both the Biblical and Babylonian lists agree in there being ten patriarchs, of whom the last passed through the flood.

As with the creation epics, the early Babylonians wrote their version of the Flood. For them the creation of their predecessors and of their environment was a historical act to which they could look back. Similarly the Flood, recorded in the eleventh chapter of the Epic of Gilgamesh, which set out an individual's search for eternal life, was to them, as to archaeological evidence also, an event which cut right across early history. As the story unfolds it is impossible not to be struck by resemblances with Genesis 6–9, even though the majority of the text is far different. Details are given of the construction of the ark to accommodate both men and beasts; the flood waters come from above and below; birds are released to test how far the waters have receded before the ark finally rests on one of the mountains of Urartu (so Gen. 8: 4). It can be argued along the same lines as with the Creation story that, coupled with the archaeological evidence found at Ur and Kish and interpreted by the discoverers to be the "Flood of Sumerian legend, which is also the Flood of the Book of Genesis", this "myth" also reflects the historic fact. Professor Heidel has concluded, "As in the creation epic we still do not know how the Biblical and Babylonian narratives of the deluge are related historically. The available evidence proves nothing beyond that there is a genetic relationship between the Genesis and Babylonian versions. The skeleton is the same in both cases, but the flesh and blood and, above all, the animating spirit are different. It is here that we reach the most far-reaching divergencies between the Hebrew and Mesopotamian stories."<sup>1</sup>

### *The Patriarchal Period*

The discovery of the archives from Nuzi and Mari has brought about a revolution of thought upon the Patriarchal period of the early second millennium B.C. Seventy thousand cuneiform documents have combined to give us a detailed view of the social and legal background of these times. Since they have been the subject of numerous detailed studies the evidence is not repeated here.<sup>2</sup> The conclusions of two leading Old Testament scholars may be taken to be the general verdict of modern scholarship on this part of Genesis. Professor W. F. Albright writes, "It is now becoming increasingly clear that the traditions of the Patriarchal Age preserved in the book of Genesis reflect with remarkable accuracy the actual conditions of the Middle Bronze Age, and especially of the period between 1800–1500 B.C." And Professor H. H. Rowley: "It is therefore

<sup>1</sup> A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (1945), p. 268.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Journal of Transactions of Victoria Institute*, 82 (1950), pp. 4f.

not because scholars of today begin with more conservative pre-suppositions than their predecessors that they have a much greater respect for the Patriarchal stories than was formerly common but because the evidence warrants it." More recently a study by Professor M. R. Lehmann<sup>1</sup> has shown how applicable are the Hittite Laws to a study of Abraham's negotiations for the cave of Machpelah recorded in Genesis 23. It has been customary to suppose that the negotiations centred round the price only and that the first polite rejection whereby Ephron, a Hittite, offered the use of part of the property was countered by Abraham's request for the outright purchase of the cave. Ephron, with oriental politeness, then offered it as a free gift; to this Abraham, requiring the title, shows his desire to make a money payment (v. 13). The negotiations are concluded when Ephron names his price of 400 shekels, which Abraham immediately and willingly pays. Now the current Hittite laws require any purchaser or inheritor of a *whole* estate to perform certain feudal services. It would appear that Abraham's second request was only for the cave "at the edge of the field" (v. 9). Lehmann therefore concludes that which while Abraham wished to avoid unnecessary obligations Ephron seized the opportunity to sell the whole property. The Hebrew *nathan* is used in its normal contemporary sense of "sell" throughout this chapter. According to this interpretation the negotiations revolved round the question of full title and consequent responsibilities, the exact details of which are omitted from the Biblical account as they are from contemporary legal texts, rather than over the price.

It has long been pointed out that this chapter remarkably preserves the correct legal terminology of the day with which we are now familiar from the many Old Babylonian real estate contracts which have been discovered. The purchase price was paid, or rather "weighed", since these were pre-coinage days, and designated as silver of the merchants (= Old Babylonian *kaspim sa tamqarim*). The transfer of ownership was made by the transfer of the silver before witnesses. The contract, which has probably been translated into our present Hebrew text, correctly designates the boundaries of the property and includes the trees within the area transferred—the latter is a distinctive feature of Hittite business documents. As Dr. Lehmann has rightly emphasized, "We have thus found that Genesis 23 is permeated with intimate knowledge of intricate subtleties of Hittite laws and customs correctly corresponding to the time of Abraham and fitting in with the Hittite features of the Biblical account. With the final destruction of Hattusas about 1200 B.C. these laws must have fallen into oblivion. This is another instance in which a late dating must be firmly rejected. Our study again confirms the authenticity of the 'background material' of the Old Testament, which makes it such

an invaluable source for the study of all the social, economic and legal aspects of the period of history it depicts."

Similar special studies have been made of various Old Testament subjects where there is external evidence to show that the presence of ideas or terms which are only valid for the historical setting in which they occur. Such studies as Yahuda on Egyptian words in Genesis 22-50, though not accurate in some details and over-stressed in others, help towards the cumulative corroboration of Scripture which is all that can be expected from these sources at the present time. Other studies may be termed as corrective corroboration: for example, the excellent study made by J. P. Free to show that the commonly accepted criticism of the mention of camels with Abraham in Egypt was inaccurate (Genesis 12: 16). Illustrated Egyptian records dated just after 3000 B.C. and similar evidence from Mesopotamia from 3200 B.C. bear witness to the camel's presence even though it is rarely mentioned in texts before the twelfth century B.C.

#### *Assyrian Evidence*

Another example of the way secular records illustrate and confirm the sacred text comes from an Assyrian inscription of Sargon II (722-705 B.C.) found during the excavations at Nimrud in 1953. The text is unique in that, unlike most royal annals, it disregards chronology and weaves the events of the king's reign into a literary composition of unusually high merit in early Semitic literature outside the Hebrew scriptures. Sargon's description of the desolation of Babylon is written soon after his operations against Merodach-Baladan in 710-709 B.C., that is, towards the end of Isaiah's ministry in Judah. I translate the relevant passage as follows:—

"At that time the track which leads from . . . to approach Babylon, the cult-centre of the gods Enlil and Ninlil, was not open, the road was impassable. The country had become a desert from days long past and any passage through the centre of it was impracticable and the way most difficult and there was no prepared path. In the inaccessible tracts thorn, thistle and jungle prevailed over all. Dogs and jackals assembled in their recesses and bunched together in herds like sheep. In this desert country Aramaeans and Suti, tent-dwellers, treacherous fugitives and plundering folk had pitched their dwellings and put a stop to any passage through the area. There were scattered settlements which for a long time had been let fall into ruin. There were no channels or furrows over the cultivated ground which was criss-crossed (with dried up irrigation works) like a spider's web. Their rich meadows had become like a wilderness, their cultivated grounds were bereft of the sweet harvest song and grain was quite cut off . . ."

<sup>1</sup> *BASOR*, Feb. 1953, pp. 15ff.

The expression "thorn and thistle over all" uses an identical expression to the divine curse upon the ground as a result of sin, following the fall of man (Genesis 3: 18; Hosea 10: 8). How striking this is when read in connection with the almost contemporary prophecy of Isaiah concerning the fall of Babylon, which state was then but an insignificant part of the Assyrian empire! The translation of Isaiah 13: 19-22 is itself a testimony to the increased philological knowledge now possible after a century of work on the Semitic languages in which Hebrew has played its own part in linguistic interpretation, only to receive far more help and clarification itself from the comparative languages.

"And Babylon, the choicest of kingdoms, the most splendid of the Chaldean beauty-spots, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited nor be dwelt in from one generation to another; neither shall the Arab pitch his tent there, nor shall shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts shall lie in groups there and their houses be full of jackals, and ostriches shall dwell there; goats shall stretch themselves out there. Moles(?) shall be in their desolated places and lizards in their (once) luxurious palaces. Her appointed time is near to come and her days will not be prolonged."

The same excavations at Nimrud (Assyr. Kalhu=Calah of Genesis 10: 11) yielded a large stele inscribed by Aššurnasirpal II in 879 B.C. to commemorate the opening of his new palace and city. He records the population at the time as 69,574 persons living within the four-mile circuit enclosed by the city walls. This certainly lends credibility to the figure given in Jonah (4: 11) of 120,000 for the inhabitants of Nineveh who lived in a city whose walls can still be traced for nine miles.<sup>1</sup>

### III. CONCLUSION

The examples given to illustrate the close relation of early secular records with the Bible serve to show how the latter is thereby explained, illustrated and in many cases confirmed. The full force of the evidence which substantiates the "holy oracles of God" could only be realized or presented in a detailed study which combined with the instances of direct or indirect confirmation, on the basis of selected contemporary written records here given, other forms of records which have a bearing on the Scriptures. The ancient arts and sciences, the genius of Semitic language, the movement of God in the history of His people, the influence of the written Word on our civilization and its literature, and many other forms of records all combine to present a testimony which, were we to study it in detail, might bring additional proofs of the truth of God's Word. Withal the paramount proof will be a spiritual one, written in the lives of individuals and therefore to be "known and read of all men".

<sup>1</sup> See *Iraq* 14 (1952), p. 28.