

THE NEWLY-DISCOVERED HEBREW MANUSCRIPTS



The hillside near the Dead Sea in which the cave is situated. The entrance (near the centre) is hidden by a projecting rock (see Editorial).

[By Courtesy of the *Palestine Exploration Fund*.

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## EDITORIAL

THE Annual General Meeting of the Association was held at the Newman International Centre, 31 Portman Square, London, W.1, on 21st December 1949. After the business meeting, Fr. Roland Potter, O.P., gave an interesting and informative lecture, on "Sacred Sites in the Holy Land." Starting on 13th January, at the same place Dr. D. J. Leahy will give a course of twelve weekly lectures on "The Background of Bible Study." They will be London University Extension Lectures. If, as we hope, these lectures are well attended further courses will be organized, covering various aspects of the New Testament. Dr. Leahy is Professor of Sacred Scripture at St. John's Seminary, Wonersh, Guildford, Surrey. Members of the Catholic Biblical Association may attend the course at a reduced fee of 15s. for the twelve lectures. Application should be made to the Registrar, 31 Portman Square, London, W.1. It is our earnest hope that the association with the Newman Centre now begun will long continue and be fruitful to both societies.

*The Newly-Discovered Hebrew Manuscripts.*<sup>1</sup> We are able to publish several photographs in this issue, through the kindness of the Palestine Exploration Fund, which we think will be of interest to our readers. The first gives a good idea of the wild and barren nature of the hilly country north-west of the Dead Sea. In a previous issue of SCRIPTURE (October 1949) we published a photograph of one of the manuscripts written in the Aramaic script. Opposite page 146 we print a photograph of part of a manuscript of *Leviticus* written in the old Hebrew or Phoenician script. These fragments were found, not by the Beduin who made the original discovery, but in February 1949 when Père de Vaux, O.P., Director of the French Archæological School, Jerusalem, visited the cave in company with Mr. Harding, Curator of the Department of Antiquities of the Kingdom of Jordan. They found a large number of fragments both of pottery and manuscripts, showing that the cave had been a storehouse for several hundred manuscripts. It is of great interest, not merely to have actual manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible, a thousand

<sup>1</sup> See SCRIPTURE, April 1949, p. 41.

years earlier than our hitherto earliest known manuscript, but also to have them in both the earlier and later script. It had been thought till recently that the older script passed out of ordinary use at the Exile or soon after and that its appearance on Maccabean coins was merely an archaizing tendency. Now however, we know that Biblical manuscripts of, say, the third century B.C. were written in this script, a fact which seems to favour the view that the old script was still used to a considerable extent at that time.

*Further Discoveries in Palestine.* An Exhibition was held recently at the Museum of Tel-Aviv of recent discoveries at Tell Qasila on the banks of the Yarkon. Excavations revealed twelve inhabited strata, of which the lowest dates back to the twelfth century B.C. (period of the Judges) and appears to be a settlement of the Philistines, who came to Palestine by sea. In the time of David the town was destroyed and the site occupied by the Israelites who rebuilt it. From the ninth to the eighth century the place was a Jewish administrative centre, the River Yarkon being used as a port. It seems probable that the cedars of Lebanon brought to Jerusalem in the days of Solomon and of Zorobabel passed through this place. About the year 732 B.C. the city was destroyed by the Assyrians during one of their campaigns and was partly rebuilt in the fifth or fourth century (Persian period). In the days of Herod the Great further building was carried out as excavations show. The principal discoveries (apart from the brickwork) are as follows: many fragments of Philistine pottery of different designs, especially of spirals and birds. Various constructions of the ninth to eighth centuries; a stone resembling a talent-weight; a receptacle containing some grains of "karshina," a kind of vetch; a potsherd with an inscription in Phoenician or Old Hebrew characters which is, in effect, a delivery note for the despatch of eleven hundred measures of oil for the King's store-houses; another which inscription reads: "Gold of Ophir for Beth-Horon, 30 shekels." Finally, one may mention that among the exhibits on show at Tel-Aviv are specimens of the earthenware bottle, called *sappahath* in the Bible, and flattened at both sides to facilitate fitting it into one's girdle for a journey.

For these details of the excavations I am indebted to Père Bauchet, O.C.D., of Jerusalem.