

## *Archaeology and Scripture*\*

**Donald J. Wiseman**

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The primary aim of this lecture is to summarise the results of recent archaeological researches which relate to the biblical doctrine of inspiration and revelation with particular emphasis on the evidence provided for the transmission and accuracy of the text of Scripture. I propose to concentrate on the bearing of recent discoveries on the Old Testament:

- I. The text
- II. The literary environment
- III. The historical situation

The science of archaeology has "come of age" in the sense that increasing materials, specialisation, and a consequent improvement in method and interpretation make it an essential tool in the study of history. In relation to the ancient Near East in particular, its discoveries uniquely enable us to make comparisons between its peoples, periods, and even phrases and those of the corresponding contemporary Old Testament. Since there are a number of reliable accounts of recent archaeological work available it is not proposed to discuss any one discovery in detail; nor is this the place to make more than a general reminder that archaeology, as all progressive branches of study, often has recourse to hypotheses in view of the inevitable incompleteness of the evidence so far produced.

### **I. THE TEXT**

The find of manuscripts in 1947–56, commonly known as the Dead Sea or Qumran Scrolls from their provenience, has an immediate bearing on our subject. Some 40,000 fragments,

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making up almost 500 documents, of which about 100 are biblical texts representing the whole Old Testament canon (except Esther), range in date, on palaeographical and archaeological grounds, from the late 3rd century B.C. to A.D. 68. These provide the earliest extant copies of the Hebrew Old Testament and afford important evidence for the transmission of the text.<sup>1</sup> The biblical texts are of at least three distinct types:

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<sup>1</sup> F. M. Cross, *The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Biblical Studies* (New York, 1958); F. M. Cross, "The History of the Biblical Text in the Light of Discoveries in the Judean Desert," *Harvard Theological Review*, 57 (1964), 281–299; F. F. Bruce, *Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London, 1961) [[http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/book\\_dss\\_bruce.html](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/book_dss_bruce.html)]; W. H. Brownlee, *The Meaning of the Qumran Scrolls for the Bible* (New York, 1964); P. W. Skehan, "The Biblical Scrolls from Qumran and the Text of the Old Testament," *The Biblical Archaeologist*, 28 (1965), 87–100.

**i) Proto-Massoretic**

The majority of the texts substantiate the basic consonantal text of the traditional Massoretic version (MT), except for the freer use of vowel letters.<sup>2</sup> Thus the theory that the MT was a Jewish recension of the early 2nd century A.D. can no longer be sustained. That text was not created by selection from various manuscripts but was rather the selection of one type of manuscript with readings standardised in detail at least as early as the 2nd century B.C.<sup>3</sup>

**ii) LXX type MSS**

The finds show that there existed a family of manuscripts in Hebrew containing many of the same readings as found in LXX, implying an amount of freedom employed by those 3rd century B.C. translators. In these there are often additions to the MT (e.g., Deut 32).<sup>4</sup> Samuel, the MT of which is often difficult even where the LXX supplies "addenda and corrigenda," is represented by a long late 3rd century B.C. text (4 Q Sam<sup>a</sup>) standing closer to the LXX than to the MT

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and more like the text of Samuel as used both by the Chronicler and by the LXX translator.<sup>5</sup> For some books, e.g., Jeremiah and Job, where the LXX and MT versions differ in length, both the shorter and longer versions are represented at Qumran.<sup>6</sup> It can increasingly be shown that there was an original Greek translation of each book of the Hebrew Bible which in turn gave rise to various recensions. It has thus become evident and it is now generally agreed that former methods of comparing individual LXX readings with the MT has led to an exaggerated view of the value of the LXX in textual criticism. Each LXX translation has first to be judged to assess the individual translator's attitude and technique. This is in no way to diminish the importance of LXX studies for their bearing on both Old Testament and New Testament linguistics and thought.<sup>7</sup> The overall result has been a remarkable change in the use of this source and a consequent general desire to avoid textual emendation of the MT.

**iii) Other fragmentary recensions,** notably texts of the Samaritan pentateuchal tradition, have come to light but so far published copies do not show the special readings which normally support Samaritan beliefs and practices.<sup>8</sup> Some manuscripts portray a "mixed" type of text (e.g., 4 Q Num<sup>1</sup> from Cave 4), yet it is interesting to read Skehan's comment after studying 13 manuscripts of Cave 4: "Here is nothing... which is recensionally different from the received consonantal text or yields improved readings in any significant degree."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Brownlee, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7. For superior readings of LXX over MT see also Cross, *The Scrolls and the O.T.* (1955), p. 421 (e.g., Deut 32:8).

<sup>5</sup> F. F. Bruce, "Dead Sea Scrolls," *New Bible Dictionary* (hereafter *NBD*, London, 1962), pp. 299ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 300.

<sup>7</sup> D. W. Gooding, "Text and Versions, 2. The Septuagint," *NBD*, pp. 1259f; H. M. Orlinsky, "The Textual Criticism of the Old Testament," *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (hereafter *BANE*, ed. G. E. Wright, New York, 1961), p. 121; Brownlee, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> P. W. Skehan, "Exodus in the Samaritan Recension from Qumran," *Journal of Biblical Literature* (hereafter *JBL*), 74 (1955), 182-7.

<sup>9</sup> P. W. Skehan, "A Fragment of the 'Song of Moses' (Deut 32) from Qumran," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* (hereafter *BASOR*), 136 (1954), 12-15.

In all except the MT there is a continual expansionist tendency in the text transmission. The form enlarges but

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the substance remains the same. Though there is marked reverence for the sacred text, there is not yet that stern adherence to the Hebrew consonantal text regularly found in the MT and exemplified, for example, in the Muraba'at biblical texts (A.D. 132-35), which show only the one standard text.<sup>10</sup>

Scribal variants abound in the Qumran texts but fall into common and recognisable categories: metathesis, dittography, haplography, homoiarchton, homoiteuton, with occasional memoriter.<sup>11</sup> While many of these may be due to the use of scribes whose occupation was to copy both biblical texts and the more paraphrastic Targums and other commentaries, it is interesting to note that measures for the preservation of the text are now found in the pre-Christian era which hitherto were only attested in the later MT, e.g., dots over doubtful words.

Some view of the nature and extent of these "scribal errors" can be gained from the analysis by Brownlee of 1 Q Isa<sup>a</sup>, a text which deviates frequently from MT. Nevertheless, it more frequently agrees with MT against other ancient versions than with them against MT. Yet these differences must not be exaggerated, since they are so often patently inferior that indirectly they support the traditional text. Of 12 readings commonly adopted from this text for the whole of Isaiah not all are universally accepted as preferable.<sup>12</sup> This text was a popular copy with a phonetic rather than classical spelling, copied by eye and generally inferior to 1 Q Isa<sup>b</sup>—copied by ear. The scroll shows that the difficulties in the text encountered by modern scholars were also present to the scribes of Qumran, for there are indications of attempts to solve them (e.g., 35:7-8).<sup>13</sup> The principal deviation may be illustrated by Isaiah 14:4 (ג for ד); the addition of "by night" to complete the parallelism, or such readings as "He will see *light*, he will be satisfied" (Isa 53:11). It is clear that 1 Q Isa<sup>a</sup> is interpretative and not recensionally connected with the LXX of Isaiah.

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Where sufficient published material from one scribal hand is extant, divergencies are not substantial and such scribal errors as can be deduced are of a minor order familiar to all involved in textual criticism. Indeed as a general statement it may be claimed that on the whole the scribal workmanship was "more accurate in the copying of these Hebrew texts than much of the work of the Christian scribes recopying the Greek Bible."<sup>14</sup>

The Dead Sea Scrolls have little direct bearing on the question of the canon. The Qumran community seems to have been the most interested in copying Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Psalms, Minor Prophets, and Daniel. They recognised the division into "The Law" and "The

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<sup>10</sup> Skehan, "Biblical Scrolls," p. 99.

<sup>11</sup> Brownlee, *op. cit.*, pp. 156ff.

<sup>12</sup> Isa 11:6; 21:8 {Isa 21:8}; 37:27 {Isa 37:27}; 40:12, 13 {Isa 40}; 41:3, 14, 25 {Isa 41}; 44:28 {Isa 44:28}; 49:12 {Isa 49:12}; 53:11 {Isa 53:11}; 65:3 {Isa 65:3}. Also the "stepping-stone" readings 6:13 {Isa 6:13}; 38:8 {Isa 38:8}; 41:17 {Isa 41:17}; 65:2 {Isa 65:2}.

<sup>13</sup> Brownlee, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

<sup>14</sup> Bruce, *Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, pp. 61ff.

Prophets," and in their commentaries treated them as the oracles of God. Though they copied many apocalyptic and pseudepigraphic works there is no evidence to state whether they were revered as deuterocanonical or not. Among these extrabiblical writings were some accorded a high degree of authority (e.g., Rule of the Community).<sup>15</sup>

On literary criticism the Scrolls, being of late date compared with the Old Testament writings, also give little information. I Q Isa<sup>a</sup> has a clear break between chapters 33 and 34, perhaps indicating that it was originally recorded on two scrolls.<sup>16</sup> By itself these texts of Isaiah do not answer questions concerning the proposed "deutero-Isaiah," though a Maccabean date for this unknown editor, as for some other Old Testament compositions (e.g., some Psalms) is now ruled out. The Qumran texts show by their commentaries, Targums, and Old Testament quotations the methods of exegesis currently employed. These are closer to the Rabbinic tradition than are our current historical, critical, and devotional interpretations; devoted largely to predictive prophecy, they were used to interpret references to persons and events of their (end-)time and its immediate past.<sup>17</sup> The documents have an important bearing

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on New Testament studies with the insight afforded of a sectarian community in the Judean desert about the time of our Lord. As well as their methods of handling scripture, rules, ceremonial ablutions, meals, and the special calendar will help in the elucidation of New Testament customs and vocabulary.<sup>18</sup> Already the bias which seeks to interpret the New Testament in the light of Hellenistic and Persian thought is changing with the disclosure of a native Palestinian-Jewish influence to be seen especially in the fourth Gospel, the Pauline writings, and the Epistle of Hebrews.<sup>19</sup>

## II. THE LITERARY ENVIRONMENT

The discovery and publication of almost a quarter of a million documents, from Syria, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and Egypt during the last fifty years have now the cumulative effect of providing a detailed historical development of literature contemporary with the more restricted (in volume) biblical documents. "Without this basic knowledge, all higher criticism remains hopelessly hypothetical. With it, the foundations are laid for a comparative approach to biblical criticism."<sup>20</sup>

(a) *Literacy and scribal activity.* From about 3100 B.C. in Mesopotamia, and soon thereafter in Egypt, Anatolia, and Elam, writing was widespread. By the early second millennium few large villages were without their scribes and in the towns and cities specialist scribes, some attached to palace or temple, were employed to write all manner of texts in various languages, dialects, and scripts. Alongside the diplomatic *lingua franca* of Amorite Babylonian using the cuneiform script (which was also adopted for non-Semitic languages). Semitic dialects using

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 56ff.

<sup>16</sup> Brownlee, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

<sup>17</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis in the Qumran Texts* (Grand Rapids, 1959) [online at [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/qumran-exegesis\\_bruce.pdf](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/qumran-exegesis_bruce.pdf)].

<sup>18</sup> Ed. K. Stendahl, *The Scrolls and the New Testament* (New York, 1957); L. Mowry, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Early Church* (South Bend, 1966).

<sup>19</sup> Brownlee, *op. cit.*, pp. 122f.

<sup>20</sup> W. W. Hallo, "New Viewpoints on Cuneiform Literature," *Israel Exploration Journal* (hereafter *IEJ*), 12 (1956), 26.

an alphabet ("Aramaic") were in common use throughout the second millennium. Current developments in various writing systems mean that in the time of

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Moses at least eight different languages in Canaan were recorded in five different writing systems.<sup>21</sup>

Many of these scribes were taught at centres under Babylonian influence.<sup>22</sup> Here they underwent a traditional training which included exercises excerpting from different texts in such a way as to imply an accepted list of classical texts and a standard order in which they were read or studied. Some texts had to be learned by heart, and others, mostly copied for libraries, were for reference only.<sup>23</sup> While manuscripts were normally copied individually, there are cases of up to six copies of one text in a library at one time (Nineveh) and evidence for at least nine individual copies of a 675 line text written in two days (Esarhaddon treaties) in May 672 B.C.<sup>24</sup> Such scribes were well aware of the traditional authority ascribed to many of their texts. Thus when a copy was derived from oral tradition, this was sometimes specifically stated and considered a less sure means of transmission than one made and checked from an older written original. Oral tradition in law and science was mainly confined to descriptions of methods, basic data and results being stated in writing. There is accumulating evidence that in the second millennium B.C. oral tradition was controlled and checked by parallel written texts.<sup>25</sup>

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(b) *Authorship and Canonicity*. The analysis of extant libraries or major "archives" at Ashur, Nineveh, Calah, Nippur, and Hattusha reveals comparable methods in the collection, selection, and editing of identical texts.<sup>26</sup> Since the scribes were often under the direct patronage of either the temple or monarch whose wishes were met, other local and indigenous writings are naturally also found. There were local versions or adaptations of such major traditional texts as the Creation epic, historical annals, chronicles, king lists, as well as special collections of religious texts (e.g., hymns) and other genres (mathematical, medical, astrological). While the overwhelming majority of documents were anonymous, certain texts (to judge by catalogues of text titles of the 14th and 8th centuries B.C.) were ascribed to known authors. Some were accorded divine authorship and therefore considered authoritative. There was a conception of canonicity wherein the sum of revealed knowledge was given once for all by the antediluvian sages. "From that time nothing else has been discovered." Such also was the Rabbinic view of God's revelation entirely contained within the Torah.

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<sup>21</sup> G. E. Mendenhall, "Biblical History in Transition," *BANE*, p. 50, n. 23.

<sup>22</sup> D. J. Wiseman, "Some Aspects of Babylonian Influence at Alalakh," *Syria*, 39 (1962), 180-187.

<sup>23</sup> W. W. Hallo, *loc. cit.*, p. 25 (and n. 54).

<sup>24</sup> D. J. Wiseman, *Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon* (London, 1958).

<sup>25</sup> J. Laessøe, "Literacy and Oral Tradition in Ancient Mesopotamia," *Studia Orientalia Ioanni Pedersen*, (Copenhagen, 1953), pp. 205-218; cf. W. F. Albright in *City Invincible* (ed. E. G. Kraeling; Chicago, 1960), p. 123. More recently E. Reiner has asked if it is possible "that the recording of what we know of Babylonian literature originated not with the scribe but with the magician and the exorcist?" (E. Reiner and H. G. Güterbock, "The Great Prayer to Ishtar and its Two Versions from Bogʻazkoʻy," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* (hereafter *JCS*), 21 (1967), 257. This view is based on the known use of certain epics and prayers as incantations (or amulets) in specific situations. While practical reasons can also be adduced for the writing down of Scripture, it should be noted that the scribe and prophet would there be the originating hand.

<sup>26</sup> E. Weidner, "Die Bibliothek Tiglatpilesers I.," *Archiv für Orientforschung*, 16 (1953), 197-215.

Nevertheless there is no sure evidence that these scribes selected literary works and consciously passed on authoritative texts. As in Egypt, ritual and laws were considered as god-given without any intermediary being named. Where texts are ascribed to scholars by name little can be adduced from the reference. These may have been editors or copyists rather than authors since in a few instances where sources are given these show they have consulted a variety of texts but have kept close to an earlier recension. The Babylonians were not ignorant of the famous scribes of temple schools who worked over texts (e.g., Arad-Ea; cf. Ezra). It will be seen that this scribal activity cannot be considered "canonisation" of texts in the sense the word is applied to the Bible since, like the Jewish scribes, their art is primarily one of copying, checking, and preserving traditional texts.<sup>27</sup>

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Texts were commonly divided into series ("Books"), designated by the opening words as title, and into sections, collections, or groups on a single tablet ("Chapters"), which were linked to the following by a colophon or catch-line.<sup>28</sup> Lists of titles or incipits show us that many texts have not yet been recovered, and this may be due to the same archaeological accident as in Palestine. For there, even more than in Mesopotamia, writing materials were perishable, being primarily the wax-covered writing-board (Akkadian *lê'um*; Heb. *luah*), leather and papyrus scrolls.<sup>29</sup>

The scribal responsibility included the preservation of the written word and handing it on to their successors undiminished. Thus literary and legal texts often contain an injunction not to destroy, damage, or deface the text on penalty of curse for those who fail to keep the words and blessing for those who obey them. Covenant ("treaty") texts demand that they shall be periodically read in public and taught to the hearers' sons and their son's sons for ever. Such important documents were laid up "before the god" in the temple. It will be readily seen that this scribal literary activity had its close counterpart in Israel and Judah.

(c) *Literary genres*. The range and volume of documents from the ancient Near East now allow an analysis to be made of the various categories of literature current by general type:

(i) *Early historiography*. Epics, especially the recently discovered new text of Atrahasis (c. 1800 B.C.), itself derived from even earlier sources, "king lists" and epic poems combine to convey the oldest Babylonian account of the creation of man, the fall (?) and the Flood. As with Genesis 1–11 this early history, for such they considered these events, was combined in a single document including poetic narrative of events

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<sup>27</sup> W. C. Benedict and E. von Voigtlander, "Darius' Bisitun Inscription, Babylonian Version, Lines 1–29," *JCS*, 11 (1957), 1ff; W. G. Lambert, "A Catalogue of Texts and Authors," *JCS*, 16 (1962), 59ff. Texts were ascribed to the gods Ea and Oannes-Adapa.

<sup>28</sup> Hallo, *IEJ*, 12 (1956), 23.

<sup>29</sup> D. J. Wiseman, "Assyrian Writing-Boards," *Iraq*, 17 (1955), 3–15. "Tablets" of Isa 30:8 and Hab 2:2 were probably writing-boards of this form. The Decalogue was written on stone, as were Babylonian legal and religious edicts intended for public display.

linked by genealogies and without any specific indication of the time covered by the events described.<sup>30</sup> It is noteworthy that there is no unanimity in the view that the Genesis 1–2:4 narrative borrows from the later Babylonian 13th century Epic of Creation, the only certain points of similarity being the existence of water at the first creation and the sabbath rest.<sup>31</sup> Similarities between the Hebrew and Amorite (W. Semitic) accounts of the flood are more striking and a copy of the Babylonian Flood (Gilgamesh) story has been found at Megiddo from the 14th century B.C.<sup>32</sup> A firm case for literary borrowing would be hard to establish, but for our present purpose it suffices to note the similarity of general literary form between the early historiographies. It is equally important to observe the differences of purpose, of emphasis and omissions in Scripture, in particular in the creation of the universe, the fall of man, and the initial fellowship of God in covenant with man. The historical nature of these early narratives is at present the subject of keen debate. In my view these texts were a valid form of historiography and were considered “historical” (in our post-Herodotus use of that term) by the ancient writers themselves.

(ii) *Later historical narratives.* The discovery of some 60,000 tablets from the Bronze Age (1800–1550) mostly from Syria and upper Mesopotamia (Mari, Alalakh, Ugarit, Nuzi) has led to a radically different conception of the Patriarchal period, through the ability to compare the historical, cultural, and linguistic background of this area and period with the contemporary patriarchs. The correspondence between the later Hebrew, and Mesopotamian and Egyptian historical forms of document is well known.<sup>33</sup>

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(iii) *Law.* Collections of legal judgements made by a human ruler to his deity as a report of the discharge of his responsibility and exercise of his divine calling and wisdom are to be found in Babylonia (e.g., Ur-Nammu, Lipit-Ishtar, Eshnunna and Hammurapi’s Laws) and Israel (Deuteronomy).<sup>34</sup> Treaties (covenants) between states and individuals of equal or lesser standing are among the “covenant” forms found in all ancient Semitic literature. They include a historical prelude or situation stated or implied, stipulations, popular response or acknowledgement, witnesses, instructions for preserving the enactments, and curses and blessings on the faithless or the faithful participant. Such suzerainty (Exod 19–24, Josh 24, Deut) and parity (Gen 21, 26, 31, 1 Kings 5) treaties are also found in the O.T.<sup>35</sup> As in the extrabiblical text the complete form of a treaty may not be recorded on one document but as abstracts copied on several.<sup>36</sup> It is difficult in view of this evidence to understand how Von Rad and Noth can continue to separate the Exodus from the Sinai event. It is particularly noteworthy that no covenant of the direct God-individual (Sinai) type has been attested outside the Old Testament.

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<sup>30</sup> A. R. Millard, “A New Babylonian ‘Genesis’ Story,” *Tyndale Bulletin*, 18 (1967), 1–18; W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atrahasis, the Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 15–23.

<sup>31</sup> W. G. Lambert, “A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 16 (1965), 287–300.

<sup>32</sup> A. Goetze and S. Lewy, *Atiquot*, 2 (1959), 121ff.

<sup>33</sup> The precision with which historical data was recorded in Assyrian annals, the Babylonian Chronicles, and astronomical diaries is discussed in D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings* (London, 1956), pp. 1–5.

<sup>34</sup> D. J. Wiseman, “The Laws of Hammurabi Again,” *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 7 (1962), 161–168.

<sup>35</sup> K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (Chicago, 1966), pp. 90–102 [[http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/book\\_ancientorient.html](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/book_ancientorient.html)]; M. G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King* (1963), pp. 42ff.

<sup>36</sup> D. J. Wiseman, *The Alalakh Tablets* (London, 1953), Nos. 1–3, 126, 456.

(iv) *Wisdom Literature*. Proverbs, precepts and moralistic instructions, biographical accounts of a righteous sufferer (as the biblical Job), so-called "pessimistic literature" (as in parts of Ecclesiastes), fables and parables, love songs (as the Song of Solomon)—but so far no allegories—are found in Sumerian, Akkadian and Ras Shamra texts.<sup>37</sup> As with the laws any undisputed similarity between texts of this class and the Old Testament can be explained as the dependence of both on a common Near Eastern stock of expressions.

The texts with which the Hebrew scriptures can be

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compared have recently been extended by the publication of Babylonian literary texts in the cuneiform script from the archives of Ugarit. These were written locally by scribes trained in Babylonian who were employed alongside the natives writing their own experimental alphabetic cuneiform script.<sup>38</sup> These palace employees were engaged in interstate correspondence as well as the work necessary for the fiscal, political, and palace administration. The international treaties, letters, and contracts imply customs, terminology, and ideas in many ways similar to those surviving in later Israel.<sup>39</sup> The latest published texts are of importance as showing the literary and religious background of Canaan at a time when the Israelites were settling in to the south.

The collection of texts includes part of a bilingual Sumerian and Akkadian version drawn from earlier texts describing the education of a scribe.<sup>40</sup> Ritual texts, collections of magical formulae, and lists are included with religious texts. In one list of gods Ba'al Sapōn is followed by "god the spirit" (*il abi*) and "the god" (*ilu*). Dagan (biblical Dagon) is listed and is followed by seven Ba'als.<sup>41</sup> There is thus fuller information than has been hitherto available from the Ugaritic texts. Another fourteenth century B.C. text represents "the only version of the Babylonian flood story found outside Mesopotamia so far."<sup>42</sup> In this Babylonian (not Syrian) literary composition, Atrahāsīs ("the very devout") appears to be introducing the story of the flood itself. This version has the form of first person narration not found in the later Gilgamesh epic in which the flood is a separate entity. This, with the fragment from Megiddo, shows that scribes in Palestine copied out traditional Babylonian literature. At Ras Shamra there is also an unusual composition relating to Gilgamesh.<sup>43</sup> From the

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same city comes a text of the so-called "Babylonian Job" (*ludlul bēl mēmeqi*) which indicates an earlier date for that poem and thus for the biblical Job than some allow.<sup>44</sup> Other compositions recount the wisdom of Shube'awelum to his son on leaving home, on travel,

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<sup>37</sup> W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford, 1960), pp. 1ff; "Divine Love Songs from Babylon," *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 4 (1959), 1ff.

<sup>38</sup> J. Nougayrol, "L'Influence Babylonienne à Ugarit, d'après les Textes en Cuneiformes classiques," *Syria*, 39 (1962), 28–35.

<sup>39</sup> J. Gray, "Ugarit," *Archaeology and Old Testament Study* (ed. D. W. Thomas, Oxford, 1967), pp. 145-167.

<sup>40</sup> J. Nougayrol, "Textes suméro-accadien des Archives et Bibliothèques privées d'Ugarit," *Ugaritica*, V (ed. C. F. Schaeffer, Paris, 1968), 23–28 (no. 15).

<sup>41</sup> Nougayrol, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-64.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 167, pp. 300-304.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 168, pp. 304-310.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 162, pp. 265-273 (13th century B.C.).

street women, parents, the choice of a wife, buying an ox, and on fools and wise men, concluding that all is vanity.<sup>45</sup> Proverbs, a lyric in phonetic Sumerian, Akkadian and Hittite versions, extols the mother of lú.dingir.ra as a good, fertile, and happy woman (cf. Prov 31:10–31).<sup>46</sup>

Sometimes included in this category of "Wisdom" literature, but surely to be considered in their own right,<sup>47</sup> are the collections of hymns and psalms made at various ancient centres and often used to encourage cultic unity.<sup>48</sup> The Ugaritic texts have gone far to show the early nature of such poems as the Songs of Miriam and Deborah, the blessing of Moses and the sayings of Balaam, the free use of metre, parallelism, and other poetic forms current there and thus to diminish the urge of some scholars to amend the text to conform to rigid patterns.<sup>49</sup> The current "pan-Ugaritic" implications that these texts influenced the Hebrew psalms to any extent is far from convincing. The argument that Psalm 29 is "an adaptation to Yahweh of a Canaanite hymn" rests on a few parallel thoughts and disregards other ideas in this same psalm which on the same methodology could equally be compared to Akkadian hymns.<sup>50</sup> Similarly Psalm 68, which Albright interprets as a catalogue of incipits,<sup>51</sup> is thought by others to be a

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liturgical hymn with its origin in a Canaanite sanctuary, mainly because Baal (as the Lord God himself in Isa 19:1) is called in Ras Shamra he "who rides the clouds" and thunders. But this title is equally applied to Mesopotamian storm-deities. Psalm 82 is said to presuppose the polytheistic mythology of Canaan because Leviathan is equated with the Ugaritic Lotan. But it can be shown that Leviathan like Yam, Tannin, and Reshep and, more doubtfully, Dan(i)el of Ezekiel 14:14–20 are certainly demythologised in the Old Testament even if they are references to current pagan myths. As so often when parallels are sought with extrabiblical material, full account must also be taken of the many differences. This especially applies to religious expression, since the Ras Shamra epics and related texts with their reliance on magic wrought through deities with marked sexual attributes, marriage, fertility and funerary rites, provide a glimpse of pre-14th century B.C. Canaanite religious life not unexpected since it represents beliefs and practices condemned by the devout Israelite worshipper. Similarly the Ugaritic terminology for their elaborate ritual system with its whole (*kl*), burnt (*srp*), peace (*šlmn*), trespass (*ʿasm*), gift (*mtn*), and fire (*ʿešt*) offerings shows a clear difference from the Levitical sacrifices in use, purpose, and in spirit.

Even the later range of noncanonical Psalms from Qumran is not surprising when compared with the freedom of the earlier Babylonian poets who employed their topoi, religious and

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 163, pp. 273-290.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 169, pp. 310-332.

<sup>47</sup> R. E. Murphy, "A Consideration of the Classification, 'Wisdom Psalms,'" *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum*, 9 (Leiden, 1963), 156–167.

<sup>48</sup> W. W. Hallo, "Royal Hymns and Mesopotamian Unity," *JCS*, 17 (1963), 112–118.

<sup>49</sup> F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman, "The Song of Miriam," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 14 (1955), 237–250; W. F. Albright, "The Oracles of Balaam," *JBL*, 63 (1944), 207; 67 (1948), 191–210; W. F. Albright, "A Catalogue of Early Hebrew Lyric Poems," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 23, 1 (1950–51), 1–39; Orlinsky, *BANE*, p. 125.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. E. Jacob, *Ras-Shamra-Ugarit et l'Ancien Testament* (Neuchatel, 1960), pp. 73ff.

<sup>51</sup> Albright, "Early Hebrew Poems," 1–39.

other phrases, lines, and stanza creatively in ever new combinations.<sup>52</sup> Free composition, including historical narrative, is known from the second millennium.<sup>53</sup>

Such a brief comparison of the main classes of Akkadian and Hebrew literature,<sup>54</sup> which could be said to fall within the basic groupings of Law, Historiography, and Writings (in the biblical range of that term), only stresses a general coincidence

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of the Hebrew literary background with that of her neighbours. Hebrew historiography is recorded as the Divine activity interpreted and recorded by the prophets, an institution not certainly attested among her neighbours.<sup>55</sup> Thus Akkadian prophecies are largely texts in which the reigns of unnamed kings or princes are cast in the form of predictions, the reign being described as either a "good" or "bad" time.<sup>56</sup> These texts are related to the very extensive omen literature<sup>57</sup> of the ancient Near East which has no place in the Hebrew canon with its special emphasis on Divine revelation through the written and living word.

(d) *Language*. One obvious product of this growth in the number of available Semitic texts, of a type and date contemporary with the Old Testament records and from a closer geographical proximity to the scene of the events, is an increased understanding of the Hebrew and Aramaic languages. In particular the texts from Ras Shamra, but no less those from Mari and Alalakh, have enabled progress to be made towards a historical study of Hebrew, its vocalisation, orthography, dialects, grammar, and syntax. For example, the use at Ugarit of enclitic *-m* and other final *mêm*, pleonastic *waw*, the clarification of the particles notably *l*, *b*, 'al, *ki*, *mn*), and

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the use of the verb have shown that many emendations previously proposed for the MT are unnecessary. This is not the place to enumerate the numerous lexicographical clarifications and explanations of individual words and expressions now universally acknowledged from these same sources.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> A. L. Oppenheim, "A New Prayer to the 'Gods of Light,'" *Analecta Biblica*, 12 (Roma, 1959), 282-301.

<sup>53</sup> E.g., The statue of Idrimi and the Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur.

<sup>54</sup> Similar comparison could be made with Egyptian scribal methods and types of literature. See D. J. Wiseman, "Books in the Ancient World," *Cambridge History of the Bible, From the Beginnings to Jerome* (ed. P. R. Ackroyd, Cambridge, 1970), pp. 30-48; K. A. Kitchen, op. cit., p. 132.

<sup>55</sup> The Babylonian official *maḥḥu* is a secular emissary rather than an "ecstatic prophet." Recent discussions on prophecy at Mari are useful for showing the form of activity of what the Old Testament would call "false-prophets"; e.g., A. Malamat, "Prophetic Revelations in New Documents from Mari and the Bible," *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum*, 15 (Leiden, 1966), 207ff; W. L. Moran, "New Evidence from Mari on the History of Prophecy," *Biblica*, 50 (1969), 15-56; Fr. Ellermeier, *Prophetie in Mari und Israel* (Herzberg am Harz, 1969).

<sup>56</sup> A. K. Grayson and W. G. Lambert, "Akkadian Prophecies," *JCS*, 18 (1964), 7-30; R. D. Biggs, "More Babylonian Prophecies," *Iraq*, 29 (1967), 117-132. For Egyptian predictions see K. A. Kitchen, "Some Egyptian Background to the Old Testament," *Tyndale Bulletin*, 5/6 (April 1960), 6-7.

<sup>57</sup> E.g., The omens from livers, unnatural births, lucky and unlucky days, observations of materials, movements and colours of persons and animals, and also astrology. These texts as well as the "scientific" tablets mathematics, astronomy, medicine and lists of chemicals, geological and geographical observations—are types of texts omitted from the Old Testament as contrary to, or irrelevant for, its purpose.

<sup>58</sup> E.g., W. J. Moran, "The Hebrew Language in its Northwest Semitic Background," *BANE*, pp. 54-72.

### III. HISTORICITY

On the basis of the evidence from archaeological sources illuminating the text, literature, and languages of Scripture some attention must be directed to the problems of the historicity of the narratives themselves. Undoubtedly today attention is focussed largely upon Genesis I-XI. I have attempted to show that the outline form of this "early historiography" may be similar in both Hebrew and extra-Hebraic sources, but with markedly different emphasis and purpose. Can archaeology help in establishing the historical nature of the biblical record of such events as creation, the fall, the flood, the earliest civilisation, the dispersal of peoples and languages? Most archaeologists, in the narrowly accepted professional definition of this term, would be the first to say that the creation of the universe, the earth, man, and such moral concepts as the Fall lie outside their proper sphere of investigation. Thus they might expect to investigate the result of these events and, for example, bring evidence for the date of man's first appearance in ancient Near Eastern town-dwelling communities (c. 7-6th millennium B.C., e.g., Çatal Hüyük and Jericho) or in village life even earlier (e.g., Jarmo, c. 9000-7000 B.C.). They can chart the introduction of pottery in the 6th millennium or of monumental public buildings c. 4000 B.C. ('Obeid) before the advent of writing (c. 3100 B.C.).<sup>59</sup> Similarly they can show that Genesis 4-6 tells of arts and crafts, including irrigation, husbandry, viticulture, which accord in general with archaeological discoveries of these early periods. Yet no scholar of international reputation with practical experience in Near Eastern field work writes in

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confirmation of there being direct archaeological evidence for the biblical Flood unless this be equated with a prehistoric catastrophe or with the remains of a local inundation traceable in S. Iraq and reflected also in the Old Babylonian texts. This raises questions not of the historicity of the narratives, but of interpretation, for some consider that Genesis I-XI does not represent a continuous and unbroken chronological narrative, and thus creation and the universal flood go back to a time earlier than those suggested by the common excavations.<sup>60</sup>

The closest evidence, chronologically, adduced is from traditional Babylonian texts, such as that of Atrahasis, to which reference has already been made. Yet, aside from any general coincidence of subject matter or literary form including "pictorial" or epic expression, these texts, fragmentary as they are compared with the narrative detail of the Hebrew, do not and cannot prove or disprove the historical worth of the Genesis stories. The most that might be argued either way is that both are equally historical or unhistorical, the Sumero-Babylonian version being less clear, incorporating diversions from the truth to be expected from their polytheistic background.

The later historical narratives of the Old Testament are questioned by certain scholars of Old Testament studies (but far less so by historians of the ancient Near East in general) on grounds of higher criticism rather than of history. Their attitude is closely bound up with their attitude to Scripture as a whole. Thus Alt, Noth, and to some extent Eissfeldt, begin their "history" of Israel with the foundation of the so-called "amphictiony" (now increasingly questioned), all pre-Exodus happenings being outside Israelite history. Though these earlier traditions may be, according to their view, borrowed or later set down from oral tradition, they will often allow them to be surprisingly accurate! On the other hand, the comparison of

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<sup>59</sup>G. E. Wright, "The Archaeology of Palestine," *BANE*, pp. 72-83.

<sup>60</sup>T. C. Mitchell, "Archaeology and Genesis i-xi," *Faith and Thought*, 91 (1959), 28-49.

ancient documents with the patriarchal and later narratives has led to a radically different conception of all periods of Israelite history to that commonly accepted fifty years ago. It has also led to a state of flux in Old Testament studies generally since there has been a departure by

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nearly all historians from the old critical consensus of the Wellhausen school hypotheses without any adequate replacement. Thus the near (or "neo-") conservative schools of thought led by Albright and Mazar would consider the Old Testament documents (Gen 12 onwards) as "substantially historical."<sup>61</sup> They refrain from according full historicity to the Old Testament history on the grounds of supposedly substantiated errors. These may be roughly classed as (i) disagreement between (sometimes duplicated) narratives of the same event and (ii) errors substantiated by archaeology against the Hebrew narrative.

In the first category would fall such matters as the attribution of "the same event" to two persons, e.g., the experiences of Abraham and Isaac, the death of Goliath at the hand of David and Elhanan (2 Sam 21:19), as well as the irreconcilable nature of some of the differences in dates and figures.<sup>62</sup> In the second come such "errors" as the references to the occupation of Ai at the time of the conquest, for which no archaeological

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evidence has been found in detailed excavations,<sup>63</sup> "anachronisms" like the reference to Philistines and camels in the Patriarch period,<sup>64</sup> or to Darius the Mede as ruler of Babylon at a time when external records show no king of Babylon between Nabonidus and Cyrus.<sup>65</sup>

In reply I personally would maintain that many of these difficulties are raised through there being insufficient extant evidence, either archaeological or scriptural, for a valid definition of

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<sup>61</sup> H. H. Rowley, *The Old Testament and Modern Study* (London, 1952), pp. xxf.

<sup>62</sup> On the transmission of numerals and consequent errors see H. L. Allrick, "The Lists of Zerubbabel and the Hebrew Numeral Notation," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 136 (1954), 21–28. Note the Qumran support of the LXX (75) against MT (70) in Exod 1:5, thus according with Acts 7:14. The types of numerical error, e.g., adding additional noughts: 700 (2 Sam 10:18)—7000 (1 Chron 19:18); 40,000 (1 Kings 4:26)—4,000 (2 Chron 9:25) or omission of "decimal" digit: 18 (2 Kings 24:8)—8 (2 Chron 36:9) may be due to a place system not preserved. Other variant readings, e.g., 800 (2 Sam 23:8)—300 (1 Chron 11:11), 30—50 (Num 26:7) or differences by one unit 2000 (1 Kings 7:26)—3000 (2 Chron 4:5) may be due to the use of stroke digits and thus to a poor manuscript. While various interpretations of 'elep '1000' as, e.g., "officer," or even as glosses to mark the column in which the entries were made, provide a possible interpretation for some high figures (R. E. D. Clark, "The Large Numbers of the Old Testament," *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute*, 87 (1955), 82ff), the use of some high figures, e.g., 10,000 as an "army" unit, may eliminate some apparent discrepancies. Some unexplained number variants remain. For similar variants in Babylonian texts see C. J. Gadd, "Inscribed Barrel Cylinder of Marduk-Apla-Iddina II," *Iraq*, 15 (1953), 128, where Sargon II gives the number of captives from Samaria in 722 B.C. as 27,270, 27,280 and 27,290 in versions of the same event.

<sup>63</sup> E.g., Ai might not be correctly identified with et-Tell.

<sup>64</sup> On the problem of the Philistines and Abraham's camels see, e.g., K. A. Kitchen, "Camel," *NBD*, pp. 181f; T. C. Mitchell, "Philistines," *NBD*, p. 988.

<sup>65</sup> Possible answers have been offered by J. C. Whitcomb, *Darius the Mede* (Grand Rapids, 1959) and D. J. Wiseman, *Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel* (London, 1965), pp. 9-27 [[http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/book\\_daniel.html](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/book_daniel.html)]. On divergent accounts of the same historical event, cf. narratives of the battle of Der by Sargon II in ed. H. G. Güterbock, *Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger (Assyriological Studies, 16, Chicago, 1965)*, p. 341.

the problem and thus of the circumstance and interpretation. Some are due to an interpretation of the evidence, whether biblical or otherwise, which need not necessarily be the only one tenable. Allowing this would reduce the number of "errors" to (i) those which could be varying presentations of the same fact; (ii) those which at present defy solution through lack of evidence; or (iii) those which might be classified as "scribal errors." The last apply mainly to single words, spelling, or numerals and the proven errors of this category are liable to be the subject of diverse interpretation.

When due allowance has been paid to the increasing number of supposed errors which have been subsequently eliminated by the discovery of archaeological evidence, to the many aspects of history indirectly affirmed or in some instances directly confirmed by extra-Biblical sources, I would still maintain that the historical facts of the Bible rightly understood find agreement in the facts culled from archaeology equally rightly understood, that is, the majority of errors can be ascribed to errors of interpretation by modern scholars and not to substantiated "errors" of fact presented by the biblical historians. This view is further strengthened when it is remembered how many theories and interpretations of Scripture have been

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checked or corrected by archaeological discoveries. Moreover, the specific viewpoint of the respective historians represented by the Biblical and non-Biblical sources must also be weighed in assessing the relative value of their sources.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

Extrabiblical sources provide an insight into the background of the biblical text, literature, religious beliefs, and history. They indicate the contemporary thought and methodologies but cannot of themselves directly relate to the biblical doctrines of revelation and inspiration. They provide evidence of care with which traditional texts were copied and transmitted, indicating that the textual errors of our "*textus receptus*" (MT) are of a minor nature common to all ancient copyists which, in the case of the Scriptures, do not affect our understanding of any major doctrine or detract from an obvious and vital interpretation of the narrative. In this, textual criticism of the Old approaches that of the New Testament. At the same time these studies highlight the problems caused by divergent interpretation of the text, an important subject which lies outside the brief of this lecture. Nothing presented here need or should, I submit, detract from the view of Scripture which holds it to be the Word of God trustworthily, accurately, clearly, and uniquely transmitted to us.