THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ARCHAEOLOGY FOR BIBLICAL STUDIES

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During the war years there has been little excavation in the Near East, but this has afforded an opportunity to evaluate the materials already at hand. A number of significant texts have already appeared in which such evaluation is made,[1] others will undoubtedly be forthcoming. The rapid expansion of knowledge through this field of investigation, the spectacular discoveries made, and the extravagant claims made in some quarters, all suggest the need for an appraisal of the values in archaeology, for biblical studies. If we understand the purposes and methodology of the archaeologist we may be enabled to read aright the enlarging volumes of history. As we see the significance of interlocking cultural patterns, we shall be the better able to weigh the significance of Hebrew religious culture. As we trace the heritage of the past we may understand something of its influence in the present, and the present may be liberated from the dead hand of the past as understanding comes to us.

Until the turn of the twentieth century there was little of purpose in archaeology except to acquire treasures from the past for display pieces in our museums, and occasionally there were attempts to prove or disprove certain portions of the Bible. Science now recognizes that any investigator who seeks to prove or disprove any theory (as distinguished from testing) is likely to be biased in judgment, and therefore unscientific. The only purpose of the modern excavator is to recover artifacts with such scientific skill and care that he can place in the hands of the historian materials from which ancient history may correctly be written. Such history may support Bible tradition, it may modify it, or even contradict it, but that is incidental for the modern historian. Actually there are few specific dates in our Bible and in the past we have been forced to string our history of the Hebrew people, and particularly of their neighbors, upon insecure dates. Now we may approach the problem of their history with the confidence that the dates proposed by the historian have been carefully checked. Similarly, obscure phrases in prophetic teaching are now alive with meaning because the same or similar phrases have been found in other literature and in new contexts. For example, it was thought strange that there should be a humanitarian provision in the Primitive Code of Exodus 34 prohibiting boiling a kid in its mother's milk. From a magical incantation text recovered from Ras Shamra we have the description of an ancient ceremonial designed to bring rain. The heart of the ritual was to boil a newly-born kid in its mother's milk. It would seem probable therefore that the Hebrew regulation was not humanitarian but simply one of protest against a neighbor's religious practices. But such insights are possible only after the archaeologist and historian have done their work, that of making available unbiased information from the past.

The methods used by archaeologists may be grouped under four heads. The first method was simply that of "pot-hunting." Since practically all archaeological investigation is made possible by the generosity of benefactors, it is natural that such benefactors should expect results and recognition. Both demands were formerly answered by

[1] *E.g.* McCown: *Ladder of Progress in Palestine,* 1943; Burrows: *What Mean These Stones,* 1941; Glueck: *The Other Side of The Jordan,* 1940; Albright: *Archaeology of Palestine and the Bible,* 3rd ed., 1940; Albright: *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel,* 1942.

bringing back pretty pots for museum display, each display bearing tributes of praise to the generosity of the benefactor. Little scientific information resulted from this technique, except as inscriptions were recovered accidentally. The next method was in the direction of the scientific. It was discovered that in the ancient east many mounds were the result of one civilization piling on top of another. There were two chief reasons for this. First, many buildings were usually constructed of mud brick or clay, and built on the surface of the ground. Disintegration came quickly and the houseowner simply leveled off the debris and built again on top of the old materials. In general, however, the level of an occupied site changed little during the occupation. But there were periods when the site was not occupied. The inhabitants may have been driven off by enemies. Fire may have destroyed the entire city. There were other causes. An unoccupied city soon feel into decay to be covered quickly by sands from the desert. Those who reoccupied the site leveled off the ground and began their own construction without regard to what lay beneath. Only in the case of larger stone buildings were foundations sunk. If the earlier occupation were terminated by fire either due to accident or to enemy action, a layer of ashes can be distinguished between it and the succeeding level of occupation. The second method of excavation proceeded from this knowledge. A pit was sunk through the mound, levels were carefully noted and measurements taken, and objects were photographed "in situ" before removal. This method is still used of necessity in some expeditions, but the chief objection is that the pit may give an inadequate sampling of the mound. To correct this fault a third method was used, that of cutting a trench across the entire mound and sinking it to virgin soil. A fourth method was simply a development of the third, to excavate the entire area by levels, and this is the method used whenever possible in any modern excavation.[2] The last three methods are all variations of "stratigraphical" digging and differ only in the extent to which the work is complete. Three cardinal principles must be obeyed meticulously: excavation by levels, careful and exact recording, and, interpretation after comparison with other expeditions. The first two are field work, the last is frequently deferred until the return to the home base. The archaeologist must ever remind himself that the mound before him is a record of man's past and as he proceeds with the work of stripping the mound that record is being destroyed. Unless he correctly records his evidence down to the slightest detail that part of man's record will be lost. Careful recording is a primary requisite. A man may incorrectly interpret the evidence, but if he has honestly and painstakingly recorded the facts the interpretation will be corrected later, but if the evidence is incomplete or destroyed, correction is difficult.

Spectacular discoveries have naturally attracted attention, but they were not always the most important. The opening of King Tutankhamen's tomb occupied public attention for months, yet little new information was gained for historians had already carefully pieced together that portion of Egypt's history from other evidence. Egypt's great monuments have been known for centuries, but it was not until the discovery of the Rosetta Stone that men had found the important key to unlock Egypt's written treasures. Even after possession had been gained of the Rosetta Stone it took years of work before scholars could actually read Egyptian hieroglyphs. In a similar way the key to the cuneiform writings was found in the Behistun inscription. Now after many years of work, Sumerian, Baby-

[2] See Burrows: *What Mean These Stones,* pp. 12ff, for a more detailed description of methodology.

lonian, Assyrian, and Persian, may be read with relative ease. New languages are being discovered from time to time, and we now have much information about nations we never knew existed. The story of man's growth is a fascinating one, and bit by bit that story is being pieced together. The volumes of ancient history are being enlarged constantly. Limitation of space permits only a brief glance at some of these volumes.

Until a few years ago little or nothing was known of the Sumerians, a non-Semitic people who occupied the Mesopotamian valley for centuries before the Babylonians came upon the scene of history. One of the oldest stories of creation is to be found in their literature. The Sumerians apparently came into the valley from mountainous regions, and continued to worship the mountain deities. To accomodate their gods, they built artificial mountains on the tops of which their gods were presumed to reside. The Babylonians in turn built similar structures known as "Ziggurats" for their gods. It is possible that the tradition of the "Tower of Babel" (Gen. 11:1-9) reflects this same pattern of thought. The Sumerians bequeathed their language to the priests of Babylon and for many centuries Sumerian was the religious language of Babylon, just as Latin is in use today in Roman Catholicism. Many "dictionaries" have been found in the Babylonian and other temples, giving the Babylonian meaning of Sumerian terms.

Fairly complete histories have been written of the Babylonians and Assyrians.[3] Among their literature are to be found The Tablets of Creation, The Babylonian and Assyrian Psalms, temple records, and the records of the great military campaigns. One of the outstanding contributions was the recovery of the Hammurabi Code, from the twentieth century B. C., and its parallels to the Covenant Code (Ex. 21-23) are of great interest.[4] It now appears that the Old Sumerian Code was borrowed and modified by the Babylonians, becoming the Hammurabi Code. In turn the law of the Babylonians was borrowed by the Canaanites and may have existed as a codified civil law about 1200 B. C. Then the Hebrews adopted it and made adjustments in the light of changing social patterns and religious concepts. The Covenant Code achieved its present form between 500 and 400 B. C.

The campaigns of the great Assyrian leaders Tiglath Pileser III, Sargon, and Sennacherib are now well known through tablets, prisms, and monuments. The fuller knowledge of Assyria's strengths and weaknesses enables us to understand more fully the rise and fall of Hebrew political fortunes. It is interesting to note that even in that day military leaders always claimed victory, with negligible losses of their own armies, and stupendous losses inflicted upon the enemy, even though a study of the map reveals that they have lost territory. Apparently these were strategic withdrawals.

To the northwest of Palestine, in Asia Minor, excavations have given us knowledge of the Hittites, Hyksos, and Hurrians, nations that were hitherto only vaguely known, with some historians denying their existence. The great political disturbances from Mesopotamia to Egypt are becoming increasingly clearer as more knowledge is gained of Asia Minor and the surrounding peoples. The Hittites moved in from Europe shortly after the beginning of the second millenium B. C. They contested, and successfully, the power that Egypt had over the northeastern Mediterranean and its adjacent lands. Hurrians meantime had pushed into nor-

[3] *Cf.* A. T. Olmstead: *History of Assyria,* Scribners, 1926; A. Goetz: *Hethiter, Churriter, und Asyrer,* Cambridge, 1936.

[4] An excellent translation of the Hammurabi Code is available in J. M. P. Smith: *Origin and History of Hebrew Law* (1931) pp. 181-222.

thern Mesopotamia and became the ruling class. By the middle of the seventeenth century their influence was felt as far south as Egypt. The movements of Hittites and Hurrians pushed ahead of them great hordes of Semites and other people. This conglomeration of people has been identified with the movements of the Hyksos, who conquered and controlled Egypt for many years, between the middle Kingdom and the New Empire. It is to this period that the Joseph stories undoubtedly belong.

Excavations in Palestine indicate that there was no time during Hebrew history when the influence of Egypt was not felt. Our knowledge of Hebrew history, therefore, has been greatly increased by the great amount of information that has come to us from excavations in Egypt.[5] Among the many contributions made by the Egyptians to Hebrew culture are strong literary and religious influences.[6] It has been suggested that Hebrew monotheism roots back into the great religious reform of Ikhnaton, but it is doubtful if Egypt ever progressed beyond the stage of monolatry, and it is certain that in the period when Egypt's influence could be presumed to be the strongest, at the time of Moses, the Hebrews were henotheists. Literary parallels have been noted between "The Hymn to Aton" and Psalm 104; "The Two Brothers' Tale" and the Joseph incident with Potiphar's wife; and "Sayings of an Egyptian Sage" and Proverbs. Another group of documents recovered from Egypt are the famous Tell el Amarna Tablets which were written in Palestine in the fourteenth century B. C. They are written in Akkadian (cuneiform) which was the international language of that day, and were sent to the Egyptian Pharaoh. The great turmoil in Palestine due to the infiltration of in HABIRI or SAGAZ, is the subject of these tablets. These reports of Egyptian representatives, together with the evidence from Jericho which establishes the fall of that city about 1400 B. C., have been accepted as proof of the conquest of Palestine by the Hebrews in the fourteenth century. Meantime historical and biblical criticism had established a date of 1200 B. C. Further evidence has now been adduced which indicates that the conquest of Palestine by the Hebrews lasted for a long period and that in all probability there was more than one wave of migration into that country. More evidence is needed, but it becomes increasingly clear that the Hebrews were not one people except for a short period under David and Solomon. Even then the ties were political and not of a common ancestry and culture.

One of the most startling excavations in recent years has been that at Ras Shamra on the north Syrian coast. The history of the town covers many hundreds of years, but our particular interest is in the tablets recovered from the close of the fifteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth centuries B. C. Close parallels with Hebrew literature are being discovered constantly.[7] The literary parallels are more often found between Ras Shamra and the late priestly documents of the Hebrews than with the earlier J and E documents. Other parallels have been noted in the Hebrew Psalms, in Job, and in the Book of Daniel. One of the heroes at Ras Shamra is named Dan(i)el. Claims have been made through the public press that the original Adam and Eve account, and a reference to Abraham are to be found in these documents, but careful examination of photographs of the tablets reveal no such items. An analysis of the content of this newly discovered literature and the structure of the language will occupy us for

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[5] See Breasted: *History of Egypt*, 1912; and Steindorff and Seele: *When Egypt Ruled the East*, 1942.

[6] Breasted: *Dawn of Conscience*, 1939.

[7] C. H. Gordon: *The Loves and Wars of Baal and Anat*, 1943; Schaeffer: *The Cuneiform Texts of Ras Shamra — Ugarit*, 1939.

many years, but the net result will be a better understanding of the Hebrews and their neighbors in that period of Hebrew entry into Palestine in its earliest stages.

Excavations within the borders of Palestine have helped us to fill in the details of Hebrew history that have often been omitted by writers of the Bible accounts. A picture of interlocking cultural patterns emerges. The land of Palestine was not an isolated region but was the link between the great civilizations in three continents, Asia, Africa, and Europe (by way of Asia Minor). Armies and caravans constantly travelled its roads, and cultural influences were many and varied. The Abraham stories fit that early period before the Hittite fertility religion had impinged upon Phoenician and Canaanite culture. There is no reference to the Baal cultus or fertility rites in the Abraham stories. The Jacob and Esau stories reflect the later pattern of the late eighteenth and seventeenth centuries. Still later the Joseph stories may be fitted into our knowledge of Egyptian history, in that period when the Hyksos were in control. The invasions in the fourteenth to twelfth centuries are well attested by changes in pottery, the newcomers bringing much inferior types. Evidence from figurines and temple areas indicate that by now the Baal religion has strong hold upon Canaan. Our Bible states that the father of Gideon, the Yahweh-champion, was a follower of Baalism. The period of the Judges was one of confusion and clash. The great clash between Baalism and Yahwism, however, did not come until the time of the great prophets in the ninth and eighth centuries. The luxury of the ruling classes in Samaria is well attested by the excavations in that area by Harvard University. Meantime the monarchy had come into being, and the declining power of Assyria and Egypt are clearly indicated in archaeological evidence, their decline making possible the rise of a new nation, the Hebrews. The Hebrew nation was never strong except under David, for early in the reign of Solomon, control of the colonies begins to slip away. This placed the monarchy in an embarrassing position. Solomon solved this by raising funds by two methods, each attested by excavation. Solomon traded horses, and there were a number of centers at which great stables were built for caring for horses in transit from the north to Egypt by way of Solomon the middle-man. Megiddo (Armageddon) is a notable example. Then Solomon entered the metal industry, and excavations at Ebion Gezer, at the head of the Red Sea, indicate that considerable copper smelting was done there in Solomon's time. We know, too, that it was from this port that the fleet of Solomon, the only "Jewish Navy" in history, set sail.

There has not been as much confusion regarding later dates and influences and we shall therefore omit that portion of the story. It may be valuable, however, to indicate some of the Semitic influences that impinge upon our own culture. We have until recent years been content to look to Greek and Roman cultures for the beginnings of our own, but it is becoming increasingly clear that we have not recovered the whole of the story until the Near East has told its part. Our literature and religion have had their primary influence from the Near East, but that is already recognized. The division of the day into twenty-four hours, and the hour into sixty minutes comes from Babylon. Likewise the 360 degree circle. The names of many of the constellations are Semitic, and even the noun "star." Our vocabulary is heavy with borrowed Semitic words. The alphabet came through the Greeks, but it was in all probability a Semite, or Semites, who invented it. The shape of the letters was worked out in Palestine and Phoenicia before being transmitted to Greece through the agency

of Phoenician merchants. Much of mathematical knowledge was systemized by the Greeks, but used by the Babylonians centuries before the Greeks are known. A tablet from the twentieth century B. C. states a Babylonian mathematical problem, the solution of which depends upon a knowledge of the "Pythagorean" theorem. The "zero," of prime importance in mathematics, was used early by the Assyrians. But these people had their limitations. Their problems were always practical problems, and often solved by rule of thumb. For example they did not know "Pi" and regularly used the value 3 in finding the areas of circles, etc. But they knew from experience that this was not correct, and they worked out correction tables, so that if the diameter of the circle exceeded a certain length they knew that a corresponding correction needed to be made to their estimate of the area of the circle.

Much of man's early knowledge of the human body came from the Egyptian rites of mummification. Egypt was the first people of which we have record to evolve a calendar based upon the movements of the sun. It is probable that weaving began in the valley of the Nile, and it was there that glazing and the manufacture of glass was discovered. Cosmetics are first found in the oldest Egyptian burials. A study of the evolution of beads can be an interesting pursuit, and is possible in any museum of Egyptian artifacts. Beadmaking was a fine art very early among the Egyptians, and the arrangement of some of the necklaces indicates extremely good taste. In the practical fields and in the fine arts we owe much to the inhabitants of the Near East, but it is only belatedly that we are recognizing that debt.

And what of the contribution of the Hebrew? Excavations indicate that usually his material culture was decidedly lower than that of his neighbors. But he judiciously borrowed from those neighbors and benefitted from them. It is in the field of religion, however, that the Hebrew makes his greatest contribution. Oftentimes he needed to borrow literary patterns from his neighbors by which to express the religious discoveries he had made. He took a polytheistic poem of creation and rewrote it in the light of his own belief, and has taught the world "in the beginning (one) God created." The Hebrew of the eighth century was the first to assert a belief in one God. It was in that same period that Amos gave us the teaching that creation is moral because the creator is moral. It was in that same period, too, that Hosea insisted that this moral God had a love and concern for man. Down to this time the Hebrew had believed that religion was a matter of the covenant relation between the group, as a group, and the deity. Jeremiah, then Ezekiel, asserted in the seventh and sixth centuries that religion was a matter of individual conduct. Then came the decline. Judaism descended to legalism and sacerdotalism, but there were enough brave pioneers who deviated from the accepted pattern, that the people were challenged, and their messages have been gathered into our Bible. Many of these heroes are nameless, but their messages still challenge. Such people are worth knowing, and we are constantly seeking fuller information concerning the cultures that produced these leaders and their challenging messages. Some of that information will come from future archaeological expeditions.