

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

Recent Biblical Archaeology.

BY THE REVEREND J. W. JACK, D.D., GLENFARG, PERTSHIRE.

IN our last article we mentioned that several additional tablets had been discovered at Ras Shamra (or Ugarit) on the Syrian coast. One of these, a commercial account, which consists of five lines in Accadian recording a loan, and which is believed to date from 1400 B.C., or earlier, was actually found over five hundred yards from the present place of excavation—a fact which points to the wide dispersion of documents and other writings throughout the town. A fragment of tablet of the same literary type as those dug up in the temple library was even found half a mile away, on the surface of a field, at *Minet el-Beida*, the port near the shore. Here, also, part of a handle belonging to a large jar, and containing an inscription of five lines in the cuneiform alphabetic script written in the reverse direction (*i.e.* from right to left), was discovered not far from the surface, being the second example of this retrograde or 'sinistroyric' writing unearthed at Ras Shamra (a specimen was also found in 1933 at Bethshemesh, near Jerusalem). Some of these more recently discovered inscriptions and tablets, like the earlier ones, throw an interesting light on the Old Testament. On one of the two steles from the temple of Dagon, the dedicator's name is a Biblical one, 'Azzan (Nu 34²⁶), and his offering concerns a feast of two days' duration, evidently that of the new moon (cf. 1 S 20^{24ff.}), thus showing that this feast was not confined to Israel, but was an ancient Semitic one, probably going back to the time when the moon was still an object of worship. On one small fragment of tablet, believed to date from about 1200 B.C., or a little earlier, we read of 'the two hands of the sea' and 'the two hands of the river,' where the word 'hands' (𐎠𐎵) is used figuratively, exactly as in the Old Testament, to signify 'shores' or 'banks' (cf. for the sea, Ps 104²⁵, and for rivers, Is 33²¹). The same fragment contains the name *Hobab* (*Hbb*), identical with that of the father-in-law of Moses (Nu 10²⁹, Jg 4¹¹), and probably the same as that of the adversary of Gilgamesh (*Hu(m)baba*) in the Babylonian legend. Strange to say, in one of the tablets we find two parallel exclamations, *grš-ym* ('the surge of the sea') and *mr-ym* ('the shaking of the sea'), which are both connected in the text with personal appellations and are believed by Virolleaud to give us the

derivation of the names Gershom and Miriam, the son and the sister of Moses (the Biblical derivation of the name Gershom, founded probably on folk-etymology, is given in Ex 2²², 18³). Similarly, there occurs in one of the earlier tablets the exclamation *ey-zbl* ('Where is Zebel?'), which seems to furnish the exact explanation of the name Jezebel (in Hebrew 'Izebel), or is at least preferable to the phrase hitherto suggested, '*I-ze-Baal*, 'Where then is Baal?' An interesting commentary on certain Old Testament passages is afforded by the recently published tablet (III. AB, A), describing the rebellion of the waters (both rivers and seas) against Baal. The poem pictures these elements as rising and launching their waves against the earth which is his abode, and seeking to overthrow his throne. In defence, he smites their rulers ('the Zebul of the Sea' and 'the Suffete of the River'), and suppresses the fury of the waves. The myth appears to be similar to that in the first of the Seven Babylonian Tablets of the Creation, where we find *Tiāmat*, the personification of darkness and evil, waging war against the gods, but it is clearly independent and serves to illustrate several Old Testament references. In particular, it seems to find an echo in Ps 93, 'Thy throne is established of old: . . . The floods have lifted up their voice; The floods lift up their waves. Above the voices of many waters, The mighty breakers of the sea, The Lord on high is mighty.' Similarly it throws light on the mythological language of Is 17^{12f.}, where even the alliteration and syntax are like instances in the Ras Shamra texts, 'Ah, the uproar of many peoples, which roar like the roaring of the seas; and the rushing of nations, that rush like the rushing of mighty waters . . . but he shall rebuke them, and they shall flee far off.'

The further discoveries at Lachish (*Tell Duweir*) illuminate the Biblical background, especially in the closing years of the Judæan monarchy. The city was one of the frontier forts of Judah, and occupied a key position, dominating the Philistine towns, some of which (Askelon, Ashdod, and Gath) could be seen from the summit. The potsherds recently unearthed in the 'guard-room,' containing correspondence (in carbon iron ink) dating from the last years of the monarchy, establish the reality of some of the chief actors at that time, as mentioned

in the Biblical records. They bear striking testimony also to the religious reformation known to have been carried out by Josiah, Jehoiakim's father, for nearly all the names on the sherds are compounded with *Yahu* (Yahweh), showing that the worship of Yahweh must have made considerable advances under Josiah's impetus. Among the more noteworthy finds, apart from the potsherds, may be mentioned a bone plaque, pierced with thirty holes in three rows of ten, similar to the one found at Gerar, and probably intended as a calendar to mark the thirty days of a lunar month; a long three-pronged iron fork, with a short handle, evidently a 'flesh-hook' used by the priests when any one offered a sacrifice (cf. 1 S 2^{13, 14}); some small rods (one of ivory, the rest pottery), supposed to be a form of 'curling-irons' for curling the long ringlets on the wigs fashionable at the time (cf. the contemporary Assyrian reliefs depicting the siege of Lachish); a rough pottery bowl with ten letters painted on it in white in the proto-Phœnician alphabet, and dating from about 1300 B.C. (or perhaps later); a steatite scarab, used as a seal, with the name Ahimelech on it, dating probably from the closing period of the monarchy; and a small clay seal with two lines of inscription, '(Belonging) to Gedaliah, who is over the house.' As the expression 'over the house' is one of high authority, equivalent probably to 'chamberlain' or even 'vicegerent,' the owner of this last-mentioned seal may have been no less a person than Gedaliah, whose father, Ahikam, protected Jeremiah from the anti-Chaldean party (Jer 26²⁴), and who was appointed by Nebuchadnezzar to govern Jerusalem after the dethronement of its last king, Zedekiah, in 587 B.C. (2 K 25²²). His two months' rule and treacherous murder are detailed in Jer 40. 41.

Some time ago we referred to the finding at Mizpah of an onyx seal of Jaazaniah, probably one of the four army captains who surrendered to Gedaliah there (2 K 25²³). This seal, which is now in the Palestine Museum at Jerusalem, is of special Biblical significance. The selected stone, onyx, was doubtless intended to serve as a protective charm, for the upper side is finished in imitation of a human eye, and magical potencies were believed to belong to this species of agate, which had the distinction of being one of the beauties of Paradise (Gn 2¹²). An interesting point is that the third and lowest register of the seal represents a cock in a fighting attitude. The comb, wattles, and spurs leave no doubt that a rooster is meant. The fact that no domestic chickens are ever mentioned in

the Old Testament (unless in 1 K 4²³, where *barburim* is translated very doubtfully 'fatted fowls') has led to the idea that they were unknown in Palestine before Hellenistic times. But this seal, dating from about 600 B.C., affords decisive evidence to the contrary. It is quite a likely thing that Solomon, who imported peacocks and apes from Ophir, may have brought barn-yard fowls from the same regions, or perhaps from Persia where they were indigenous. The use of the cock symbol on the seal, may indicate that cock-fighting was not unknown among the Israelites. At all events, the fighting cock was an appropriate symbol on the seal of a soldier.

Excavators have been busy in Iraq (Mesopotamia) and neighbouring districts. At Ma'eri or Mari (modern *Tell el-Hariri*, on the Middle Euphrates), M. André Parrot, attaché to the Louvre Museum, has now finished a second campaign. In the ancient royal lists, the Mari dynasty follows that of Adab (c. 3200 B.C.), being the tenth 'after the Flood,' and its kingdom was a very powerful one, extending as far as the Persian Gulf. Innumerable statues and statuettes have been unearthed in the temple, bearing inscriptions which belong to the earliest stage of cuneiform, and the palace has also been laid bare, showing most of the rooms (about fifteen in number) beautifully paved with baked bricks. This important royal dwelling dates, it is believed, from Hammurabi's time (c. 2067-2024 B.C.), and more than sixteen hundred tablets have been found in it, these being in an excellent state of preservation, some of them having been enclosed in large jars. The city appears to have been destroyed by a violent fire, probably at the instigation of Hammurabi, which has left a thick layer of ashes, containing traces of straw with which many of the roofs must have been thatched. The discoveries give some idea of the remarkable civilization that existed in the early pre-Sargonic epoch. A fact of outstanding importance, in whatever way we may explain it, is that, according to the inscriptions, the people of Mari were not actually Sumerians, but of Semitic race, with a civilization of a Sumerian type. They may be regarded as the forerunners in Mesopotamia of Abraham and the Hebrews, who ventured north to these regions and those beyond about a thousand years later, and from there migrated to Canaan.

At Dur Sharrukin (modern *Khorsabad*) the Oriental Institute of Chicago University has been working steadily for the last two or three years. The city was built by Sargon II. of Assyria (721-705 B.C.) on a spot where no former habitation had

stood, and for a short time it replaced Nineveh as the capital of Assyria (thus recalling in some respects the 'mushroom' metropolis of Egypt built at Tell el-Amarna by Akhenaten, the heretic Pharaoh). It was square in shape, surrounded by walls measuring approximately one mile each way, with a pair of gates penetrating each wall. Traces of brilliant decoration in red, blue, black, and white have been found throughout the interior of the citadel, reminding us of the wall-paintings discovered at Til-Barsib (modern *Tell Ahmar*) and other places in Assyria. The art of painting was evidently common in Assyria—even the shields of the warriors of Nineveh were painted red (Nah 2³)—but it seems to have been little developed among the Israelites, though Jeremiah (22¹⁴) mentions the painting (*mashah*) of houses inside with vermilion, probably after the manner of lacquer work, and Ezekiel (8¹⁰, 23¹⁴) speaks of idolatrous forms portrayed upon the walls. Probably the few paintings among the Israelites can be traced to Assyrian and Egyptian influence.

A further interesting commentary on the Flood legends has been furnished by the last report, published recently, of the late L. Ch. Watelin on the excavation of Kish. It has been found that the buildings below the Flood level (marked all over Kish by a bed of clay) were well planned structures, and that there was a definite street and a well thought-out drainage system. The houses were built of mud bricks, and baked bricks were used for the pavements. In some of the rooms there were flint implements, such as borers, scrapers, and sickle blades. The people made bitumen figurines and models of various animals. One of the most interesting objects found was a pottery two-wheeled chariot, with seven model 'equines.' In the same pre-diluvian layer was a cemetery (which Mr. Watelin dates *c.* 3200 B.C.), in the graves of which were found daggers, lance-heads, chisels, axes, saws, and fish-hooks, all made of copper, which must have been plentiful. A detailed report has now appeared of the researches conducted at Lagash (modern *Tellôh*, about fifty miles north-east of Ur) by the Abbé H. de Genouillac, under the Louvre Museum. The new excavations have revealed a superb culture, hitherto unsuspected, beneath the Sumerian vestiges, going back far beyond the Sargonic epoch to distant prehistoric

ages. Metal has been found in abundance, especially gold gems, jewels, and copper objects. The most numerous of these belong to the women's toilet: pins, brooches, needles, mirrors, rouge spoons, tweezers, and tubes of stibium or kohl for eye-paint. There are also small stone pyramids, counters, and other tokens for games, as well as numerous amulets (some engraved), shells, objects in bone and bitumen, spindle disks, pommels, and nick-nacks of various kinds. The large variety of jewellery and other artistic objects reveals the refinement, not only of the feminine 'mode' and toilet, but of Mesopotamian civilization in general at an epoch earlier than the confines of history. This extension of a well-developed civilization backward to five thousand years ago is one of the most important results of recent archæology. It is worthy of note that, though there are Flood deposits deep down at Ur and Kish, no signs of any such have been found so far at *Tellôh*, *Warka*, (*Erech*), or any of the other Babylonian cities, though excavators have searched carefully for them. We may thus infer that these great Floods, which no doubt gave rise to the Biblical legends, were local and confined to certain districts; and they were probably relatively short in duration, for the layers of civilization above and below the slimy deposit at Ur are almost identical. The character and level, moreover, of the Flood deposits at Kish and Ur are not the same, showing that these two cities were inundated at different periods.

Insect remains are occasionally dug up in Palestine. At Beth-shemesh the excavators under Professor Grant, of Haverford College, America, unearthed the pupal cell of a beetle of the family Scarabæidae, and the tribe Dynastini. This tribe contains leaf-eating beetles which pupate in the ground, and the cell discovered is believed to be about two thousand eight hundred years old. At Mizpah the workmen have come across a terracotta bottle jar, which is meant to represent a beehive built up in a blunt cone by means of coiled ropes. A spirally incised bottle-neck on the side makes a doorway for the bees. Inside was found a wax-like deposit, probably the remains of honey. The object is of great interest and value, as corroborating the practice of bee-farming in ancient Palestine, and showing that hives made of straw coils were used at that early date.