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Recent Biblical Archaeology.

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

THE Lachish inscribed potsherds, discovered under the burnt debris of the guardroom floor, and thus dating from the fall of the city, have been translated and studied by Professor Torczyner, who is publishing his comments on them. As Lachish was one of the defenced cities that remained unfallen until the closing period of Zedekiah's reign (Jer 34⁷), *c.* 587 B.C., when Nebuchadrezzar besieged Jerusalem, it is to the last year or two of this period that the letters must be dated. This seems to be corroborated by the mention of Nedabiah, a grandson of king Jehoiakim (1 Ch 3¹⁶⁻¹⁸) as the bearer of one of the letters, for he could not have been old enough until this time—as it was, he could not be more than eleven or twelve by the end of Zedekiah's reign—to be entrusted with such an important mission. One of the letters (No. 4), indeed, implies that it was sent to Lachish at the very time when this city and Azekah were practically isolated owing to the invasion, and were in communication by means of fire-signals with some friendly outpost. This was the time when the pro-Egyptian party in Jerusalem were looking anxiously for the arrival of Hophra's army from Egypt to relieve the situation, and the letters seem to give hints of the military contact that was being maintained between the two countries. A great desire for peace is expressed in the letters. But we must wait for Professor Torczyner's translation of them, and his views as to the circumstances under which they were written, before forming definite conclusions. It is interesting to note in one of the letters (No. 2) how the correspondent compares himself to a dog in the presence of his lord, using expressions which are practically identical with those in the Old Testament (2 K 8¹³, 1 S 17⁴³, 2 S 9⁸), and reminding us of the fawning and adulation manifested in the Amarna Letters to the Pharaoh. The Hebrew used throughout is simple and Biblical, though there are some peculiarities in words and syntax. The present writer, who has had the privilege of studying the letters in the original from photographs kindly supplied to him by Sir Charles Marston, and who hopes to comment on them elsewhere, has no hesitation in saying here that they form an excellent external corroboration of the historical statements made by the Biblical authors.

According to reports of the Samaria excavations, a few of the potsherds found there recently are

inscribed with the Divine name, 'To Yahweh' (יהוה or יהוה). Nearly thirty years ago a specimen of this kind was discovered at Samaria by the Harvard Expedition, the inscription being scratched on the rim of a bowl and believed to date from the eighth century B.C.; and another sherd of the same character, forming the shoulder of a jar, came to light during excavations at Megiddo in 1932, and may be dated from 800–600 B.C. The Samaria ones, however, to which we refer, are believed to be of later date, certainly one or two centuries after the fall of the monarchy. The purpose of the inscriptions may have been to show, as Professor Sukenik suggests, that the contents of the vessels were dedicated to Yahweh, either as Temple taxes or voluntary tributes. So long as the monarchy existed in the northern kingdom, jar-handles and similar objects were doubtless inscribed 'For the king,' as we know was done in Judah, but since the government had now become a theocracy and Yahweh was the head of the nation, they were naturally inscribed with His name. They show that Yahweh worship continued in the northern kingdom long after the inhabitants of Samaria were deported by Sargon, and in spite of the influence of foreign cults.

Professor Garstang, in his fifth campaign at Jericho, has excavated to a depth of fourteen metres below the Middle Bronze stratum (2100–1400 B.C.). He has found that in the Early Bronze Age (roughly, the third millennium B.C.) the houses at first were circular, not unlike granaries though larger. Later, they were built square, and a strong defensive wall of brick was erected round the city. Lower down, in the next stratum (the Chalcolithic, *c.* 3700–3300 B.C.), he has discovered numerous grain wells, giving evidence of agricultural activity. The pottery here is an imitation of basket-work, and is adorned with broad bands accompanied by brown-painted triangles and other ornaments associated with the ceramic objects discovered by Père Mallon at Teleilat Ghassûl, and it is thus specially instructive as fixing the date of the civilization at this latter place. Lower still, in the Neolithic stratum (*c.* 4600–3700 B.C.), the houses are built solely of mud, with a coating of plaster on the face of the walls, but are remarkably well preserved. In this layer were found two groups of plastic statues together with evidences of a char-

acteristic flint industry. It is interesting to note that Professor Garstang, one of the most competent and trustworthy archaeologists, has thus probed into human occupation at Jericho during a period of two thousand years before Abraham. In the process he has unearthed no less than thirty thousand potsherds.

The Ras Shamra tablets continue to form an excellent commentary on the Old Testament. Some lines in the Baal epic (*Syria*, xvi. 29 ff.) remind us forcibly of corresponding Biblical passages. The verbal similarity, indeed, is so close that it cannot be due to chance. Thus (lines 8-9), 'Lo, thine enemies, O Baal, Lo, thine enemies wilt thou smite; behold, thine adversaries wilt thou cut off,' are almost identical with Ps 92⁹, 'For, lo, thine enemies, O Lord, for, lo, thine enemies shall perish; all the workers of iniquity shall be scattered'; while the next line, too, shows an equally remarkable resemblance to Ps 145¹³ (Dn 3³⁹). In the same tablet (lines 14, 16) we read of Baal striking the 'Suffete of the River' 'between the hands' (𐤁𐤍 𐤁𐤍). The latter expression is peculiar, but it gives us the correct interpretation of the words in Zec 13⁶, 'What are these wounds between thy hands?' for the parallelism in the context of the Ras Shamra verses shows that what is meant is 'between the shoulders' (𐤁𐤍 𐤁𐤍), *i.e.* 'on the back,' or more probably 'on the breast.' In the latest tablet published (*Syria*, xvi. 3) we read of God (El) 'laughing in (His) heart,' a form of words analogous to Gn 18¹², 'Sarah laughed within herself,' the same Hebrew verb (𐤁𐤍 𐤁𐤍) being used in both cases. This tablet describes how Baal and Hûd (son of Dagon) engaged in a hunting expedition, but were both devoured by hybrid or fantastic beings. It is noteworthy that the name Hûd ('splendour'), which has probably some etymological connexion with Hadad, occurs in 1 Ch 7³⁷ as that of a man of Asher, and in other Biblical passages in theophorous names (Abi-hûd, Ahi-hûd, 'Ammi-hûd). It is interesting to find, too, that at Ras Shamra, in the fourteenth century B.C., the manifestations of mourning were similar to those in Israel, consisting mainly in rending the garments and covering the head with ashes. On the death of Aleya, we read how Latpon left his usual place, and, sitting on the ground, rent his vesture and scattered chaff and ashes on his head. Three times also he uttered his lamentation in the same rhythmic type of metre as was used by the Israelite women when bewailing the dead, and to which Budde has given the name of the *Qinah* or 'dirge.' These mournful songs were uniformly

composed in verses of two members, the length of the first of which stands to that of the second in the proportion of 3 : 2, giving rise to a peculiar limping rhythm, in which the second member dies away as it were and expires. The measure, no doubt, is used in the Old Testament for a great variety of poems, and occurs frequently in the prophets, but whenever mourning women are introduced speaking in person (cf. Jer 9^{18, 20} 38²²), or assuming in a symbolic manner the rôle of mourners (Am 5¹, Ezk 19, etc.), this kind of pentameter is uniformly chosen. We have thus identity of mourning customs and even of poetical 'dirge' among the Phœnicians and Israelites at this early age.

Important excavations, under Professor Speiser, have been made at *Tepe Gawra* ('The Great Mound'), which lies a few miles north-east of Nineveh (modern *Mosul*). The value of the site lies in the fact that, unlike all others in Northern Mesopotamia, it contains a virtually unbroken record which begins far back in the Neolithic period (that of the Obeid or earliest pottery), and extends to the middle of the second millennium B.C. There are over a dozen strata, two or three of them being separated by ashes, testifying to the repeated burning down of the place. In one layer (the IVth, *c.* 2000 B.C.) the charred bones of the inhabitants have been found strewn over the floor of the shrine and the pavements of the adjoining courtyards. The main fact apparent from the excavation is the existence of an advanced civilization in this cradle of humanity five thousand years ago, long before the Hurrians or the Hebrews came on the scene. Here, in these early times, was a lofty acropolis, with a large and progressive population, who had commercial and other associations with distant lands. A terra-cotta figurine of a covered wagon which has been unearthed, and which may be dated 2500 B.C., can only be compared with specimens found in Transcaucasia and Northern Syria, thus giving tangible proof of connexions with the transmontane regions. Many of the copper and other objects discovered are similar to the ones found at Susa, Mohenjo-daro, the Caucasus, and Central Europe, and the similarity is such that it cannot be mere coincidence. Commercial ties and correspondence seem to have linked the remotest corners of the world, as then known. Probably this advance in international intercourse was caused by the rise of copper as a decisive factor in civilization. At all events, this early period at *Tepe Gawra* affords undoubted witness to the wide inter-relations which form the background of the Copper Age;

and this is corroborated by Mr. Mallowan's Expedition (under the British Museum and the School of Archæology in Iraq), which has recently explored the Habur region of Northern Mesopotamia, examining more than sixty mounds, and which reports that, as early as 4000 B.C., there appears to have been a commercial route running all the way from Nineveh westward, by Jabal Sinjar and Northern Syria, to Anatolia. Clearly, there must have been a civilization so advanced that historians will be compelled to revise all previous views on the chronology of human evolution.

Among the objects discovered in Stratum VI (c. 3000 B.C.) are nineteen models of what Professor Speiser regards as horses. It has long been a highly controversial problem in Mesopotamian archæology as to whether the horse was known in these regions before the beginning of the second millennium, or at least the end of the third. The animal figures from Ur, at first thought to be horses, are now held by many scholars to represent the onager or Asiatic wild ass. But Professor Speiser is in no doubt as to the Gawra specimens, and his conclusion seems to be borne out by figurines from Kish and Billa (the Vth Stratum) and a vase painting from Khafaje in Lower Mesopotamia. It was many centuries later, so far as we know, that horses were introduced into Palestine. Probably they were brought by the Hyksos or Shepherd Kings, who no doubt journeyed down on horseback from their distant home. According to Sir Flinders Petrie, who found several of their mounts at *Tell el-Ajjûl* (Old Gaza), the species was a short-backed one, about fourteen and a half hands high. It was long afterwards, however, before the Israelites began to import horses. The first mention of them is in the Deuteronomic Code, where the king of Israel is forbidden to multiply them (Dt 17¹⁶), in case heathenish cults might thus be introduced or undesirable alliances made with Egypt.

The existence of advanced architectural knowledge at Gawra is apparent from the discovery of an excellent vaulted hall, dating from the end of the fourth millennium B.C., and built with true arch construction. The intrados spring up in a fine graceful curve. The origin of arches has hitherto been uncertain, but it must now be traced to Mesopotamia or farther eastward. If we except Arpachiya, another ancient centre four miles from Nineveh, the arch at Gawra is the earliest known one. At Ur, we know, the true vassoir arch has been found by Woolley in addition to the pure corbel vault, but

it is doubtful whether it is earlier than the third millennium. At Bethshan two rooms have been unearthed with arched roofs, and even one of the streets there appears to have been arched over, but the date of these structures cannot be earlier than about 1400 B.C. At Gezer cisterns of masonry, roofed with rough arches, have come to light, and in the Shephelah many caves are roofed in the same way, but all these constructions seem to belong to the Hellenistic period (500-100 B.C.). That the Gawra craftsmen, too, were by no means deficient in knowledge of metallurgy is evident from a remarkable copper ladle or pan which has been found (nearly all the metal objects are of copper). The noteworthy thing is that the whole of it, including a long handle, is raised from a single sheet of metal, all being in one piece. It is hammered and not cast, yet there is not a crack anywhere, although for five thousand years it has lain unprotected on a hard floor under a heavy mass of debris. The same skill is seen in the peculiar hairpins discovered. These are tapered down to a point at one end for insertion in the hair, while the other end is left broad and curled over into a tube, in which feathers or flowers were meant to be placed. Similar examples have been found at Ur, as well as in the Caucasus and the Danubian regions. But what endows the Gawra examples with additional interest is that the broad end is forked, so that the ornament becomes a double holder. Hitherto we have known nothing definite concerning slingstones, except that smooth stones from the brooks were used by the Hebrews (cf. 1 S 17⁴⁰). At Gawra, however, and probably throughout Mesopotamia, pellets of clay, mostly ovoid, seem to have been in constant use. The excavators found them everywhere. There were no less than four hundred and sixty specimens in one narrow chamber. As many of them are poorly fired, perhaps it is these clay stones that are referred to in Job 41²⁸, where 'leviathan' is said to turn them easily into 'stubble.'

Innumerable terra-cotta models of animals, chariots, wheels, couches, and various other objects, have been found at Gawra. At some of the sites in Palestine excavators have unearthed similar things, though of much later date, and the significance of such models has been the subject of much discussion. Perhaps they may have served simply as toys or ornaments, but it seems more likely that they had a religious connexion, being either commemorative or propitiatory or 'apotropaic' in character.