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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.

ONE hundred more of the valuable Nuzi tablets have recently been translated by Professors Pfeiffer and Speiser of the American Schools of Oriental Research. Coming like the rest of the texts from a Hurrian community (near *Kirkûk*, in Assyria) which had intimate associations with the early Hebrews, they throw an altogether new light on many passages in the patriarchal narratives. They necessitate, in fact, a reinterpretation of these, for they show beyond any doubt that the social background portrayed in the narratives is not that of the eighth and ninth centuries, when they are believed to have been compiled, but that of north Mesopotamia many ages earlier, as far back indeed as the time of Jacob, and the compilers must have had authentic material before them, probably written as well as oral, dating from these earlier ages. In the light of these new tablets, taken along with others already published, much can be said in explanation of certain patriarchal customs. The story of Jacob and Laban (Gn 29-31), for instance, takes on a new aspect. According to one tablet, it was the custom for the parents to give a handmaid to a daughter on her marriage, and this is precisely what Laban did to Leah and Rachel (Gn 29^{24, 29}). Judging from circumstances described in another tablet, there seems ground for believing that Laban had adopted Jacob as his son, and by Hurrian law of adoption had the proprietorship of him as well as of his wives, and even of his children and flocks. Hence it was that he could say to Jacob (Gn 31⁴³), 'The daughters are my daughters, and the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks, and all that thou seest is mine.' Laban had thus every right to inflict penalty on Jacob for running off and taking some of the household with him, but he chose to be lenient for religious reasons. 'It is in the power of my hand,' he said, 'to do you hurt; but the God of your father spake unto me yesternight, saying . . . speak not to Jacob either good or bad.' Moreover, the tablets show that an adopted son had no right to the household gods or *teraphim* (which constituted the chief title to the inheritance), if there was a begotten son living, and consequently the indignation of Laban, who had now sons of his own, at Jacob's action was justified, 'Wherefore hast thou stolen my gods?' (Gn 31³⁰). Apart from such illustrations of the patriarchal period which are numerous, the tablets reveal the

existence of many customs found later among the Israelites. Thus the gleanings of the cornfields appear to have been the perquisites of the poor and destitute, as we find in the Pentateuchal codes (Lv 19^{9f}, 23²², Dt 24¹⁹⁻²¹), for one of the tablets, which is reminiscent of the Book of Ruth, refers to gleaning rights on the part of the lower classes of Nuzians. We read of these rights being abused by servants who had come ostensibly to glean, but who appropriated grain to which they were not entitled, and ended up by being prosecuted as thieves. One cannot study these Nuzi texts without noting the wonderful state of civilization there at the beginning of the fifteenth century B.C. In connexion with matters of civil government, some of the records read like those of modern times. The city of Nuzi was governed by a Mayor, and fourteen of the texts deal with a legal trial of him and several of his henchmen for certain alleged offences, principally bribery and corruption. The noteworthy fact is that these men could be and ultimately were brought to court for their misdeeds—a remarkable proof of the advanced condition of social and political life in these regions three thousand five hundred years ago. Further evidence of the excellent civil organization of the Hurrians, equal almost to that of modern times, may be seen in the fact, referred to in one of the tablets, that a standard measure unit, made of copper, was kept in the gate of the 'City of the gods' at Arrapha (modern *Kirkûk*). This was a more scientific basis of measurement than the primitive one adopted by the Israelites (six palms or twenty-four fingers = a cubit), which was probably derived from Egypt.

Among the several thousand cuneiform tablets unearthed at Mari (*Tell Hāriri*, in north Mesopotamia) are numerous letters to Zimrilim, the last king of this remarkable city-state, who was a contemporary of Hammurabi of Babylon (c. 2067-2024 B.C.). As these concern events in the days of Abraham, only a few years after he had left Mesopotamia for Canaan (Gn 11³¹), they are of supreme importance to the Biblical historian. They give us most interesting information not only about Mari, but the many cities round about (they contain the names of 150 unknown to us before), thus adding considerably to our geographical knowledge of these regions at that time. We learn that Babylonia

was called the country of Kurda, that the name of the King of Haran (where Abraham had been living) was Ashditakum, and that the main traffic at Carchemish was in wood, including cedar. The letters describe the commercial life, social customs, military equipment, and other matters. The country appears to have had only a precarious security, as it was frequently exposed to revolts within and attacks from outside. Among other peoples who attempted to seize the city were the Hebrews (*Habiru*), and it is not improbable that these belonged to the same section as the followers of Abraham. Devastating incursions into the Mari district were of common occurrence, including pillaging of villages, massacre of the inhabitants, and sheep-stealing, and there were incessant conflicts between different towns. As the tablets number over 14,000, they will prove an abundant and precious mine for our knowledge of the ancient East, and will take their place beside those of Nineveh, Tell el-Amarna, Tello, Boghaz-keui, Yorgha-Tepé, and Ras Shamra.

The conclusion come to by the late Madame Krause-Marquet and her assistant excavators at Ai that this city was uninhabited at the time of the Israelite entry into Canaan, and that consequently the picturesque and dramatic narrative in chapters 7 and 8 of Joshua is mere untrustworthy legend, has raised considerable discussion among Biblical scholars. As stated in a previous article, the origin of the city goes back to about 3000 B.C., or earlier, when it was an almost impregnable stronghold. Its name at that time, before it became known as Ai (or 'The Ai', as the Biblical narrative calls it, *i.e.* 'The Ruin'), seems to have been Beth-aven (cf. Jos 7²), which may be a primitive form of Beth-Hadad, 'Temple of Hadad.' After many vicissitudes, it was destroyed by a great conflagration (probably the work of enemies) about 2000 B.C. Its inhabitants were driven away, its palace and sanctuary were levelled to the ground, and its powerful fortifications were partly overthrown. According to the excavators' conclusions, it remained in this deserted condition till the Iron Age, about 1200 B.C., when a small population took possession of part of the site, adjoining the acropolis. After about a century, however, or not more than one and a half, their occupation ceased, and the place was finally abandoned. It is evident from all this that when Joshua entered Canaan (*c.* 1400 B.C.), the city must have been in ruins. In a recent article, however, we drew attention to the fact that potsherds belonging to the late Bronze Age (*c.* 1600-1200 B.C.)

had been discovered on the site some years ago, and that a stronghold of this nature could not have been entirely uninhabited during such a long period. Apart from the potsherds, there are undoubtedly very good grounds for this view, and it is not impossible that further excavation (which is being undertaken by M. André Parrot) may support it. At the same time, whether we accept it or not, a theory put forward by Père Vincent allows us to assume the correctness of Madame Krause-Marquet's conclusions, and also preserves the historicity of the narrative in Joshua. Jericho had just been conquered and burnt to the ground. It was of prime importance to the Israelites that they should not remain in the Jordan Valley, but should advance at once into the high country north and west. The best, and practically the only, route open to them was through the gap by Ai and Bethel. The Canaanite clans round about (including those in Bethel, Jos 8¹⁷), thoroughly alarmed at the fate of Jericho and thrown on the alert, leagued themselves together to bar the advance. They concentrated their forces on the summit of 'The Ruin,' which was still a veritable and formidable place of defence. Here they probably erected shelters, brought all necessary provisions and equipment, and for the time being turned the place into an armed stronghold. Hence Joshua's attack on it, so graphically described in the two chapters, and hence also the narrator's reference to it not only as 'The Ruin' (which is the correct term and the one he generally uses), but also as a 'city' (so far as its external appearance under the occupation went). This theory of Vincent's seems to be conformable to fact, for we have only to realize the strategic importance of Ai for the Canaanites. Not only did the site command a wide view in the Jericho direction, but there were strong defensive walls on the south (still thirteen to sixteen feet high in some places), while steep watercourses enclose the site on all the other sides. Here the Canaanite forces could find secure shelter, and defend themselves against the advancing Israelites. We have an instance of the same thing in the action taken by the Bedouin tribes in southern Trans-Jordan in 1895, when the Turkish government attempted to establish a military post among them. These tribes, having formed a confederacy, took up their position in some ruined entrenchments which had been occupied by the Romans and Nabateans, and it required a large body of troops, with modern equipment, to dislodge them. The ramparts of Ai offered a much more powerful shelter to the Canaanites, and it was only by a ruse or stratagem

on the part of Joshua that the place was captured. Women as well as men are stated to have been among the slain (8²⁵), it is true, but this does not imply a resident occupation, it simply accords with the fact that in the East the women take part in combat. But, as the place was a ruin, occupied only temporarily, there is no mention of children, as we find in the case of Jericho (6²¹). If this theory of Vincent's be correct, the narrative in Joshua takes on a new meaning. It has no doubt been adorned with certain adventitious elements, but, after all, it becomes the actual account of a striking episode in the Israelite conquest of Canaan.

Sir Charles Marston has favoured the writer with an account of the more recent excavations at Lachish. The Great Shaft, which is rectangular in shape (84 by 74 feet wide) and descends vertically through the limestone rock beneath the city, has now been opened up and reaches a depth of 85 feet. It has no stairway down, and its purpose is still a mystery, though it is believed to have been connected with the water-supply of the city. The digging of such a huge pit by the ancient inhabitants must have required enormous labour and skill. It meant the quarrying out and removal of some five hundred thousand cubic feet of solid rock with the aid of only primitive tools of flint, copper, or soft iron (the marks of which are still fresh). The chasm appears to have been constructed at the time of the Jewish monarchy, though it may have been an enlargement of a far earlier work. It must have been clear and open when Nebuchadrezzar destroyed the city (587 B.C.), for the burnt débris has been found thrown into it to a depth of 30 feet. If it was connected with the water-supply, it reminds us of the underground water tunnels which have been found at Jerusalem, Megiddo, and other places, and which are quite characteristic of the fortified cities of Canaan. It is on such a huge scale, however, that it surpasses anything hitherto discovered in Palestine, and we must await further reports as to its purpose. It may well remind us of the text (Is 51¹), 'Look unto the rock whence ye were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye were digged.'

Another important feature of recent excavation at Lachish has been the discovery of a large rock-tomb, consisting of three chambers. The remains in these, it was found, had been destroyed by fire, no doubt as an act of desecration. Some children employed by the expedition managed to pick out from the burnt ashes not only bronze and copper articles (melted by the heat), but no less than 192 Egyptian scarabs, some of which are gold-mounted.

There were also four alabaster toilet vases, a bronze razor, some toggle-pins, two cylinder seals of the Syro-Hittite type, fragments of glass vessels, much bead work, and numerous arrow-heads. The wealth displayed makes it possible that the tomb was a royal one, and that the occupants had been closely connected with Egypt. The scarabs include those of King Shesha (or Apopa) of the sixteenth dynasty, as well as of Thotmes III. (c. 1501 B.C.), Amenhotep II. (c. 1447 B.C.), Thotmes IV. (c. 1423 B.C.), and Amenhotep III. (c. 1419-1383 B.C.). The contents thus cover the period from Hyksos times (the sixteenth dynasty) down to the entry of the Israelites under Joshua (c. 1400 B.C.). The interments in this particular tomb seem to have come to an end at this time, and the destruction no doubt occurred then. Was it the family tomb of Zimrida, the governor of Lachish, who, according to the Amarna tablets, resisted the *Habiru* (Hebrew) invasion and was taken prisoner and slain? When the city settled down under the Hebrew Conquest, some of the inhabitants seem to have continued their association with Egypt, for the contents of the tombs adjoining the desecrated one proved to contain the scarabs of some of the succeeding Pharaohs, namely, Ay, Horemheb, and Rameses II. But the break in the succession of Egyptian royal scarabs about 1400 B.C., and the burning of the main tomb at this time, may not be unconnected with the Israelite Conquest.

The remainder of the recent finds at Lachish include several objects with writing on them. One of these is a Hyksos dagger (believed to date c. 1600 B.C.), with an inscription down the centre of the blade. The inscription consists of four characters, two of which Mr. Starkey connects with the ancient Semitic script of Sinai. A second inscribed object is a carnelian quartz seal, beautifully polished, and having on its lowest space the name Asahiah, and on its middle one five Hebrew letters reading 'For Shephatiah.' Both these names are well-known Biblical ones, and here they probably refer to individuals in the time of Jeremiah (cf. Jer 38¹, 2 K 22^{12, 14}). A third object is a bowl, inscribed in Egyptian hieratics both on the interior and the exterior, and thought to date c. 1250 B.C. Unfortunately, it is broken into numerous fragments, but twenty-five of these have been recovered, and when put together the whole measures seven inches across and just over two inches deep. The object had evidently been brought from Egypt, for the writing, so far as it can be deciphered, refers to certain measures of wheat gathered from the harvest in certain months of Inundation.