

A HISTORY OF CIVILIZATION IN PALESTINE

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A History of Civilization in Palestine by R. A. S. Macalister

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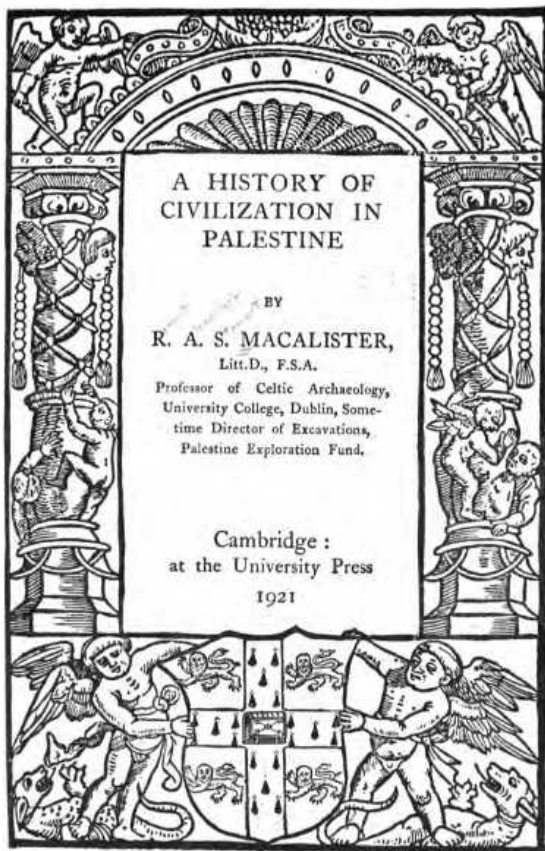
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R. A. S. MACALISTER

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IN PALESTINE**



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PALESTINE

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PREFACE

JUST forty years ago, as we write, Captain Warren made the first experiments in excavating in Palestine. Just twenty years ago Professor Petrie closed the work with which he inaugurated the era of scientific research. When Captain Warren began his work, it was expected by many that a few strokes of the spade would settle the questionings on Biblical subjects that were then being asked with ever increasing persistence. The dreams of the subscribers centred round records of David's wars and of Solomon's glory; the Ark of the Covenant and the idols of Manasseh; some, perhaps, hoped for a letter or two written by one privileged to hear the words of Him who spake as never man spake. Nothing of the kind has come to light, however, with the single exception of the Moabite Stone—and that was not discovered by a professed explorer, but lighted upon by accident by a travelling missionary who had no idea of the value of his 'find'!

On the other hand, we now look back through vistas of history unimagined forty years ago, and our way is illumined by strange lights breaking through from unexpected quarters. Here and there, no doubt, there are still dark corners which we may hope will some day be made clearer. We have

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obtained, not a bare confirmation, but what is far better, a wider comprehension of the familiar history.

It is a disastrous mistake to suppose that the aim of excavation is the discovery of contemporary written documents. They are most important, but it is very easy to exaggerate their value, especially when we are dealing with the ancient East. The monument of a vainglorious oriental king is not less fulsome, and not more convincing, than is a modern patent-medicine advertisement. The authority of a letter depends ultimately on the personality of its unknown writer. When (as has notoriously been the case in explorations in Assyria and Babylonia) tablets and bas-reliefs are made the chief purpose of the work, the humbler utensils that speak of the life and civilisation of the country are apt to be neglected, and their essential value lost for ever by the destructive processes of the excavation itself.

It is also an error to suppose that the special function of an excavator is to *confirm* written history, sacred or profane. If this were so he would be the most useless of men. He calls the dead of the past from their graves, and, so far as he can, makes them live once more their lives before the spectators: but this imaginary *anastasis* cannot persuade those who hear not Moses and the Prophets any more effectively than would an actual resurrection. His duty is not to pencil over outlines already drawn, making no

PREFACE

vii

impression on the sketch: his function is to fill in the background, and to add the touches that ultimately make a perfect picture. It is from this point of view that the results of recent exploration are regarded in the following pages.

In this, the second impression, some errors have been corrected, and some modifications introduced, necessitated by the momentous events which have taken place since the book was first issued.

R. A. S. M.

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
Preface	v
I. Palestine and its Earliest Inhabitants	1
II. The Later Stone Age in Palestine	12
III. The pre-Israelite Semitic Occupations	26
IV. The First Struggle of West and East	43
V. The Hebrew Monarchy	63
VI. The Captivities and After	70
VII. The Growth of the Religious Consciousness in Israel	78
VIII. Roman and Byzantine	96
IX. Muslim and Crusader	107
X. Till Yesterday	117
Bibliography	130
Index	134

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

No.	Page
1. Graffiti in a cave found at Geser. (<i>From a drawing prepared for the Palestine Exploration Fund by the author and reproduced by permission of the Fund</i>)	14
2. One of the Kabûr Beni Isra'în. (<i>From a photograph by the author</i>)	19
3. A corner of a Palestinian Village. (<i>From a photograph by the author</i>)	25
4. A Philistine Captive. (<i>From a photograph by H. R. Hall, M.A., F.S.A., illustrating his article on the 'Discoveries in Crete' in the Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology, June 1909; reproduced by permission of the Society and of Mr Hall</i>)	61
5 & 6. Terra-cotta Plaques 'pourtraying the Queen of Heaven.' (<i>By permission of the Palestine Exploration Fund</i>)	90 & 91
7. Ruin of a Byzantine Village. (<i>From a photograph by Rev. Prof. G. A. Barton, Bryn Mawr</i>)	99
8. Façade of the Ruined Synagogue at Mairon. (<i>From a photograph by the author</i>)	103
9. The Tombs of Kings Godfrey and Baldwin I. (<i>From Beauséant's 'Relation journalière du voyage du Levant'</i>)	114
Map of Palestine	at end

CHAPTER I

PALESTINE AND ITS EARLIEST INHABITANTS

A TRAVELLER landing at Jaffa and setting his face to the East, will in his journey pass through strangely varied scenes. The comparatively uninteresting and half-Europeanised town, from which he starts, lies surrounded by its famous orange groves, shadowed by waving palms and by sub-tropical trees and plants. These he leaves behind almost immediately. At first he traverses the plain of Sharon, a tract of magnificent fertility, yielding rich returns even to a people who have not progressed in scientific agriculture since the days of their Canaanite forefathers. After some ten or fifteen miles the scenery suddenly changes, and the traveller finds himself among rocky mountains, intersected by complex winding valleys. Many of these valleys have almost as rich possibilities as the plain, but the cultivated areas are now comparatively small. Traces of old terraces on the hill side shew that in former days there was much more extensive agricultural work

carried on here than at present. Rising among the bare and rugged hills, the traveller at last reaches the summit of the long chain, on the top of which stand Jerusalem and Hebron, and which stretches from Beersheba northward to lose itself in the maze of the mountains of Ephraim. Crossing this, he finds the opposite side to be yet more desolate than that over which he has come—a waterless waste, full of hills of an outline so unearthly as to suggest the weird appearance of lunar scenery. At the bottom of the eastern slope of the chain he finds himself in the fertile but unhealthy depths of the Jordan valley. Beyond the Jordan is the steep precipitous wall that guards the pleasant uplands of Moab. Crossing these, the traveller reaches at last the great highway which year by year is trodden by the pilgrims from Damascus to Mecca. And beyond is the trackless desert.

The river Jordan, flowing from north to south, is a natural boundary between the western and the eastern parts of the journey we have imagined: and some words of description of this extraordinary river are a necessary introduction to the study of the country's physical features, with which this chapter is principally concerned. It rises in the spurs of Mount Hermon, about 1700 feet above sea-level. Several powerful springs unite to form a single stream, which, running down a marshy bed, expands, after about 40 miles from the most northerly source,