

**ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE
OLD TESTAMENT: WAS
THE OLD TESTAMENT
WRITTEN IN HEBREW?**

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Archaeology of the Old Testament: was the Old Testament written in Hebrew? by Edouard Naville

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WAS THE OLD TESTAMENT
WRITTEN IN HEBREW?

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EDITOR'S GENERAL PREFACE

IN no branch of human knowledge has there been a more lively increase of the spirit of research during the past few years than in the study of Theology.

Many points of doctrine have been passing afresh through the crucible; "re-statement" is a popular cry and, in some directions, a real requirement of the age; the additions to our actual materials, both as regards ancient manuscripts and archaeological discoveries, have never before been so great as in recent years; linguistic knowledge has advanced with the fuller possibilities provided by the constant addition of more data for comparative study; cuneiform inscriptions have been deciphered, and forgotten peoples, records, and even tongues, revealed anew as the outcome of diligent, skilful and devoted study.

Scholars have specialized to so great an extent that many conclusions are less speculative than they were, while many more aids are thus available for arriving at a general judgment; and, in some directions at least, the time for drawing such general conclusions, and so making practical use of such specialized research, seems to have come, or to be close at hand.

Many people, therefore, including the large mass of the parochial clergy and students, desire to have in an accessible form a review of the results of this flood of new light on many topics that are of living and vital interest to the Faith; and, at the same time, "practical" questions—by which is really denoted merely the application of faith to life and to the needs of the day—have certainly lost none of their interest, but rather loom larger than ever if the Church is adequately to fulfil her Mission.

It thus seems an appropriate time for the issue of a new series of theological works, which shall aim at presenting a *general survey* of the present position of thought and knowledge in various branches of the wide field which is included in the study of divinity.

The Library of Historic Theology is designed to supply such a series, written by men of known reputation as thinkers and scholars, teachers and divines, who are, one and all, firm upholders of the Faith.

It will not deal merely with doctrinal subjects, though prominence will be given to these; but great importance will be attached also to history—the sure foundation of all progressive knowledge—and even the more strictly doctrinal subjects will be largely dealt with from this point of view, a point of view the value of which in regard to the “practical” subjects is too obvious to need emphasis.

It would be clearly outside the scope of this series to deal with individual books of the Bible or of later Christian writings, with the lives of individuals, or with merely minor (and often highly controversial) points of Church governance, except in so far as these come into the general review of the situation. This detailed study, invaluable as it is, is already abundant in many series of commentaries, texts, biographies, dictionaries and monographs, and would overload far too heavily such a series as the present.

The Editor desires it to be distinctly understood that the various contributors to the series have no responsibility whatsoever for the conclusions or particular views expressed in any volumes other than their own, and that he himself has not felt that it comes within the scope of an editor's work, in a series of this kind, to interfere with the personal views of the writers. He must, therefore, leave to them their full responsibility for their own conclusions.

Shades of opinion and differences of judgment must exist, if thought is not to be at a standstill—petrified into an unproductive fossil; but while neither the Editor nor all their readers can be expected to agree with every point of view in the details of the discussions in all these volumes, he is convinced that the great principles which lie behind every volume are such as must conduce to the strengthening of the Faith and to the glory of God.

That this may be so is the one desire of Editor and contributors alike.

W. C. P.

LONDON.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THE title of this book: *Archaeology of the Old Testament*, does not agree exactly at first sight with its contents, which turn entirely on the question of language, and in which I have attempted to show that the books of the Old Testament, as we know them, in their present Hebrew form, are not in the original language written by their authors.

This question, which seems purely literary, is, however, archaeological in its origin. It has been raised by excavations in Egypt. It arose when first the fellaheen unearthed the Tel-el-Amarna tablets, and afterwards when the pick and spade of scientific explorers brought to light the Aramaic papyri of Elephantiné.

When the bearing of these two thoroughly unexpected finds is considered on all sides and when the circumstances in which these documents originated, the political, social and religious conditions which they presuppose are studied without any bias, one cannot help being led to question the assumption which has been long undisputed and held as unassailable, that these books of the Old Testament are in the language used by their authors when they wrote them down, and that they went through one change only, that of the script. For square Hebrew does not go further back than the time of the Christian era, when it took the place of the old Hebrew or Canaanite alphabet. Such is the foundation on which rest all the

present systems which profess to explain the composition of the Old Testament, especially the constructions of the critics, their minute analysis of the text, and the conclusions they have derived from that analysis.

In regard to this, I put forward the following facts which can hardly be disputed. Before Moses, and after his time, Babylonian cuneiform was used in Palestine for official documents, contracts, and anything connected with law. The popular form of Babylonian and Assyrian cuneiform, their book form, was Aramaic as we know from the so-called bilingual tablets, and from the Aramaic version or papyrus of the inscription of Behistun. The Jews settled in Egypt wrote and spoke Aramaic, which was not the language of the country. The script peculiar to the Hebrew or Jewish language, the square Hebrew, is derived not from the Canaanite, but from the Aramaic alphabet.

These facts, the historical value of which may be recognized without being a Semitic scholar, do not seem to have been grasped by the critics in their fullness. Philological criticism is here out of place. History is the point of view from which these discoveries have to be studied; and looking at them in that light, I have been drawn to conclusions very different from the theories now in vogue. Some of these conclusions have only dawned upon my mind by degrees, from a careful study of the Aramaic papyri.

During the last ten years the historical methods have gone through a period of change. Anthropology and biology claim to be heard. For an explanation of the past, we now look, more than was done before, at the present condition of mankind. This principle I have endeavoured to follow, and the reader will find that in several cases I have taken examples from the

present day which seemed to strengthen the argument.

Our notion of language is also different from that of the old linguistic school. Language is no more pre-eminently a written text. It is the speech of living men, which may vary according to time and localities. Social circumstances may have induced men to invent an alphabet, to adopt a written language. But this progress towards unity is more or less conventional; it is not limited by political boundaries. It may extend in religious, literary or legal matters over countries where the people speak different dialects. A written language has not of necessity a script of its own which distinguishes it from neighbouring idioms. It may adopt one in common with other languages. Cuneiform is one of the most striking examples of an alphabet used for different tongues.

Historical facts viewed in the light of new methods are the foundation of my theory, which in certain respects will be considered as more radical and revolutionary even than Reuss' critical system when it first appeared. Relying on that evidence, I can, using the expressions of one of the most conservative critics, the late Dr. Briggs, "have the face" to challenge "the Old Testament scholars of the world." On the other hand the readers will recognize that the new line I have taken has brought me back to the old traditional view about the authorship of several books of Scripture. I hope that such chapters as that on Egypt will show that it is not through any "dogmatic environment" but from a sincere conviction based on facts, that I joined the "contemptible minority" which still believes in the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and that I have ranked myself among the so-called "anti-critics" in spite of the distinguished divine's prophecy, "The signs of the times indicate that

in a few years they will disappear as completely as the slave-holders."

This book consists of two parts, each of them dealing chiefly with the results of one of the two great discoveries. Since it is intended for the public, and not for scholars only, I have not gone into long discussions. Philological questions being left aside, by the nature of the argument, it was not necessary to mention the names of the critics, except occasionally. For instance, in the chapter on Genesis I quote Kautzsch and Socin, not because their views are not held by others, but because on their analysis of that work rests the coloured or "rainbow" Genesis which is well known. The quotations of the Biblical text are always from the Revised Version, the translation generally used by scholars.

I cannot close without expressing to the Rev. Wm. C. Piercy my deep thankfulness for the invaluable help he gave me in improving my English style. Still, I must beg the British and American readers who will do me the honour to peruse these pages, to be indulgent as regards the form, and not to mind here and there expressions which may sound too much like French, the native language of the present writer.

Whatever may be the judgment of the critics, I shall feel myself very fortunate if my conclusion that the words of the Old Testament, like those of our Lord, have come to us in a form which is not their original garb, and that the oldest of them are the work of the author whose name they bear, may attract the attention of those who have a sincere reverence for the Holy Writ, and may induce them to look more closely into systems which are now generally presented by their authors and supporters as being above discussion.

EDOUARD NAVILLE.