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THE PALESTINE EXPEDITION

AN HISTORICAL INSCRIPTION

EGYPT between the years 1375 and 1315 B. C. passed through two revolutionary movements, a sweeping reformation and a sharp counter revolution, that mark that period of 60 years as one of special interest. It began with the accession of Akhnaton to the throne of the Pharaohs and his attempt to become the head of a new ideal State that was to replace the traditional scheme of things in Egypt. There was already in existence a spirit of unrest among the people. New ideas in conflict with tradition were making themselves felt and an era of reform appeared to be imminent. The young Pharaoh was a remarkable man, who lacked neither intellect nor courage nor domestic virtue. On the other hand, he was not fit to rule or to cope with the dangerous state of public affairs inherited with his kingdom. He decided to put himself at the head and front of the new movement with a passionate thoroughness that commands respect though it was devoid of wisdom and statesmanship. It was his lofty and impossible purpose to make a perfect world on a philosophical plan, a world in which everybody would be free and happy. While he was engaged in effecting his astonishing reforms, his empire fell to pieces, troubles crowded in on every hand and the rich Asiatic provinces of Palestine and Syria were lost. After a reign of seventeen years, Akhnaton died and was buried in a lonely rockcut tomb that he had made for himself and his family near his newbuilt capital now marked by the mounds called Tell-el-Amarna. He was followed by his two sons in law who reigned in succession, Sakere and Tutankh-amen—two short reigns followed by three other brief reigns till Seti I mounted the throne in 1314 B. C. Meantime under Tutankh-amen and his successors came the counter revolution that undid the reforms of Akhnaton. Carrying forward the same restoration, Seti I in his turn undertook to weld the Empire together again, for which purpose he reorganized the military resources of Egypt. He then conducted a brilliant and successful military campaign in

Palestine and Syria against the various Semitic tribes, including the Hebrews, that had been warring and pillaging throughout these countries since the days when Akhnaton had failed to send relief and afford protection to his Asiatic possessions.

In the Plain of Jezreel, just south of Galilee and near the Jordan, Seti I fought a battle and captured Beth-shan where he set up a monument with an inscription recording the event. That stele has been discovered by the University Museum expedition in its excavation on the acropolis of Beisan, the ancient Beth-shan.

The following is taken from Mr. Fisher's report upon the discovery.

"During its first season at Beisan (1921), the Expedition of the University Museum discovered a large Egyptian stele which proved to have been erected there by Seti I (1313-1292 B. C.), probably to commemorate the campaign into Palestine and Syria undertaken by him in the opening year of his reign. Egyptian records in Palestine are not many and the Beisan stele is so badly weathered that nearly two thirds of the inscribed surface is destroyed beyond hope of decipherment. Even in its fragmentary condition, however, the historical value of the stele is evident. The district of Meqedaa mentioned in line 15 of the inscription may refer either to a place represented by a mound still bearing a similar name, lying three miles southwest of Beisan, or it may be Megiddo, the fortress guarding the other end of the Valley of Jezreel. There has always been some question as to the identification of the various tribal names of people inhabiting Palestine and Syria in ancient times. The stele gives several tribal names that may be identified. The Sethiu are perhaps the Suti mentioned in the El Amarna correspondence carried on between Syria and Egypt some fifty years earlier during the reign of Akhnaton. The Rethennu are the Syrians and the Aamu, a nomadic tribe from the eastern desert. The Aperu may be the Khabiri, some of whom are stated by Rameses II, the son of Seti, as being then in captivity in Egypt. The context here implies that they were in possession of the citadel of Beth-shan at the time of Seti's expedition. With them are associated, presumably as confederates, the Tuir(sha). The latter part of this name is obliterated, but they can be identified with the Tyraenians, ancestors of the Etruscans. Hitherto the earliest mention of them is during the reign of Merenptah, grandson of Seti, nearly ninety years later.

"Of special interest to us is the fact that the stele contains the name given to the citadel of Beth-shan by its Egyptian conquerors, the 'Hill which secureth the fainthearted.' Whether this was merely the Egyptian transliteration of a name already existing or was coined by them it is clear that the phrase expresses an appreciation of the dominating position of the stronghold over the immediate vicinity. The same idea is reflected in the later Hebrew name of Beth-shan or Beth-shean, the 'Hill of Security', which survives in Beisan, the present name of the site."

This inscribed Egyptian stele had been appropriated and used as building stone by the Byzantine builders about 1800 years after it was carved and erected to commemorate Seti's campaign. When found, it was built into the foundations of a circular Byzantine church.

During the second season's work at Beisan, namely 1922, the excavation on the hill forming the principal part of the ancient City was carried down to the Biblical level, which will engage the attention of the excavators during the present year.

Some of the most important discoveries for the season of 1922 were made in the large cemetery outside the town, where rock cut tombs were found corresponding to various dates down through the Roman Period. Among the most interesting of these discoveries were early tombs of the Philistines in which were found sarcophagi made of clay and curiously shaped with lids representing human characters. The discovery which occasioned the most interest was a marble sarcophagus of the period of Herod the Great with a Latin inscription giving the name of Antiochus, the son of Phallion. This Antiochus was therefore a cousin of Herod the Great.

Our excavations in Palestine have attracted widespread attention and raised the expectations of scholars everywhere. The following abstract of a letter received by the Director of the Museum from Father Lagrange is characteristic of many that have been received:

"On the invitation of Mr. Fisher, Fathers Vincent, Abel and myself went to visit his excavations at Beisan. We admired the precise method of his excavation and the diligent care with which everything is registered. His latest results are splendid; it is the finest excavation in Palestine and much more may be expected."

Father Lagrange is Director of the French School of Bible Study and Archæology at the Dominican Monastery of St. Etienne in Jerusalem.