

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06352-4 - Jerusalem: The Topography, Economics and History from
the Earliest Times to A.D. 70: Volume 2

George Adam Smith

Excerpt

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BOOK III

THE HISTORY

VOL. II.

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CHAPTER I

THE PRELUDE—ABD-KHIBA

c. 1400 B.C.

THE histories of most famous cities melt back, through the pride of their peoples or the hatred of their foes, into legendary tales of their origins, which find their exact moulds sometimes in the memory of an actual fact, sometimes in a religious symbol, but often in more or less fantastic etymologies of the city's name. Of such legends Jerusalem has her share. We have seen the rabbinic fable associating her name with two of the early Patriarchs.¹ Josephus, followed by many Jews and Christians, identified the Temple Mount with a 'Mount Moriah,' which he took to be the scene of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac; but the Biblical story of the latter knows no 'mount' so called.² The accounts of Jerusalem's origin, which are due to the fancy, not untouched by malice, of Egyptians or Greeks, either connect the late form Hierosolyma with the Solymi of Homer, or ascribe the formation of the City to a band of refugees from Egypt, some say in the leadership of Moses.³ We now know that

¹ Vol. i. 258 n. 1.² Vol. i. 267.³ For Manetho's story, see *Jos. C. Apion.* i. 14 f., 26 f. (Müller, *Frag. Hist. Gr.* ii. 511 ff.). Of Greek accounts these are samples: Hecatæus of Abdera (Müller, *Frag. Hist. Gr.* ii. 391); Posidonius of Apamæa (*Id.* 256); Lysimachus of Alexandria (*Jos. C. Ap.* i. 34; Müller, iii. 334 f.); cf. Tacitus, *Hist.* v. 2. Plutarch (*De Iside et Osiride*, 31) dismisses a curious legend as a confusion of Egyptian and Jewish reports. On the Solymi see vol. i. 262.

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Jerusalem, under that name, existed before the arrival of Israel in the land; and the sole fact of importance which these legends reflect—the most wandering fancy could not have missed it—is her debatable position between Egypt and Babylonia. For the compound name Jerusalem various etymologies are possible. But there is no doubt of its Semitic origin; and, as we have seen, it was bestowed more probably by Canaanite settlers than by Babylonian conquerors of Palestine.¹

We have also seen that these Semitic settlers from Arabia had, about 2500 B.C., succeeded men of another race belonging to the Stone-Age. The presence of this race in Palestine is beyond doubt. Something of their personal appearance and manner of life has been illustrated by discoveries on other parts of the land; while their occupation of the site or neighbourhood of Jerusalem is proved by the great numbers of flint weapons and tools which have been picked up within her surroundings.² But the Stone-Men lie beyond the limits of history proper.

If we leave aside the ambiguous narrative in Genesis xiv., the earliest written records of Jerusalem present her as entering history with a plain and sober air, singularly in keeping with that absence of glamour which we have noted in her clear atmosphere and grey surroundings.³ Among the archives of the Egyptian court, about B.C. 1400, there have been discovered a small number of clay tablets, seven or eight in all: letters from Jerusalem which describe her condition in plaintive detail and with no

The Stone-Age.

Sober Entrance of Jerusalem into History, c. 1400 B.C.

¹ Vol. i. 253-58.² Vol. i. 283-88.³ Vol. i. 22.

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touch of the ideal. They invoke no deity, they assert no confidence, material or spiritual. They speak only of the City's loneliness, her disappointment in her protectors, her abandonment to an approaching foe. Yet even so, these tablets are more symbolic of the history of Jerusalem than any legend or prophecy could have been. Their tone is in unison with the dominant notes of the long tragedy to which they form the prelude. They express that sense of betrayal and of vanishing hope in the powers of this world which haunts Jerusalem to the very end.

Nor is it less typical of the course of her history that the tablets reveal Jerusalem as already under the influence of the two great civilisations, which, Already in touch with Babylon and Egypt. between them, shaped the fortunes and coloured the character of her people. The tablets are written in the cuneiform script, and in the language, of Babylonia: a proof that the influences of this most ancient seat of human culture already ran strong across Western Asia. The politics, which the tablets reveal, have their centre at the other side of the world, with Babylonia's age-long rival. Jerusalem is a tributary and outpost of Egypt; and Egypt is detected in that same attitude of helplessness towards her Asian vassals which is characteristic of her throughout history. As in the days of Isaiah, she is *Rahab that sitteth still*; promising much, but when the crisis arrives, inactive and unwilling to fulfil her pledges.¹ As in the days of Jeremiah, the expected *King of Egypt cometh not any more out of his land*,² and Jerusalem is left alone to face a foe from the north. Other instances may be

¹ Isaiah xxx. 7.² 2 Kings xxv. 7.

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cited. When Antiochus Epiphanes took Jerusalem in 168 B.C., and desecrated the Temple, Judæa was still claimed by the Ptolemy of the time, but he did not stir to her help. Down to the retreat of Ibrahim Pasha in 1841, Egypt, whether because of the intervening desert or the fitful prowess of her people, has been unable, for any long period, to detach Palestine from Asia and bind it to the southern continent.

Soon after 1600 B.C. Egypt, under the Eighteenth Dynasty, began a series of campaigns in Syria, which carried her arms (on one occasion at least) to the Euphrates, and reduced the states of Palestine for four centuries to more or less regular dependence upon her. No fewer than fourteen of these campaigns were undertaken by Thutmosis III. about 1500 B.C. He defeated, at Megiddo, a powerful Canaanite confederacy, but left to his successors, Amenhotep II. and Thutmosis IV., the reduction of some separate tribes. So far as we know, the next Pharaoh, Amenhotep (Amenophis) III., enjoyed without interruption the obedience of his Asian vassals. By his only possible rivals, the kings of Mesopotamia and Babylonia, he was recognised as sovereign of Syria, and his influence extended northwards to Armenia. His vast empire, his lavish building throughout Egypt and Nubia, his magnificent temples at Thebes, his mines and organisation of trade, his wealth, along with the art and luxury which prevailed under all the monarchs of his dynasty, and their influence on the Greek world—represent the zenith of Egyptian civilisation. Whether, in his security and under the zeal with which he gave himself to the improvement of his own land, Amenhotep III. neglected

Egyptian
Dominion in
Palestine,
1600-1200 B.C.

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the Asian provinces of his empire, is uncertain. In any case he was succeeded by a son whose interests in Egypt were still more engrossing, and who for this or other reasons was unable to preserve the conquests of his predecessors. Amenhotep IV. was that singular monarch who effected a temporary revolution in the religion and art of Egypt. Turning his back upon Amōn and the other ancient gods, he spent his reign in the establishment of the exclusive worship of Aten, the Sun's Disk, and in the construction of a centre for this and a capital for himself. He introduced styles of art as novel as his religious opinions; free and natural, but without other proofs of ability. Absorbed in these pursuits, Amenhotep IV. was the last kind of ruler to meet, or even to heed, the new movements in Asia which threatened his empire. Across the Euphrates lay three considerable kingdoms: Babylonia, then under a Kassite dynasty; Assyria, her young vassal, but already strong enough to strike for independence; and Mitanni, a state of Hittite origin in Northern Mesopotamia. It was not, however, from these, divided and jealous of each other, that danger had to be feared by Egypt. From Asia Minor, the main branch of the Hittite race, the Kheta or Khatti were pushing south-east, alike upon their kinsfolk of Mitanni, and upon the Egyptian tributaries in Northern Syria.

It is beneath this noontide, and approaching eclipse, of Egypt's glory that Jerusalem emerges into history. The correspondence, of which her eight clay tablets form a small portion, was discovered at Tell el-'Amarna, in Middle Egypt, the site of the capital of Amenhotep IV. It was conducted

The Tell el-
Amarna
Letters.

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between his father and himself on the one side, and the Trans-Euphrates kingdoms and the Syrian feudatories of Egypt on the other.¹ Through it we see, passing over Palestine, a close and frequent communication between the Nile and the Euphrates.

The human interest of these Letters is intense: kings at peace, but in jealous watch of each other, their real Their human interest. tempers glowing through a surface of hypocrisy. They marry and give in marriage; they complain that they cannot get evidence whether their daughters or sisters sent abroad for this purpose are alive or well treated; they appeal to the women of the courts which they seek to influence. Above all they are greedy of gold, of which Egypt is the source; one alleges that a present of gold-ore, when it arrives, yields less than the promised value, another that wooden images have been sent instead of golden. One even grumbles that his royal brother has not inquired for him when he was ill.² There is some humour, much cunning, and once (if the interpretation be correct) a

¹ The tablets of Tell el-Amarna are now in Berlin and London. The following facts, recorded in them, are taken from H. Winckler's transliteration and translation in *Die Thontafeln von Tell-el-Amarna*: Berlin, 1896. In the following references B., followed by a figure, signifies the Berlin collection; L. the London collection; and W. Winckler's rearrangement and numbering of the letters. Knudtzon, in the *Beiträge zur Assyriologie*, iv. pp. 101 ff., 279 ff., gives some revision of the tablets, with corrections of earlier readings and translations. An account of the substance of the tablets is given by C. Niebuhr in *Die Amarna-Zeit*, the second Heft of vol. i. of *Der Alte Orient*, and by Wallis Budge in the last chapter of vol. iv. of his *History of Egypt*. See also Winckler, pp. 192-203 of the third edition of Schrader's *Die Keilinschriften und das Alte Testament*, and Sayce on 'Canaan in the Century before the Exodus,' *Contemporary Review*, lxxxviii. (1905) 264-277.

² B. 7: W. 10.

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frank proposal of villainy.¹ Between these very human courts and their countries there moves a constant commerce: 'Write me what thou desirest from my land, they will bring it thee, and what I desire from thy land, I will write thee, that they may bring it.'² For the Egyptian gold and oil, the states of the Euphrates send manufactured gold, precious stones, enamel, chariots, horses, and slaves. These are not all royal presents. A Mesopotamian king complains that his merchants have been robbed in Canaan, Pharaoh's territory. Caravans cross Palestine or pass from it into Egypt. Phœnician ships, not without danger from Lycian corsairs, bring to Egypt copper, bronze, ivory, ships' furniture, and horses from Alashia, either Cyprus or Northern Syria. They take back silver, oil and oxen.³ One letter begs the king of Egypt not to allow the writer's merchants to be wronged by his tax-gatherers (?).⁴ Such are a few of the many details: so many, and so intimate, that it may be truly said, before the Roman Empire there is no period for which we have records more replete with the details of social intercourse or with revelations of personal character and policy. All is vivid, passionate, frank. Of this busy, human life, thirty-three centuries ago, Jerusalem was a part, lying not far from one of its main arteries.

¹ B. 9: W. 15: 'Why should the ambassadors not remain on the journey, so that they die in foreign parts? If they remain in foreign parts, the estate belongs to the king. Therefore when he (thy present ambassador) remains on his journey and dies, then will the estate belong to the king. There is therefore no [reason why we should fear] that the ambassadors die in foreign parts, whom we send . . . the ambassadors . . . and . . . and die in foreign parts.'

² B. 1: W. 6.

³ L. 5-7 and B. 11-15: W. 25-33.

⁴ B. 12: W. 29.

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The letters from the chiefs of Palestine, among whom the ruler of Jerusalem was one, reveal the duties that Egypt required of her feudatories, the awe in which they held her power, the dangers which threatened them through her inaction, and all the intrigue and duplicity arising from so ambiguous a situation. Some of the writers have Semitic names; that is, they are native Canaanites or Amorites. Others have non-Semitic names: interpreted by some scholars as Hittite or Mitannian.¹ They profess themselves slaves of Egypt, and address the Pharaoh with fulsome flattery. They prostrate themselves before him—‘seven and seven times.’ He is their lord, their king, their gods and their sun.² They are his slaves, and the grooms of his horse.³ They hold their hereditary domains by his gift.⁴ They send tribute,⁵ and are obliged to certain services, such as provisioning the royal troops who march through the land,⁶ and maintaining royal garrisons.⁷ They guard the posts entrusted to them by the king, and the king’s chariots; but also the gods of the king.⁸ In return they expect to be protected by Egypt, and to receive supplies.⁹ One of the chiefs, Iabitiri of Gaza, says that in his youth he was taken to Egypt.¹⁰ In short, the position of these feudatories of Pharaoh is analogous to that now occupied by the semi-independent rajahs of India under the British Government. And just as the latter places, at the courts of the rajahs, political agents with great powers, so Egypt had at that

The Letters
from
Palestine.

¹ Sayce, *Contemporary Review*, lxxxviii. 267, 269 ff.

² A frequent formula.

³ B. 118-22: W. 210-13.

⁴ Frequent.

⁵ e.g. L. 67: W. 198.

⁶ L. 52, 54: W. 207, 209; B. 114: W. 194.

⁷ B. 113, 121: W. 193, 212: L. 52, 53: W. 207, 208.

⁸ B. 122: W. 213.

⁹ Frequent.

¹⁰ L. 57: W. 214.