

PREFACE

I never dreamed that I would one day write a book on the Phoenicians, but pure coincidence turned things otherwise and brought it about that in course of time I ended with this book.

At the age of twenty five my voice was yet unaltered and high pitched as in my boyhood. One day by sheer chance I met someone who told me he had had the same experience, and explained to me that my voice is the result of misphonation and misuse of vocalization and vocal cords. He instructed me how to use correctly my vocal chords and vocalize properly. I followed his instructions and performed the exercises he set me while a radio was turned on full volume in the background with me trying to overtop the radio sound. The result was overwhelming, and within two days my voice changed utterly from high pitched to low pitched. At the time I was a medical student and curiosity drove me to inquire into this phenomenon from the anatomical point of view. This, I came to realise, would involve a better understanding of the vowels and the basis of phonetical writing. In my quest for more information on the subject I came across a book on phonation, which mentioned, among other things, that the Phoenicians are considered the inventors of the first system of phonetic writing in the world. My first reaction was to go to the university library and look up the entry "Phoenicia" in both the Encyclopedia Britannica and Larousse Encyclopedia. There I learned that the Bible is regarded as a primary source for knowledge on the Phoenicians, and so I naturally referred to the Bible. I was amazed to discover that certain passages in the biblical writings were clearly misunderstood and misinterpreted, and this inevitably led to an erroneous approach. The more I delved into the study of the history of the region the more I was astonished to perceive what sort of "scientific basis" constitutes the accepted reconstruction of Israelite and regional history.

The study of the history of a nation is the study of a succession of events. In this study of the past, the historian is assisted by whatever he can lay his hands upon; archaeology, epigraphic texts, linguistic terms, philology and the like. An error in the interpretation of terms or findings will inevitably cause misunderstandings in the comprehension of historical events. This may have a repercussion on the understanding of other developments connected with these events. Reasons for mistakes may be either subjective errors resulting from the erroneous approach of scholars; or objective ones due to ideas and

theories based on concepts, and beliefs which were in accordance with data available at a specific period. Accumulation of new data in the wake of new findings, lead to new ideas, but concepts and theories formed earlier may still remain unchanged. For example; when epigraphic findings were rare, the invention of phonetic writing was ascribed to the 10th century B. C. Accordingly, most of the biblical narratives such as the Exodus, conquest of Canaan, tribal settlement, etc. were assigned to an orally transmitted tradition which was only later written down. This together with certain interpretations (Biblical, . archaeological and alike) led to the assumption that the biblical narratives have no historical value and cannot be regarded as a reliable or trustworthy source (Graf, Wellhausen; Alt and others), even though the Bible assures us that Moses himself recorded the comings and goings of the Israelites in the desert. In time, new epigraphic findings brought the date of phonetic writing back to about 1500 B. C. There is therefore no longer any reason to deny the possibility of written records or documents dating from the time of the Exodus and conquest of Canaan, as indicated in the Bible. However although our attitude toward the history of phonetic writing has fundamentally changed, this has not effected any change in our viewing of the biblical narratives as oral transmission.¹

Permutation and alteration in the meaning of terms and words taking place in the course of time, may also lead to erroneous understanding. For example, the Hebrew word "Iy" (י) today means an island. Biblical verses such as "Iy Caphtor" (the original homeland of the Philistines according to the Bible), were accordingly understood and translated as the 'island of Caphtor' . This rendering of the term brought in its wake a mass of conceptions relating to the Philistines who presumably "came" from the island of Crete, etc. We will see that the word "Iy" in the Bible meant "land" and not "island", thereby undermining the very basis for the view that the Philistines came from Crete. Yet the "Philistine theory" is so firmly rooted in our times apparently corroborated by archaeological findings that its origin is already forgotten. If we now try to show that it is basically erroneous we shall probably be confronted by the various archaeological findings, although the problem is really one of interpretation given to these findings.

In Tel Ed-Dweir ostraka were found written in ancient Hebrew. The mound was identified as ancient Lachish. and the ostraka, known as the 'Lachish letters', were ascribed to the period of the destruction of the first Temple (578 B. C.). There are grounds for dating the ostraka to the period of king Rehoboam c. 917 B. C.² We therefore have to "move" backward

1 However Dussaud points out that Israelite history must be reexamined in light of the fact that writing was known already in the region in the patriarchal period. (La notion d'ame chez les Israelites et Phéniciens, SY., 16, 1935, p. 277.)

2 Ganor, N. R. The Lachish Letters. P. E. Q. . 1967. p. 74.

the date of many of the findings discovered in that mound. Different points of departure inevitably bring about radical changes of attitude to certain problems in the present, past or future. If we assume that the Exodus occurred in the period of Raamses II (the prevailing theory), then the Israelites must have invaded Canaan in c. 1200 B. C. Then the inevitable conclusion is that when they reached the cities of Jericho, Bet-El, Ai and other cities they must have found them already destroyed being that their destruction is assigned archaeologically to an earlier period. The outcome is: theories of two exoduses or alternatively negation of biblical historicity. Findings like the Ras Shamra (Ugarit) tablets (assigned to the 14th century B. C. and with a context very similar to that of the biblical narratives) inevitably constitute "proof" that the Israelites "borrowed" their culture from the "Phoenicians" as is widely believed. But if we accept that the Exodus took place about 1400 B. C. (following biblical evidence), then the assertion of "borrowing" or two exoduses etc. has no basis whatsoever.

One of the main sources for studying the history of our region was and still is the Old Testament. Every scholar, directly or indirectly, returns to the Old Testament as a main source. The Jews recognising the Old Testament as a holy book accepted it literally and in the past did not question its veracity. Their attitude towards it was of elucidation and exegesis rather than criticism. Compared with them the first gentile investigators, most of whom were members of various churches, were motivated by the understanding of Christianity, and their wish to see it enhanced. Naturally this attitudes, as we will see later, had implications for the history of the entire region. For myself also, the Bible serves as the basic ground, yet my approach is not either to negate or to affirm. My point of departure is that the Bible is a book which was written by Jews for the nation of Judah, and it has a main trend which is to assert that the Jewish God is the almighty power and all-ruling providence in the universe. These two points must be borne in mind in evaluating biblical statements. Nevertheless, the very fact that the O. T. includes stories such as the concubine of Gibeah (Ju. 19); David and Bat-sheba (2Sam. 11); Amnon and Tamar (2Sam. 13), etc. shows clearly that this is not a book which depicts events and their protagonists in merely a praiseworthy and glorifying light. It presents objective happenings but in a manner which betrays the subjectivity and tendencies of its editor.

In the 18th century (Astruc Jean 1684–1766), there began what has been regarded as scientific biblical criticism and research. Although ostensibly this was objective scientific investigation in actual fact it continued like any other investigation to be founded on former investigations. This approach challenged biblical historicity and veracity and led to a dismembering of the Bible (O. T.). Eventually it was "proved" that the biblical text was merely an assemblage of aetiological legendary narratives (Alt, Noth etc.): We are told, for example,

that the conquest of the cities Ai and Jericho as reported in the Bible, never happened or at most the biblical editors "confused" the conquest of Ai with that of Beit-El (Albright and others). We are further told that the Exodus, which is the climax and major turning point in the history of the nation of Israel and which forms a strong basis for the Jewish religion never existed (Nibuhre, Finkelstein etc.) or alternatively that there were two Exoduses, (Rowe, Albright and others), etc. Whenever the "scientific archaeological facts" did not correspond with the biblical narrative, it was always the Bible that was at fault. It was either unreliable traditions transmitted from one person to another, or copyist mistakes, aetiological tales, etc. I have not come across many cases where archaeologists confessed that perhaps they were the ones at fault in the understanding and interpretation of archaeological findings. As we will see these ideas were corollary and consequential to dating the Exodus wrongly to c. 1200 B. C.

When writing this book I tried to preserve as objective a stern as possible and suppress entirely the subjective personal point of view. I have tried to base myself and tried to obtain an objective picture, as much as possible on primary sources only, and not on the views and theories a succession of different scholars, which generally contradict each other. It is only after arriving at conclusions from the primary sources, that I turn to the discussion of those theories and archaeological findings relating to them. By adopting this approach, I believe the reader will encounter views and conclusions already advanced by others but which I arrived at by my own methods. However, our ultimate conclusions differ.

The sources from which I took material to write this book, were partly read by me in the original and partly in translation. In cases where I was aided by translation, I was not satisfied with only one source but examined and compared various sources. I should note here that translations of historical sources, are always a reflection of the translator's understanding of the source; and it is according to this understanding that historical knowledge is formed and not according to the source itself. As regards this book, it is not the sources themselves that are important but the way they were understood and explained; these are reflected by and can be studied from the different translations. However it should be noted that because of the intricacies of historical events and developments certain problems raised and discussed were of necessity left unresolved until later chapters. The main outlines of this book were published earlier in Hebrew in two booklets and a book entitled "Who were the Phoenicians"? The first of these was published in 1952 in Geneva, the second at the beginning of 1962 in Israel, and the book in 1974, but their arguments are discussed here in greater detail. In this book I set out to controvert the by now universally accepted view that the Phoenicians were an ancient Canaanite people, whose homeland is the

region of today's Lebanon. The thesis advanced is that "Phoenicians" was the name applied by the ancient Greeks to the people of Israel, but because of a long series of misinterpreted and misunderstood facts, linguistic religious and archaeological, this truth was not recognized up till now. As a result certain key historical events recounted in the Bible, such as the Exodus, the conquest of the land of Canaan etc., were wrongly understood, leading inevitably to a distorted reconstruction of the history of this region. Another important factor contributing to this distorted view is the religious secession within Israel that climaxed at the time of Ezra the Scribe. This secession eventually led to the formation of a new nation – the Judeans – who seceded from the majority of the Israelite nation. Following this, the name 'Phoenicians', which previously had referred to the whole of the Israelite nation, was now applied only to the Israelite majority remnant, and in time became restricted to the people living on the Levantine coast.

The conclusions advanced in this book differ from those generally accepted today. Nevertheless I arrived at them only after deep and careful thought, and my decision to publish them in book form is because I am persuaded of their veracity and their appropriateness. Though I am sure this book, like any book, is not exempt from technical defects, I hope nonetheless the reader will be persuaded of the truth of the arguments put forward here.

A NOTE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

While translating this book into English I was faced, for the most part, with the problem of how to present the English reader with questions based on the interpretation and pronunciation of Hebrew words and quotations which lie at the very source of the erroneous understanding and interpretation of biblical history as discussed here. Translation into English of these words and passages was patently impossible for the very reason that such translation would deprive them of their main essence and would not express the actual connotation in the original tongue. Added to this difficulty was that of Bible translations which in many instances neither overlap with, nor are identical to the Hebrew source. Such inaccuracies frequently constitute the very basis for the distortion of certain events concerning the history of the region. To the reader trained in the Hebrew language, these numerous inaccuracies can be easily pointed out. But it is almost impossible to do so for the English reader, because to quote from an erroneous English translation of the Bible in order to expose inaccuracies in that same English translation is obviously self-defeating. In any case, it would perpetuate misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the citations and so frustrate their purpose. In order to overcome such difficulties and to provide the English reader not conversant with the Hebrew language with the means of understanding the words and passages cited in the text, and of following the arguments laid out in this book, I have cited, in several instances, the words and quotations in the original Hebrew, transcribed and explained in English, so that the English reader might be able to get a more exact sense of the citations. Another problem was that of the spelling and pronunciation of certain names which differ in Hebrew and in English such as Raamses–Rameses, Yehuda–Judah, Yehoshua–Joshua, etc. I have referred to these names in their original Hebrew pronunciation, except for certain names already familiar in their English form such as Joshua, Judah, etc. I referred to these occasionally in their Hebrew form side by side with the English one when a specific reason called for it, e. g. Joshua (Yehoshua) etc. I trust that the English reader will thus surmount the unavoidable difficulties and be able get at the heart of the matter discussed here.