

THE INDUS AND THE PENTATEUCH

A STUDY OF THE INDUS CIVILIZATION

THE realisation of the significance of Harappa and the excavation of Mohenjo Daro are events of outstanding importance in the progress of archæology during the last fifty years. Harappa, a very old town-site in the Montgomery District of the Punjab, has been known for some time and a few small softstone seals and other objects have been found. Only gradually did it become clear that these remains had no relation to any other civilization of India. Harappa had suffered for many years from the inroads of brick-robbers and offered, by itself, little prospect of further significant information. The enthusiasm of Sir John Marshall led to the search for other sites of a similar nature. In 1922 such a site was discovered in the lower valley of the River Indus in the Province of Sind, south of the Baluchistan frontier. Since then other sites have been found and it has been possible to estimate, to some extent, the territorial expansion of an entirely unknown civilization which had attained an exceedingly high degree of development.

Most of the work has centred round Mohanjo Daro, the site discovered in 1922, and, with the exception of Harappa, a great deal remains to be done before the full significance of the other sites can be made known. Such conclusions as have been reached are based mainly upon the excavations in Mohanjo Daro and to a lesser, though important degree, upon the findings in Harappa. That we have at present only a very unsatisfactory picture, is obvious from the opinion of Marshall that the Mohanjo Daro culture extended from beyond Harappa to the mouth of the Indus 'in a south-easterly direction at least as far as the Gulf of Cambay.'

Mohanjo Daro is smaller than Harappa, which lies some four hundred miles to the north-east, but even so it is more than a square mile in area, and since the outlying portions are buried under the alluvial deposits of the Indus, which now flows nearly four miles to the east, it may have been considerably larger than the site so far investigated. The main site is a mound standing some forty to fifty feet above the surrounding plain, with a Buddhist stupa and monastery, of a very much more recent date, on still higher ground. The stupa is of special interest as possibly built on the plan of an older temple.

Work went on regularly from 1922 until 1931. Since then excavations have been slowed down considerably and have ceased altogether for long periods.

From its foundation the fate of the city was bound up with the

Indus. It suffered from the constant shifting of the bed of the river, and even more from the frequent floods which more than once, during the history of the city, reached cataclysmic proportions. Since the final abandonment of the city, the level of the Indus has risen about twenty feet, so that excavations lower than the present level of the river are seriously hampered by sub-soil seepage. This obstacle could be overcome only by the installation of costly pumps. But even so seven different strata of superimposed buildings, or horizontal sections of buildings, for the inhabitants used as much of the partially covered existing buildings as possible without disturbing their plan or structure, have so far been recognized. Only guesswork can say how many further strata may lie between the present seepage level and the first foundation of the city.

The chronology of these strata has not been settled by authorities, but it is evident that a very long period must have elapsed between the founding and the abandonment of the city. It is true that the inscriptions and other objects remained of a striking sameness throughout the period covered by the excavations, but the same can only be assumed of the lower levels which remain untouched. Nor would it seem safe to insist too much upon the lack of development during the period so far examined, for there is an inexplicable paucity of remains in comparison with the area examined, due perhaps to intentional destruction, and this prevents certain conclusions. Moreover, Heras, the greatest authority on Mohanjo Daro, informed the present writer that he could sometimes distinguish early from late inscriptions by various clear indications.

In spite of the extraordinary difficulty of excavating, it is hoped that everything will be done to prevent flagging of enthusiasm. Most of those who have examined the work so far accomplished are convinced that Mohanjo Daro has a very large contribution indeed to offer to archæology, comparative religion and to Biblical studies. One instance of many may show what assistance fuller knowledge of this culture could give in the discussion of Pentateuchal origins. Heras claims that some seals give the history of the Fall, and that of these, the earlier seals show the serpent as intimately connected with the crime which calls forth the anger of An and the expulsion of the man and woman from the safety of the walled city. Later seals repeat the story but with the substitution of the man-eating tiger of India for the serpent of the more primitive version.

Pottery, statuary, metal weights, tools, machines, human skeletons have come to light. But, without doubt, by far the greatest interest centres round some three thousand small inscriptions, many of these from Harappa, generally accompanied by drawings of human

beings, trees and animals, and for the most part carved on steatite or soapstone. The inscriptions on the seals are all very short and up to the present are the only specimens of writing which have been found. Doubtless longer writings on more perishable substances as leather, skins, cloth, wood, were made, but no trace has survived the passage of more than five thousand years.

The script is pictographic. A number of scholars have attempted to decipher it, and mention must be made of the work of Hunter and von Meriggi. Not the least difficulty was the excessive brevity of the inscriptions. It is now recognized that the only satisfactory interpretation is that offered by Rev. Professor H. Heras, S.J., under whom the present writer had the privilege of studying the Indus civilization. Heras has succeeded in reading all the three thousand pictograms so far found.

Before any real attempt could be made upon the meaning of the inscriptions, it was essential to ascertain the language used on the seals. The language would, in all probability, be bound up with the race of the writers. For reasons too complex for exposition here, Heras decided that the inhabitants of Mohanjo Daro, who certainly were pre-Aryan, were Dravidian and that the language used was also Dravidian. He was the more convinced of the truth of this supposition by the existence at the present time of a Dravidian-speaking, though racially non-Dravidian tribe, the Bahuis in nearby Baluchistan. Heras then attempted the reconstruction of early Dravidian, or more correctly of Proto-Dravidian, which he assumed gave origin to the various Dravidian languages spoken today, or at least showed them in a primitive stage. This entailed a careful study of the comparative grammar and morphology of all Dravidian languages, with especial regard to the earliest literary remains, in an effort to reveal the nature and rapidity of the development in each, and the degree of convergence and divergence between them. It was expected that this would show the root-language in its simplest and most persistent form. The criteria applied were in strictest accord with the established laws of philology and comparative grammar.

But even the reconstruction of Proto-Dravidian was only half the problem. There remained the assigning of the proper sound to its proper sign. In this part of the work it could be assumed, first, that the pictograms were to be sounded as the vocable of the object they represented, and, second, that frequent juxtaposition of signs might indicate something corresponding to the oblique cases. The surmise proved correct. The first sign deciphered was read as a kind of possessive case and pronounced 'adu.' Then came the word for 'tree,' pronounced 'maram.' Then the reading of the two signs

'maram adu,' meaning 'of the tree.' Heras had succeeded.

It is difficult to state with certainty the age of the culture revealed by Harappa and Mohanjo Daro. Present opinion makes it pre-Sumerian and at least contemporary with the Proto-Elamite civilization; while Heras thinks that the earliest seals may take us back seven thousand years in the written history of the human race.

The fuller appreciation of the script is adding weight to the hypothesis advanced by Langdon and supported by Hunter, that pictograms of the Indus culture gave origin to the Brahmi alphabet. But not only the alphabet came from those Proto-Dravidians. Closer examination is showing once again the great continuity of history, for in many aspects India's religious and general culture seem to derive from those long-forgotten inhabitants of the Indus valley, whose very existence was unsuspected twenty-five years ago.

There is more than a superficial similarity between the script of the Indus culture and that of the Elamite-Sumerian of the Mesopotamia delta. This led the first investigators to derive the Indus culture from that of Sumer and to refer to it as Indo-Sumerian with the entire emphasis on Sumerian. Then naturally came the consideration of the possibility of a migration from the Euphrates to the Indus. But all this is no longer seen to be tenable and now the complete independence of the Indus culture is fully admitted, although it is still held by some students that the similarity of the two cultures might be due to commercial intercourse which undoubtedly existed between the two peoples. But with the growing conviction that some of the Indus seals are older than the establishment of the Sumerians on the Euphrates, the hypothesis advanced by Heras that the civilising movement was from the Indus to the Euphrates, and not *vice versa*, and that the Sumerian culture which met that of the Elamites took its origin from the Indus valley, becomes more acceptable.

However that may be (and if it be true, then we may well be in touch with a source of the Pentateuchal story far more ancient than that offered by the Marduk myth of the Tigris and Euphrates), we are certainly brought face to face with a people whose recorded culture and religion reach as far back as that of any other known race.

The work so far completed on the Indus civilisation leaves no doubt that the earliest inhabitants of Mohanjo Daro were monotheists. Such inscriptions as, 'The Supreme Being of Life', 'Mina, the farmer of the Crab about whom the One has decreed', 'The Supreme Being of Mina being help', leave no room for any other explanation. But there are many pointers which lead us to think

that we are actually witnessing a change from monotheism, held longest by the more cultured classes, to polytheism, welcomed by the more ignorant. It is not improbable that this change, apart from the natural tendency to personify and deify the forces of nature, was influenced by the importance of the signs of the zodiac in the computing of the seasons. References to the Fishes, the Crab, the Arrow, the Ram are very often met. It is easy to see both the monotheistic and the polytheistic interpretation attaching to such an inscription as, 'That is the eight god, whose one side is the sprinkled great Fish, which means, 'That is the God of eight forms, one of whose forms is the great Fish (Pisces) sanctified by the sprinkling of lustral water'. It may be that we should look to the reverence shown to the eight signs of the Indus zodiac for the origin of the later extreme development of the worship of 'the hosts of heaven' among so many of the people under Mesopotamian influence, fear of which corruption led Moses to give his own nation a seven-day week and a daily dedication to some work of Creation.

There are signs that the inhabitants of Mohenjo Daro were not of the same stock. Examination of the few skulls which have been found points to the same conclusion. This may explain the tendency to polytheism and also a later, but unpopular, linga worship. It may also help us to understand the many references to a trinity of gods which is found interwoven with this mixture of polytheism and monotheism. It would be interesting indeed to find the earliest forms assumed by this trinity. In the form so far made known to us we find An, the Father, Amma, the Mother, and Anil, the Son. But since, on some of the seals, An is found with one body and three faces, that is, two profiles and one full, we may be permitted to postulate a simpler and purer doctrine of the triune God to have been held by the earlier inhabitants of the city. We can appreciate some of the possible implications in such an inscription as the following, which is the most explicit 'trinity' reference so far deciphered, 'Uda mun per kadavul adu kalak air', meaning literally, 'The joined life of the united three great gods'.

Such of the city of Mohenjo Daro as has been excavated shows a very high degree of development in architecture, street-formation, wells, drainage, sewerage, handicraft, and government, and this is true even of the very earliest levels. Using the ordinary computation of archaeology, this would imply that even the earliest levels are the product of a society organised and permanent for very many generations. The affinity of the Indus culture with those known as Mediterranean is established, but evidence is inclining some students to make the Indus older than any of them. May we hope that we have advanced another step towards the common origin of the

cultures from which our Pentateuch came and towards the primitive revelation of which it speaks?

Mohenjo Daro and Harappa were deserted at the same time, and this would seem true of other sites, as Chanhu Daro and Amri, where remains of the Indus culture have been found. But what force brought to so sudden an end a society so well-established can only be the subject of conjecture. The more recent levels show what may be signs of racial decadence, while groups of skeletons displaying evidence of violence, and the fact that all statuary is broken, might suggest conquest by a very hostile race. . . . The name itself, Mohenjo Daro, the Hill of Death, may enshrine some such long-lost tradition.

J. J. CROWLEY, PH.D.

P R E S E N T I N G T H E N E W T E S T A M E N T

THERE are before me three books: *The Scripture Textbooks for Catholic Schools*, edited by Mgr John M. T. Barton, and published by Burns Oates and Washbourne.¹ They are uniform and each costs 4/6. The binding is very good for the price.

The foreword by Cardinal Griffin states the fundamental point: 'So many people are taught all about the Scriptures, but few are taught to read them'. That set me thinking. It is certain that an inconsiderable number do read the New Testament. Our aim is to persuade them. There is no need for persuasion with the children; they take what is given them by their masters. So the first question arises: do three more books on the New Testament make it more or less likely that the people who read them will read the New Testament itself? Many times I have set about reading, particularly the Old Testament, and found myself very soon reading a commentary instead. Will these books have the same effect on the children?

To begin with the Lives of our Lord. One is for small children, but is so written that it could be read with pleasure by a person of any age; the other is for school children in their teens. The method employed in both is to make a straightforward account of the life of our Lord drawn from all four Gospels, with occasional digressions and enlargements on local history, geography, liturgy, and so on. They both read easily and have a telling style, but not so telling as that of the New Testament writers, for these have a brevity and

¹*A Short Life of Our Lord*, by Patrick J. Crean, Ph.D.

A Study of the Gospels, by the Rev. Thomas Bird, D.D., Ph.D.

The Church in the New Testament, by the Rev. Sebastian Bullough,

O.P., M.A., S.T.L.