

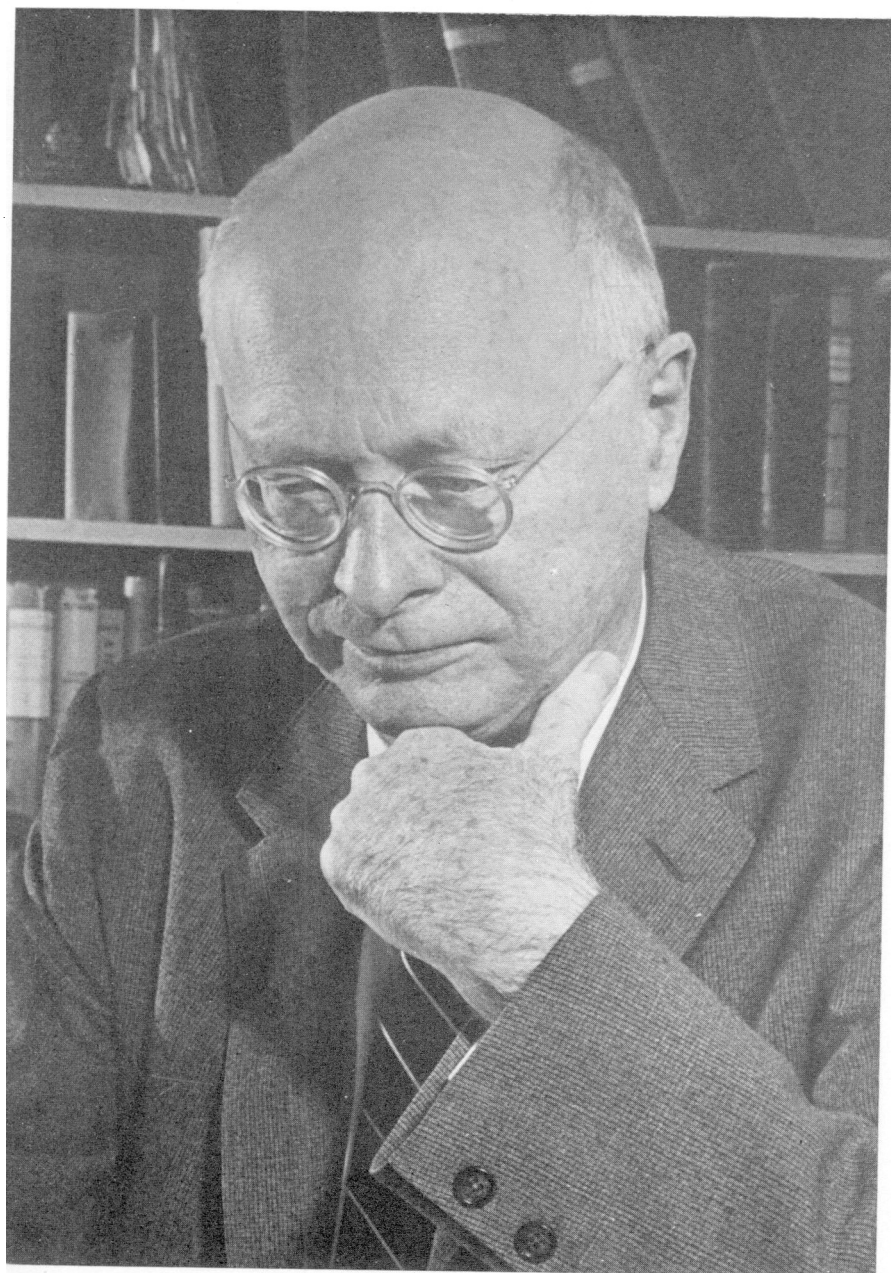
WILLIAM FOXWELL ALBRIGHT

With the death of Professor Albright on 19 September 1971 Biblical and Oriental studies have lost a scholar of pioneering zeal and a teacher of international influence. In particular his passing deprives the School of Oriental and African Studies of a distinguished Corresponding Member, elected in July 1965 for his contribution to Asian studies. He was the Jordan Bequest Lecturer for the sessions 1963–5 and in the latter year gave the series of lectures which were to appear, as the last of 10 volumes from his pen, under the title *Yahweh and the gods of Canaan : a historical analysis of two contrasting faiths* (1968). These lectures epitomize his wide-ranging interests and novel thinking. Two years later he added the Corresponding Fellowship of the British Academy to the many international honours bestowed on him.

Born of missionary parents in Chile on 24 May 1891, he is said to have virtually memorized by the age of 12 every book on ancient history and archaeology he could secure. His interest in the Biblical world grew deeper. Despite poor sight he was always a voracious reader who committed the essentials readily to an active memory. His career was largely associated with the Johns Hopkins University where he received his doctorate in 1916 and was W. W. Spence Professor of Semitic Studies from 1929 till his retirement in 1958. His realization of the need to master not only the history, literature, languages, and archaeology of ancient and modern Palestine but also that of her neighbours led to a lifetime of continuous and arduous study. His first publications were in the fields of Assyriology and Egyptology, interests which never dimmed.

In 1920 he was appointed Director of the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem where he learned Arabic and Modern Hebrew and launched on a heavy programme of field-work. The publication of his excavations at Saul's Gibeah (Tell el-Fül ; 1922, 1933) and Tell Beit Mirsim (1926–32) stressed the importance of the application of sound archaeological theory and provided a detailed comparative stratigraphy and ceramic yardstick for Palestine which is still valid. In this way, following the work of Sir Flinders Petrie and coupled with that of his contemporaries and friends, Vincent, Roland de Vaux, Nelson Glueck, and Kathleen Kenyon, he founded Biblical archaeology as a recognized academic discipline. His popular *Archaeology of Palestine* (1949), frequently brought up to date (last in 1960), provided the public with a clear and reliable exposition of these progressive studies. Albright's long and conscientious backing for the American Schools of Oriental Research had much in common with his British colleagues who similarly worked to establish the British Schools of Archaeology in the Near East as centres for field-work as well as for serious academic research. It is most appropriate that the American school in Jerusalem has been renamed the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research in Jerusalem.

The secret of Albright's international influence on so many aspects of ancient Near Eastern studies, as witnessed by the frequent references to his



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work, may perhaps lie in the instrument he forged in the *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* which he founded and edited for 38 years till 1968. In this quarterly journal he had an outlet for immediate and enthusiastic comment on current field-work and publication. At least a quarter of his literary output, including more than 100 articles, out of the more than 1,100 items listed in the bibliography of his writings, was devoted to this journal. He was thus often the first in print with news, discussion, and criticism of any find relating to the area and especially to the Old Testament. His knowledge of the history and languages of the region was used to highlight the significance of each new discovery. He usually added pertinent comment and related the matter to wider horizons, often unrecognized by the original discoverer. While his primary intention was to draw the attention of colleagues to the new material his suggestions were never thrown out at random but always to encourage others to enter the lists in a like flexible and open-minded manner. He himself was always firm and courteous with those from whom he differed. With his transparent honesty he was often prepared to retract an opinion he had advanced if the new evidence so warranted. Having his journal at hand to publish his up-to-date thoughts this 'change of mind' might sometimes seem confusing. It was, however, only his eager willingness to share a recent idea beyond the immediate circle of the growing number of his students. He should not be criticized adversely for this tendency which extended the influence of the 'Albright School' far beyond America. To-day many of his students, trained as he was in wide appreciation of several branches of Near Eastern studies, carry on his work with distinction in their more specific fields.

Professor Albright will long be remembered for his work in clarification of problems of Near Eastern and Biblical chronology. His many-sided interests inevitably led him to assume a leading role in this kind of research. He cogently defended the attribution of the Patriarchal period to the early Middle Bronze Age (c. 2000–1700 B.C.) and carefully sought for correlation between the Palestinian and related evidence throughout the Biblical period. Though his 'low' system of Near Eastern chronology, based on the chronological position assigned to the early dynasties of Egypt and to the First Dynasty of Babylon (1830–1531 B.C., i.e. Hammurapi of Babylon 1728–1686 B.C.), has not been widely accepted it has proved a corrective spur to the 'high' chronology proposed by Sidney Smith.

Another area of interest to Albright followed his early study of *The vocalization of the Egyptian syllabic orthography* (1934). He wrote several articles on Semitic epigraphy and on the origin and development of the alphabet. His valuable study of the Serabit al-Khadim inscriptions which he dated to 1500 B.C., *The Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions and their decipherment* (1966), followed a visit to the remote site with the University of California African Expedition. This initial work in Sinai led to the non-profit-making American Foundation for the Study of Man for which Albright, as a First Vice President, served as chief archaeologist during the initial expedition to Timnā' and Hajar bin

Ḥumayd (1950–1). This enabled him to propose a new and reliable chronology for central and South Arabia on the basis of inscriptions, types of masonry, and pottery and stratigraphy.

Albright was always abreast of developments in Semitic philology to which he made many good contributions. He did not, however, often enter directly into controversial matters of Old Testament literary criticism. He chose rather to pioneer in relating the poetic and other features of Ugaritic with those of early Hebrew poetry (e.g. the Song of Deborah) and to tackle problems of style and rhetoric. Canaanite languages, literature, and customs always fascinated him. At the same time he was among the first to pronounce his belief in the antiquity and authenticity of the Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumrān. It was always a matter of satisfaction to him that his former students were among those whose detailed work carried forward this important branch of Old and New Testament studies.

Yet the major reason for Albright's wide-spread influence was his own character. Throughout his work he aimed to state clearly the philosophy which centred his studies on the Bible and its historical setting. He ever sought for the distinctive characteristics of the Hebrew and other ancient religions. It is small wonder then that his *From Stone Age to Christianity: monotheism and the historical process* (1940) has run to many editions as a reference work as has his *Archaeology and the religion of Israel* (last revised in 1968). The same concern with the interrelationship between archaeology and religion dominates his all too little known *History, archaeology and Christian humanism* (1964). In a sense his *Yahweh and the gods of Canaan*, with which this School is happily associated, proved a last testament in which he showed how 'the swelling tide of discovery has brought the evidence needed to prove the remarkable accuracy of the Israelite tradition'. He drew to himself students and scholars of differing faiths, among Jews and Christians he was an 'ecumenist' encouraging conservatives and radicals alike in their quest for knowledge of the truth. None who sought his help seriously were disappointed. If the world of scholarship in general remembers Albright as the Nestor of Biblical archaeology, many individuals, like the writer, will recall his infectious enthusiasm and the encouragement he so constantly gave that one left his study determined to work harder to be a true scholar and to become a man of wide vision and faith as he was.

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