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The Hyksos at Heliopolis

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THE actual beginning of the work of excavation at Heliopolis by Professor William Flinders Petrie, February 26, 1912, was an event in Egyptian exploration whose full significance can hardly yet be appreciated, while the outcome may be disappointing. Archaeologists are constantly reminded by their experience that it is the unexpected that happens, and they have occasion to cultivate the stoicism of the Spanish proverb, "Blessed are they that expect nothing, for they shall not be disappointed."

Not much is definitely known concerning the ancient city of On, Egyptian Annu, but the glorious reputation of that ancient capital and religious center spreads its glamour over the early history of dynastic Egypt and also glows like an aurora on the horizon of patriarchal history. The general statement of the inauguration of the work of exploration at Heliopolis is being published by Professor Petrie in the annual volume of the British School in Egypt. It is not intended to give in this paper a full account of that work, mainly this first season a work of survey and of trial trenches, but to give, out of the closest observation of the excavations while in progress day by day, some account and some discussion of what appear to be remains of the Shepherd Kings, the Hyksos, at Heliopolis.

We are informed by Manetho as quoted by Josephus (Against Ap. i, 14) that the Hyksos under their first king Salatis made the city of Avaris "very strong by the walls he built about it," and that they "built a wall around all this place, which was a large and strong wall." Until within a few years it was not possible to do more than speculate concerning the character

of that stronghold with its fortifications large enough for a great army, the imagination, meanwhile, being all the time haunted by the familiar idea of a fortified camp furnished us by the Romans, manifestly a worthless idea for this case. In the year 1906 came the uncovering of the ruins at Tell el-Yehudiyeh by Professor Petrie. Among its surprises was a wall of mud brick enclosing a large area. The wall was about 40 meters wide, but with sloping instead of perpendicular sides. The enclosure was in the form of a truncated oval or parallelogram with rounded corners, and measured about 350 meters in its shortest diameter. There was no gateway, but, instead, a sloping causeway led over the wall. The stratum of debris to which this wall belonged yielded a large number of scarabs of the Hyksos period and very few of any other time. The character of the wall prepared for defense by "bow people," such as the Hyksos probably were, the suitability of this wall for a fortified camp or great stronghold, the probable location of Avaris, and the more positive evidence of the Hyksos scarabs of this stratum of debris, led Professor Petrie to regard the fortress as an early stronghold of the Hyksos, either the one at Avaris or another similar one of about the same period. Now this Tell el-Yehudiyeh lies about four miles north of the site of Heliopolis. Its ancient Egyptian name was Hres and it was closely related to the religious institutions at the great capital. The history of the conquest of the delta by the Hyksos is not known, nor is it sure that they ever gained possession of the capital at Heliopolis, but considering their long reign and their practical suzerainty over lower Egypt the occupation of the capital is most probable, indeed, practically certain. If Joseph was prime minister under one of the Hyksos kings, as asserted by Syncellus, it seems certain that the Hyksos then had control of the capital. Joseph was given as a wife the daughter of the Priest of On, which implies that the religious establishment at On was in good measure subservient to the king.

In view of all these facts, the conditions found at Heliopolis during the past season of work are most interesting and suggestive. Schiaparelli who conducted a limited work of excavation

at Heliopolis a few years ago, the full report of which was never published, announced that he had discovered near the obelisk a great wall about 40 meters wide and pierced by mysterious tunnels. Professor Petrie, after considerable preliminary survey work, set the workmen to cut a transverse section through this wall reported by Schiaparelli. The wall was immediately found and proved to be 40 meters wide at this point. The "tunnels" upon thorough investigation were found to be streaks of sand in a central core of the wall which had been thrown up by the builders to lessen the brick work. About this core the brick-work was erected. The core consisted for the most part of mud, but here and there sand had been dumped in. In a cutting of the wall these deposits of sand had the appearance of tunnels which had been filled up with sand. The completion of the transverse section made their real character at once apparent. The wall was shown to have sloping sides with a perpendicular height of about three meters. Another section of the wall was made on the axis of the temple area to find the place where the gateway of Egyptian temples was uniformly placed, but the wall was found to be continuous. A public road passing at this point prevented an examination in front of the wall for an inclined approach that may have passed over the wall. The course of the wall to the right and the left was easily traced upon the surface and was in the form of a truncated oval or parallelogram with rounded corners, having a width in its shortest diameter of 350 meters. It is not yet possible to determine the long diameter. Not many antiquities of any kind have yet appeared, but even in the small extent to which excavations have been carried this year some Hyksos pottery has been found in connection with the wall.

Thus we have at Heliopolis a remarkable repetition of the conditions found at Tell el-Yehudiyeh: a wall with sloping sides for defense with the bow in both places, an inclined causeway over the wall at Tell el-Yehudiyeh instead of a gateway and the absence of any gateway at Heliopolis at the point where the gateway is to be expected at the entrance of the temple area. The dimensions and shape of the wall agree

also, it being 40 meters wide and in the form of a truncated oval whose short diameter is 350 meters. Add to this the Hyksos remains in the similar strata. The concurrence of all these evidences raises a strong presumption that we have here at Heliopolis the same kind of fortification as at Tell el-Yehudiyeh, erected for the same purpose and by the same people. And this doubling of the evidence at these two places is a decided step forward in the positive identification of the builders of these strange foreign defences in Egypt with the great Hyksos invaders. It would be natural, surely, that foreign invaders having entered the land and made a fortified camp at Hres should repeat this method of defense at some other points at least, before they finally, if ever, gave up their character as bow-people, and adopted the Egyptian method of defense. If Tell el-Yehudiyeh be Avaris or a similar fortification, what is more to be expected than that when the Hyksos became masters of the capital four miles away they would fortify the seat of government there, including the stone temples, in the same manner as they had fortified at Avaris? Moreover the negative argument is of value here. Who else than the Hyksos were ever of sufficient importance and power in ancient Egypt to erect such foreign defenses and especially at the great capital of Heliopolis? Altogether it seems most likely that a new chapter has been added to the history of the patriarchal times and that further excavations will admit us to the place of the seat of the Hyksos government in the days of Joseph.