

and evil-minded husband, a student of the Cabbala, to commit adultery. The townspeople are shocked when the husband denounces his wife. The unfortunate woman hangs herself; the husband realizes he has lost a true love, and the town is destroyed. The manner in which sexuality is introduced on the marriage bed, the unnatural passions that swirl about; the interweaving of mystical Judaic teachings and plain lust — all these elements are blended by Singer into a powerful, frightening story. It is no wonder that this originality, this looking at the world with fresh though sharp eyes, has fascinated the American reader. Singer is an original. No one else abides in his world. It is unreal, ghostlike, full of images invoked also by impressionist painters who splash their canvases crazily but bright. But the magic of Singer's soaring prose, his ability to create devils in a world which we do not inhabit but which is close enough for recognition, hold us and

entrance us. We are in the presence of a master not only of words but of imagination. We may be uneasy in his world of devils. We may be shocked by his lack of inhibitions. But we are also caught up by him and acknowledge his mastery. (Copyright, The Jewish Chronicle Feature & News Service)

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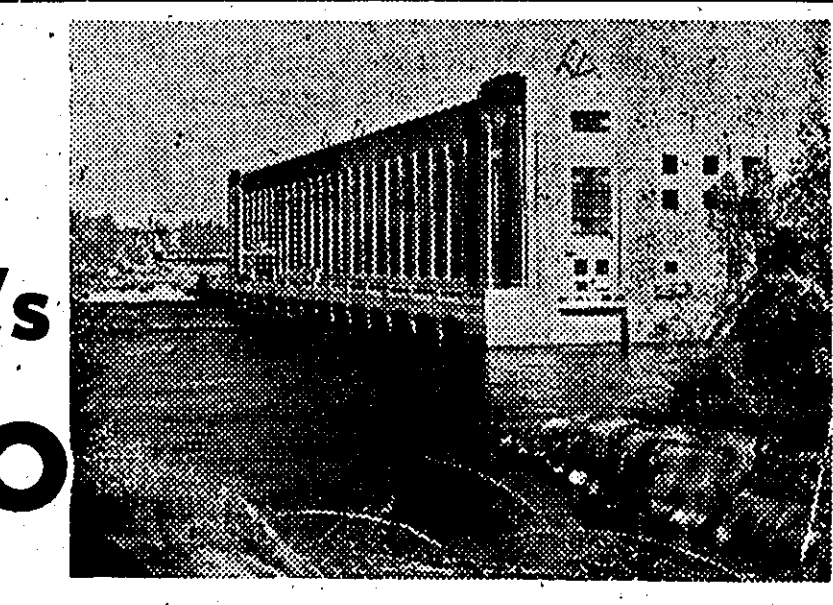
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ANCIENT ISRAEL AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

By CYRUS H. GORDON
Chairman, Brandeis University Department of Mediterranean Studies

THE New Testament fits into such a well-known historic context that there has never been any question of its Mediterranean connections. Through the career of Jesus unfolded within Jewish Palestine, "Acts" and the "Epistles" take us into the Greek provinces and to the capital itself of the Roman Empire. What we tend to forget is that the voyages of Paul were along sea-lanes that had been traversed by Mediterranean traders for millennia. This fact, fully attested by archaeological discoveries, has not yet been sufficiently applied to Old Testament studies.

For reasons that can only seem perverse in retrospect, Old Testament Palestine is not generally understood to have been a Mediterranean country. Handbooks on collateral information about ancient Israel draw on Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Canaanite, and even on Anatolian and Arabian material. However, the Mediterranean is not only often left out but leading Old Testament historians go so far as to say that the ancient Israelites had no contact with the sea and regarded it as a great unknown inhabited by monsters.

What is the actual evidence? The Bible describes several tribes as navigational. In the early days the Tribe of Dan was so devoted to seafaring that the Song of Deborah (Judges V, 17) chides it for neglecting its duty by land to the other tribes: Zabulun and Asher are also described as nautical tribes (Genesis XLIX, 13; Judges V, 17).

All this means that the one great unexplored approach to early Israelite history is from the Mediterranean-side. I was first led to this conclusion by my study of the Ugaritic tablets unearthed by a French expedition on the North Syrian coast since 1929. They date from between 1400 and 1200 B.C.E. and are written in a North-West Semitic language close to Hebrew.

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