

The supposition that they were Hebrews does not imply that they were Hebrews returning from Egypt, but that they belonged to a Hebrew stock which had remained behind when Israel and his sons, whose descendants afterward took the name of children of Israel, went into Egypt. From a number of different sides the question has lately been raised whether the migration into Egypt did not leave behind a considerable part of the Hebrew race. The term "Hebrew" seems to have a different use from the more common term "children of Israel." The latter was the people's own designation of themselves, in the narrower sense of those who drew their descent from Israel, and came out of Egypt. The other appears to have its origin in the Terahite and Abrahamic migration from Babylonia, and before it became limited to the children of Israel may have included other allied clans which did not go down into Egypt. The supposed discovery of the names of Joseph-el and Jacob-el as Palestinian localities before the Exodus has also served to raise the question as to Hebrews who may have remained in Palestine during the oppression in Egypt.

We may with some confidence draw more than one important conclusion from the fact that the correspondence between Palestine and Egypt was, about the year 1400 B.C., written in the Babylonian script and language. One is that writing was introduced into the Phœnician and Palestinian region by the Babylonian conquerors, who, perhaps, long before the time of Hammurabi (if Hammurabi is the Amraphel of the Elamite confederacy which overran Palestine in the time of Abram) extended their conquests along the coasts of the Mediterranean and even invaded Egypt. The language and writing of Egypt were not natural to Palestine, which spoke a Shemitic tongue like the Assyrian. During this early period, before the time of Thothmes, the Phœnician coast was more vulnerable from the east or north than from the south. So we find that in each of the principal towns along the coast and in the interior there was a scribe familiar with the Babylonian or Assyrian language, although speaking it with dialectic variations, and compelled to use that language because it was the only one, except the Egyptian, reduced as yet to writing.

This implies another important conclusion, that the Phœnician character had not yet come into use in the century before the Exodus; otherwise it is incredible that the native governors under the Egyptian kings would not have made use of their own language and script. The earliest known Phœnician inscriptions are five or six hundred years later than the time of these tablets; but indications drawn from the shape of the letters would show that the Phœnician characters had their origin in a form of the hieratic Egyptian script of a period somewhat earlier than Moses. Of this we cannot be certain, however; but the discovery of these tablets, written in Palestine and Phœnicia, and now one of them found in Palestine itself, and dated about 1400 B.C., gives us a date after which the Phœnician writing must have come into general use.

The discovery made at Tel-el-Hesi by our countryman, Mr. Bliss,