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Amorites and Canaanites (Schweich Lectures on Biblical Archaeology)

Kathleen Mary Kenyon

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From the Biblical record it is clear that the principal occupants of Palestine at the time of the advent of the Israelites were the Amorites and the Canaanites. Who were these two peoples? Excavations have shown that towards the end of the third millennium nomadic groups disrupted the urban civilization of the Early Bronze Age in Palestine. Delivered in 1963, these lectures describe these groups and show that they can be linked with the Amurru of Syria. They are thus the ancestors of the Biblical Amorites. About 1900 B.C. these were succeeded by another group, likewise derived from Syria, but from the coastal region, bringing with them an urban culture which seems to have evolved in the neighbourhood of Byblos. It is equated with that of the Canaanite towns of the Syro-Palestinian coast. The Israelites entering Palestine had little material culture of their own. They settled amongst their Amorite and Canaanite predecessors and adopted their way of life. The light thrown by archaeology upon this way of life is thus very relevant to Biblical studies. Houses and tombs, especially at Jericho, have provided much evidence, and have shown that there was no real cultural break, at least until the twelfth century B.C. A study of the systems of fortification moreover, shows that a foreign ruling aristocracy, probably the Hyksos, could be absorbed without altering the basic culture. This was the setting in Palestine at the time of the entry of the Israelites.

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