



William F. Albright, 1891-1971

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McCORMICK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

WHEN WILLIAM FOXWELL ALBRIGHT was called upon to state succinctly what his profession was, in the questionnaire for *Who's Who*, he chose the single word "orientalist." When the incorporators of the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research met in March, 1970, to select their corporate title, the adjective "archaeological" was chosen with a view to Albright's own understanding of the term, as anything having to do with the past of the entire region within which the Institute resided. In similar fashion, Professor Albright expanded to the bursting point such descriptions as "biblical scholar," "philologist," "Palestinologist," and such pigeon-holing tags as "conservative" and "liberal." One recalls with humor and appreciation the copy of True Comics passed around a classroom at Johns Hopkins just before "the Old Man" began his lecture, which exuberantly called him "the world's outstanding authority on old things." His association with the American Philosophical Society, and his election to the National Academy of Sciences (in the Anthropology section!) are simply further indications of the breadth within which he sought to operate. But the breadth was not at the expense of meticulous attention to detail, of assiduous assembly of data, nor of careful recognition of the provisional nature of his conclusions. If it is becoming to a scholar to state plainly when he has been wrong and to move ahead to newly won positions based on the latest finds, no scholar of this generation has surpassed Dr. Albright in this virtue.

On September 19, 1971, two months after a massive stroke had stalled his still facile, alert mind, and just under four months after his eightieth birthday, Dr. Albright died in Baltimore, Maryland. The two points of his scholarly residence had been the Johns Hopkins University and the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem. Born in Chile to Methodist missionary parents, he had received higher education at Upper Iowa University (A. B., 1912) and then his PhD under Haupt at Johns Hopkins in 1916. By 1919, he was Thayer Fellow at the ASOR in

Jerusalem, a year later its acting director, and from 1921 to 1929 and from 1933 to 1936 its resident director. Within the gap in that spread of years, he returned to Johns Hopkins, and then in the second segment held joint appointments in Baltimore and Jerusalem.

Some indication of Dr. Albright's scholarly progression can be gained by looking at his relationship to the American Oriental Society. Many of his students and colleagues remember his wistful claim that only his inherently poor eyesight kept him from becoming an assyriologist—he simply could not spend all of his energy discerning cuneiform signs; nevertheless, his first written work and his doctoral dissertation concentrated in this field, and no fewer than six of his first nine bibliographical entries (the final count exceeds a thousand) were assyriological pieces appearing in *JAOS* between 1915 and 1918. Some forty items, including ever-valuable book reviews, graced volumes 35 to 76 of the *Journal*. The subject matter of these contributions ranged more broadly after his career in Jerusalem began, including attention to Egypto-Semitic etymologies, evidence for Northwest Semitic personal names in Egyptian sources, and an exceedingly important study of the tenth century Byblian Phoenician inscriptions. In 1935-36 he was President of the Society, as he concluded his long period of semi-residence in Jerusalem. In the meantime, new journals were being launched, almost always with articles by Dr. Albright in their inaugural issues. He was a founder of the Palestine Oriental Society, and used the pages of its journal for extended reports on topographic surveys and studies of ethnographic implications. The *BASOR*, an infant when he first went to Palestine, became later on quite literally an extension of his scholarly personality; he became its editor in 1931 and continued in this capacity for thirty-eight years. The fledgling *Biblical Archaeologist* was gently baptized by Professor Albright thirty-five years ago with a delightful article about the not-so-delightful biblical cherubs. The *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* counted him

among its first contributors as it replaced the *AJS* in 1941.

Professor Albright's books were a discernibly separate part of his scholarly production. Even his excavation reports, but more obviously his outstanding *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, his Ayer lectures volume *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, and his latest full-scale book *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, were striking and provocative synthetic works, in which the efforts of a profound philosophical and historical acumen reached fruition. Many a specific point, originally lined out in a technical article or adumbrated in a ten-line footnote to an article on an ancillary subject, here received its setting and elucidation; but, then, these volumes provided their own new set of hints and probings yet to be followed up. There was annoyance abroad, on occasion, at the alleged temerity with which Dr. Albright would venture into adjacent precincts not so minutely known to him, but such annoyance could never afford to ignore the myriad new insights which encounter with his mind provided. In this regard, his 1964 volume *History, Archaeology and Christian Humanism* is typical. As originally conceived, this was to be the first volume of an extensive publication of *Kleine Schriften*, but Dr. Albright, never one to stand still, proceeded to write virtually the entire volume on fresh subjects, and the rest of the plans for republication of now increasingly inaccessible articles never materialized. Perhaps the plan will be revived as a memorial, but at least the scholarly world has at its disposal complete Albright bibliographies in two *Festschriften*, up to 1961 in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* and up to 1968 in *Eretz Israel*, Vol. 9 (1969). The list will be brought to conclusion in the near future, after a number of unpublished articles, completed or nearly completed in the first half of 1971, appear posthumously. A third *Festschrift*, edited by Hans Goedicke and titled *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright*, was presented on his eightieth birthday, May 24, 1971.

Lest this appreciation become too long, let me point in conclusion to two related personal facets of Dr. Albright's life and work. As he himself points out, in his contribution to the 1948 volume *American Spiritual Biographies*, his career was governed by what D. Noel Freedman in a fine memorial piece in *BASOR*, No. 205, calls the "classic psychological principle of compensation."

Of poor and "minority" origin (a Protestant in a Catholic country), and handicapped physically as well, he never lost sight of the person in need within his general purview. A struggling Hopkins degree candidate, cowed by the awesome learning of his teacher, would find a supportive human being in that teacher—perhaps a bit clumsy in his expression of support but no less helpful because of that. For the Jews in Germany in the thirties and the War, there was not only a strong general sympathy, but in instances many of which we shall never know about, specific help and encouragement. In the 1948 autobiography, he focused upon what he discerned as a pervasive problem of racism in post-war Europe and America, a prophetic attack which has proved all-too discerning.

And then there is the story of his encounter with Roman Catholicism. His wife, Ruth Norton Albright, became a convert to Catholicism during the early years of their marriage, and one of his four sons a Catholic Brother who is a fine mathematician. From a childhood of conflict with Catholicism as it manifested itself in Chile, he conducted a teaching career into contact with which the blossoming of Catholic biblical and near eastern scholarship brought men like William L. Moran, Mitchell J. Dahood, Raymond E. Brown, Roger T. O'Callaghan, Richard Caplice and others, to study at Hopkins with a host of colleagues—mostly Protestant, never enough Jews—who together have added measures of lustre to their mentor's larger fame.

Orientalist, archaeologist, biblical scholar, philologist and linguist, philosopher of history; honored by countless degrees and awards from academic institutions in America and abroad which are Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, secular; educator of an entire school of American scholarly endeavor and tutor to the entirety of Israeli archaeological scholarship (in 1969, his last visit to the Near East, he became a "Notable of Jerusalem"): Has there been any scholar in any field in this century who has surpassed Dr. Albright in combining control of data, daring, breadth, penetration and a sense of the expanding limits of his field of study? A coming generation of scholarship which for whatever reason may well paralyze itself with wary examination of mini-issues of proper method instead of pioneering new and appropriate methods, or with increasing narrowness of perspective, will have failed its indebtedness to such giants in the earth as William Foxwell Albright.