

## NELSON GLUECK (1900–1971): an appreciation

As one who has taken the results of Nelson Glueck's pioneer work as a starting point for her own, I learnt with regret of his death early in 1971. As my admiration for his achievements is considerable, despite some criticisms of his methods and conclusions, an opportunity to assess both the strengths and weaknesses of his work is welcome.

Glueck's work had several main facets. His early studies in Biblical exegesis at Cincinnati led to a Ph.D. from the University of Jena in 1928. This work, *Das Wort hesed im alttestamentlichen Sprachgebrauche . . .*, was published in German in 1927, but only recently in English (1967). This early background, though never subsequently returned to in major scholarly works, formed in many ways the basis of all his subsequent activities.

It was fresh from Germany that Glueck arrived in Palestine in 1928 and came under the influence and direction of W. F. Albright. At this stage, Albright's influence must have been paramount, revolving as it did then around American School field-trips through Syria and Palestine, with considerable emphasis on topographical identification, the excavations at Tell Beit Mirsim and the first proper recognition in Palestine of the varied uses of ceramic typology. The latter became one of the most useful tools employed by Glueck in his subsequent identification of dates of occupation in Transjordan and the Negeb, and it seems clear that these few years might be described as the most significant for the pattern of his later life.

Perhaps Glueck's best known work is his survey in these two areas, that for Transjordan was published in the *Annals of the American Schools* between 1934 and 1951, and preliminary accounts of the work in the Negeb, between the years 1952 and 1963, appeared in the *Bulletin*. These surveys also provided the material for his more popular books, *The Other Side of the Jordan* (1940), *The River Jordan* (1946) and *Rivers in the Desert* (1959). The journeys on which he undertook the survey work were beset by limitations of time, financial and physical resources and political disturbances, but nevertheless Glueck added knowledge of over 1000 sites to our list for Transjordan alone, as well as hundreds in the Negeb. The benefits of this work include knowledge of settlement patterns which still exceeds the amount known for Palestine, where he looked at only very few areas. The brief written descriptions of a number of sites already destroyed or which perhaps will be destroyed before further work can be done, and the preservation of names and facts which tend to be lost under conditions such as those presently facing the countries of the Near East are in themselves invaluable contributions. The neat collections of pottery carefully preserved from these expeditions remain an important group for study. He also produced a number of stimulating ideas in his conclusions, which have been the subject of lively debate. Even if his conclusions cannot be accepted *in toto*, it does not affect the importance of the evidence.

As a balance to these very considerable contributions, various criticisms can be made. It has been claimed that Glueck published only those sherds familiar to him from Palestinian typology,<sup>1</sup> thus for Transjordan disguising the unknown or different elements which are essential to our proper understanding and assessment of this region, especially perhaps in the Late Bronze–Early Iron Age.

<sup>1</sup> H. J. Franken and W. J. A. Power: "Review of Glueck's *Explorations in Eastern Palestine* in the light of recent evidence" *Vetus Testamentum* XXI (1971), 119–23.

To some extent this is a valid claim, magnified by a method of publication in which sherds are usually attributed definitely to particular periods though frequently Glueck cannot have had more than intuitive knowledge on which to base the identification. For example, Early Bronze–Middle Bronze sherds are occasionally identified as Middle Bronze, and generally Glueck's classification of Middle Bronze Age pottery in Transjordan must be treated with considerable caution. This matter is particularly difficult to sort out, as the publication of the sherds lacked any attempt at typological or chronological arrangement.

The form of publication between Vols. I and IV of *Explorations in Eastern Palestine* showed considerable progress as experience was gained in both method and knowledge, and the fourth volume is a more useful tool than the first, though there are some indications of rather hasty treatment among the tremendous number of sites dealt with. Glueck considered that nearly all sites of any importance in Transjordan had been discovered in the course of his survey; that it was not quite so thorough is suggested by the work of S. Mittmann north of the Zerqa and my own in the south-east Jordan Valley region, as in both cases it is clear that the number of sites for the area can easily be doubled. There was also a tendency to survey along the more accessible lines of rivers and modern routes, which may therefore occasionally offer a false impression of ancient settlement patterns.

That a certain amount of the topographical work is subjective in approach is indicated by descriptions of sites where defensive walls or other features are attributed to one particular phase, when the pottery picked up showed that the site was occupied during several; and by the positive identification of features which subsequent investigation has shown to be incorrect. For example, the defensive walls at Tawilan of which Glueck provides a sketch plan, proved to be simply surface lines of field stones when excavated by Mrs. C-M. Bennett. This is of course a pitfall of survey as opposed to excavation techniques and points to the conclusion that Glueck pursued his evidence further than it could legitimately take him. Much of the purpose of Glueck's work was aimed at illuminating Biblical archaeology, at assessing the historical traditions in terms of topographical background. This led him for example, to the identification of the Biblical period of Abraham with the hundreds of Early Bronze–Middle Bronze sites he discovered. His years of survey work before World War II were marked by great co-operation between Glueck and officials of the government of the Hashemite Kingdom of the Jordan, which was somewhat shadowed by later political activity.

Oddly, considering the number of sites which he discovered, the two sites Glueck actually dug were found by others. Khirbet et-Tannur was reported through the Transjordan Police and Peake Pasha, and Tell el-Kheleifeh was discovered by Fritz Frank. Glueck's publication of et-Tannur, delayed by nearly thirty years, is not a model for an excavation report, but makes accessible a vast amount of very important material as well as giving a wide ranging summary of the Nabataeans by a man who had travelled through much of their territories. It also provides a stimulating and important assessment of the art and religion of the Nabataeans in the wider context of the Classical World. Again, though not all his conclusions are acceptable, and the excavation added little to our knowledge of the pottery of the period, these things do not belie the importance of the work and the undoubtedly timely rescue of some very important sculpture. The excavations at Kheleifeh from 1935 to 1940 remain

unpublished except for preliminary reports, and have been the subject of considerable debate. Frank's original identification of the site as the Solomonic port city of Ezion-Geber, Glueck's announcement of the finding of a large-scale smelting works on the site and subsequent reassessment as a Solomonic fort await the final analysis. Glueck also published numerous articles on the mining of copper ores in the Arabah which form an important basis for future work.

Much of the last twenty years of his life were devoted to teaching and administration as head of Hebrew Union College, and his influence in the field of Jewish and Biblical studies was great. This side of his character and work is also important in assessing his contribution to biblical archaeology—that of a man of wide experience and energy, great biblical and topographical knowledge, who made what he had to offer available to many people rather than restricting his information to the narrower field of scholars.

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