

George Edayadiyil, CMI, *Exodus Event: Its Historical Kernel. A Study of the Origin of the Biblical People and the Egyptian Exodus. Vol. 1. From Exodus and Beyond.* Bangalore: ATC, 2007, pages xvii + 156. ISBN 81-7086-429-1.

Dr George Edayadiyil's book explores the historical kernel of Exodus in the light of the extant biblical and extra biblical texts and archaeological material. Exodus is an issue on which no one expects consensus due to the mysterious archetypal nature of its narrative that combines history, social memory, faith, cult, tradition and theology. Fr. Edayadiyil's is a humble but profound book that stands distinct for the rare sense of objective balance about a strongly debated issue, the historical kernel of the Pentateuchal text of the Exodus in the Old Testament. There is a commendable body of literature on it in various languages. The Exodus movement as described in the Pentateuch begins with liberation struggles in Egypt (Exodus 1-14), the land of slavery, and further it speaks of the first phase of the formative struggle of the Jewish community (Exodus 16 to Deuteronomy 40). Charged with the energy of liberation, the book helps us experience a massive current of energy. In different chapters the book recounts the antecedents of the Exodus Event, the chronology of the Egyptian and Canaanite contexts, the nature and identity of the supposed proto-Israelite groups in Egypt and Canaan, the historical probability of the Event against the background of the various settlement theories and the geographical location. The book very briefly recapitulates the ancient Near Eastern history (related to the Exodus narratives of the Bible) that is divided into the archaeological periods of the Early Bronze Age (3100-2000), Middle Bronze Age (2000-1550), Late Bronze Age (1550-1200 BCE) and Iron Age (1200-586 BCE). The author argues that the existence of slavery and persecution in Egypt, as described in the first chapter of the book of Exodus is borne out by history.

The historical basis of the Exodus, the main concern of the book, has been variously argued by scholars from divergent perspectives, which according to the author, range between the pan-historical and pan-mythical. The central argument of the author is that the Biblical

story of the Exodus is faith history and not a chronicle. As there are no extra-biblical parallels to establish the veracity of the Biblical narratives, the author seeks the probabilities of an Israelite presence in Egypt in the light of the available archaeological and extra-biblical documents. Another argument relates to the identification of the group of people called Israelites in Canaan of the late 13th century BCE as evidenced by the reference to the Israelites' presence in the Merneptah Stele. The author thinks that they resemble the *Habiru*/*'Apiru*/*SA.GAZ* of the Near Eastern texts. Many scholars believe that an earlier *'Apiru* settlement involving some part of the tribes was later incorporated into the Israelite confederacy. The various settlement traditions could not disprove the presence of the proto-Israelites in the late 13th century BCE. The author rightly remarks that the impact of the Exodus on the settlements was never in the magnitude described in the Biblical narratives. At the same time, he argues for the plausibility of the Exodus Event in the light of certain extra-biblical references. He also argues that the lack of evidence for the Biblical conquest model does not in any way disprove the Egyptian sojourn and the Exodus Event. His strong presumption is that the nature of settlement does not prove or disprove the possibility of the Exodus. The author underlines the fact that there was a great movement of people across Canaan at the time of the Exodus, and that there were Israelites among them. He rightly presumes that the political chaos of Canaan would have helped the emergence of the Hebrew people.

The author seems to follow the views of the Humanists who argue that the Exodus Event could not have taken place earlier than the reign of Ramesses II (c. 1290-1224 BCE). The terminal date of the Exodus is established by them on the basis of the mention of the defeat of Israel in the land of Canaan as seen on Pharaoh Merneptah's Victory Stele (c. 1209 BCE). However, Egyptologists and archaeologists ascribe the Event to a few centuries anterior to this. In fact, there are three periods posited for the Exodus. They are 1540, 1446 and 1250 BCE. Archaeological evidence helps us identify the

Exodus with the expulsion of the Hyksos from Egypt around 1570-50 BC. The discovery of the Merneptah Stele that mentions Israel now forces us to admit that Israel was already in Canaan at the time of Merneptah. The expulsion of the Hyksos seems to match well with the story of the Exodus. Several scholars like Reford, Menetho and others identify the Jews with the Hyksos, and the Exodus with the expulsion of the Hyksos from Egypt by Ahmose who founded the 18th dynasty (1570-50 BC) for there was no other recorded mass exit from Egypt in the past. All Hyksos were not pro-Israelites as is evident from the Pentateuchal allusion to those expelled from Egypt as a 'mixed multitude.' The Egyptians as well as the Hyksos saw this as a great event: the former as a great military victory and the latter as a great emancipative victory.

Archaeologists show lack of evidence of occupation in Sinai during the Late Bronze Age probably due to the expulsion of the Hyksos that accompanied the scorched earth operation of Ahmose's march to Sharuhén (Tell Ajjul ?), and suppression of the region for three years. The presence of Hyksos at Tell ed Daba (Avaris ?) is archaeologically attested to a certain extent. We know from contemporary Egyptian records that they were defeated and forced to recede to Canaan. The Middle Bronze Age predatory destructions seem to fit well with the conquest of Canaan by Joshua. During Amenhotep II's reign (1453-1419 BC) about 3600 Apirus and 15200 settlers of Shasu were taken as captives from Canaan, some of whom were obviously Hebrews. There is a strong presumption that 'Apiru' is 'Hapiru' and that the word 'Hebrew' derives from the word 'Hapiru'. Further, topographical lists of Canaan attest the Hebrew presence in Canaan during the period. The land acquired the name 'Israel' when the twelve 'Hapiru' tribes formed a confederacy in the age of Merneptah.

As the author rightly maintains, the archaeological data reveals that the Exodus as portrayed in the Pentateuchal narratives never happened. Moses, Aaron, Phineas, Joshua, the King of Arad and Sihon the Amorite, and their actions as portrayed in the Bible seldom have archaeological corroboration, for the Biblical narration is a later

version of an archaic oral tradition told in mythical embellishments. The author agrees with the widely accepted view among historians and archaeologists that there is a time lag of centuries between the historical kernel and its embellished version in the Pentateuch. Archaeologists have pointed out that several cities mentioned in the Pentateuch were non-existent. If Moses had written the Pentateuch in either 1540, 1446, or 1250 BCE he would not have included accounts of non-existent cities. Obviously the text received the written format in post-exilic times, probably between 490-458 BCE. Motifs of the Pre-exilic prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Hosea, which suggest some familiarity of an Exodus from Egypt, would have us believe that some of the traditions in the Pentateuchal narrative are Pre-exilic.

Dr. Edayadiyil's book, seeking to present what is truly historical about the Pentateuchal narration of the Exodus Event, abstains from the technical niceties of controversies about the identification, dating and location of the Event, which often tend to leave the reader in utter confusion. It is an epistemological predicament that the author is forced to confront. He engages in a creative encounter with the predicament and marvellously succeeds in the most difficult task of ferreting out a reasonably balanced conclusion and rendering the historicity of the Event plausible to the non-specialist reader in logical terms and scholarly ways. It is an eminently readable work.

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