

HIGHLIGHTS OF ARCHAEOLOGY IN BIBLE LANDS

by

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

TREASURES FROM SYRIA

Assyrian inscription throwing light on a New Testament Word. A monument has been discovered at *Kefr-Hauar*, Syria, which was erected in the imperial period of Roman history by one who terms himself “a slave of the Syrian goddess.” He tells in the inscription on this monument of making journeys wherein he begged for the goddess, and he boasted that each image brought seventy bags. The word he used for “bags” is the same word in the Greek that was used by Matthew in 10:9, 10: **“Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey.”** Thus the word scrip or wallet is the same word as used in the Syrian inscription to mean a “beggar’s collecting bag.” There was to be no begging by the disciples on their missionary journey. 1

The Chalice of Antioch. In 1910 some Arab well diggers discovered at Antioch several silver objects, including a great chalice with twelve figures thereon, a plain chalice, three book covers, and an ornamental cross. The Arabs divided these treasures among themselves, but the Kouchakji Brothers, a firm of Paris and New York, succeeded in getting possession of these objects, removing the oxidation from the large chalice at Paris, and then sent it to New York where one of the brothers and his nephew have it in their care.

Dr. Gustavus A. Eisen spent nine years in making a careful study of the cup, and the conclusions of his study were published in a two-volume work with many illustrations.

The chalice is in two portions, an inner cup made from a plain silver sheet, and an outer ornamental receptacle for the cup. Two figures of the same person appear on opposite sides of the receptacle: the one pictures a youth with a roll in hand, and the other shows him as a mature person. Grouped around each of these figures are to be seen five figures looking toward the one person who is given prominence.

Dr. Eisen came to the conclusion that the person pictured twice is none other than the Christ, seen as a youth and as the world’s Saviour. As Saviour His right hand touches a plate where there are two fish and five loaves of bread, and beside Him stands a lamb, and above and beyond Him a dove is seen. Beneath His feet a Roman eagle is seen which was the symbol of the empire.

Throughout the decoration is intertwined a grapevine. He suggests that the four figures about the youthful Christ are the four writers of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and the fifth one, he says, was James the brother of John. The four about the mature Christ he suggests to be Peter, Paul, James, and Jude, while the fifth one, corresponding to James on the other side, he believed to be Andrew.

Dr. Eisen believes the carved work to have been done in the latter part of the first century, just before A.D. 70. According to this view, the inner cup was the Holy Grail, or the cup Jesus used at the Last Supper, and that the outer container was made to keep this treasure in it.

The artistic work on this chalice is evidently Greek in character and of a high type. The face of Christ gives appearance of being divine, and there is real character portrayed in the likenesses of the apostles. But there is divergent opinion as to the date of this old treasure. Some scholars are of the opinion that the dates A.D. 120-140 would be more likely to be the period in which this work of art was consummated. Others suggest it may have been as late as A.D. 500. An early date, but not in the first century, is more probable for this splendid work of Christian art. 2

Other finds at Antioch. In 1932 excavations were begun at Antioch by the Princeton University and the Musees Nationaux de France. Among the principal finds were hundreds of floor mosaics. The dates for these run from A.D. 100 to the sixth century.

These discoveries supply an unequalled opportunity for the study of this sort of Graeco-Roman art. The circus of Antioch was excavated. It is believed to have been built in the first century B.C. It was attracting crowds in the days when Paul and Barnabas preached in the city. And Chrysostom (A.D. 347-407) charged certain professing Christian men with the sin of loving the circus. 3

1. Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, pp. 108-110.

2. George A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible*, ed. of 1937, pp. 564-570; Camden M. Cobern, *The New Archeological Discoveries and their Bearing upon the New Testament*, pp. 550-552; Bruce M. Metzger, "Antioch-on-the-Orontes," *The Biblical Archaeologist*, XI, No. 4, Dec. 1948, pp. 86, 87.

3. Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, pp. 258-260; Cobern, *op. cit.*, pp. 549, 550.

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