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A non-traditional traditionalist: Rev. A. H. Sayce and his intellectual approach to biblical authenticity and biblical history in late-Victorian Britain

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A NON-TRADITIONAL TRADITIONALIST:
REV. A. H. SAYCE AND HIS INTELLECTUAL APPROACH TO BIBLICAL
AUTHENTICITY AND BIBLICAL HISTORY IN LATE-VICTORIAN BRITAIN

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
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Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by
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B.A., Louisiana Tech University, 1999
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For my father,
the late Roosevelt Belton
who encouraged me to dream big

and for my mother,
Velma Belton
for being my cheerleader

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between science and religion was a dominant topic in late-Victorian Britain. This is exemplified in the debate over biblical authenticity and bible history. After 1860 higher criticism, the textual examination of the biblical texts became a prominent issue of discussion in British society. Higher critics brought into question the authorship and authenticity of the Pentateuch, particularly that of *Genesis*. One significant contributor to this debate was Oxford educator and Assyriologist Rev. Archibald Henry Sayce, who firmly believed that philology, history and, particularly, archeology provided the evidence necessary to validate the accuracy of biblical texts. Supporters of orthodoxy embraced Sayce's argument, believing he had successfully countered the arguments of the higher critics and exonerated biblical authenticity. His combination of liberal theology and modern philology made him the ideal advocate for the truth of the bible, which he defended in a new, 'scientific' way rather than resorting to traditional theological arguments.

This dissertation examines Sayce's intellectual approach to biblical history and emphasizes his significant contributions to the debates over Old Testament criticism. Even though Sayce embraced the use of archeology, history and philology in proving biblical authenticity, he acknowledged similarities between Babylonian texts and the *Book of Genesis*. The recognition of these similarities was shaped by his extensive study of ancient history and philology.

Sayce's use of liberal, scientific methods to defend orthodoxy makes his contributions to late-Victorian religious thought interesting and complex. His career and religious interpretations not only reflect Britain's interest and focus on religion but also British society's anxiety over secularization and its impact on religious life. Contemporary works which deal with religion in

Britain, and more specifically higher criticism, either omit Sayce or underemphasize his contributions. This has contributed to the lack of information on Sayce. This dissertation relies on newly discovered documents, used here for the first time, to provide insight and perspective into Sayce's intellectual development from religious liberalism (the acceptance and acknowledgment of the higher critical) during the 1860s to firmly defending orthodoxy (harshly criticizing higher critics) after 1895.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Take away my last, and plural I appear;
Take away my first, and singular I become;
Take away my first and last, and, strong to say,
That all is nothing remains something is left.
What is my first? A sounding sea:
What is my last? A plowing river:
Thro' whose depths I calmly, glide along,
Parent of sweetest sound, myself for ever mute.
I found out the Answer to be God.¹

Rev. Archibald Henry Sayce

During the late Victorian period, biblical interpretations were influenced by developments in science, industrialization, urbanization and the changing political landscape. The rise to power and prominence of liberalism, economic, political and cultural, was of especial importance. But biblical exegetes, and Christian believers, did not necessarily or universally reject liberalism; on the contrary, many learned to adopt their faith to it. One version of liberal scientific thought, Darwinian evolutionism, was accepted by some theologians and the liberal-enlightened critique of miracles was incorporated into religious thought. Many Victorians believed that evolution and Christian views could co-exist. Hugh McLeod writes in his *Religion and Society in England, 1850-1914* that “many Christians of the time seem to have assimilated the arguments of the biblical scholars or the scientists relatively painlessly, and to have restated their faith in terms which they thought consistent with the new knowledge.”² For some the marriage of religion and science resulted in more liberal attitudes toward faith.

¹ Archibald Henry Sayce, Diary for 1864, entry 26 November 1864, Sayce Papers, Queens College Library, Oxford University, England, United Kingdom. It is not known whether this entry was originated by Sayce or lifted from another source. But whether it was composed by Sayce or not, the fact that it was found in his personal diary conveys the deep meaning the quotation held for Sayce. It signaled an intense devotion for God and his strong belief that God provided the answers to life's questions.

² Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850-1914* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 5.

This progressive view of religion coincided with political change. In addition to enfranchisement and increased feminist activities, religious groups were given more of a political voice. In 1829 the Catholic Church received emancipation through the Catholic Relief Act. By 1858 Jews were admitted into Parliament and by 1886 atheist Charles Bradlaugh was admitted to Parliament. These changes reflected the growing political acceptance of religions other than Anglican, and the gradual inability of the Church of England to call itself the national church.³ Even though biblical liberalism was becoming acceptable, there was still the worry that this movement led to a fully secular society, one that omitted the role of the bible. These religious and social changes contributed to the anxiety toward changing biblical thought.

Even though British liberals seemed content to combine scientific knowledge with religious thought, there was one area which sparked controversy and questioned the limits of science. By 1860 the so called 'higher criticism,' the literary examination of the bible, developed most extensively in Germany, became a prominent topic in British religious and intellectual life. It brought into question the authenticity of biblical accounts, which orthodox Christians believed led to the questioning of faith. The post 1860s anxiety concerning higher criticism was inspired by the radical biblical liberalism of intellectuals like the Young Hegelian David Friedrich Strauss.

Prior to the controversy over higher criticism in Britain, rational philosophers had underlined inconsistencies in the scriptures and scientific research in the natural sciences had challenged some of the accounts in the bible. In the seventeenth century Bishop James Ussher had determined the date for the creation to be precisely 23 October 4004 BC. Geological research, however, pointed to a much older Earth. Jean André Deluc (1727-1817) noted that the

³ Frances Knight, *The Nineteenth Century Church and the English Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 201.

days of the creation could not have been in increments of 24 hours because the sun and stars were not created until the fourth day. To counter this claim, some British researchers like John Kidd and Joseph Townsend suggested that the creation should be understood in geological terms, according to which days were the equivalent to geological ages. This interpretation was also accepted by German Franz Delitzsch, the father of German Assyriologist Freidrich Delitzsch, who labeled it the ‘day-age’ theory.⁴ But for many others, the implausibilities of events such as the parting of the Red Sea, or the raising of Lazarus made the bible suspect as an historical narrative. Already by the early nineteenth century, theologians (especially in Protestant lands) were hard pressed to explain to their flocks exactly what of the scriptures—and especially the longer more detailed narratives of the Old Testament—they were to believe.

During the mid century, higher criticism received a mixed response from scholars. In 1845 Frenchman Ernest Renan claimed that the study of biblical history destroyed his faith. He was headed to the priesthood but study of Oriental languages and history of Christianity led him to leave the Catholic Church. Renan reasoned that “all truth was scientific;” and in seeking the ‘truth,’ biblical scholars looked to archeology to expound on the history of the bible.⁵

Knowledge of the ancient period was enhanced by archeological discoveries. Archeologists located writings on monuments which implied that Babylonians had libraries.⁶ In the 1840s Paul-Émile Botta and A. H. Layard uncovered hundreds of written tablets which made up the Library of Nineveh. Included among the finds was the *Enuma Elish*, a Babylonian account of the creation, which was discovered in 1849. Prior to this discovery little was known

⁴ Nicolaas A. Rupke, “Christianity and the Sciences,” *The Cambridge History of Christianity: World Christianities c. 1815-1914*, edited by Sheridan Gilley and Brian Stanley, vol. 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 167.

⁵ Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century: The Gifford Lectures in the University of Edinburgh for 1973-4* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 215-217.

⁶ Archibald Henry Sayce, *Higher Criticism and the Verdict of Monuments* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1894), 19.

about the ancient world; the British Museum only had enough Assyrian and Babylonian antiquities to fit in a small case. Between 1844 and 1859 Lobegott Friederich Konstantin Tischendorf, a German biblical scholar and professor at Leipzig, discovered the Codex Sinaiticus. Tischendorf's valuable discovery was one of the oldest biblical manuscripts known and became very important to textual criticism of the bible. It consisted of about 390 sheets and was believed to have been written around 350 AD.

Even though science had contributed to biblical knowledge, higher criticism was surrounded by religious controversy in Britain. Higher criticism did not take center stage in Britain until 1860 with the publication of *Essays and Reviews*, which was followed by John William Colenso's *The Pentateuch Examined*. In addition to Colenso, Rowland Williams, Henry Bristow Wilson, and Benjamin Jowett all supported biblical criticism. Like the later scholar of the 1890s Samuel R. Driver, they believed that higher criticism enhanced biblical knowledge through healthy inquiry. Driver and other supporters of higher criticism believed that biblical inquiry strengthened the public's knowledge of biblical history.

Not all biblical scholars viewed higher criticism as virtuous and a useful addition to biblical history. Higher criticism caused waves in Protestant and Catholic churches due to the fact that some theologians deemed it a threat to religious orthodoxy. The response to higher criticism in Britain was evident in the 1860s beginning with the controversial reception of *Essays and Reviews* (1860). Because the work was considered to advocate German higher criticism, three of its contributors (Williams, Wilson and Jowett) were charged with heresy. Also in 1862 Colenso was at the center of controversy due to the publication of his *The Pentateuch Examined*, which questioned the historical accuracy of Old Testament accounts.

Beginning with the publication of *Essays and Reviews* by seven Anglican churchmen in 1860, higher criticism became a dominant issue in Britain. Higher criticism forced British Christians to rethink the whole question of biblical authority. In 1872 interest in archeology and its relationship to the bible was further fueled by George Smith's decipherment of cuneiform texts discovered in earlier excavations at Nineveh, some of which were later compiled as the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. One of Smith's most important finds was an account of a deluge similar to that found in *Genesis*. This discovery caused many biblical critics to doubt the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and question the uniqueness and divine inspiration of the Old Testament. For some British evangelicals such as Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) and Joseph Parker (1830-1902) the whole theological approach to faith rested on the inerrancy of the bible. A renowned evangelical preacher from London, Spurgeon viewed higher criticism as theological heresy. Beginning in the 1880s, Congregationalist minister P. T. Forsyth (1842-1921) dealt with the problems of higher criticism, which he believed could be resolved through the atoning power of Christ. At the same time, some liberal theologians, such as William Robertson Smith, continued to embrace biblical criticism at the risk of being ostracized by the church. W. R. Smith was accused of heresy by the Free Church of Scotland after he published *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church* in 1881. He was convinced that criticism was an extension of the Reformation and an inspiring characteristic of Christianity.⁷ In addition to Protestant and evangelical opposition, Catholics and mid-century Tractarians also expressed reservations about the liberal conclusions drawn by higher critics. In the opinion of many Anglo-Catholics and their Tractarian supporters like John Keble and Edward B. Pusey, critical thought rejected the authority of the Church.

⁷ John Rogerson, "History and the Bible," *The Cambridge History of Christianity: World Christianities c. 1815-1914*, edited by Sheridan Gilley and Brian Stanley, vol. 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 188.

New biblical interpretations freed supporters of orthodoxy to counter critical arguments. They used archeology not to challenge but to prove the accuracy of biblical accounts. In 1883 Edouard Naville argued that he had discovered the Egyptian city Pithom (House of Atum), which is mentioned in *Exodus* 1:11. The city was believed to have been constructed by the Hebrews during their enslavement in Egypt. The city of Ramses, also mentioned in *Exodus* 1:11, was uncovered by Flinders Petrie in 1905-06 at Tel el Retabeh. During the early 1880s Sayce himself became the first to copy and translate the inscriptions in Siloam tunnel, which proved to be the “oldest example of Hebrew writing yet found.” The inscriptions were believed to have been made during the reign of Hezekiah, the Hebrew king mentioned in *2 Chronicles* 32:30.⁸

Defenders of orthodoxy also used new cuneiform findings to make their case. Many critics had questioned the existence of a Hebrew literary tradition and contended that it was improbable that the Pentateuch was written during the time of Moses. The identification of cuneiform accounts similar to those in *Genesis*, however, relayed to researchers that the ancient Orient was very literary. In 1887 the Tel el Amarna tablets were uncovered in Egypt which added more proof that the ancient world was a literary one. The Tel el Amarna tablets were correspondences written in cuneiform. The discovery suggested that cuneiform was more commonly read than scholars had presumed. The valuable finds also suggested that the ancient Hebrews understood cuneiform and were exposed to Babylonian texts, hence the ancient Hebrews may well have had a literary tradition and Moses, therefore, could have written the Pentateuch. The discovery of the Tel el Amarna tablets gave new life to the debate over textual criticism.

Because some viewed textual criticism as a threat to religion and believed it discredited Mosaic authenticity, archeology thus became a scientific tool both to challenge Mosaic

⁸ Sayce, *Reminiscences* (London: MacMillan & Co., 1923), 192.

authenticity and to prove the reliability of the bible. Rev. Archibald Henry Sayce, a tutor and fellow of Queen's College, Oxford University, was an avid supporter of the argument that archeology proved the bible. He believed that the ignorance of critics could be alleviated if only they waited for the results from historical analysis and archeological research. Sayce declared: "No one could even dream that a vast literature was lying under the mounds of Assyria, waiting only for the spade of the excavator."⁹ In the 1860s, Sayce embraced higher criticism and religious liberalism. As the decade progressed, however, Sayce gradually shifted to more conservative views. His religious and intellectual shift resulted from his struggle to reconcile his orthodox beliefs with recent scientific discoveries. In an effort to make science and religion fit, he emphasized the archeological evidence of the bible and asserted that archeology proved the bible. He was so convinced in the authority of archeology that he proclaimed that biblical accounts that had not yet been proven would be exonerated eventually through archeology. Sayce's intellectual approach to orthodoxy acknowledged the virtues of philological work but noted the misunderstandings and untruths created by the omission of archeological evidence. During the late-Victorian period when higher criticism was under heavy fire by supporters of orthodoxy, Sayce's counter argument to higher criticism was welcomed by those of orthodoxy views.

As a young man, Sayce was frequently ill. His time indoors was spent reading and studying languages and learning about ancient cultures. Sayce applied his thirst for knowledge to religion. Professor John Earle introduced the young Sayce to religious liberalism and biblical criticism which won his interest because of its application of rational methods to biblical scholarship. One of the first works which put Sayce on the path of biblical liberalism was Bishop John William Colenso's *The Pentateuch Examined*. Because of his interest in Assyria

⁹ Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 36.

and his desire to explore and prove the arguments presented by John William Colenso, Sayce was inspired to study Assyriology. But, Sayce gradually rejected the religious liberalism that he had embraced during his youth and early years at Oxford in favor of more orthodox views. Interpreting the important new oriental texts now accessible to scholars, Sayce expressed hostile views toward religious liberalism, directing his discontent toward textual criticism. Sayce's training in archeology, philology and theology allowed him to read the new materials and to construct scholarly arguments to counter higher criticism. Publishing many popular books on biblical archeology in which he used his specialized expertise to defend the historical truth of the scriptures, Sayce became the leading advocate for biblical authenticity. As this thesis will argue, Sayce played an important role in British cultural history in using archeological evidence to call into question the results of higher criticism. Sayce, indeed, may have saved the Old Testament for British orthodox supporters—at least for a time.

Sayce was a scholar and Oxford reformer. He was also an Anglican priest, and a dedicated Christian. Even though he attempted to use archeological and philological evidence to validate the bible, he was still influenced by his religious beliefs. Later in his life in particular he was not able to successfully separate his religious beliefs from his research. He could study religion objectively if he were able to see it just as another historical subject, but he could not. As the introductory quotation, taken from Sayce's diary, suggests, he believed the answer to his questions concerning life was God. Even though Sayce believed that the 'science' of archeology was essential in unlocking the mysteries of the bible and shedding light on biblical texts, his understanding of biblical history was still one firmly rooted in his Christian faith.

Like Matthew Arnold who worried that “the masses [were] losing the bible and its religion,” Sayce stressed in his sermons the importance of faith in orthodox teachings.¹⁰ Sayce believed that those who held true to orthodox views would remain faithful to the bible and not be persuaded by the contradictions presented by higher critics. Like his friend and mentor Edward B. Pusey, Sayce believed in the divine inspiration of the bible. But whereas Pusey focused on the spiritual side of the bible and argued that higher criticism would have a damaging effect on the religious beliefs of the British public, up until the mid 1890s, Sayce saw the benefits in higher criticism. Unlike Pusey and other traditionalists, Sayce acknowledged the similarities between *Genesis* and Babylonian texts. The recognition of Babylonian influences on biblical literature reflected his liberal views of religion and his acceptance of science (i.e. philological and archeological evidence) —even when it countered conventional religious beliefs.

However Sayce’s religious views shifted from liberal to more conservative. The discovery of the Tel el Amarna tablets in 1887 resulted in his formulating an argument against higher criticism. Sayce’s attitude toward textual criticism grew intense as the 1890s progressed. In 1895 his criticisms of textual criticism became hostile, reflecting his strong belief that biblical criticism not only discredited the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch but ultimately threatened Christianity. Rev. Sayce’s arguments in favor of the authenticity of *Genesis* became more vociferous during and after the 1890s. Drawing on the experience of David Friedrich Strauss, a German scholar who eventually stopped considering himself a Christian after dissecting the bible, Sayce emphasized the dangers in higher criticism and the harm it did to Christianity. During this period his writings against higher criticism exuded not only support for archeology but also religious zeal.

¹⁰ Michael Wheeler, *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 10.

Sayce revealed his opinions concerning higher criticism in many works. From 1877 to 1883 Sayce wrote for various outlets including the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, *Academy* and religious organizations such as The Religious Tract Society before publishing books concerning research on the Hittites and the relationship between Assyriology and the bible. Prior to 1895 Sayce acknowledged the contributions made by higher critics. He also argued that higher criticism had a place in biblical criticism, shedding valuable light on biblical texts. His definitive work *Higher Criticism and the Verdict of the Monuments* (1893) reflected the merging of German higher criticism and orthodoxy. While noting the virtuous contributions made by textual criticism, Sayce also explored the danger of criticism, which he argued led to the misinterpretation of the bible. After 1895 he vigorously expressed his concern for Christianity. Sayce worried that if the Old Testament was torn apart then there would not be anything for Christianity on which to stand, resulting in the eventual extinction of Christianity. Whereas higher critics believed they were seeking to understand biblical text, Sayce thought critics destroyed the bible and Christianity. He believed: “The destruction of the foundation endanger[ed] the structure which [it] has been built upon it.”¹¹

It is inaccurate to label Sayce as either a higher critic or traditionalist. Likewise, as Mark Elliott writes in his article “Biblical Archaeology and Its Interpretation: The Sayce-Driver Controversy” (2003), it is unwise to describe Sayce as a fundamentalist or a pseudo-scholar. As emphasized in this dissertation, Sayce’s contention was not with higher criticism itself but with the critic. Even though he believed that literary analysis contributed to biblical knowledge, Sayce asserted that critics misrepresented the information gained through textual criticism and that archeology was more reliable in proving the bible. Because Sayce was convinced that

¹¹ Sayce, “The Composition of the Pentateuch,” *The Early History of the Hebrews* (London, 1897; reprint, Kessinger Publishing’s Rare Reprints, 2005), 121.

archeology, along with biblical history, proved the bible, I have chosen to title this dissertation *A Non-Traditional Traditionalist*. Sayce held a steadfast belief in orthodoxy, while at the same time recognizing the Babylonian influences in the bible and using scientific methods to prove biblical authenticity. He believed that higher critics must examine the Old Testament in its totality, which included archeological and historical research. Even though Sayce did fear the damaging effects caused by the conclusions drawn from higher criticism, such as the improbability that Moses wrote the Pentateuch and the insignificance of *Genesis* as an actual history, he strongly believed that biblical history and archeology in conjunction with philology should be used to study the bible. Unlike other traditionalists, Sayce did not rely on theological arguments to defend orthodoxy but instead took a non-conventional approach and insisted upon the virtues of science in proving the bible. He was, in the end, confident that science would verify the history of the bible and further prove its theological claims.

Sayce represents a strain of thought in late Victorian culture which has not been sufficiently studied. He was a man who had an intellectual approach to Christian doctrine. Rev. Sayce also believed that science and Christianity could coexist, reflected in his embrace of science. At present, we know rather little about the world of orthodox belief in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain, and especially little about the ways in which sciences like philology and archeology were integrated into discussions of biblical authenticity. Here, Sayce was an extremely influential figure, both, in intellectual circles and much broader circles of the reading public.

Sayce's academic career reflects Victorian society's interest in the biblical evidence uncovered by archeology, but more importantly it personifies how unsettling higher criticism was for British society. Even though during this period of doubt, late Victorian Britons still

viewed faith and religion as important. Britons continued to attend church and children were sent to Sunday school. Likewise couples continued to get married in church and have their children christened. However, there were exceptions to these religious habits. In 1869 T. H. Huxley started the religious sect of agnosticism, which was slowly gaining followers, among whom were Herbert Spencer and George Eliot. Also the atheistic sect, which was largely made-up of men, slowly increased in size, particularly in the 1870s and 1880s. These slight religious changes were complemented by the moral changes that took place during the 1890s. Writers such as Allen Grant, who advocated a ‘New Hedonism,’ and Havelock Ellis, who promoted a revolution in sexual ideas, may have also contributed to the public’s anxiety about the disappearance of Christianity from the public sphere and sharpened its interest in Sayce’s proclamation that science, in the form of archeology, could, after all, validate the bible.¹²

Studying Sayce’s religious beliefs and academic accomplishments may also enhance our understanding of the complex process known as ‘secularization’ in late Victorian intellectual life. Callum Brown writes that religious change in Britain resulted or led to the “profound secularization of—or decline in—‘conventional’ religion.”¹³ During the late Victorian period, methods of expressing religion changed. Brown describes late Victorian religion as less conventional; Jeffery Cox labels it as ‘diffusive Christianity.’ Whatever the label we choose to describe late Victorian religious practices, it remains clear that British Christians held liberal views of religion and the bible while at the same time seeking proof of orthodoxy. This complex marriage between religion and science is evident in Sayce’s career and in his popular writings. An examination of his works shows that religion was still important to the British during this

¹² See Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society in England*.

¹³ Callum Brown, “The Secularisation Decade: What the 1960s Have Done to the Study of Religious History,” *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 30.

period of secularization—but audiences, too, wanted to be kept abreast of the latest scientific findings, and appreciated works which integrated specialized information about the ancient world with reflections on the accuracy of the scriptures. Sayce's works were frequently requested by societies and journals interested in the relationship between archeology and the bible. Likewise many of his articles written during the late 1890s and turn of the century were published in inexpensive penny dailies which were accessible to theologians not specialized in science, and the laity. The various forms in which he expressed his views, ranging from abstruse and higher specialized monographs to unambiguous popular tracts, demonstrate that he harbored both scholarly aspirations and the desire to appeal to a broad audience.

In addition to writing works concerning archeology and the bible, Sayce engaged in research concerning the races of the ancient world. Here he expressed his own, unique views on race. Even though he used progressive thought to argue the orthodoxy of the bible, Sayce's views concerning race were anything but progressive. He believed that biblical history was shaped by Aryan people with the exception of the Cushites, whom he described as neither black nor white but a special race. In his treatment of race, Sayce utilized the research of ethnologists and philologists as well as pseudo-scientists such as phrenologists and craniologists. Unlike many of his fellow oriental philologists, he argued that physical features, not language, determined race. Sayce also believed that there were exceptions to racial characteristics. He believed that there were some Aryans who were not intellectually superior just as there were those of African descent who were.

In analyzing Sayce's views of race, one realizes the complexities and contradictions of his arguments. His writings reflected racist thought with glimmers of open-mindedness. Even though Sayce supported the inferiority of non-Aryan races, he did not present a totally negative

depiction of Africans. However, Africans who were connected to biblical history were labeled as Aryan or—in the case of the Cushites—non-black. Because of his belief in biblical authority, he argued that those involved in biblical history were connected to the Aryan race and were not black.

The academic career of Sayce is a topic largely ignored by researchers. The majority of the research on Sayce focuses on his contributions to archeology and philology. John Wilson's *Signs and Wonders upon Pharaoh* (1964) and John Wortham's *The Genesis of British Egyptology* (1971) mention Sayce's efforts to decipher cuneiform and his contributions to knowledge, but only offer passing analysis of the scholar's contributions and none of his cultural significance. Henry Aubin devotes a small portion of his work *The Rescue of Jerusalem* (2002) to Sayce and his views of the people of Cush. He argues that Sayce believed the Cushites did not have a role in Jewish history because they were part of the black race. In an attempt to answer the question of why the renowned scholar held racist views, Aubin argues that Sayce accepted the unofficial role of government representative and policy promoter. He writes: "Sayce, in other words, lost all critical distance between himself—as a scholar and cleric who was originally probably quite devoted to ideals like truth an adjunct—and empire. He became the cosseted adjunct of a colonial regime."¹⁴ Even though the work presents the racist views of Sayce in the context of British imperial history, it fails to thoroughly examine why Sayce labeled the Cushites as belonging to a special race. In addition, Aubin fails to analyze Sayce's definition of the other races of the ancient world. Nor does he explore Sayce's whole scholarly and theological development.

¹⁴ Henry Trocmé Aubin, *The Rescue of Jerusalem: The Alliance between Hebrews and Africans in 701 BC* (New York: Soho Press, 2002), 260.

One work which looks at Sayce's influence on biblical history and his opposition to higher criticism is the article "Monument Facts and Higher Critical Fancies" by Barbara Zink MacHaffie. This interesting article notes Sayce's shift in tone toward higher criticism, from accepting to hostile. But MacHaffie does not discuss reasons for his shift. Also the article does not emphasize enough on Sayce's role in promoting orthodoxy. In the space of an article, of course, MacHaffie could not do justice to Sayce's intellectual development and hence fails to provide a reason for his religious views. Nor does the work emphasize the importance and consequences of the Tel el Amarna tablets. MacHaffie mentions Sayce's ideological shift because of the discovery of the tablets, but she does not discuss the implications of the find for Sayce's work, such as the proof of a literary ancient world. In addition to these observations, the work does not discuss in detail the contentious areas, such as the authorship of the Pentateuch and the role of *Genesis*, in which Sayce worked out his critique of the higher criticism.

The goal of this dissertation is to fill in the gaps left by previous researchers. Even though late Victorian religion has been studied by scholars such as Jeffery Cox, Hugh McLeod and Callum Brown, they have paid little attention to the arguments presented by higher critics and their opponents; instead, their focus on the British public's changing view of the church as indicated by social dynamics such as church attendance, non-conformity and class distinctions. Peter Bowler's work on the relationship of science and religion provides additional insight into British society's response to science; however, the work focuses on the early twentieth century and the role of the pure sciences while mentioning the events and impact of the late nineteenth century. Sayce's intellectual approach to the bible and biblical history sheds new light on the period and further enhances our knowledge of it. His life shows, for example, that not only was religion still important to society, but that the seemingly arcane subject of higher criticism was in

fact a central concern for religious intellectuals, the clergy and laity. Archeology played an important role in understanding biblical history, and may have been instrumental in derailing liberal theology's tendency to ever-deep skepticism about the bible's authenticity.

The dissertation builds on newly uncovered documents used here for the first time. These sources include sermons, diaries and unpublished works which were recently discovered atop a shelf at the Queens College Library in Oxford, England. Also included in this collection are Sayce's sermons which are not dated but one may presume the sermons were given prior to 1890—the year he left Oxford to spend his winters in Egypt. These valuable documents provide additional insight into Sayce's ideas and career path. Further study of them will surely provide further insight into Sayce's thought trajectory.

In treating Sayce's intellectual approach to biblical history, this dissertation focuses on his intellectual beliefs and academic career. The second chapter examines Sayce's upbringing in Bath. This biographical chapter looks at the shaping of Sayce's ideas during his childhood and early years at Oxford—1845 to 1877. Even though he became a Broad Churchman, Sayce still held on to the values of his High Church upbringing. His acceptance of religious liberalism continued at Oxford where it was further enhanced with studies on Hegelian philosophy and intellectual growth. Sayce's interest in oriental languages combined with the liberal teachings of Broad Churchman Professor John Earle and the conservative teachings of Tractarian E. B. Pusey laid the foundation of Sayce's intellectual development. This chapter also examines the influence of Colenso's interpretation of the Pentateuch on Sayce, which led him to wish to one day defend Colenso's views. In addition to this, the chapter examines Sayce's membership and contributions to various academic and religious societies.

Chapter three treats Sayce's intellectual views during the 1870s. It analyzes his sermons and notes his Christian devotion while at the same time relaying intellectual ideas. He also expressed views on evolution which applied to the development of ideas. Sayce believed that religious dogmas changed over time, hence dogmas were not static. In his opinion, Christianity was shaped not only by Judaism, but also by ancient Egyptian religion. This liberal view on the origins of Christian ideas and rituals reflected his progressive intellectual and religious views.

Chapter three also examines Sayce's activity as an academic reformer at Oxford University. He worked to revise the curricula and examination system of the university. The academic system at Oxford was important to Sayce because he believed that improving studies and incorporating modern science (i.e. the study of oriental languages and cultures) benefited Hebrew studies. This in turn resulted in better qualified Hebraists and more knowledgeable clergy. One of the reasons for Sayce's concern for university studies was his interest in Assyriology which he employed to his study of biblical history.

The analysis of Sayce's intellectual development during the 1870s sets the stage for chapter four which treats his argument against higher criticism. Sayce believed that archeology proved the Mosaic authorship of the bible. He asserted that the flaw of higher criticism was that it solely relied on philology without taking into consideration biblical history and archeology, which he deemed as more reliable. Because of the mistakes of higher critics, biblical misinterpretations were prevalent. The two areas of contention with higher critics which this dissertation analyzes in detail are the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and the similarities between *Genesis*, primarily the accounts of the Creation and Flood, and Babylonian texts.

In regards to the Mosaic authorship, critics believed that authors or composers other than Moses had a hand in writing the Pentateuch. Critics argued that Hebrews did not have a

writing tradition before the period of kings, only an oral tradition.¹⁵ Since critics believed that Moses could not have written the Pentateuch, it was believed that the work was a compilation, gathered by a compiler during a later period. Sayce accepted the idea that the Pentateuch, in its present form, was not original to Moses. However, he asserted that redactors revised Moses' writings, resulting in the Pentateuch's present form. Textual revisions by redactors did not change the fact of Moses' central contribution to the work. Sayce's interpretation of biblical history allowed for the role of redactors while at the same time asserting the original Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. The critics' assertion that Moses did not write the Pentateuch had consequences in Sayce's mind. He deduced that questioning Moses' authorship cast the shadows of doubt on all of Hebrew history and the role of Jews in biblical history.

Even though Sayce held orthodox views when it came to the authorship of the Pentateuch, his view of *Genesis* was far from orthodox and gives credence to the label 'nontraditional traditionalist.' Sayce acknowledged the similarities between *Genesis* and Babylonian texts. Even with the similarities, Sayce affirmed that the Pentateuch was inspired by God. He argued that Hebrew writers removed pagan elements from Babylonian texts to express the divineness of God.

The fifth chapter treats another facet of biblical history—the races of the ancient world. Here, Sayce's opinion of race is examined, and research shows that the progressive thinking which was applied to his interpretations of religion and his views on academic improvement at Oxford was not demonstrated in his attempt to define the races of the ancient world. In shaping his racist opinions, Sayce relied on his religious beliefs. Just as he combined biblical knowledge with history, philology and archeology in formulating his argument against higher

¹⁵ Sayce, "The Composition of the Pentateuch," 104.

criticism, Sayce incorporated the science of phrenology and the latest research in ethnology to define the races of the ancient world. Also he, like his friend Max Müller, argued that language did not determine race because language may be learned and unlearned. The analysis also shows that Sayce believed that those who participated in biblical history were connected to the Aryan race. He concluded that the people of Egypt were a part of the Aryan race. He added that the people of Cush were a part of a special race that was neither Aryan nor black. Even though Sayce conveyed racist views, he believed that there were exceptions to the theory that race determined intelligence and creative genius.

Neither historians nor biblical scholars have thoroughly examined Sayce's contributions to biblical history. It is the goal of this work to provide insight into Sayce's intellectual trajectory and contribute to the understanding of the influential factors which shaped Sayce's views. By grasping a better, more in-depth perspective of Sayce's views and influences and analyzing his place in late-Victorian intellectual and religious life, one gains an insightful view, if not a new perspective, into the development of professionalization, the interplay between science and religion, and the emergence of secularization. Sayce's intellectual development began during his youth. It was during this period that he was exposed to both High and Broad Church ideas. The combination of these religious interpretations laid the foundation for Sayce's future application of science and religious liberalism to support his argument for orthodoxy.

CHAPTER 2 SAYCE THE MAN

During the nineteenth century English society experienced political, cultural and economic changes. Industrialization transformed the urban poor into the proletariat and caused a portion of the rural population to migrate to urban cities in search for work. By the mid-nineteenth century the agrarian, aristocratic and hierarchical society of the eighteenth century jostled with an urban, industrial society in the process of male enfranchisement. In addition to these political and economic changes, Britons also had to contend with the Darwinian revolution, which had scientific and social repercussions, and the growing interest in nonconformist denominations as opposed to the Anglican ideal of the Established Church.¹

Amid the discussions over working conditions, universal male suffrage and changing interpretations of the bible, due to the new sciences and Darwinian thought, a small world of intellectuals devoted their lives to the advancement of knowledge and the continuation of the humanist tradition. These intellectuals lived what may be considered a charmed life, consisting of travel, reading and scholarly conversation.² They were often trained theologians, the majority of whom had attended the Anglican universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

The central goal of Oxford and Cambridge was to train future clergymen, and during the eighteenth century 60 percent of the students at Oxford and Cambridge were ordained.

¹ Jeffrey Cox. *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth, 1870-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 7. Cox states that the influence of Darwinian thought contributed to the questioning of orthodoxy and helped shape agnostic thought. The influence of science on religion may have had a small role in decreasing church attendance in Anglican churches; however, people continued to attend church and send their children to Sunday school. What was more surprising to Anglicans was the growing memberships of non-conformist churches. See Knight, *The Nineteenth Century Church and English Society*. She argues that the Anglican Church experienced a transformation, moving from a unique, national religion to becoming a denomination among many.

² University Fellows were not allowed to marry and with no wives or children on which to spend money, fellows indulged in books and foreign travel. Sayce describes their lives as 'intellectual.' These scholars interacted with the most distinguished personalities of the day from London, Paris, Germany, America and elsewhere.

Following in the footsteps of Oxford and Cambridge, other universities began offering theological courses. In 1834 the University of Durham (Anglican) began teaching theology, and King's College London (created as a secular institution) promoted the study of theology in 1847, but both were overshadowed by Trinity College in Dublin (Anglican) which produced more graduate clergy than anywhere outside of Oxford and Cambridge.³

Theology training was complicated by the discovery of antiquities in the Near East during the early nineteenth century. Antiquities uncovered concerning the ancient civilizations of Assyria, Egypt and Babylon provided additional insight into the history of the Old Testament. Many intellectuals of the day used the discoveries made in the Near East to support the authenticity of the Old Testament. Others, however, were led to question the Old Testament's veracity, recognizing that it was no longer the only source for oriental history. For High Church Anglicans, biblical authenticity in conjunction with church traditions was important; for evangelicals, biblical authenticity was important because the bible (along with prayer) was the conduit by which humanity communicated with and understood God.⁴ Biblical interpretations which questioned the infallibility of the bible were viewed as threatening by Anglicans and non-conformists. One threat of particular interest was the higher criticism, which dealt with the literary and historical study of biblical books to determine the date and origin of authorship.⁵

Theology combined with interest in antiquities created intellectuals who were familiar not only with the bible but also with ancient cultures and languages. One British scholar who embodied these characteristics—biblical scholar, philologist and progressive thinker—was Rev.

³ Knight, *The Nineteenth Century Church*, 107.

⁴ Glover, *Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Independent Press, 1954), 16.

⁵ The higher critical method was originally used on ancient texts concerning the writings of Homer before they were applied to the books of the bible.

Archibald Henry Sayce, a fellow, tutor and later Chair of Assyriology at Oxford University. Sayce is credited with deciphering Hittite texts along with becoming an expert on Assyrian and Babylonian cuneiform. He was also a critic of higher criticism and developed an extensive and scholarly argument for the accuracy of the Old Testament. Sayce believed that an over-analysis of religion led to a questioning of faith and, he feared, a loss of faith altogether. His counter argument to the higher critics was based on his confidence in archeology and biblical history.

In order to fully understand Sayce's biblical arguments, it is important to examine his childhood and years of study at Oxford. It was also during his childhood that Sayce became fascinated with languages and oriental cultures, which subsequently led to his study of the Orient at Oxford. Also during these periods Sayce was exposed to diverse religious beliefs, such as High and Broad Church ideas. It was during these years from the 1850s to the 1870s that Sayce blossomed into an eminent scholar, gaining membership into various scholarly societies. The foundation from which Sayce will build an eminent academic career began in his childhood at Bath and his undergraduate years at Oxford.

Childhood

Sayce was born on September 25, 1845⁶ to a family which originated in southern Wales.⁷ His paternal great-grandfather was a banker with artistic tastes and builder of Clifton Hill House, a town-house located in Bristol. Sayce was one of four children born to Rev. Henry Samuel Sayce, the vicar of Caldicott in Monmouthshire, Wales. Sayce had an elder sister and two younger brothers, Herbert and Montford. While in Monmouthshire Henry Samuel Sayce built

⁶ This is the date of birth provided by Sayce in his *Reminiscences*. His obituary in "The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology" puts his birth on September 5, 1845. *Men and Women of Time: A Dictionary of Contemporaries* puts his birth in 1846.

⁷ His great-grandfather, for reasons unknown to Sayce, changed the spelling of the family name from Sayse to Sayce.

Mount Balan House, which was near the Roman walls of Caerwent.⁸ Sayce's father, whose qualifications included a MA degree, received the appointment of vicar of Caldicott in 1835.⁹ Charles Tynte, Esq. of Somerset acted as Rev. Henry Sayce's patron.¹⁰ At the age of six, Sayce and his family left Monmouthshire and moved into Clifton Hill House in Bristol. Sayce recalls the beauty of Clifton Hill House, particularly the large garden, antique furniture, art and Dresden china. His family members, however, were not as appreciative; Sayce recalled that much of the furniture, art and china were sold for a fraction of their worth.¹¹

As Sayce recollected his youth, he was nostalgic for the old ways of living when "the curse of industrialism had not yet invaded the western country to any great extent." Sayce described society during his youth as being void of social dependency which, he believed, came from industrialization. Sayce fondly recalled the days when houses were self-sufficient and all the household duties such as cooking, baking and washing were done at home.¹² His affinity for the society of his youth was connected to his later criticism of modernization. In later sermons Sayce would argue that modernization was the cause for the Britons' lack of religious fervor.

Illness plagued the young Archibald and continued throughout his life. He wrote in his *Reminiscences* that his first utterance was a cough.¹³ During his childhood he suffered from typhoid and tuberculosis. Because of his "weak lungs"¹⁴ many did not expect him to survive into adulthood. The frailty of his health was countered by his voraciousness to learn, particularly

⁸ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 1.

⁹ Subscription Evidence Record, ID 6811, Clergy of the Church of England Database NLW, LL/SB/14 [Subscription Book on-line]; available from <http://eagle.cch.kcl.ac.uk:8080/cce/DisplaySubscription.jsp?CDBSubscrID=6811>; Internet; accessed 25 January 2007.

¹⁰ Appointment Evidence Record, ID 13086, Clergy of the Church of England Database NLW, LL/BR/Facsimile of Cardiff MS 3.468 [Episcopal Register on line]; available from <http://eagle.cch.kcl.ac.uk:8080/cce/DisplayAppointment.jsp?CDBAppRedID=13086>; Internet; accessed 13 February 2007.

¹¹ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 2-4.

¹² *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁴ F. M. G., "A. H. Sayce [Obituary]," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* (1933): 65-6.

Oriental languages.¹⁵ It was not until Sayce was seven that he learned the English alphabet and at age eight he began learning Latin. By the age of ten he was reading the works of Virgil, Xenophon and Homer.¹⁶

In 1858, just before Archibald turned thirteen, Henry Samuel Sayce moved his family to a neighborhood in Bath, where the family home remained until Henry Sayce's death later in the century.¹⁷ Around this time the young Sayce was introduced to comparative philology and became acquainted with Professor John Earle, former professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford and future founder of the Anthropological Society of London. Sayce was taken by Earle's intellect and his well-stocked library, which was far better than his father's meager collection of books. While visiting Earle's library, Sayce read lectures by Max Müller on the *Science of Languages*. Müller, an Oxford professor of language and philology and future life-long friend of Sayce, was a German philologist and Orientalist. Müller achieved acclaim for his groundbreaking work on Sanskrit as well as for his more popular essays on comparative linguistics and religion. Müller's *Science of Languages* "took [Sayce]...by storm,"¹⁸ increasing his interest in Oriental languages. Sayce credited Müller with teaching him comparative mythology and Sanskrit.¹⁹ In the spring of 1859 his interest in Egypt and Assyria was further heightened by a trip to the British Museum with his father, where they spent most of their time in the Egyptian and Assyrian galleries.

Sayce was an inquisitive youth, who pondered over theological questions, quickly coming to the realization that man was a religious being.²⁰ Even as a child Sayce showed signs of deductive reasoning when at the age of nine, after reading a portion of a translation of the

¹⁵ Sayce spent the winter months of his childhood indoors, resulting in his spending an ample amount of time reading. The incompatibility of England's winters and Sayce's health resulted in Sayce spending the winter months in Egypt, where the dry air and warm environment did his body good.

¹⁶ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 7.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 261.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

Qur'an, he reasoned that if Christianity was better than Judaism because it was later, then 'Mohammedanism' must be better than Christianity.²¹ This profound statement shocked his mother, but looking back on the incident, Sayce justified his comment as innocent inquiry; children, he argued, have no "consciousness of sin."²² For Sayce to characterize his question as a "sin" reveals the traditional attitudes he exuded later in life. The notion that Islam is better than Christianity was unimaginable for the older, mature Sayce who would advocate orthodoxy. Sayce's innocent inquiry during his youth foreshadowed his future achievements as a scholar of religious history.

Rev. Sayce also admitted that during his youth he believed in the Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation, but soon realized his folly when he understood "the fact that it was not also the belief of those around [him]."²³ Sayce's sensitivity to the ideas and beliefs of those around him suggest his willingness to conform to the ideas of his family. It is evident that his family played an important role, perhaps equal to that of the Oxford intellectuals, in building his religious foundations. The sway Sayce's family had over his religious ideology remained even during his years at Oxford. Agnosticism was not an option for Sayce. During his childhood biblical training was instilled within him, and it was still very strong; it could not be removed. But a far stronger temptation than agnosticism for Sayce was Roman Catholicism. When friends and mentors were converting from the High Church to the Roman Catholic Church, Sayce remained an Anglican even though the temptation to convert was strong. His childhood training was too firmly implanted in his "'subconscious mind' to be removed."²⁴ The more he studied the Anglican Church and the writings of John Newman, the famous Tractarian who eventually

²¹ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 18.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

converted to Roman Catholicism, the more “their logical conclusions” pointed to Roman Catholicism. In order to fight this “strong temptation” to leave “the church of [his] fathers,” Sayce turned to H. P. Liddon (1829-90, future Canon Liddon), a close and influential friend. Sayce admired Liddon partly because of his enlightening sermons. Liddon’s sermon was one of the first university sermons Sayce heard at Oxford. Liddon described Sayce as a “good Churchman” even though he was a Broad Churchman.²⁵

While recovering from a bout of typhoid, Sayce became interested in Assyrian culture and cuneiform. In addition to spending his childhood reading various novels and works on language, Sayce also enjoyed reading the bible. But in the mind of the youthful Sayce, the stories of the Fall of Man and the Flood (both in *Genesis*) seemed more like stories from an imagined world, similar to those in the *Arabian Nights*. Sayce reflects:

I do not remember a period, when, for instance, the story of the Fall in the *Book of Genesis* was to me in any sense of the term historical; in my early days it was like a story in the *Arabian Nights*, perfectly possible in a world, different, it is true, from that in which I usually lived, but not from that into which my dreams, whether waking or sleeping, might transport me.²⁶

Sayce credited his love of literature and study for helping to develop his character, hence encouraging his “natural dreaminess and imaginative tendencies.”²⁷

As Sayce grew older, he began to use historical and philological tools to better understand the bible. At sixteen he became more interested in religion and politics. His childish view of *Genesis* as a fictional story gradually changed as he learned Hebrew and studied the bible in depth. He realized that “the story in *Genesis* belonged to a different order of things,”²⁸ which reflects his adult belief that *Genesis* was not a fictional book but the foundation of Judo-

²⁵ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 34.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

Christian beliefs. Sayce also came to acknowledge the Israelite and Babylonian influences in *Genesis*.

Sayce's intellectual growth was also influenced by his neighbor Professor John Earle, a Broad Churchman from Oxford. The Broad Church emphasized moral ethics over orthodoxy and combined religious faith with faith in human reason. Broad Churchman believed that the Anglican Church should be tolerant and incorporate a "broad" range of religious conformities. However, as Charles Sanders explains in his *Coleridge and the Broad Church Movement* (1972), the movements at Oxford and Cambridge differed in their approaches. Both embraced liberalism and appreciated science and textual biblical criticism; but whereas the Cambridge Broad Church Movement attempted to combine progress with reverence for the past and institutions, the Oxford Broad Church Movement emphasized intellect and questioned traditions and church authority.²⁹ It was the Oxford movement which Earle embraced and introduced to the young Sayce. Earle's influence in Sayce's life is most evident during a time when Bath was being overrun by Ritualists (supporters of the High Church). Even though Sayce's father was a High Churchman, the young Sayce was receptive to the ideas of Earle. Because of his interest in ancient cultures and literature, Sayce reveled in Earle's library. He wrote: "Fortunately for myself he took a fancy to me, and I used to spend Sunday after Sunday drinking in his conversation and all the new knowledge it opened out to me, and reveling in the books of his library."³⁰

During this time Sayce was exposed to a life of dichotomies. At home and around family and Bath, orthodox Anglicanism ruled; but on Sunday afternoons at Professor Earle's library,

²⁹ Charles Richard Sanders, *Coleridge and the Broad Church Movement: Studies in S. T. Coleridge, Dr. Arnold of Rugby, J. C. Hare, Thomas Carlyle and F. D. Maurice* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972), 14. Some participants of the Cambridge movement were F. D. Maurice and Charles Kingsley. Matthew Arnold and Benjamin Jowett were just a few of those who embraced the Oxford school.

³⁰ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 13.

religious liberalism reigned. Not only did Earle expose Sayce to the beliefs of the Broad Church, resulting in Sayce becoming a Broad Churchman himself,³¹ but Earle also introduced Sayce to Bishop John William Colenso's *The Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua Critically Examined*, which produced a storm of controversy in Britain. Colenso's work may be considered key in bridging the gap between British critics and those on the European continent, particularly those in Germany who were already active in the area of biblical criticism.³²

Colenso

Colenso (1814-83) was bishop of Natal (a province in South Africa) and a champion of Zulu rights. While conducting his missionary duties and sharing with the Zulus biblical stories, Colenso was questioned about the bible. "A simple-minded, but intelligent, native,--one with the docility of a child, but the reasoning powers of mature age" asked if the story of Noah's Ark was really true. Colenso did not have a response, nor could his heart allow him to lie in the name of the Lord. The young man's question forced Colenso to thoroughly evaluate his faith and confront his very own questions regarding religion, which in previous years had made him feel uneasy. Before, Colenso was satisfied to "settle down into a willing acquiescence in the general truth of the [Old Testament] narrative,..." even though inconsistencies were present in "particular parts of it." For Colenso, if the biblical history seemed flawed, it was redeemed by "the doctrinal and devotional portions of the bible," Colenso "found so much...Divine Light and Life" in the devotional parts of the bible. This, he added, was enough to "feed [his] own soul..." but it did not satisfy his intellectual side.³³ Colenso may be characterized as a religious traditionalist with doubts--"that is to say he subscribed to the conventional view of the day, but he was not entirely

³¹ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 34.

³² See Thomas Kelly Cheyne, *Founders of Old Testament Criticism* (London: Methuen & Co., 1893).

³³ John William Colenso, "Preface to *The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua Critically Examined*," vi-vii, reprinted in A. O. J. Cockshut, *Religious Controversies of the Nineteenth Century: Selected Documents* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 220-221.

happy about it.”³⁴ Having read works on geology, Colenso “knew for certain, on geological grounds, a fact, of which [he] had only had misgivings before, viz. that a *Universal Deluge*, such as the bible manifestly speaks of, could not possibly have taken place in the way described in the *Book of Genesis*,...” After further researching the historical accuracy of the Old Testament,, Colenso proclaimed, “...I tremble at the result of my enquiries.”³⁵

What gave Colenso the strength to continue his biblical research in light of the internal battle between spirit and mind was his strong faith in God, for God, as Colenso described, was a God of righteousness, love and truth.³⁶ Because he was a “servant of the God of Truth,” Colenso had a duty to uphold religious ideas but could not “urge [a fellow brother] to believe that, which [he] did not [himself] believe.” To answer the young man’s question concerning the factual nature of *Genesis*, Colenso gave a response which “satisfied [the young man] for the time, without throwing any discredit upon the general veracity of the bible history.”³⁷

Instead of renouncing his position as bishop, Colenso began reevaluating Christian theology and studying biblical criticism. Colenso exclaimed that the questions asked by the Zulus “had set him free,”³⁸ but reluctantly so. Colenso expressed that he felt unwillingly driven to search more deeply for the answers to the biblical questions.³⁹ He was “inspired by practicalness and not academic quandary.”⁴⁰ He was neither a Hebrew scholar nor historian⁴¹ but believed that his ideas would be well received because he was a working clergyman and not an academic.

³⁴ Peter Hinchliff, *John William Colenso, Bishop of Natal* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1964), 85.

³⁵ Colenso, “Preface to *The Pentateuch*,” vi-vii.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, viii-ix.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, viii-ix.

³⁸ Cheyne, *Founders of Old Testament Criticism*, 199.

³⁹ Colenso, “Preface to *The Pentateuch*,” viii-ix.

⁴⁰ Cheyne, *Founders of Old Testament Criticism*, 200.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 199-200.

Unfortunately Colenso's work had the opposite effect and angered the Anglican Church, consuming more attention from the Church than Darwin's *The Origin of Species*.⁴² Between 1862 and 1865 Colenso published Parts I-V of his *The Pentateuch Examined*, which he expanded into seven parts.⁴³ Colenso believed it was his duty as a missionary to share his views immediately with the public. To the question of "why publish to the world matters like these, about which theologians may have doubts," Colenso responded that theologians were not the only ones with doubts but also the larger body who "not only doubt, but [also] disbelieve, many important parts of the Mosaic narrative."⁴⁴

Colenso's response coincided with the sentiments at Oxford during Max Müller's early years. Students at Oxford confided in Müller that they were unbelievers but put up a facade of being orthodox.⁴⁵ For these reasons Colenso could not wait until the work was completed in its totality, with Parts I-VII being released at the same time as one complete work.⁴⁶ Colenso did not foresee the criticism awaiting him, even though his previous work *Romans* was under heavy criticism by the Church for presenting a doctrine of universalism, which the Church believed questioned orthodox teaching on the atonement and salvation since universalism suggested that all humans would be saved.

Part I, written between January 1861 and April 1862, treated the book of *Genesis*; it may be considered the most controversial and the most heavily attacked of the parts, even though

⁴² Peter J. Bowler, *Reconciling Science and Religion: The Debate in Early Twentieth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 199.

⁴³ Part VI (1871) and Part VII (1879) are repeats of the German criticism, which placed the legislation of Leviticus after the Exile period and the Elohist aspects of the Pentateuch during the age of Samuel. These latter Parts were not as controversial as Parts I-V mainly due to the fact that the ideas presented in the last two parts were not new, but had been presented and advocated by German scholars.

⁴⁴ Cockshut, *Religious Controversies of the Nineteenth Century*, 233.

⁴⁵ Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary: The Life of Professor the Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Müller* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1974), 104.

⁴⁶ Hinchliff, 85.

Colenso asserted that his belief in the essential core of Christianity remained unaltered.⁴⁷ In Part I Colenso proposed the unhistorical nature of *Genesis* and questioned the plausibility of Noah's ark.⁴⁸ Colenso confessed that after "a closer study of the Pentateuch,--[he] became convinced of the unhistorical character of very considerable portions of the Mosaic narrative..."⁴⁹ Dutch biblical critic Abraham Kuenen commented that Colenso's critique conveyed the idea that "the very documents which most expressly put themselves forward as authentic, and make the greatest parade of accuracy, are in reality the most unhistorical of all."⁵⁰

With regard to Colenso's book, Sayce expressed that he had an open mind concerning the work and wrote that: "I began to look forward to the day when I could champion his [Colenso's] cause."⁵¹ One could argue that Sayce's embrace of Colenso's ideas were the result of his tutelage under Professor Earle, who had sympathies toward Colenso.⁵² During this time in Sayce's life he supported Colenso and his ideas despite the fact that Colenso was highly controversial among orthodox religious thinkers and was even ridiculed in secular newspapers. The church characterized the book as a product "spewed out of hell."⁵³ A popular joke of the period had Colenso as its subject:

My first expresses numbers, my second magnifies numbers, my third
negates numbers, and my whole destroys numbers. Who am I?
Co-lens-o.⁵⁴

This joke also alluded to Colenso's questions surrounding the *Book of Numbers*. Colenso calculated the Israelite population from clues provided in *Numbers* 1:3 and resolved that the

⁴⁷ Hinchliff, 97.

⁴⁸ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 23.

⁴⁹ Cockshut, *Religious Controversies of the Nineteenth Century*, 226-227. Colenso explains that he purposely used the word 'unhistorical' instead of 'fictitious' because the latter implies the writer's conscious effort to deceive.

⁵⁰ Cheyne, *Founders of Old Testament Criticism*, 201.

⁵¹ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 22.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

population of Israel had to have been around 2,000,000 strong. With a population so large, it would make it virtually impossible for Moses and Joshua to speak to ‘all Israel,’ which is alluded to in *Deuteronomy* 1:1 and *Joshua* 8:35.⁵⁵

This joke exemplifies the degree of ridicule Colenso faced by adversaries in Britain, and registers the fact that many believed that Colenso’s views were destroying the bible. It also reflected the anxiety in society regarding biblical criticism. Even though Colenso raised questions concerning the doctrine of the Anglican faith in his *Romans*, it was his biblical criticism of the Old Testament which many religious leaders and some liberals such as F. D. Maurice could not forgive. Colenso was stunned to find out that the one whom he thought would embrace his views—that is Maurice—rejected them. Colenso expected the conservative Edward B. Pusey to oppose his views of the Pentateuch but had not expected Maurice to follow suit. Even though Maurice opposed the views of Pusey and believed in religious tolerance, Maurice held conservative interpretations of Scripture. Maurice believed that a clergyman of the Church should not expound on views which undermined the faith, and Pusey asserted that Colenso’s views could not be “reconciled with that of the Church of England.”⁵⁶ Both Maurice and Pusey, who would have been on opposite sides of religious issues, campaigned for Colenso’s resignation which reflected just how unsettling Colenso’s views were for the High Church and members of the Broad Church.

During the 1860s when Colenso was facing heavy criticism from religious and lay figures, who warned the public of the dangerousness of his views, Sayce supported Colenso and even considered him a friend. Later in life, when Sayce became the champion of orthodoxy and

⁵⁵ Hinchliff, 96. Colenso went further to argue that the animals in the possession of the Israelites would need twenty-five square miles of grazing land. If the Hebrews were scattered about an area this large, it is highly improbable that the directions for carrying out the Passover could have circulated in the length of time outlined in the *Book of Exodus*.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

traditional religion, he would begin to distance himself from Colenso, even becoming embarrassed to be called Colenso's friend.⁵⁷ What caused this great shift? The answer lies in Sayce's support of orthodoxy and his intense criticism of biblical critics. These topics will be discussed in more depth in the following chapters.

In the midst of the Colenso controversy Sayce interacted with Colenso himself, as well as Rev. W. Houghton, a naturalist and Orientalist, and Tractarians who were friends with Professor Earle.⁵⁸ Just as the Broad Church had a role in influencing Sayce, participants of the Oxford Movement (Tractarians) also shaped his intellectual development. The Oxford Movement (Tractarian Controversy) was connected to the High Church. Tractarians respected Anglican Church traditions because Tractarians believed church traditions represented the "ancient and undivided church." Tractarians were convinced that they supported the true Anglican position on theology. They also believed that:

the bible could only be approached with the proper spirit of reverence when it was approached not with the fallen, objective, detached intellectualist mind of the individual, but with the eyes of the ancient and undivided Church for which the biblical texts were in fact written, and which selected some to be biblical and others not."⁵⁹

Those that supported the Oxford Movement asserted the authority of the Church and its teachings. Participants of the Movement included John Newman, John Keble and Pusey, who in particular played a role in shaping Sayce's views during his years of study at Oxford. Pusey emphasized the devotional aspects of religion and was so important to the movement that his name was applied to the movement, leading it to be known also as 'Puseyism' and its followers as 'Puseyites.'

⁵⁷ Cheyne, *Founders of Old Testament Criticism*, 233

⁵⁸ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 23

⁵⁹ Owen Chadwick, *Spirit of the Oxford Movement: Tractarian Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 30.

Sayce wrote that 1864 was the year his mind moved from boyish thoughts to philosophic questions, hence marking his elevation to maturity.⁶⁰ This period in his life coincides with the beginning of his study at Oxford. Whereas John Earle and family helped to shape his childhood at Bath, it was Oxford which put him on the path of scholarship. Also this period in Sayce's life is interesting in that during the course of 1864 the Colenso controversy was a dominant topic of discussion, sparking theological debates.

It is evident from diary entries written during 1864 that Sayce's ideas and inquiry became more intellectual and philosophical in his attempt to answer the question "What is truth?"⁶¹ On December 4, 1864, he wrote: "If my soul is immortal, it has always existed. But God alone is eternal. Therefore my soul is part of God."⁶² Here Sayce used reason to understand the eternal nature of the soul and also man's connection to God. Because the soul lives forever, man is affixed to God in an eternal union.

Even with his highly intellectual inquiry, God remained central to Sayce's ideas. He wrote on May 13, 1864:

It is our duty to imitate God to the utmost of our powers. He is all good; we must be as good as we can: He is all powerful (mentally), we must be as mentally-powerful as we can: He is all-wise; we must be as wise, as full of wisdom and knowledge, as we can.⁶³

Sayce later added to his diary on August 12, 1864 that: "We cannot be punished by God for our ignorance. We were created thus ignorant. It is not our own fault."⁶⁴ Sayce believed that even

⁶⁰Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 242. Another benchmark in maturity came later with the death of his mother. He writes that her death "made a sudden break in my life; it seemed, as it were, to cut me off from my boyhood." His mother's death had to have occurred prior to the winter of 1887 because her death prevented him from spending the winter of 1887-88 in Egypt.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

⁶² Sayce, *Diary for 1864*, entry 4 December 1864.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, *Diary for 1864*, entry 13 May 1864.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, *Diary for 1864*, entry 12 August 1864.

though humanity was created ignorant, it was the duty of the individual to strengthen the intellect and in so doing, imitate God.

The answer to his question of ‘truth’ will come to Sayce later in life. Sayce recalled that an acquaintance of his, Professor E. Freeman, stated that he was unable to understand “how a religion [could] be true, and yet not universal.” This remark “sank deeply into [Sayce’s] recollection.” Sayce reasoned that ‘truth’ is relative, and absolute ‘truth’ is virtually impossible to achieve in a finite world and a finite mind.⁶⁵

Contemporary Society

The changing attitudes toward religion in late-Victorian Britain were due to the developments of new sciences, which contributed to the redefining of Christian beliefs and practices, and the growing interest in non-conformist churches as alternatives to Anglicanism. In addition to science and non-conformism, the Church faced challenges from the world of leisure and entertainment. Workers were interested more in entertainment, whether it was soccer, the pub or relaxing outdoors.⁶⁶ For many workers the last thing they wanted after working six days was to attend a church service and listen to a sermon. When faced with the option of church or sleeping-in, workers often chose the latter.

The argument that church attendance declined during the Victorian period as shown in the 1851 census is not totally true. Even though many were surprised in the growth of non-conformist churches revealed by the census, it is incorrect to conclude that Anglican attendance declined because of the inaccuracies in the census. The census was taken once a year during morning service. Those who attended evening services were not counted and those who attended on other Sundays were not counted. Another indication that the public valued religion was that

⁶⁵ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 140.

⁶⁶ Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, 103.

parents continued to send their children to Sunday school and required them to learn the Prayer Book.⁶⁷ The public was still concerned with death, judgment, heaven and hell. The question “What must I do to be saved?” preoccupied the minds of the Victorians and Edwardians.⁶⁸ The Britons in many ways valued the role religion played in society and spirituality but may not be considered devout practitioners of the faith. They practiced what Jeffery Cox calls ‘diffusive Christianity’ which denoted a general belief in God, that good people would be taken care of, that God was just but remote from everyday concerns, and that the bible was uniquely a valuable book.⁶⁹ This ‘diffusive Christianity’ resulted in a less conventional religious practice. The public created its own brand of Christianity, and the liberal clergy believed that God dwelt within the untraditional Christian just as the traditional.⁷⁰

The religious intellectuals’ response to the new sciences reflects the close relationship forming between religion and science during the nineteenth century. Due to the ideological changes, many contemporaries “responded not by rejecting Christianity, but by adopting more liberal versions of the faith.” According to Hugh McLeod many Christians of the late-Victorian period “seem to have assimilated the arguments of the biblical scholars or scientists relatively painlessly, and to have restated their faith in terms which they thought consistent with the new knowledge.”⁷¹ This new assimilation of progressive ideas contributed to the merging of science and religion during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Between 1864 and 1865 pro-

⁶⁷ Sunday schools took on many roles aside from teaching the bible. They acted as day-care centers which were important since many working class communities were crowded and they enabled parents to have quality time away from their children. Sunday schools also served a moral purpose for the community. Many believed that learning about God and hymns were essential to becoming a fine adult. Hugh McLeod writes in *Religion and Society in England* that particularly among the working class there was the importance of respect and becoming a part of the “respectable working class.” The parents in this class wanted to produce “God-fearing, respectable, law-abiding citizens.” Sunday schools also helped prove that one was a member of the ‘deserving poor.’ This title carried with it the assurance that one could receive assistance from the various charities available.

⁶⁸ Knight, 47.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 203.

⁷⁰ Cox, *English Churches in a Secular Society*, 93. Cox argues that the religious liberals believed that God worked in diffusive Christianity as well as embodied various forms of Christianity.

⁷¹ McLeod, *Religion and Society in England*, 5.

religious scientists argued that scientific research should be done in such a way as to support religious beliefs. Some scientists rejected the marriage of science and religion, arguing that it went against the freedom of thought; nevertheless, in 1865 the Victorian Institute was created as a forum where science and scripture could be discussed.⁷² These religious scientists were labeled as liberals, and their liberal faith de-emphasized the role of miracles and original sin but saw Christ as a spiritual figure in their lives.⁷³ They believed that theology benefited from a more scientific approach.

Studies at Oxford

Sayce thoroughly enjoyed his undergraduate years of study at Oxford. He looked back on this period of his life with fondness, for this was the time of his ‘great’ transformation into adulthood. During these years Sayce interacted with Broad Churchmen, Low Churchmen and High Churchmen, receiving a well rounded understanding of the different facets of the Anglican faith. His days were spent studying languages and listening to University sermons. He became close friends with John Rhÿs (1840-1915, later Sir. John Rhÿs), future professor of Welsh at Oxford. The two shared an enjoyment for comparative philology and British history. They also shared an interest in the lectures and works of Max Müller. The student/teacher relationship between Sayce and Müller eventually evolved into a life-long friendship. Sayce frequented Müller’s home to discuss the latest theories and ideas on language. Müller’s home became the epicenter for intellectuals in Oxford. Sayce describes the Müller home as a “gathering place of Americans and foreigners.” Through acquaintance with Müller, Sayce met Charles Kingsley, another Broad Churchman along the lines of Maurice, and Thomas K. Cheyne, contributing writer and future editor for the *Times*. Cheyne was interested in the Orient and devoted pages to

⁷² Bowler, 30

⁷³ Ibid., 34

the subject matter. Because of his interest in all things Oriental, Cheyne encouraged Sayce to become a contributing writer for the *Times*, which Sayce would do during his time as an Oxford fellow.⁷⁴

As Sayce's undergraduate years came to an end, his health problems reemerged. This time, not only were his lungs affected, but also his eyes. Between 1874-3 Sayce followed the close directions of a physician and gradually his eyes improved, although health issues with his lungs persisted throughout his life. During this bout with poor health, Sayce continued his studies and received informal lessons in Semitic languages from Edward B. Pusey, Chair of Hebrew at Oxford. Pusey was intrigued with Sayce's Assyrian studies because he believed that Assyrian studies would benefit biblical and philological research. Pusey's interest in Assyria coincided with the public's growing interest in the Near East.⁷⁵ On December 9, 1870 the Society of Biblical Archaeology was founded and Sayce became one of its members.⁷⁶ His friend Dr. Samuel Birch became the society's first president and head of the Oriental Department at the British Museum. It was Birch who insisted that the word "biblical" be added to the title in order to attract subscribers.⁷⁷ The Society's goal was to research Egypt, Palestine and parts of the Near East as it related to the bible.

Sayce returned to Oxford after undergraduate studies and became a College tutor. He also began working on his first book *Comparative Grammar of the Assyrian Language*. In 1874 Sayce was selected to represent Oxford in the Old Testament Revision Committee, which met in London four times a year at Westminster.⁷⁸ Sayce used his visits to London, not to lecture on

⁷⁴ Sayce, *Reminiscence*, 85-88.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁷⁶ F. M. G., "A. H. Sayce [Obituary]," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* (1933): 65.

⁷⁷ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 55.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 93. Sayce stepped down in 1881. The Committee was an international collaboration created to establish an improved translation and clearer version of the Old Testament. The Americans had hoped to have their own Revision Committee but because of the expenses needed to fund such a committee, not to mention the finances

Assyriology which he had done on previous occasions, but to visit the British Museum and copy cuneiform tablets. Also, while visiting the British Museum Sayce had the honor of meeting George Smith “to whose genius and assiduous labour Assyriology owes so much.”⁷⁹ Smith was a printer and self-taught man who mixed and mingled with the small circle of Assyriologists. But Smith’s name went beyond the small world of Assyriology and entered the realm of celebrity.

On December 3, 1872, Smith delivered a paper to the Society of Biblical Archeology. The paper concerned the Chaldean account of the Deluge, which Smith had translated from the cuneiform tablets. Smith’s findings pointed to close similarities between the Babylonian text and *Genesis*. Sayce wrote that Smith’s observation “came as a shock to the theologically minded public and produced a corresponding sensation,” which sparked a renewed interest in Assyriology.⁸⁰ Because of Smith’s findings, a new world opened up – a world of “marvelous cuneiform literature, with long and extraordinary myths and with striking biblical parallels.”⁸¹ Capitalizing on his popularity and this new discovery, the *Daily Telegraph* funded Smith’s first trip to the site of Nineveh to recover the missing sections of the Flood Tablet, which he did on the fifth day of his expedition. Over the next two years the British Museum sent him out on their behalf. He died in 1876 at the age of thirty-six while returning to England from his third visit to the site.⁸²

were absorbed by Cambridge and Oxford, the American members settled for sending their suggestions to England. English Jews also advocated for an independent Old Testament Revision Committee because they figured they were better qualified to translate Hebrew. But like the Americans, they too were unable to establish a committee independent of Cambridge and Oxford.

⁷⁹ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 94.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁸¹ John A. Wilson, *Signs and Wonders upon Pharaoh: A History of American Egyptology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 62.

⁸² Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 94 and Wilson, *Signs and Wonders*, 61.

Before Smith's death, Sayce talked with the famous researcher at the British Museum about his latest findings from Nineveh. While examining the artifacts, a man and woman approached to observe. The couple was very inquisitive, asking various questions which Smith happily answered. Then in an act of verification the woman asked, "Are you Mr. Smith?" Smith responded, "My name is Smith, Madam." Surprised to have actually met the famous researcher, she said, "What, not the great Mr. Smith?" and she and the man insisted on shaking his hand.⁸³ This exchange between Smith and the couple reflect the fame achieved by Smith and the indelible mark he left on archeology and biblical history.

The Conservative Sayce

During Sayce's years at Oxford, he believed in the equality of the human spirit. In 1865 Sayce believed that:

The body is confined by the motions of quantity and quality. Hence body recognizes inequality. Since one body would be larger and stronger than another, quantity and quality being real and measurable. But spirit is confined, illimitable, free from all...(illegible)...space. And as being illimitable, it necessarily recognizes equality.⁸⁴

Affirmation of spiritual equality, however, did not imply a belief in political, physical and intellectual equality. He strongly believed both that wealth allowed for leisure time to read and to develop the intellect and that society should not promote mediocrity. Even though Sayce believed people were not socially, mentally and physically equal, the spirits of man were limitless and hence spiritually equal. Also Sayce argued that even though the body may be hindered by the physical world, the spirit was not and hence embraced equality. This spirit also helps to characterize human free will. Sayce believed that God granted mankind free will.

Sayce wrote:

⁸³ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 94.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, Diary for 1864, entry 8 March 1865.

We love to gaze upon the past and future and deck them with unreal glory, because of our free-will. For we hate constraint. Our free-will revolts against it. But the present is ever before us; do what we will, we can never get rid of it. Hence we hate its [the present's] despotism, and try to fly from it by merging ourselves in the past and future.⁸⁵

The desire to focus on the past and romanticize it is something of which Sayce was guilty. Sayce fondly remembered his youth and life in Bristol and Bath.

In the 1870s Sayce moved toward conservatism. He opposed individualism, emphasizing physical and mental inequalities of humanity. Throughout his career Sayce was never particularly active in politics. He viewed himself as a conservative and embraced the Tory Party during the Disraeli era. In the 1870s during Disraeli's second term as prime minister, Sayce began to shift his ideological beliefs toward traditional and pro-orthodox ideas. Sayce supported the Tories as an alternative to the Radicals, the leftwing of the Liberal Party. He described the Radicals as in fashion at the time. Sayce even went as far as to imply that during his youth he embraced radical ideas. It was in the 1860s that he agreed with Colenso and looked forward to championing his cause, but the more mature Sayce would argue that that was a part of his 'radical' youth which he had shed. He argued that by the 1870s he had "shed the Radicalism of [his] younger days and attached [himself] to the chariot-wheels of Disraeli's 'Tory-Democracy.'" He displayed signs of letting go of his Oxford liberalism and rejected the middle-class ideas of competition and individualism. The fact that he no longer viewed himself as radical denotes an important shift in Sayce's ideology. Sayce outgrew his radical nature and embraced a more conservative perspective on politics, which also infected his religious beliefs.⁸⁶

Sayce's 'radical' youth may be attributed to the environment at Oxford during his schooling. Max Müller observed the differences between the environment at Oxford and the

⁸⁵ Sayce, Diary for 1864, entry 7 March 1865.

⁸⁶ Ibid., *Reminiscences*, 108.

environment at German universities. Müller confessed to friends that he had to get used to the lack of constraints placed on the teachers and students at Oxford. Even though Müller was commenting about the 1850s, not much had changed by the 1860s. Because Oxford lacked stern oversight of students and faculty, a spirit of free thinking (or in Sayce's words 'radicalism') was fostered. This is evident in the rise in liberalism at the university and the Oxford Movement before that, which was not exactly radical but it did incorporate free thinking.

Even though Sayce held conservative views, his friends argued the opposite, asserting that he was more liberal than they. Some of the issues which Sayce supported were the granting of female suffrage, disestablishment of the Church, and Home Rule for Ireland. Sayce opposed liberalism because he believed it stood for mediocrity. Sayce believed that liberals supported mediocrity, which placed the weak on equal footing with the strong. In 1876 during a University sermon at St. Mary's, Rev. Sayce preached against the idea that everyone was born equal. He asserted that equal rights and powers went against the primary laws of the universe, and to enforce such a doctrine would only lead to anarchy and disaster. He wrote:

It was equally in vain that I tried to point out to them that their "Liberalism" meant the rule of ignorance and incompetence in the first place, and in the second place, the degradation of the mass of the people into mere soulless "hands." That every one is born "equal," with equal rights and powers, is contrary to experience as well as to the primary laws of the universe, and the efforts of puny man to enforce such a doctrine can lead only to disaster. On the physical side, where the healthy are mingled with the blind and sickly and where the long-lived are often the most incapable, the inequalities are appalling; on the social side, where the fool can enjoy advantages denied to the intelligent, they are just as striking; while on the intellectual side the differences are still more marked. And it is just on the intellectual side that political action is determined. The rise and fall of civilisation are dependent on whether or not the world is to be governed by reason and knowledge.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 109.

Since civilization was dependent on reason and knowledge, Sayce was convinced that only the wealthy and learned are fit to govern. He asserted that:

Art and learning alike demand wealth, leisure and education. They are essentially aristocratic luxuries; history and experience alike prove that the mass of mankind have neither the brains nor the taste for them. The ordinary man is destructive rather than constructive. Like the bees in a beehive or the ants in an ant-hill he seems to have been created to carry on that corporal labour which under the direction of “the gifted few” provides the outward framework of culture and civilisation.⁸⁸

Sayce went further and argued that “modern democracy...is built on a form of civilization which is wholly mechanical.” Society’s dependence on mass labor has led to a “loss of the personal element,” which results in the dehumanization of the worker.⁸⁹

Professor Sayce

The 1870s were a very busy time in Sayce’s life. Aside from writing numerous articles on language and teaching at Oxford University, Sayce became very active in various academic organizations. He began the decade with his Deacon’s Ordination in 1870.⁹⁰ He spent the year 1875 dividing his time between teaching at Oxford, lecturing on Monday afternoons in London on Assyrian script, writing for both the *Times* and New York’s *Independent* and attending meetings of the Old Testament Revision Committee. Word of his achievements in Assyriology traveled across Europe. By 1881 he had published his first book *Comparative Grammar of the Assyrian Language* (1872); *Principles of Comparative Philology* (1874); *Babylonian Literature* (1877); what Sayce deemed as “one of the best of [his] books,” *Introduction to the Science of Language* (1879); and *Monuments of the Hittites* (1881).

⁸⁸ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 109-110.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁹⁰ Victor G. Plarr, “Rev. Archibald Henry Sayce,” *Men and Women of Time: A Dictionary of Contemporaries Revised and Brought Down to the Present Time* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1899), 973.

While conducting research at the British Museum, Sayce met Dr. Friedrich Delitzsch, a professor of Assyriology in Berlin and writer of the *Assyrian Dictionary*. Delitzsch expressed to Sayce that he had heard of his reputation as an accomplished Assyriologist. Delitzsch told Sayce that he was expecting to meet a “venerable gentleman with a white beard.”⁹¹ He was shocked to find out that Sayce had accomplished so much at such a young age. In light of his accomplishments, in 1890 Sayce was nominated by the Italian government to be Oxford’s delegate at the fourth Oriental Congress in Florence.

Sayce achieved membership in several societies including the Royal Academy of History of Madrid and the Oxford Dante Society (whose membership included friends T. K. Cheyne and John Earle). In addition to becoming a member of the Society of Biblical Archaeology, he became associated with the Committee of the Egypt Exploration Fund and the Palestine Exploration Fund. But his most treasured membership was in the Athenaeum. While busy with the Revision Committee, Sayce received the “greatest [honor] ever conferred upon [him].” He was elected member of the Athenaeum, which was an academic society whose members were known for their artistic, literary and scientific achievements. Distinguished members of the nobility also joined the Club. Sayce became the Athenaeum’s youngest member (at the time).⁹² His sponsors were Herbert Spencer and Matthew Arnold, who acted as a guide and mentor. Membership afforded Sayce a place in London “where [he] found all the books and periodicals [he] needed as well as a society [he] most enjoyed.”⁹³ Immediately after his election to the Athenaeum, Sayce was elected to join a small dining club whose members were interested in the Orient and mostly of members of the Athenaeum. Members included Cheyne; Sir Henry

⁹¹ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 93-94.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 124. Sayce remembers being told by Arnold, “You are the youngest member of the Club; you must not shock its susceptibilities by running up the stairs!”

⁹³ *Ibid.*

Rawlinson, the famous Orientalist; and Sir Henry Layard, archaeologist famous for his excavation of Nimrud.⁹⁴

In the spring of 1876 Sayce assisted Müller in his teaching duties. Müller resigned his position as professor of Comparative Philology so as to devote more time to study the ancient language and literature of India.⁹⁵ The university selected a Deputy Professor to teach Comparative Philology, giving Müller free time to pursue his interest. Sayce, who was saddened to see Müller step down, was selected to act as Deputy and received a stipend of £300 a year.⁹⁶

In 1877 he was appointed Examiner in the Honor School of Theology. He was placed on a committee which included Pusey, Liddon and other professors of theology. The job of the committee was to draw up a plan which would place the theology school on the same level as the other honor schools at the university. Requirements for a degree in theology were relatively low and needed to be revised. In order to graduate only a minimum knowledge of theology was necessary, which demanded students answer only one question about Christian doctrine.⁹⁷ It was necessary to revise the course of study and the examination process. The committee met once a week each term for over a year. The revisions made were an updated reading list and a new examination procedure. Sayce and another were appointed examiners with the understanding that they were to “make the examination a real test of theological scholarship and deal remorselessly with candidates who lacked either the knowledge, the application, or the brains to aspire to Honours.” He and his colleague took their jobs seriously and with zeal. Sayce deduced that Rev. E. S. Ffoulkes was placed on the committee as senior examiner to counter the zeal of

⁹⁴ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 123-124.

⁹⁵ Max Müller, MSS Eng c. 2808 fols. 59-60, Bodleian Library, Oxford University, Oxford, England, United Kingdom.

⁹⁶ Chaudhuri, 234.

⁹⁷ Marvin R. O’Connell, *The Oxford Conspirators: A History of the Oxford Movement 1833-45* (London: The MacMillan Co., 1969), 28.

the two junior members and act as a less opposing figure to the candidates. Because of Ffoulkes's gentle nature, Sayce gave slightly weaker students in need of gentle treatment over to Ffoulkes for questioning.⁹⁸

Sayce also became a contributing writer for journals and an active member of archeological organizations. Societies became the vehicle by which Sayce published or became the starting point for future scholarly works. He contributed articles on the Old Testament and archeology to the Religious Tract Society; his articles were the foundation for the work *Fresh Light from the Ancient Monuments* published in 1885.⁹⁹ He also became a member of the Egypt Exploration Fund (1882),¹⁰⁰ which novelist Amelia Edwards¹⁰¹ co-founded with Reginald Stuart Poole. The Fund worked closely with Flinders Petrie and helped him receive funding for his research. Sayce negotiated on behalf of the Fund in Egypt and was the first to inform Flinders Petrie of projects proposed by the Fund.¹⁰²

Life for Sayce changed in the late nineteenth century. After the death of his father, Sayce left Oxford in November 1890 to spend his winters in Egypt. His father and family had always played an influential role in Sayce's life. He wrote that his father's death "left [him] free to follow whatever line of life [he]" chose.¹⁰³ The next phase of life which he sought to pursue did not include Oxford and "English ambitions." He gave up his professorship and other university offices (keeping his fellowship) and spent his time on the Nile aboard his dhahabiya, *Istar*.

⁹⁸ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 145.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 226.

¹⁰⁰ Now it is called The Egypt Exploration Society.

¹⁰¹ After spending 1873-4 on the Nile, Edwards published *A Thousand Miles up the Nile*, which addresses the neglect shown toward Egyptian monuments. The work became a best-seller. She and Sayce also joined the Society for the Preservation of the Monuments of Ancient Egypt, whose goal was to protect antiquities from further plunder.

¹⁰² Margaret S. Drower, *Flinders Petrie: A Life in Archaeology* (London: Victor Gollancz LTD, 1985), 63 & 70. Edouard Naville was asked by the Fund to locate and research sites affiliated with the Old Testament. Naville, who was in the process of finishing his *Book of the Dead* coupled with the possibility that he did not want to endure the inconvenience and uncomfortable working conditions, turned the offer down. The Fund then asked Petrie who accepted.

¹⁰³ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 273.

Named after the Babylonian goddess *Istar*, the boat had nineteen crewmen and two servants and was the largest sailing dhahabiya on the river.¹⁰⁴ Sailing the Nile was a delightful experience for Sayce. British archeologist Flinders Petrie accompanied Sayce for a short while on the dhahabiya. The two had met at Oxford and a friendship developed which lasted forty years.¹⁰⁵

In the years to follow Sayce conducted research in Egypt and produced several works which included *Races of the Old Testament* (1891), *Higher Criticism and the Verdict of Monuments* (1894), *Patriarchal Palestine* (1895), *The Egypt of the Hebrews and Herodotus* (1895), *Early History of the Hebrews* (1897), *Babylonians and the Assyrians* (1900), and *Egyptian and Babylonian Religion* (1903). In 1891 Sayce accepted the Chair of Assyriology at Oxford which did not demand residence or teaching. The winter of 1907-08 was his last time on his boat. The charm of Nile was lost and the life of leisurely sailing was gone.¹⁰⁶ In Sayce's opinion the effects of modernization had reached Egypt. Prices increased and workers demanded higher pay. No longer were boats allowed to sail along the bank of the river, but ordered to float in the middle of the stream along with other boats.¹⁰⁷ To escape his new surroundings, Sayce sold his boat and gave the antiquities he had collected while in Egypt to the Cairo Museum.

Recollecting life on the Nile, Sayce writes: "It was with somewhat of a heavy heart that I quitted

¹⁰⁴ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 273, Wilson, 100-101, and Plarr, 973. Drower's *Flinders Petrie and Sayce's Reminiscences* describes the experience of sailing along the Nile. The boats usually carried eight to ten passengers and a crew. The dhahabiya also had sleeping cabins, dining area, and observation area and some were equipped with bathrooms. This form of travel was not as cheap as traveling on a tour steamer, which journeyed from Cairo to Luxor in eight days. Travel on a steamer may have been faster, but there were fewer stops and the passengers were usually poorly informed tourists seeing the sites. On a dhahabiya the captain stopped wherever he was told and for however long the passengers desired, allowing them the opportunity to see various monuments and copy inscriptions. The only problem encountered by traveling on a dhahabiya was that it would get stuck on a sandbank, taking time away from site seeing and resulting in the omission of some sites to conserve time.

¹⁰⁵ Drower, 51-52.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 55. Petrie described life on the Nile as a "lesson in laziness." While waiting for the dhahabiya to be unstuck or for a gust of wind to come, passengers passed the time by playing games and reading. Even with the inconvenience, Petrie considered his days on the dhahabiya with Sayce as a delightful experience. Sayce, on the other hand, revealed to *The Academy* that the dhahabiya was not the best way of seeing the monuments of Egypt even though he continued to use the dhahabiya and even expressed regret and remorse when he chose to sell the boat.

¹⁰⁷ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 338.

the boat. The last of my books was written in it.”¹⁰⁸ Even though Sayce left his beloved Egypt, the love of traveling did not subside. From 1911-12 Sayce spend the winter in the Far East visiting Japan, Malaya, Hong Kong; he also traveled to India and America.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

Rev. A. H. Sayce was a theologian, archeologist and philologist. The path of his scholastic career began during his childhood at Bath and continued throughout his studies at Oxford where he was introduced to the writings and views of Hegel. Sayce credited Hegel with introducing him to the idea that dogmas and ideologies change over time. His ailments led to his intense study of languages and his later travels to Egypt. As an Oxford don, scholarship was his first love, which is seen in more depth in chapter two which treats his efforts to improve scholarship at Oxford in order to strengthen the position of the University and also to diversify the curriculum to include studies in the Orient.

Influenced by both his High Churchman father and his Broad Churchmen friend Professor Earle, Sayce developed a religious balance which laid the foundation for his intellectual development. Even though Sayce embraced the views of Colenso, by the 1870s he shifted to conservatism and took a more critical approach to Colenso’s ideas. He valued his Anglican beliefs; his father’s influence kept him from converting to Catholicism, but Sayce remained a progressive religious thinker which is evident in his argument against the higher critics presented in chapter three.

In chapter three the role of the intellectual movement on religion is examined more closely. In addition to this, chapter two will further examine Sayce’s positions on religion and social progress (i.e. industrialization and social evolution) evident in his sermons and other

¹⁰⁸ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 339.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 370.

writings on the topic. Through Sayce's scholastic life, one sees that religion was still important to the British. His sermons reveal his critique of the secular world and its negative effect on British society and its contribution to what Sayce saw as the demise of Christianity.

Paradoxically, Sayce's scholastic achievements and writings also reveal that secularization may not have been as dominant an issue in late-Victorian society as once believed. Chapter three argues that the political leaders and University intellectuals still held deep seeded religious beliefs which influenced the character of university life. Likewise, in light of the decline in church attendance, the public in general was also still interested in religion and specifically the role archeology had in biblical research. Society's emphasis on religion is evident when examining Sayce's efforts to transform Oxford University and the popularity of his writings. Sayce, who viewed himself as an archeologist and not a theologian, was embraced by religious organizations and was frequently asked to contribute articles which detailed the relationship between archeology and the bible.

Religion, university reform and science, along with the social tone of Britain, played a role in shaping Sayce's intellectual views. The influences of intellectuals such as Hegel, Pusey and Müller are also evident in Sayce's intellectual development. Chapter three treats these themes and examines Sayce's opinions as relayed in his sermons and other writings.

CHAPTER 3 SAYCE THE INTELLECTUAL

T. W. Heyck argues in *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England* that prior to the 1870s there was no group called ‘intellectuals;’ those who carried on an intellectual-centered life were labeled as either ‘men of letters’ or ‘men of science.’ The men of science were the smaller of the two groups. Prior to the 1880s science was considered a field which consisted of people of various levels of social status, studying different areas of the natural sciences. It had not reached the status of a field of specificity or advanced scholarship. Clubs like the Athenaeum, of which A. H. Sayce was a member, consisted of a few scientists but were mostly made up of writers, political figures and barristers.¹ Men of letters, which was the larger group, consisted of poets, novelists, historians and philosophers, and they drew on their knowledge of the liberal arts. The term ‘intellectual,’ which lumps both groups together, was not readily used until after 1860 and was not a term used much in Britain.² However, a dominant characteristic of Victorian life was the growing specialization and professionalization of intellectual life in Britain.

A. H. Sayce is the perfect example of this new sort of late-Victorian intellectual. He represents the ‘men of letters’ with his religious writings and represents the ‘men of science’ through his Assyriological research. Sayce combined these areas of religion and science (also philosophy and science) to create his progressive view of religion, which was supported by archeological evidence. Life as an Oxford fellow and don provided Sayce with the time necessary to hone his philosophical ideas concerning religion and science, and to speak to the relationships between the two through his sermons.

¹ T. W. Heyck, *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982), 36.

² *Ibid.*, 24.

To explore Sayce's philosophical and religious beliefs, the chapter will look at four examples of Sayce's intellectual development: his sermons, his views on evolution, his efforts to reform the curriculum at Oxford, and his accomplishments in the field of archeology. Through his sermons, Sayce emphasized the importance of language for understanding the Holy Scriptures. He reinforced the importance of faith in the bible and faith's role in strengthening Christians. His sermons also reflected his worry that with modernization came a decreasing church attendance and a weakening religious conviction.

In sermons given during the 1870s and 80s, Sayce explained the definition of 'hell' and 'paradise.'³ During the 1870s there was a great interest in the idea of immortality. Prior to the 1870s, questions arose concerning the plausibility of a merciful God exacting eternal punishment. Sayce did not believe that after the crucifixion that Jesus Christ went down into hell to preach. He deduced that Christ did not enter a place of torment. This view coincided with the Victorians' emphasis on God as merciful.⁴

Sayce believed that an emphasis on secularization hindered those who possessed weak Christian convictions. He observed that some Christians equated Christianity with Confucianism. The connection drawn between the two religions, Sayce believed, resulted in Christians viewing Christianity as a religion which emphasized morality over the significance of Jesus Christ. Consequently, faith in biblical teachings, he preached, was essential to Christianity; and he stressed that faith in the teachings of Jesus Christ differentiated Christianity from other religions, notably Confucianism. Also in his sermons, Sayce argued that British

³In 1870 Sayce received his deacon's ordination. It is not known whether or not his sermons were given publicly. One may assume that those found at the Queens College Library were given publicly since he had stated in *Reminiscences* that he had publicly given a sermon.

⁴ Geoffrey Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians: A Study of the Nineteenth-Century Theological Controversies Concerning Eternal Punishment and the Future Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 4. Rowell states that the questioning of mortality dominated the 1870s. By the 1880s and '90s interest in the topic had decreased and was replaced instead with concern over "the rights of nations and imperial policy."

society had become preoccupied with contemporary luxuries and had forgotten about preparing for the after-life. He noted his worry that progressiveness (i.e. modernization) led to the de-emphasizing of religion, which culminated in secular activities taking the place of church attendance.

Because Sayce emphasized in his sermons the importance of philology in understanding biblical terms, the discussion of his sermons will be followed by a treatment of his unpublished works which dealt with the evolution of knowledge. Sayce believed that through the understanding of philology and Hegelian philosophy church dogma would evolve to a higher level of ideological development and become more progressive. He asserted that Hegelian philosophy explained the evolution of ideas and the development of religious dogma. Sayce, who was an admirer of Hegel, argued that Hegel laid the foundation for evolutionary theory, preceding Darwin. He believed that because ideas evolved and transformed themselves, religious dogma also changed. His emphasis on dogmatic evolution was a departure from Oxford's emphasis on conventional religious views, "dogmatic Anglicanism" uninfluenced by contemporary philosophical and theological thought.⁵ Prior to the 1870s, university High Churchmen rejected the idea of developing a theological school because of fear that it would diminish the sacredness of the bible and Anglican Creed while also promoting biblical criticism.⁶

Following the treatment of evolution is an examination of Oxford reforms. Sayce the intellectual became Sayce the reformer and worked to improve studies at Oxford. He believed that oriental studies were essential to biblical studies and argued that Oxford should incorporate science in the curriculum in addition to the traditional humanities. A. H. Sayce also argued for

⁵ Cheyne, "The Maintenance of the Study of the Bible," *Essay on the Endowment of Research* (London, 1876), 180.

⁶ M. G. Brock and M. C. Curthoys, eds., *The History of the University of Oxford: Nineteenth-Century Oxford, Part I*, vol. VI (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 313-314.

the elimination of the examination system, which, he believed, promoted cramming and not true scholarship.

Adding “reformer” to his status as intellectual, A. H. Sayce advocated the incorporation of archeology and oriental studies within the traditional humanities curriculum. As Britain was being transformed by the industrial revolution, Oxford had remained relatively unchanged. Training was centered on the liberal arts and all were expected to graduate in Greats (classics). It was a foregone conclusion that those who attended Oxford were going to make their career either in the church or law. While the nation was conforming to the changes brought on by industrialization, Oxford failed to follow the lead of society and incorporate practical courses in the curricula. Those interested in reforming the universities questioned why classical studies should be required instead of more technical and specific fields like economics and the pure sciences. Utilitarians argued for the introduction of more useful courses from which an industrial society would benefit. Along with offering limited courses, Oxford utilized an archaic examination system which rewarded cramming and not the love of education. Also professors and tutors were required to teach several subjects without being required to specialize in any. Because educational training remained static, Oxford produced mediocre students. The quality of education was a concern for progressive professors at Oxford. Some changes were implemented, beginning in 1854, by the Executive Commission. Among the issues of concern for the Executive Commission were the restrictions on fellowships. The commission allowed fellows to use fellowships as supplemental income.⁷ After the work of the commission, Oxford educators noted that further modifications were yet needed.

Sayce, who participated in the debate over Oxford studies, proposed revisions which would raise standards and increase the university’s appeal to future students. He believed that an

⁷ Brock and Curthoys, 318-319.

improved oriental studies program would produce qualified researchers which subsequently would improve biblical studies. Moreover, an improved program in oriental studies would produce scholars capable of translating ancient texts and understanding the period in which the texts were written.

The fourth and final section of the chapter treats Sayce's archeological and philological achievements. Sayce used his time at Oxford to further the discipline of Assyriology through research and publications, becoming the foremost researcher in Assyriology and was credited for identifying Hittite civilization. Sayce also met various leaders in archeology and Egyptology and participated in various research-promoting societies. The discovery of the Tel el Amarna tablets put Sayce on the path of defending the Mosaic authenticity of the Pentateuch. He believed the tablets provided insight into the ancient Near Eastern civilizations and biblical history. Sayce strongly believed that archeology could be used to defend the accuracy of the biblical records that made up the foundation of the Christian faith. In his view Christianity originated in ancient Egypt and evolved over time.

Analyzing Sayce's Sermons

Sayce argued that humanity depends on language to express thought, and words are symbolic of the mental pictures in the mind. He was convinced that "we cannot conceive of anything without [symbolism]," making symbols "a fundamental part of our nature."⁸ Humanity uses language to interpret and convey symbols. Sayce believed that "man develops language out of himself but it is language that reciprocally paves the way for the progress of the mind."⁹ Since an individual expresses his or her ideas through the symbol system that we call language, Sayce deduced that "the dogmas of religion are built up on metaphor[s] and

⁸ Sayce, Diary for 1864, entry 1 October 1864 and entry 6 October 1864.

⁹ Ibid., Diary for 1864, entry 9 October 1864.

symbol[s].”¹⁰ As the meaning and interpretations of words change, so then does dogma and vice versa. Sayce reasoned that dogma built on “false metaphor” will in turn be false. Likewise dogma based on metaphors which are no longer relevant will become obsolete and archaic.¹¹

Sayce tackled the issue of language and meaning in an Easter sermon where he made note of the different interpretations of ‘hell.’ Sayce acknowledged that the Apostle’s Creed declared that following the crucifixion “Christ descended into hell.” But Sayce argued that viewing ‘hell’ as a “place of torment is a modernism,” a modern understanding based on word usage and representation.¹² Medieval painters, for example, depicted the place Christ entered after the crucifixion as a prison; this image reflected their view of hell.¹³ Sayce explained that the word ‘descend’—he “descended into hell”—made one think of going down, hence the idea of hell as a place of torment below earth. Yet ‘hell’ is simply a translation of the Greek *Hades*, which he asserted referred to the realm of the dead, nothing more.¹⁴ Sayce explained that after Christ died, his body remained in the grave but His spirit traveled to the world of the dead before “ascending” to Paradise. In his sermon, Sayce examined the interpretations and misinterpretations surrounding the days prior to the resurrection:

Christ’s lifeless body descended into the earth, his living soul departed to heaven; such, I fancy would be the conception a good many of us would form of the words of the Creed. It is certainly not the conception which the Church intended to be formed of them. Christ did not depart to heaven until His ascension, when His glorified body reunited to its soul returned to the Father from whom he had come forth.¹⁵

¹⁰ Sayce, *Symbolism*, Sayce Papers, Queens College Library, Oxford University, England, United Kingdom, 30 (31).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 31 (32).

¹² *Ibid.*, Easter Sermon, Sayce Papers, Queens College Library, Oxford University, England, United Kingdom, 2.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

Here Sayce pointed out that the Church did not promote the idea that Christ entered heaven immediately following the crucifixion. Sayce is of the opinion that Christ did not enter heaven until His ascension.

Sayce asserted that Christians often misunderstood “Heaven” as well. Again, language was crucial. He explained that Christ did not enter heaven immediately but journeyed to Paradise:

It was not in heaven, but in Paradise that He promised the penitent thief they would meet together, and the Paradise of Jewish theology was not that state of eternal and unchangeable bliss to which the Christian looks forward when he speaks of heaven.¹⁶

He also described ‘Paradise’ as a place of preparation before meeting God:

By Paradise the Jew would have understood that stage of existence to which the disembodied soul passed after death, a stage merely in its history and a place of training for a higher existence in the presence of the Infinite God Himself.¹⁷

For Sayce, the Jewish explanation of ‘Paradise’ was important because Christianity built on Judaism; the first Christians were Jewish preachers and disciples who were steeped in Jewish traditions and theology and who used “the terms of religion in the Jewish sense.”¹⁸ Since Paradise is a place one went before entering heaven, then one might rightly conclude that Paradise is equivalent to Hades. Sayce explained,

For them, as for our Lord and the thief upon the cross, Paradise was practically the equivalent of the Greek Hades, neither heaven nor hell with modern sense, but that intermediate state between our mortal existence and the day of final judgment for which we seem in modern English to have no special name.¹⁹

¹⁶ Sayce, Easter Sermon, 3.

¹⁷ Ibid., 3-4.

¹⁸ Ibid., 4.

¹⁹ Ibid., 4-5

Thus Sayce challenged the traditional understanding of hell and eternal punishment. He asserted that it was incorrect to believe that upon death Christ entered the heaven of the modern sense.

To advance such an idea, he believed, led to the misunderstanding of Christianity.

Also in Sayce's Easter sermon he exclaimed that too often much more is read into scripture than is necessary. Some passages should be accepted as they were, without excessive examination. Human understanding is finite and some aspects of theology will not be understood because "we who are finite cannot explain the mode of working of an infinite God."²⁰ In trying to understand the inexplicable, Christians allow certain scriptures to become stumbling-blocks. One such text, Sayce noted, is the parable of Dives and Lazarus, "a stumbling-block to many, simply because they have not chosen to accept it as it stands."

Referring to the parable of Dives and Lazarus, Sayce declared:

Time after Time it has been slurred over or explained away, and yet it is just one of those declarations of our Lord about whose authenticity there is not the least doubt. If we reject it we must reject also all the other parables and sayings ascribed to Christ. There is none for whose genuiness the evidence is more complete.²¹

Sayce figured that once the validity of certain biblical passages were questioned then so would the rest of the bible be questioned. Sayce's ultimate response to the over-examination of scriptures was simply that humanity cannot know the workings of God, an idea frequently referred to in the sermon and in his arguments against the higher critics. Sayce also relayed this

²⁰ Sayce, Easter Sermon, 7. Also see Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 140. Sayce was asked how a religion could be true and not be universal. This "sank deeply into [his] recollection." At the time Sayce was asked, he could not provide a response. After pondering the matter Sayce declared: "The remark ignored the fact that truth can only be relative in this world of ours; absolute truth doubtless ought to be universal, but the finite mind in a finite universe can attain merely to fragments and reflections of the Light which 'lighteth every man that cometh into the world.'" Sayce's comment echoed his belief in the limited conceptualization of humanity.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

belief concerning the limited comprehension of mankind in his 1864 diary. He wrote: “But the mortal can not comprehend the immortal. [Aiming] at the infinite only strains [the mind].”²²

Sayce acknowledged that humanity can never fully understand the essence of good and evil or “how in the language of theology Christ’s blood washed away our sins.”²³ Even though humanity is flawed, the human race still has a relationship with God. God speaks to humanity through language because words denote deeper meaning—a meaning that extends beyond the senses.²⁴ Symbolism is one of humanity’s most basic media for understanding God. Sayce explained that symbolism is humanity’s way of lowering the divine so that it may be understood.²⁵ Both Christ and Buddha spread their messages through parables, which Sayce asserted were comprehensible to ordinary people and yet representative of a deeper meaning.²⁶

Sayce feared that industrial society placed religion at the bottom of its priorities, behind leisure activities. His worries echoed those of many in the Church from the late eighteenth century on.²⁷ Some religious figures depicted industrialization as mechanical and imposing. For Sayce, however, industrialization was less problematical than modernization. His characterization of modernization seems similar to industrialization; however, for Sayce industrialization dealt with material progress and innovation while modernization affected ideas and cultural development. A modern society, he argued, was built on mechanics and not personal interaction; modernization transformed workers into a “dehumanized” labor force.²⁸ He feared that the new modern pleasures and innovations were replacing religion. Now the

²² Sayce, *Diary for 1864*, entry 28 October 1864.

²³ *Ibid.*, *Symbolism*, 30 (31) and Easter Sermon, 6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, *Symbolism*, 30 (31).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, *Diary for 1864*, entry 1 August 1864.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, *Symbolism*, 32 (33).

²⁷ Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* (London: Routledge, 2001), 16.

²⁸ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 110.

Church had to compete with soccer matches, pubs and train rides for the attention of the British public; from Sayce's point of view, religion was losing the competition.

He expressed his views in a sermon taken from *Mark* 8:36 which poignantly states: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"²⁹ The question posed in the sermon is "Can we wonder then that our age can much claim the merit of being an age of faith?"³⁰ Sayce provided a negative answer to the question and worried that Christians were losing faith in the teachings of the Church. He declared: "If, therefore, faith is the essence of religion I am afraid that our age cannot be described as a very religious one."³¹ He asserted that "religious light of the path has been replaced by electricity," resulting in a focus on material things:

We have comfortable homes, pleasant [illegible], first-class hotels, well-cooked dinners, rapid means of getting about. Why should we be weary...? Our lives and thoughts are too full of pleasant occupations or the business affairs which place those pleasant occupations within our reach to allow us much time for thinking about another life.³²

Because society enjoyed comfort, there was no reason to desire to live in a world beyond the one of comfort. Those who are content with the material goods of the world fail to look to the new world as a future home, choosing instead to focus on the earthly world of materialism. Sayce believed that a focus on secular matters had caused the decay and subsequent fall of ancient Egypt. He argued that "their [the Egyptians'] sight was dulled by [too] much reverence for the

²⁹ *Mark* 8:36, KJV.

³⁰ Sayce, *Sermons and Papers* 1.10, Sayce Papers, Queens College Library, Oxford University, England, United Kingdom, 3.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

³² *Ibid.*, 1-3

past and the materialism which came of a contentment with this life.”³³ Because their focus shifted from the after-life to the secular world, Egyptians’ society crumbled.

Sayce believed that it was Dives’s materialism which led him to a place of suffering instead of the pleasant peace of Abraham’s bosom, where Lazarus rested. Dives suffered not because he was a wicked man but because he “selfishly enjoyed the good things of this world,” resulting in his becoming concerned with “his own comfort and well-being.”³⁴ Drawing on the biblical parable, Sayce declared:

Those who believe that this world has little to offer have faith in the unseen [and] a belief in a better world. Those who are content with what they see around them can get along very well without either the faith or the belief.³⁵

Because the British no longer emphasized the after-life, Sayce began to question the level of faith possessed by non-churchgoing Britons. He asserted that “those whose vision is (illegible) by the experiences of this life are not likely to have a very profound faith in what lies beyond it.” As British society grew more prosperous and as industrialization multiplied the material comforts available, the public placed more emphasis on the here and now and not life after death. By showing no concern for the here-after, the public relayed to Sayce a lack of faith which culminated in a de-emphasis on religion because “faith is the essence of religion.”³⁶

Sayce argued that he no longer lived in an “age of faith” but rather in an “age of comfort.” Moreover, not only did British society enjoy comfort and luxury, it had also made the gospel comfortable. Sayce realized that “there [was] more that [had] been equally comfortable.

³³ The Gifford Lectures subtitled “Professor Sayce on Egyptology,” *The Daily Free Press*, 23 October 1900, Newsclippings 1900-01. Queens College Library, Oxford University, England, United Kingdom. This was a reprint of a lecture given at Mitchell Hall, Marischal College at Aberdeen.

³⁴ Sayce, Easter Sermon, 10-11.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, *Sermons and Papers*, 1.10, 3.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

Never before [had] the gospel of comfort been....so efficiently realized.”³⁷ Sayce protested that a large percentage of Britons had not objected to the compromising of the gospel to make it more comfortable to the public.

Sayce believed those who chose not to place their emphasis on material things proved their faith to God and displayed their confidence in the promise of heaven since “Christianity fixes its gaze on a future world...”³⁸ On the other hand, those who saw faith as inconsequential were satisfied with contemporary British society. Those with great wealth at their disposal but who lacked faith possessed false contentment. In Sayce’s view, a man without faith was a man without hope. He wrote: “A life without religious faith is but a blind and painful struggle for existence without the silver lining of hope.”³⁹ Sayce stressed the need for the British public to focus on making preparations for eternal life rather than temporary gratifications on earth.

Sayce emphasized that death is a constant and a law of life. He stated:

All that is born must die. The day must come for each of us when we must leave behind us our comforts and our possessions our friends and acquaintances,and our pleasure. We cannot carry them with us when we die.⁴⁰

We have no control over death, nor can we avoid it. One could argue that because death had always been a fixture in his life, beginning with the chronic illnesses of his youth, Sayce had been preparing for death since his childhood; and whenever it should come, he was willing to face it. It could be concluded that Sayce did not fear death and was resolved to leave this world for something better. In 1898 Sayce suffered from blood poisoning which almost took his arm.⁴¹ While visiting Egypt, he was bitten by “the most deadly of Egyptian serpents”—the horned asp.

³⁷ Sayce, *Sermons and Papers*, 1.10, 2.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Easter Sermon, 12.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, *Sermons and Papers*, 1.10, 11.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, *Reminiscences*, 304.

After cauterizing the wound, his leg swelled, and Sayce was warned that death was likely if the swelling moved above the knee. He was told to rush immediately to the doctor, but Sayce ignored this advice. In his opinion, “whether I was to live or die would be decided long before we could get there.” Miraculously Sayce went back to researching within weeks.⁴² Because of his personal experiences, he seemed resolved to leave this world for a better one.

Sayce viewed Christianity as more than a moral code like Confucianism.⁴³ He noted that morality had been misplaced under religion. Sayce argued that the difference between morality and religion was that morality began in the community and extended to the individual whereas religion began with the individual and extended to the community.⁴⁴ He maintained that the Christian religion was a belief based in “an unseen world [which] surrounds us whether we are conscious of it or not ... We can not escape [it].”⁴⁵ Confucianism, in contrast, omitted this “faith in the unseen, faith in a power that works for righteousness, faith ... in our master Christ.”⁴⁶ Sayce, echoing the sentiments of his sermon, described religion as pertaining to “a power outside [our]selves,” whereas morality dealt “with [our] conduct one to another.”⁴⁷ Just because society had realized the duties owed “to our brother-man” and had learned to be less selfish, did not mean that society should settle for the present existence.⁴⁸

Sayce believed that man needed faith, which is stronger than morality, to withstand temptations. He wrote:

Systems of morality are excellent things for people who have been well brought up, who are kindly and honourable by nature, and who

⁴² Wilson. *Signs and Wonders*, 99.

⁴³ See Sayce, *Sermons and Papers*, 1.10, 9-10. Morality and religion were not synonymous to Sayce. He argued that Christianity promotes mercy which Confucianism does not. Christians’ ability to apply mercy is a testament to their faith.

⁴⁴ The Gifford Lectures, *The Daily Press*, 23 October 1900.

⁴⁵ Sayce, *Sermons and Papers*, 1.10, 4

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁷ The Gifford Lectures, *The Daily Free Press*, 23 October 1900.

⁴⁸ Sayce, *Sermons and Papers*, 1.10, 9.

are sufficiently well off to have comparatively few temptations put in their way. But for the great mass of mankind something more is needed than a system of morality.⁴⁹

Sayce argued that morality is not a strong enough force to compel people to “choose the good and eschew the evil” and “resist temptation and follow the will of God...”⁵⁰ Christianity was the only religion that provided strength for the weak and redemption for the wicked:

History has shown that this motive force is supplied by Christianity in a way that no other religion has been able to supply. Other religions have succeeded in producing saints out of those who were saintly by nature. Christ alone has converted the sinner with the saint. Christ’s message alone has penetrated to the Jews of misery and squalid crime and lifted the outcasts of humanity to a level with their more fortunate fellow-men.⁵¹

Max Müller, like Sayce, held strong religious convictions and defined faith as unconditional submission to God. Müller wrote that the teachings of Christ “confront us from the earliest childhood as the infallible law of a mighty church, and demand of us an unconditional submission, which [is] call[ed] faith.”⁵² Another friend of Sayce, Flinders Petrie, also believed that religion was based on faith. He defined religion as the “belief concerning any ideas which cannot be immediately verified by the physical senses.”⁵³ What could not be understood through the senses was explained through faith.

From Sayce’s point of view, faith is a part of individuals and the spiritual realm is all around. This view is similar to that of his friend and mentor Max Müller who believed that “the least important thing does not happen except as God wills it;” therefore, God is concerned with all matters whether they are spiritual or material, making it impossible to eliminate faith from

⁴⁹ Sayce, *Sermons and Papers* 1.10, 10.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 11.

⁵² Max Müller, *Memories* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1904), 75.

⁵³ Flinders Petrie, *Religion and Conscience in Ancient Egypt*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen & Co., 1920), 3.

secular society.⁵⁴ Even though this “unseen world” is always present, Sayce argued British society “relegated [religion] to a place by itself and ordered” that it not mix “with the things of this secular world.”⁵⁵ He believed that society ignored religion to concern itself with the pleasures and comforts of the world.

Through Sayce’s sermons it is evident that he was concerned about the spirituality of the British public. His sermons reflected his religious devotion and the importance he placed on faith. Also, his opinions on dogmas reflected progressive religious views. In analyzing dogma, Sayce drew on his philosophical teachings and knowledge of ancient history. An analysis of his views on the development of dogmas provides additional insight into the religious side of Sayce. Views on ideological evolution and dogmatic change reveal the progressive aspect of his religious belief.

Evolution of Knowledge

While Sayce used his sermons to emphasize the importance of philology in shaping biblical interpretations and to express his worry that Christian convictions of the British public were weakening, he also sharpened his views concerning the development of knowledge. He believed that ideas, which came from the minds of man, evolved and transformed themselves. The concept of evolution may have been systematized by Charles Darwin, but its roots extend back into the early nineteenth century. Sayce was familiar with Darwin second-hand,⁵⁶ but he had read *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844) by Robert Chambers. In the work, Chambers denied the notion that the Creation occurred as described in *Genesis* and argued that the development of species follows natural law. Chambers believed that God initiated creation but allowed creation to develop within the laws of nature. *Vestiges* is credited as one of the first

⁵⁴ Müller, *Memoires*, 54.

⁵⁵ Sayce, *Sermons and Papers* 1.10, 5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, *Reminiscences*, 31.

works which promoted an idea of natural evolution even though much of its scientific information has been discredited.⁵⁷ It was Darwin who merged Chambers' theory with scientific evidence.

Sayce did not detail his opinions on the works of Darwin, but he did apply the idea of evolution to the development of ideas. He wrote in his unpublished work entitled *Dogma*:

The key-note of the nineteenth century has been the doctrine of evolution. The ideas of growth and development have become so essential a part of our philosophy that it is not easy to transport to the period when arbitrary and sudden creation seemed the natural law of the world.⁵⁸

In this section I will examine his unpublished texts in detail, noting his application of evolution to religious and intellectual development. Rev. Sayce's unpublished texts reveal his interpretation of ideological evolution and provide further insight into his religious and intellectual sides.

By the late Victorian period, Darwinian views of evolution had been largely accepted not only in scientific thought but also theology. Many Christians embraced Darwinian science and applied it to Christianity. Even though Darwin's *Origin of Species* faced criticism from biologists and churchmen, progressive theologians applied Darwinian evolution to biblical understanding. Theologians like F. J. A. Hort of Cambridge and *Essays and Reviews* contributor Frederick Temple, later Archbishop of Canterbury, believed that Darwinian ideas had a place in the understanding of theology. They believed that the application of evolutionary ideas to progressive theology made "the creation more wonderful than ever."⁵⁹ Progressive theologians interpreted the Creation story in *Genesis* as "not a number of isolated creations, but all creation

⁵⁷ Bernard M. G. Reardon, *From Coleridge to Gore: A Century of Religious Thought in Britain* (London: Longman, 1971), 289-290.

⁵⁸ Sayce, *Dogma*, Sayce Papers, Queens College Library, Oxford University, England, United Kingdom, 1.

⁵⁹ Reardon, 294.

knit together into a complete whole.”⁶⁰ Even High Churchman H. P. Liddon, one of Sayce’s friends and mentors, did not wholly reject Darwinian evolution, believing that it was not totally inconsistent with the story of the Creation.⁶¹ During the late nineteenth century, Christians not only looked to science for knowledge but also to enhance traditional values without replacing them.⁶²

Sayce’s understanding of evolution was shaped by his reading of Hegel. He argued that Hegel’s philosophy “rest[s] upon the fact that thought is impossible without development,” and that the “fully-formed conception” of an idea is the last stage of the growth process.⁶³ For these reasons the law of evolution, in Sayce’s opinion, is the law of thought.

Just as thought evolved and developed through a process, dogmas also develop and were modified over time. Based on Hegelian ideas, Sayce believed that thought was ever-changing; history revealed progress in human thought and action. Since thought evolves, so does religious dogma which can not remain “stereotypical and stationary.”⁶⁴ The Oxford Movement reflected an attempt to modify the Anglican faith, and in Sayce’s opinion, exemplified the evolution of religious thought.

Sayce also pointed to the relationship between ancient Egypt and Christianity as another example of the evolution of religion. He believed that Egyptian ideas of religion contributed to Christian development. In his Gifford Lectures, Sayce declared: “Many of the theories of Egyptian religion, modified and transformed no doubt, had penetrated into the theology of Christian Europe and formed as it were part of the woof in the web of modern religious

⁶⁰ Reardon, 294.

⁶¹ Ibid., 295.

⁶² Bowler, 56. Sayce went further and connected Darwin’s idea of evolution to the Babylonian ideas of creation. He noted that the primitive Babylonians thought of creation as progressive development and declared that “Darwin transferred and applied it [Babylonian ideas of progress] to the realm of scientific observation.” *Reminiscences*, 32.

⁶³ Sayce, *Dogma*, 2-3.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 8.

thought.”⁶⁵ He reasoned that Christians are the religious heirs of the Egyptians. As evidence for this theory he pointed to the similarities between the interpretations of the “soul and spirit, the same belief in the resurrection of a material body, and in a heaven which is but a glorified counterpart of our own earth.”⁶⁶ Another striking likeness between the two religions is the doctrine of the trinity shared by both. The Christian Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit parallels the Egyptian trinity of a divine father, wife and son (Osiris, Isis and Horus), which is borrowed from Babylonian mythology. Sayce also compared Akenaten’s Aten with the monolithic God of Christianity.⁶⁷ For Sayce, these religious similarities pointed to the contributions Egyptian religion made to Christianity, but Christianity modified Egyptian religion to make these ideas its own. Hence, Christianity, which had its foundation in Egyptian religion, evolved to be distinct and separate. The doctrine of the One God, who was all merciful, and all-powerful and all-wise, had been taught on the banks of the Nile before Moses was born, and the Egyptians saw in Horus a Redeemer; faith in Horus resulted in the pardon of sins. Judaism was not the only religion of the civilized oriental world full of high thoughts and glimpses of the truth:

It was into this world of ancient thought, of expectations and beliefs Jesus of Nazareth was born. Galilee, where He was [brought] up, was the meeting-place of Jew and Gentile, and it was from Galilee that most of His first disciples came. The revelation made by Christ was made thro’ the medium of ideas that had long been growing and forming. The Messiah came in “the fullness of time,” when the world of thought and belief was ready and prepared Him, prepared also to find in Him the fulfillment of its expectations and desires. The dogmas of Christianity start indeed with the words and commands of its founder, but in so far as they have been understood and received by His followers they have behind them a background of thoughts

⁶⁵ The Gifford Lectures, subtitled “Egyptian Religion in Modern Theology” and “Parallels between Christianity and the Egyptian Creeds” taken from Newsclippings 1900-01. Queens College Library, Oxford University, England, United Kingdom.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

which goes back to the beginnings of civilized man. The advent of Christianity does not mean a sudden break with the past, a new creation as it were out of nothing, but a revelation which adopts itself to the modes of human thought, ...⁶⁸

After the fall of Ancient Egypt “the seeds which [the Egyptians] had sown were not allowed to wither, and, like the elements of our culture and civilisation, the elements also of our modes of religious thought might be traced back to the ‘dwellers on the Nile.’” Since ideas are created from previous modes of thought, Sayce reasoned that civilization too was built on the past. Christian dogma began with Christ, but its roots extend back into the ‘beginnings of civilized man.’” It was important, then, to reach back into the ancient past to thoroughly examine the evolution of Christian ideas. Sayce deduced that Christianity was not created from nothing but rather came out of the ideas of the past and of contemporaries. He said: “We were heirs of the civilised past, and a goodly portion of that civilised past was the creation of ancient Egypt.”⁶⁹

After this statement, the audience present at the Gifford Lectures responded with a loud applause. The newsclipping, possibly taken from the *Daily Free Press*, stated that:

Dr. Sayce had proved to them that the dead serve us, and that the past was not a dead barren thing, but that it was the prophet of the present and the prophet of the future, and in the continuities of thought which Dr. Sayce had traced we had been reminded how all times were linked together, and through them all one great purpose ran.⁷⁰

Evidently at least the *Daily Free Press* understood the ideological evolution was accepted and was willing to accept the notion that Christianity might have, in some way, been born in Egypt.

Because ideas advance, “the world of thought and belief has accordingly assumed a new coloring and a new shape.”⁷¹ For example, the belief in witchcraft passed away along with the

⁶⁸ Sayce, *Dogma*, 25 (26).

⁶⁹ The Gifford Lectures, subtitled “Egyptian Religion in Modern Theology” and “Parallels between Christianity and the Egyptian Creeds” taken from Newsclippings 1900-01.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Sayce, *Dogma*, 12 (13).

old belief that the touch of a king had healing power. This new outlook on ideas help to mold what Sayce labeled as “the spirit of the age,” similar to Hegel’s *Zeitgeist*. Sayce believed that “the tendencies of an age, whether intellectual or moral, are determined by the knowledge and experience of [the] age.” The ideas “inherited from the past together with the new ideas that it has acquired” aid in shaping “the spirit of the age.” As society’s mental spectrum shifts and widens, new ideas arise and develop, reshaping social ideas.⁷² Likewise individuals have a role in shaping ideas. Individuals interpret and modify the inherited ideas of the past.

We inherit the beliefs and conceptions of our ancestors, but we increase or diminish them and so modify the inheritance we have acquired. The thoughts of mankind are ever changing and being modified, and the process of change and modification is what we call development.⁷³

Change, in Sayce’s view, may be slow or fast but what mattered were the views of those in the society. Each period of history is characterized by different ideas, and these ideas dominate society and influence the public. To show society’s differing views, Sayce drew on the example of slavery: “In the eighteenth century English society believed that the slave trade was a laudable trade of commercial enterprise; in the nineteenth century it is regarded as a crime against God and man.”⁷⁴ It took a century for the stigma of the slave trade to turn from positive to negative in Britain. The ideological change regarding the slave trade revealed a new and more advanced social morality in nineteenth-century Britain.

Development, however, did not necessarily mean progress. In *Dogma*, Sayce wrote: “So far as at least as the social world is concerned there may be a retrogressive development as well as a progressive one.”⁷⁵ For example, Sayce believed the “cultured Greek[s] and Roman[s]”

⁷² Sayce, *Dogma*, 12 (13).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 15 (16).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 13 (14).

were replaced with the “rude barbarians [who were] full of the superstitions of the north and of the warlike spirit which accompanied them.”⁷⁶ Yet even in this period of retrogression, development continued. Sayce noted that during this period the “chief articles of the [Christian] creed were defined and laid down once and for all.” In Sayce’s point of view, the Church, with help from the Holy Spirit, spearheaded social development which gave rise to both law and order and learning. The bright lamp lit by the Church penetrated various aspects of society, shedding light on the “Dark Ages.” He wrote:

As compared with the past the Church of the Tenth Century was indeed retrogressive; but its retrogression had been in accordance with the law of evolution, and the time was destined to come when (illegible) more formable conditions the development would cease to be retrograde and become progressive once more.⁷⁷

Here again Sayce’s views reflected the major influence of Hegelian philosophy. His depiction of the barbarians as the antagonists to the protagonist Greeks and Romans resembled Hegel’s view of history as the result of tensions and contradictions. As society resolved tensions, it evolved to the next stage of development.

In Sayce’s view, the evolution of ideas had also reconfigured religious views. Like other Victorian thinkers who argued on the side of orthodoxy, Sayce drew on the research done in archeology and philology. Drawing on the example of British society’s views of the slave trade, Sayce emphasized that the doctrine of development changed just as attitudes toward the slave trade changed. He explained:

The doctrine of development is itself an example of the same fact. It’s taken hold of the thinking world of today and influence its view of the whole universe. It (illegible) insensibly its judgments in all departments of thoughts, and make it impossible for us to return to the mental attitude of the certain part of the century which looked upon everything as ready-made like the animals of a Noah’s Ark. The old

⁷⁶ Sayce, Dogma, 14 (15).

⁷⁷ Ibid.

idea of creation as a sudden calling with existence out of nothing has passed away forever. The idea of development has become the dominant idea of our time; our other ideas and beliefs have had to (illegible) to its influence; and from henceforth it will remain part of the common inheritance of intellectual mankind.⁷⁸

Here Sayce noted that the physical development of the universe was not sudden. He acknowledged the new mode of thinking about the book of *Genesis* common in the later nineteenth century, which described the work as having been influenced by Babylonian texts. Sayce did not deny the similarities and accepted the view as a common indisputable fact. What Sayce did contend with is the notion that the similarities prove the fallibility of the bible and undermine its religious authority.⁷⁹ His quest to prove the validity of the bible grew intense after the discovery of the Tel el Amarna tablets in 1887.

Sayce, immersed in this new evolutionary thought, used science, particularly archeology, to prove the authority of the bible. He studied the Old Testament as a scientist, writing as an archeologist and not a theologian. Sayce stated that he researched the Hebrew text as any piece of oriental literature, trying not to focus on the fact that the work belonged to Christianity's Holy Scriptures.⁸⁰

Even though Sayce applied the scientific method to biblical research, he drew a distinction between the acceptance of science and the acceptance of Christian dogma. Science utilizes reason rather than feelings and intuition, whereas Christianity relies on divine inspiration and guidance and the individuals experience of this guidance. The contrast Sayce drew between science and Christianity is the reason why he argued he conducted research as an Assyriologist and not a theologian. He wrote:

Between the generalizations of science, however, and the dogmas

⁷⁸ Sayce, *Dogma*, 15 (16).

⁷⁹ Chapter three probes into Sayce's argument against the higher critics.

⁸⁰ Sayce. *The Higher Criticism*, v.

of his religion there is, for a member of the Christian Church, a very important distinction. The generalizations of science are arrived at by reason and observation, they are not given to us by intuition, nor are the processes by which we reach them controlled and shielded by an external and higher power. But if we accept the teaching of historical Christianity, we must at the same time accept the belief that the articles of the Catholic Creed have been arrived at and drawn up under Divine guidance.⁸¹

Here Sayce reflects his core belief in the truthfulness of the words of the bible. Christian faith depends on one's belief in the testimony of Scripture. Sayce's strong belief in the bible meant he was unable to separate his research from his religion even though he claimed to do so. But Sayce, whose views often reflect dichotomy, also acknowledged the possibility that his religious views may show in his work. He left it up to the readers to decide if he put aside his beliefs in presenting his argument.⁸² His religious views are the foundation for his argument against higher criticism. Like Ernest Renan, Sayce viewed science as the evidence of truth. But unlike Ernest Renan, Sayce believed that scientific evidence confirmed the truth of biblical records.⁸³

In his unpublished texts, Sayce argued that religious dogmas evolved. He believed that Christianity evolved from its origin which had roots in Ancient Egyptian religion and that *Genesis* was influenced by Babylonian texts. One could argue that Rev. Sayce's philosophical approach to understanding religion and ideological evolution reflected non-traditionalist views, the result of combining philosophy and religion.

His progressiveness was also reflected in his efforts to reform studies at Oxford. As an Oxford reformer, Sayce worked to end, or at least to modify, the existing examination system.

⁸¹ Sayce, *Dogma*, 20-21 (21-22).

⁸² *Ibid.*, *Higher Criticism*, v.

⁸³ Chadwick, *Secularization of the European Mind*, 217.

His efforts to revamp academia reflected his scientific side, particularly his interests in archeology and the Orient.

Oxford

In addition to religion, philosophy and archeology, Sayce concerned himself with the intellectual growth of Oxford University. He wrote:

The civilisation of a period is gauged by its knowledge, and above all by the will and wish to organise and increase this knowledge. If a university is the outcome and representative of the intellectual efforts and interests of a nation, it is here that its intellectual labour and energy should be brought to a focus, and so diffused like rays of light through the whole community.⁸⁴

He believed that the university symbolized the knowledge and progress of civilization. Because he held this view throughout his career, he focused on the advancement of oriental studies at Oxford and in Britain as a whole. Sayce believed that it was important to study the ancient Middle East in order to grasp a better understanding of the bible and biblical history, which would in turn lay the foundations for truth in the modern age.

Sayce's opinion that Oxford should revamp its curriculum may have been shaped by his close friend and Oxford professor Max Müller, who believed that the study of oriental languages was important, among other things, to govern the Empire properly. Müller argued that "the task of governing India [would] be simplified if the governing race were able, by knowledge of their languages, to enter more readily in to the thoughts, lives and aspirations of those they governed."⁸⁵ In order for the British to remain a strong governing force in India it was necessary for the governing officials to learn Indian languages. Through language culture is understood, hence making governing the area a less complicated task.

⁸⁴ Sayce, "The Needs of the Historical Sciences," *On the Endowment of Research*, (London, 1876), 204-205.

⁸⁵ Chaudhuri, 184.

Whereas Müller related oriental studies to governing the empire, Sayce associated the discipline with the advancement of religious studies and the further understanding of the ancient Near East. Drawing on his expertise as a teacher and Assyriologist, Sayce promoted the overhaul of oriental studies at Oxford. In his “Encouragement of Oriental Studies,” Sayce warned, “oriental studies are languishing in Oxford.”⁸⁶ Oxford tradition dictated that tutors taught multiple subjects but were only adequately trained in a few. Because of this lack of specialization and the focus on the examination system, the quality of education at Oxford was found wanting.

The two time-honoured English universities, with their large endowments, their excellent libraries, their wide connexion, and their national traditions, instead of holding up an ideal of sound learning and disinterested study, and checking the present mercantile current of popular belief, have degenerated into mere examining-machines. In the place of the calm pursuit of knowledge and the encouragement of original research, we have the hot competition of slaving undergraduates – for students we cannot call them – who are taught that learning is of no value except in so far as it brings profit to themselves.⁸⁷

Sayce believed that even Oxford’s Hebrew studies program, one of the most esteemed areas of study, was found wanting, producing only a few capable scholars.⁸⁸ In Sayce’s opinion, the mediocre Hebrew studies program would benefit from an exemplary oriental studies program.

The university’s weak oriental program was characteristic of the fate of the sciences at Oxford. During the nineteenth century, particularly during the first half of the century, natural science was deemed sub par compared to training in divinity and the classics. A reason for the late development and emphasis on science was due to the focus on classical studies. Just as the pure sciences lagged behind divinity and the classics, the new fields of archeology and oriental

⁸⁶ Sayce, “Encouragement of Oriental Studies, part II,” Sayce Papers, Queens College Library, Oxford University, England, United Kingdom.

⁸⁷ Ibid., “The Results of Examination System,” *Essays on the Endowment of Research* (London, 1876), 142.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

studies were also viewed as less important and hence less emphasized and developed. Sayce believed that there were three reasons for the inadequacies in oriental studies at Oxford. The first reason was the availability of a broad education in London. He argued that training was gained more easily in London, causing students to opt not to enroll in Oxford's oriental studies program.⁸⁹ Sayce was referring to London's University College and King's College. These colleges "offered a much broader curriculum than [Oxford and Cambridge], and even declared the intent of preparing young men for...careers" outside the church.⁹⁰

A combination of middle-class values, utilitarian thought, and religious toleration shaped the curricula of the London colleges. The middle class promoted hard work and efficiency; utilitarians pushed to make universities more practical and complementary to the industrial era. Utilitarians criticized the archaic university system and questioned the usefulness of the old curriculum which focused on the classics and religion. Another group which found fault in the old university system was nonconformists. Nonconformists pushed for universities to be more inclusive of all denominations. They argued that the religious requirements, which barred them from entrance into Oxford and Cambridge, should be eased.⁹¹ They believed that religious exams had their place in the School of Divinity, but not in general admissions. Because Oxford and Cambridge were closely connected to the Anglican Church, the universities were labeled as national institutions only for those who supported the state religion. In an effort to reform the

⁸⁹ Sayce, "Results of Examination System," 142.

⁹⁰ Heyck, 74.

⁹¹ The Royal Commissions of 1854 and 1856 ordered that Oxford and Cambridge admit Nonconformists, who were not required to acknowledge the Thirty-Nine Articles in order to achieve the B.A. Up until 1871 advanced degrees and fellowships still required subscription to the Articles. Sayce's friend and mentor Pusey opposed the entrance of dissenters to Oxford because he viewed the university as the protector of the Church and in so doing must uphold the Thirty-Nine Articles. In Pusey's opinion, students who did not subscribe to the Articles should not be granted admittance.

archaic university system through broader curricula offered to all denominations, University College was opened in 1828 in London followed by King's College.⁹²

An array of distinguished professors, including those in the natural sciences, contributed to the broad academic atmosphere at University and King's Colleges. Even though the new colleges were drawing the attention of many academics in the mid-nineteenth century, they still lacked the prestige of Oxford and Cambridge. It would not be until the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries that the universities will experience "great development," particularly in the areas of science and research.⁹³

With the establishment of the London colleges, educators at Oxford became reformers on a mission to save Oxford's position. Even though many opponents viewed Oxford as a symbol of privilege and antiquated study, it was still a financially rich, prestigious institution with great political influence. Gentlemen, political leaders, clergyman and administrative officials received their educations from Oxford. In the 1840s liberal professors and fellows began a movement to transform Oxford. As a result, some fellowships were opened to merit and professors were encouraged to modify teaching styles. Even though changes during the mid-century sparked improvements and the gradual modernization of Oxford, controversy over university reform continued into the late nineteenth century, when Sayce entered the debate. Sayce's critique of the education offered at Oxford forwarded the movement for academic change. He firmly believed that in order to ensure the quality of scholarship needed to adequately research the Near East and biblical texts, an exemplary program in oriental studies was necessary. Müller, too,

⁹² Heyck, 155-159. University College was established as a totally secular school. The school was free from religious requirements and offered a broad curriculum, which included history, political science, and economics. Theology, taught at University College, introduced German higher criticism to students. The "threat" of higher criticism compelled Anglicans to counter the influences of the "godless" University College with a college that offered a broad education along with Anglican theology, hence the creation of King's College. In 1836 both colleges were placed under the University of London.

⁹³ Ibid., 74.

desired Oxford to have an outstanding program in oriental languages. Their hopes did not come to fruition until the late nineteenth century with the creation of the Imperial Institute, which promoted oriental languages. The Institute was created in connection with University College and King's College in London; and in 1890 Müller gave the Institute's inaugural address.⁹⁴

Compared to the London colleges, location placed Oxford at an academic disadvantage. Training at London was enhanced by the access to academic and scientific societies, headquartered in London. Societies were places where ideas could be shared and books exchanged; and societies published the works of their members, hence increasing public interest in the respective field. Some of the well known societies in London were the Royal Society, Royal Institution (1799), Geological Society (1807), Astronomical Society (1820), Zoological Society (1826), Meteorological Society (1836) and Chemical Society (1841).⁹⁵ The Society of Biblical Archaeology was founded in 1870. The Society's president was Sayce's close friend and head of the oriental department at the British Museum, Dr. Samuel Birch. The organization concerned itself with researching Egypt, Palestine and Western Asia. India and Far East Asia were treated by the Royal Asiatic Society (1823).⁹⁶ For aspiring Orientalists, these societies provided crucial educational and professional opportunities.

Sayce also attributed the weakened state of oriental studies at Oxford to a second factor: the improbability of having a career as an orientalist at the University. University careers were mainly in church, medicine and law.⁹⁷ During the first half of the nineteenth century, clergyman, followed by solicitor, were the most popular careers for graduates of Oxford.⁹⁸ Careers in the sciences and archeology were few and far between, and fellowships were in short supply.

⁹⁴ Chaudhuri, 184.

⁹⁵ Heyck, 58-59.

⁹⁶ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 55.

⁹⁷ Heyck, 58-59 and 51.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

Fellowships were typically given to other areas of study, and not the sciences or oriental studies. During the first half of the nineteenth century few fellowships were open to competition, most were restricted to a candidate's location, school and relationship to members of the selecting committee—particularly those who could prove descent from the college's founder.⁹⁹ Fellowships were used “as a rung in the professional hierarchy of the Church.”¹⁰⁰ Often times fellowships were used during a time in a fellow's life when he was either waiting for church living accommodations or studying for the bar.¹⁰¹ In the field of archeology many researchers had to rely on the generosity of societies.

Even after reforms were made, few fellowships existed for those looking for careers outside academia. The fellowships that were available for those not interesting in pursuing a career in academia were called prize fellowships, which were not to exceed seven years.¹⁰² Many educators concluded that fellowships strictly designed for those seeking careers in academia should be created. Sayce believed that by offering academic fellowships more students would be inclined to choose academia as a career, in turn improving the quality of studies at Oxford. Since fellows would receive specialized training, fellows would be capable of teaching specialized subjects. In addition to academic fellowships, Sayce argued in favor of converting prize fellowships to research endowments. Sayce believed that research fellowships allowed professors time to conduct research and contribute to the progress of education. The push for creating research fellowships was thus acted upon by Oxford reformers and scientists such as T. H. Huxley.

⁹⁹ A. J. Engel, *From Clergyman to Don: The Rise of the Academic Profession in Nineteenth-Century Oxford* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 3.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 37. See Heyck, 163. Heyck describes fellowships “as steps in a career structure leading out of the university.”

¹⁰¹ Heyck, 72.

¹⁰² Engel, 72.

Oxford and Cambridge only provided a few professorships in the area of science and archeology. Many of the chairs had small endowments which made a parish post more attractive than an academic one. In the field of archeology, a chair in Egyptology at University College was funded through money bequeathed by Amelia Edwards upon her death. The first to hold the Edwards Chair of Egyptology was Sayce's friend Flinders Petrie.¹⁰³

On the topic of fellowships and professorships, Sayce contributed two articles to a work entitled *Essays on the Endowment of Research* (1876) edited by Charles Appleton.¹⁰⁴ The work was not a public success even though it received favorable reviews in papers and periodicals. Public response toward the work taught Sayce a valuable lesson: reviews had little influence on the sale of a book.¹⁰⁵ After this time, he learned to utilize a writing style that appealed to the public.¹⁰⁶

Even though Sayce's works gained broad appeal, his friend and fellow *Essays on Endowment* contributor Cheyne saw a danger in Sayce's popularity. Cheyne argued in *Founders of the Old Testament* that Sayce's views and writings regarding the authority of the Old Testament were restricted and partisan.¹⁰⁷ His opposition to the higher critics was so fervent that Cheyne believed it obscured his view of the higher criticism. Cheyne was convinced that biblical inquiry would benefit if Sayce "could and would co-operate with the higher critics."¹⁰⁸

This charge that Sayce was catering to the views of the public may be related to Sayce's shift toward a more conservative theology. Cheyne, who wrote as if he noticed a stark change in Sayce's ideas, mentioned that there was a time when Sayce was not ashamed to be called a friend

¹⁰³ The first to hold the Chair of Egyptology at Oxford was Francis Llewellyn Griffith.

¹⁰⁴ Appleton chose not to enter the clergy and studied German philosophy, becoming a supporter of Hegel. He founded a journal entitled the *Academy*, which was an avenue for scientific research.

¹⁰⁵ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 130.

¹⁰⁶ Cheyne, *Founders of Old Testament Criticism*, 236.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 231-236.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 234-235.

by Colenso.¹⁰⁹ This change in Sayce's ideology occurred after 1874. Cheyne wrote that between 1873 and 1874 Sayce was "friendly to critical [biblical] analysis" and accepting of Colenso's ideas. During the late 1870s, however Sayce shifted to conservatism; and over time, his conservatism became stronger and he became more determined to prove the authority of the bible. The 1870s was an important period in Sayce's life. During this decade George Smith publicly acknowledged the similarities between *Genesis* and a newly translated cuneiform text known as the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Gilgamesh, which included an account of the Flood, predated *Genesis* and brought into question the Mosaic authorship of *Genesis*.

Cheyne further revealed his disappointment in Sayce when he argued that Sayce said that he wrote for scholars, but his audience was full of potential scholars "who at any rate claim to express an opinion, and have it in their power to hinder progress."¹¹⁰ This influence Cheyne described reflects the impact Sayce wished his writings had on contemporary thought. Also, the quote reveals just how unsettling Sayce's opinions were for critics and their supporters. Cheyne does not believe that Sayce wanted to hinder progress, but rather he feared that his writings would influence potential scholars, leading them to reject higher criticism and form misinformed opinions concerning the Pentateuch and its authorship.

Even though *Essays on the Endowment of Research* was not a public success, the work played an influential role in bringing about change at Oxford. In the articles presented in *Essays on the Endowment of Research*, Sayce argued in favor of an endowment for research at Oxford and promoted the importance of research over teaching. He suggested the development of a commission that would abolish prize fellowships and multiply professorships, in addition to introducing the "new subjects of scientific research which the new age was bringing into the

¹⁰⁹ Cheyne, *Founders of Old Testament Criticism*, 233.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 234.

world.”¹¹¹ Here Sayce acknowledged the rise of the sciences and their important contribution to industrial society. Likewise he acknowledged the importance of the rising field of professional archeology, which he believed was central to biblical studies. In Sayce’s view the main objective of education:

is the collection, the combination, and the enlargement of all existing knowledge and learning, and the production and encouragement of scholars who shall give up their lives to study and research.¹¹²

Sayce’s arguments resonated with Oxford officials. An Executive Parliamentary Commission was created in 1877 to address the issue of endowments and to make college funds assessable for University and professional purposes. The commissioners resolved that universities should perform the dual job of teaching and conducting research. Prize fellowships were abolished and replaced with fellowships not restricted by religion or marital status. The only thing a candidate had to prove was proficiency in a particular area of study. In addition to these changes, Sayce proposed in his *Encouragement of Oriental Studies* further modifications but did not provide any justification for his choices. He proposed the availability of a readership in Talmudic Hebrew, a professorship in comparative Semitic philology, and the creation of one or two life professorships in the study of Japanese and Korean for reasons which are unexplained by Sayce. Sayce also encouraged the development of a chair of comparative philology to be understood as primarily Aryan philology. The chair in comparative philology would be accompanied with chairs in Celtic language and culture and Teutonic culture.¹¹³

Sayce also opposed the system of competitive examinations, which placed the practice of teaching low on the academic ladder. One thing that the reformers of the 1840s wanted to change was the examination system. Because students worked to achieve honors—in areas such

¹¹¹ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 129.

¹¹² Ibid., “The Needs of the Historical Sciences,” 204.

¹¹³ Ibid., “Encouragement of Oriental Studies.”

as history, classical studies, literature, Greek and Latin—many resorted to cramming and hiring examination coaches. By the mid-nineteenth century professors were giving fewer lectures because students were not interested in listening to a lecture which was not related to their exams. Sayce frowned on cramming, believing it suffocated learning and it exemplified the cleverness of bypassing in-depth study and research. Sayce wrote: “The grown man is what he has been taught to be, and out of cram may come many pages of examination answers, or even a fellowship, but not original research and the love of knowledge for its own sake.”¹¹⁴ Sayce believed that competitive exams and original research did not belong together.

Sayce believed the examination system both encouraged students not to value learning and awarded incompetence. Sayce commented that the crammer:

comes [to Oxford] not to learn, but to traffic in learning; not to gain knowledge for its own sake, but for what it will fetch; and his degree represents not that he has acquired the social polish and the modicum of information needful for the ‘gentleman,’ much less that he has pursued his studies under the fostering shadow of ancient institutions and noble libraries, but that he is worth a certain price in the work-a-day world.¹¹⁵

He asserted that the examination system measured students’ “memory and unintelligent acquisition of facts,” which after the exams, are “forgotten for ever.”¹¹⁶ Because of cram, students choose not to attend lectures or pursue tutorials which were deemed unbeneficial.

Sayce argued that Oxford students missed out on enriching opportunities such as learning the Indian script from Max Müller. He wrote:

we assume that the only subjects worth learning are those in which we examine, and that the worth even of these consists in their being made to ‘pay.’ Professor Max Müller offered in vain, term after term, to read the *Rig-Veda* with any one of the 2,400 members of the University of Oxford; none would go to him, since a third-hand

¹¹⁴ Sayce, “The Results of the Examination System,” 137.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 129-130.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 125 and 133.

acquaintance with a few words and forms from that oldest specimen of Aryan literature is sufficient for the schools.¹¹⁷

In place of an environment which encouraged students to cram for honors exams, reformers sought an educational system that encouraged “deep soul-searching, a love of truth and spiritual rebirth.”¹¹⁸ They wanted renewed emphasis placed on teaching, with fellows teaching within their respective colleges instead of using fellowships as income while studying for the bar or awaiting a church appointment. As a sign of the changing times, fellows were allowed to marry and remain at Oxford as teachers and scholars.¹¹⁹ These changes resulted from the new attitudes about knowledge and learning brought about by the young members of Oxford.¹²⁰ Also Oxford gradually shifted from being a religious school, aimed at producing future clergyman, to a university committed to scholarship in various areas, including science and philology.

But even though the winds of academia at Oxford were blowing in a broader, more liberal direction, there were still conservative, pro-religious sentiments present at the university and government. This is evident in the selection of a replacement for the chair of Hebrew studies. The chair was left vacant upon the death of Pusey in 1882. Pusey professed before his death that his desire was that Sayce be appointed his successor, but the appointment went to Samuel R Driver, whom Sayce considered to be “one of the best, if not the best, Hebraists in the country.” Sayce even acknowledged that Driver may have been a better choice in the eyes “of the Hebrew specialist as opposed to the general Semitic scholar.”¹²¹ However what helped booster support for Driver was his being labeled as a defender of religious orthodoxy.

¹¹⁷ Sayce, “Results of Examination System,” 138.

¹¹⁸ Heyck, 161.

¹¹⁹ Engel, 5.

¹²⁰ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 130.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 213-214.

Even though Sayce and Gladstone were personal friends, many, including Gladstone, considered Sayce to be academically “unsafe” and labeled him “as one of the leaders of ‘German’ critical theology at Oxford.”¹²² Gladstone remarked: “I have a great respect for Mr. Sayce’s talents and learning, but under no circumstances could I give him an ecclesiastical appointment.”¹²³ Although Sayce had the support of some in the orthodox camp, Gladstone could not be persuaded and the position was given to Driver. He attributed his rejection to his being a Broad Churchman and a friend to Liddon, who was not liked by Queen Victoria.¹²⁴ Sayce had hoped to use the professorship as a way to introduce the study of Assyrian “into the fast-closed ranks of British scholarship.” Sayce, who was disappointed by the event, looked on the bright side for comfort; if he had received the position he would not be able to live part of the year in Egypt. If he had had to spend his winters in England rather than Egypt, his health would have suffered.¹²⁵ Later Gladstone regretted his decision to give the position to Driver instead of Sayce. Ironically, Driver became a defender of German higher criticism whereas Sayce became a proponent of biblical orthodoxy. Gladstone, who collaborated with Sayce on an introduction to an American illustrated bible, recalled the ‘mistake’ made in listening to other counsel and not selecting Sayce.¹²⁶

Oxford experienced reform in stages, first beginning in 1854, then in 1872 and later from 1877 to 1881. During these years curricula were revamped and the position of the professor became more professional. The reforms also brought long awaited attention and credibility to the pure sciences. The academic quality of Oxford improved, but the relationships between the

¹²² Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 213.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹²⁴ See *Reminiscences*, 35. Liddon was not liked by Queen Victoria because she disagreed with a sermon he preached. Liddon told Sayce that “Her Majesty has all her claws out.”

¹²⁵ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 213.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 214.

University and its individual colleges did not change and issues concerning the relationship and duties of tutors and professors were not taken on until after World War I.¹²⁷

As we have seen, Sayce saw the establishment of a first-rate oriental studies program as part of a wider project for university reform. In developing the program in oriental studies, Sayce promoted archeology. Because he believed that archeology enhanced biblical knowledge, Sayce argued that students in oriental and biblical studies should be educated in archeology.

Archeology

As an Assyriologist, Sayce gained academic accolades, becoming the foremost translator in England of Assyrian and Babylonian texts. He deciphered unknown languages such as Elamite and Vannic. One of his great achievements was to recover the Hittite Empire for history through the identification of some undeciphered texts and artifacts. Sayce had previously written papers arguing that a new script found at Hamath was composed by the Hittites. Similar texts were uncovered by George Smith on a site at Carchemish and Ivriz, both in modern day Turkey. Using his skills of investigation and observation, in 1879 Sayce studied the picture of the pass of Karabel near Smyrna in Rawlinson's *Herodotus*. Herodotus assumed the monument was in honor of Pharaoh Sesostris, but Sayce noticed a similarity between the script at Karabel and those at Carshemish and Ivriz. By comparing pictures from various sites and noting the art and hieroglyphs Sayce was able to identify the artifacts as Hittite. Even though the dates of the texts were not known, the similarities led to Sayce's assertion that a powerful empire had to have existed in Asia Minor during the Hellenic days. This empire, Sayce believed, "extended from the Aegean to the Halys and southward into Syria, to Carchemish and Hamath, and possessed its

¹²⁷ Chaudhuri, 203-204.

own special artistic culture and its own special script.” On August 16, 1879 Sayce’s findings were published in the *Academy*.¹²⁸

A week after publishing his findings, Sayce began his travels through the East.¹²⁹ Donning his “black long-tailed ecclesiastical coat, a reversed high collar, a flat black hat”¹³⁰ and a pair of steel-rimmed glasses, Sayce explored the Near East to see the monuments in person. After his visit to Karabel to view the inscriptions, he declared that there was no doubt that the texts found there belonged to the Hittites. Sayce explained the significance of identifying Hittite script was that it “bore witness to the long-forgotten fact that Hittite warriors had once made their way to the shores of the Aegean and carried the art and culture of the East to the borders of the Greek world.”¹³¹ This led Sayce to believe that the prehistoric Greeks owed much of their culture to the Hittites.¹³² After examining the inscriptions himself, Sayce had a feeling of accomplishment and validation. Sayce’s theory was corroborated by archeological evidence; he claimed: “My prophecy in the *Academy* was fulfilled.” His accomplishment led Gladstone to refer to Sayce as “the High Priest of the Hittites.”¹³³

While visiting Karabel, Sayce discovered more monuments which he detailed in an article for the *Academy* and in the first volume of the *Journal of Hellenic Studies*. Sayce was proud that his work in Asia became an area of research for the Society for the Protection of Hellenic Studies. He believed that researching Asia Minor was important because cultural elements from Assyria and Babylonia came to the West via Hittites. To further promote research in Hittite culture, Sayce wanted to create an extensive research program in Asia Minor. He had

¹²⁸ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 162. The article was entitled “The Origin of Early Art in Asia Minor.” In it Sayce revealed for the first time that the hieroglyphs that many believed to be Egyptian were actually Hittite.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Wilson, *Signs and Wonders*, 99.

¹³¹ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 168.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 172.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 168 and 200.

hoped to have a school in Smyrna similar to the schools in Athens founded by the French and Germans. Such a school, he argued, would give Britain a monopoly on Hittite research. After a meeting with Oxford school officials, it was decided that a three-year scholarship be created for Hittite research in Asia Minor. The holder of the scholarship was to be headquartered in Smyrna. The first scholarship was given to W. M. Ramsay, who after his three years returned to Oxford to resume teaching.

Unfortunately Sayce's dream of a school at Smyrna did not come to fruition; instead, a school was created at Athens. Unlike the French and German schools, which were funded by the state, the British school depended on private contributions. British interest in Asia did not totally dwindle. The Hellenic Society provided grants for exploration in Asia Minor, and in turn published their findings in its journal.¹³⁴ The Egyptian Exploration Fund and the Palestine Exploration Fund also established funding for British archeologists.

Sayce applied his archeological and philological interests to the research of the ancient Hebrews as well. He made a copy of the inscriptions in Siloam tunnel, location of the oldest example of Hebrew writing. The decipherment was difficult because it was hard to distinguish between the characters and the cracks; but in the end, Sayce produced the first translation of the text.¹³⁵ It was at this time that Sayce became friends with Flinders Petrie, who had conducted excavations at Tell el Hesi, where Petrie believed he had uncovered the ancient city of Lachish, which gave Europeans the first glimpse of the Canaanite predecessors of the Israelites. It was not until the 1930s that British archeologist James Leslie Starkey correctly identified Lachish as being located at Tell ed-Duweir. Even though Lachish was incorrectly identified by Petrie,

¹³⁴ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 172-173.

¹³⁵ The inscription found near the tunnel was done during the reign of Hezekiah. Hezekiah and the tunnel are mentioned in 2 *Kings* 20:20 and 2 *Chronicles* 32:30.

Sayce strongly believed that Petrie's discoveries led to the development of Palestinian archeology.¹³⁶

Sayce continued to relate archeology to theology, using archeology to verify the historical accuracy of the Old Testament. Interest in the combining of the two fields was renewed with the work of George Smith, which noted the similarities between Babylonian texts and the Old Testament, particularly *Genesis*.¹³⁷ Sayce, like the rest of the British public, was fascinated with the connection between Babylonian literature and *Genesis*. Scholars and laymen searched for evidence of the relationship between Hebrew and ancient Near Eastern cultures. The Egypt Exploration Fund, of which Sayce was a member, organized expeditions in Egypt in order to shed light on the history and art of ancient Egypt as it related to the Old Testament narrative. The Fund hoped to uncover records of Hebrew presence in Egypt and identify the capital of Goshen.¹³⁸

During the summer of 1882, Sayce received scathing criticism for a comment, which he argued was not adequately explained, concerning Herodotus. Sayce had published a work questioning the originality of the first three books of Herodotus. In readdressing the matter in 1882, Sayce explained that research shows that Egyptians and Assyrians had libraries before the arrival of Herodotus; therefore, it is possible that Herodotus copied the information he reported in those chapters. The idea was further strengthened by the fact that the Greeks did not have inverted commas, making it difficult to distinguish between the words of Herodotus and the

¹³⁶ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 192-195. See also p. 241. Petrie also discovered the brick platform of Nebuchadnezzar's throne, which was left during Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Egypt.

¹³⁷ Mark Chavales, "Assyriology and Biblical Studies: A Century and a Half of Tension," *Mesopotamia and the Bible: Comparative Explorations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 28.

¹³⁸ Drower, 65.

quotation from an original Egyptian and Assyrian text.¹³⁹ This episode signifies Sayce's acknowledgment of ancient oriental cultures' influential role in the shaping of Greek culture.

After this Herodotus controversy, Sayce began combining his research with theology, and soon achieved success in the area of what he called "quasi-theology."¹⁴⁰ The Religious Tract Society asked him to contribute an article that examined archeological discoveries and the Old Testament. The article evolved into his first book on Old Testament archeology, *Fresh Light from the Ancient Monuments* (1883). Sayce attributed his interest in the relationship between the Old Testament and archeology to *Fresh Light from the Ancient Monuments*. The work, in Sayce's words, "had side-tracked" him "into theology" supported by archeology.¹⁴¹ After *Fresh Light*, Sayce published *Introduction to Ezra, Nehemiah and Ester* (1885), *Assyria* (1885) and *The Hittites* (1903). In another career first, Sayce distinguished between early Sumerian and late Semitic elements in Babylonian religion.

The combination of theology and archeology had not dominated Sayce's professional career until the discovery of the Tel el Amarna tablets which he described as the second most important contribution from the East.¹⁴² He proclaimed: "Next to the historical books of the

¹³⁹ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 224-225.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 226.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 272.

¹⁴² See *Reminiscences & Signs and Wonders upon Pharaoh*. Tel el Amarna was the newly built capital of Pharaoh Akhenaton. Akhenaton moved the capital from Thebes to an area 200 miles to the north, Tel el Amarna. The area was eventually abandoned and destroyed in dishonor of the memory of Akhenaton, the heretic. In 1887 a woman in the area was searching for sebakh (equivalent to compost) and unearthed mud patties with designs on them, which she sold. The etching on the tablets was the cuneiform script. Not knowing the significance of the discovery, holders of the tablets mishandled them. Because the tablets were transported in sacks on the back of a donkey resulting in some being broken and destroyed, it is not clear how many were originally uncovered. John Wilson stated that it could have been at least 400 pieces while Sayce presumed there were 300. A few of the intact pieces were purchased by an agent of the Louvre and sent to Paris. There, Jules Oppert, professor of Assyriology, pronounced the pieces to be forgeries. After Oppert, whom Sayce labeled as "old and blind" made this declaration, the Louvre did not purchase any more. The tablets were then transported to Luxor by donkey, during which more tablets were destroyed, before being divided and circulated around Egypt. The tablets continued to be examined by archeologists and trained philologists, but many were convinced that the tablets were forgeries; or they believed Cairo antiquities dealers, eager to make money, had planted tablets from Baghdad at Tel el Amarna. The tablets were eventually purchased by individuals and museums which began to believe in the authenticity of the tablets.

Old Testament, the Tel el Amarna tablets have proved to be the most valuable record which the ancient civilized world of the East has bequeathed to us.”¹⁴³ Cuneiform records discovered at the site of the ancient city of Akhetaton, the Tel el Amarna tablets contain international correspondence between the Assyrians and Egyptians of the fourteenth century B.C.E.

Sayce, who made his first visit to Egypt in 1879, was unfortunately not there during the winter of 1886-87 because he remained in England to mourn the loss of his mother. Because he was well acquainted with Tel el Amarna and was familiar with the antique dealers in the area, Sayce was sure that if he had been in Egypt, he would have been approached to inspect the pieces. The previous year dealers had come to Sayce with objects they had uncovered, so he was confident that had he been in Egypt, the tablets “would all have passed into [his] hands, intact and complete,” and he would have verified the authenticity of the tablets. But because at the time there was no one in Egypt acquainted with cuneiform, the dealers mishandled the tablets.¹⁴⁴ Many questioned the authenticity of the find, before the tablets were declared genuine. Between 1891 and 1892 more excavations were done at the site by Petrie, which uncovered more tablets. Petrie found additional tablets under the floor of a room he called the Foreign Office. He showed Sayce the tablets he discovered, which Sayce was pleased to see.¹⁴⁵

The Tel el Amarna tablets proved that the ancient Near East was not a world devoid of diplomatic activity and cultural exchange and that the old empires of the Orient were just as cultured as contemporary societies.¹⁴⁶ The ancient cultures were more developed and connected to one another than any of the previous scholars had guessed. The cuneiform tablets had to have

Sayce stated that 82 tablets went to the British Museum, 160 to Berlin and 56 to the museum at Gizeh. See Sayce, *Egypt of the Hebrews and Herodotos*.

¹⁴³ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 252.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 251 and Sayce, “The Discovery of the Tel El-Amarna Tablets,” *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, vol. 33, no. 2 (January, 1917): 89-90.

¹⁴⁵ Drower, 195.

¹⁴⁶ Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 7

been understood by the Egyptians, which meant that scribes were taught cuneiform in addition to hieroglyphs.

The discovery of the tablets was also significant for the ongoing debate over Mosaic authenticity. Higher critics questioned the authorship of the Pentateuch and minimized Moses' contribution. Sayce, a staunch supporter of orthodoxy since 1895, rejected such ideas and continued to assert the authorship of Moses. For Sayce, the tablets provided evidence that the Hebrews were exposed to advanced forms of education in both hieroglyphs and cuneiform; hence, there was no doubt that Moses wrote the Pentateuch.¹⁴⁷ He believed that the tablets undercut the critics' theory that the ancient Hebrews did not have a literary tradition prior to the reign of Solomon. Sayce wrote: "The discovery of the Tel el Amarna correspondence suddenly threw a new light on the whole subject and revolutionized my view of it."¹⁴⁸ Sayce became convinced that archeology provided the evidence necessary to validate biblical history. He believed that Hebrew documents must be validated "not by the assumptions and subjective fantasies or ignorance of the critic, but by archaeological research."¹⁴⁹ If the evidence did not yet exist, over time and with further excavations and research, it would eventually be uncovered. Sayce strongly believed that within the earth lay the answers to biblical questions, which in turn illuminated biblical understanding.

After the discovery of the Tel el Amarna tablets, Sayce's literary focus turned to the relationship between Egypt and the Hebrews. Even though Sayce believed strongly in the bible, he did not want to be labeled a theologian, or more specifically have his religious faith overshadow his research. Sayce asserted: "I dealt with the Old Testament simply as an

¹⁴⁷ This is examined at length in the following chapter concerning Sayce's opposition to higher criticism.

¹⁴⁸ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 272.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 273.

archaeologist.”¹⁵⁰ Even though Sayce claimed not to want to be characterized as a theologian, his literary works prove otherwise. In the years following 1887, he published *Life and Times of Isaiah* (1889), *The Races of the Old Testament* (1891), *The Higher Criticism and the Verdict of the Monuments* (1894), *The Egypt of the Hebrews and Herodotus* (1895),¹⁵¹ *The Early History of the Hebrews* (1898) and *Egyptian and Babylonian Religion* (1903), all of which dealt with theological questions.

Both Tel el Amarna and his research into the relationship between Hebrews and Egyptians increased Sayce’s interest in Egyptology. From 1889-96 Sayce sailed up and down the Nile alongside American-born Egyptologist Charles Wilbour.¹⁵² Sayce considered him to be the best Egyptologist living.¹⁵³ One of Wilbour’s great accomplishments was the purchase of papyri from Elephantine in 1893. The significance of the find would not be realized until 1900 when Sayce deciphered the text. The papyri documented a Jewish colony on Elephantine during the age of Ezra and Nehemiah, the era of the Persian Empire.¹⁵⁴ Sayce believed that the papyri revealed that after the exile, a Jewish temple existed in the extreme south of Egypt. From this find, he deduced that orthodox Jews lived in Egypt during Persian times.¹⁵⁵

Because of his accomplishments, Sayce was asked to head the antiquities museum in Egypt, but he refused. He worried about the political impact his acceptance of the position would have, since traditionally a Frenchman held the position. Sayce, who would have loved to

¹⁵⁰ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 303.

¹⁵¹ See *Reminiscences*, 304. He considered this to be his best work.

¹⁵² Wilson, *Signs and Wonders*, 100-101. At thirty-eight in the early 1870s, Wilbour moved from America to Europe to study under Gaston Maspero, renowned French Egyptologist, in Paris and August Eisenlohr in Heidelberg.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 113 and Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 332.

¹⁵⁵ Wilson, *Signs and Wonders*, 113.

accept the position, turned down the offer in order not to offend French scholars.¹⁵⁶ Another career opportunity presented itself in 1890. Just before Sayce left Oxford for Egypt, Dr. John Perowne, Bishop of Worcester, offered Sayce the position of suffragan bishop. He refused for the betterment of the friendship he shared with Perowne and recommended another to fill the position.¹⁵⁷

Conclusion

The 1870s and 1880s was a period of intellectual growth and scholarship for Sayce. He carved out a reputation as a religious thinker and an accomplished scholar. His religious beliefs are conveyed in his sermons and also played a role in his archeological research. During this period of intellectual growth, Sayce merged religion and science through his use of philology and archeology to enhance biblical knowledge and prove Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. He applied natural evolution to ideology to formulate an argument which proved the evolution of dogmas and more specifically the evolution of Christianity from its ancient Egyptian roots. Sayce also supported the establishment of more scientific areas of studies at Oxford, including archeology which he believed was essential to oriental and biblical studies.

Archeology was an area dear to Sayce. Not only did he become an eminent Assyriologist in Britain but he also came to believe that archeology proved the factual truth of the biblical records. His esteem for archeology remained high for the remainder of his life. After the discovery of the Tel el Amarna tablets in 1887, Sayce's confidence that archeological evidence

¹⁵⁶ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 261 and 284-285. Sayce did not like to get involved in politics, but he noted that Britain appeared to be more concerned with the feelings of the French than the Egyptians. Also he observed that foreign diplomats in Egypt were concerned with finances, irrigation, and law, not education and archeology. Antiquities were better used by foreign governments as bargaining tools, for example, the British used the office of Director of Antiquities to continue good relations with France. It was agreed that the Director would be a Frenchman.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 274.

confirmed biblical accounts became adamant and solidified his dedication to proving Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.

Sayce's argument against the higher critics is thoroughly examined in the next chapter. Chapter three analyzes why Sayce, who, as seen in this chapter, embraced views that one would argue were contrary to traditionalism, was supported by biblical traditionalists. Even though Sayce attempted to isolate his religious beliefs from his scholarly arguments, stating that he approached his research as an archeologist and not a theologian, his religious beliefs are prevalent.

CHAPTER 4 SAYCE THE CRITIC OF HIGHER CRITICISM

As suggested in chapter three, secularization in Britain was not as widespread as scholars once believed. For late Victorians like Sayce, religion was still important. Evidence of the importance of the bible is seen in the interest in Sayce's articles on archeological proof of the bible and his rejection as new Chair of Hebrew at Oxford. Sayce's failure to become Chair of Hebrew was due to his depiction as defender of higher criticism by Gladstone and other government officials. Hence, this incident coupled with the popularity of his writings shows that religion played a dominant role in British society.

For Rev. Sayce and nineteenth-century British Protestants, the bible was the key to understanding God and the Christian faith. Some viewed it as the infallible, timeless Word of God, which ordinary people read and from which they gathered emotional and spiritual strength. They believed that the Holy Spirit spoke in the scriptures.¹ Some intellectuals known as higher critics employed philology to understand biblical texts. This method of analyzing text in order to determine authorship and date was known as higher criticism. Sayce, who opposed the exclusive focus on philology to understand the bible, also took what is known as the plenary approach to religious interpretation; he believed that faith in the Word was essential for Christians, even if not every word of the bible was divinely inspired. If the Word of God was doubted, faith in God was weakened, possibly leading to a loss of faith altogether. Because of this danger, Sayce worried that the textual analysis used by higher critics was demolishing Christianity instead of strengthening it. However, because he agreed with higher critics that the Hebrew texts were influenced by the Babylonian texts, Sayce occupied the middle ground between traditionalism and higher criticism.

¹ Wheeler, 8.

Sayce also shares similarities with the ‘New Tractarians’ even though he was not a High Churchman. He combined his knowledge of Assyriology, biblical history and philology to develop a counter argument to the higher critics. It is true that Sayce held orthodox views, but he acknowledged the more moderate findings of higher criticism such as the similarities between Israelite and Babylonian cultures. Even though Sayce did not fully agree with many late nineteenth-century traditionalists who viewed higher criticism as an absolute evil, he was adamant about the dangers of higher criticism. He argued that the “historical hair-splitting” was the ruin of textual criticism.² He believed that God-given inspiration underlay the words of the bible. He, like the ‘New Tractarians,’ stuck to the core beliefs of the old Tractarians which was “to find the Word of God in the bible.”³ Sayce’s “aid was eagerly accepted” by the traditionalists to attack the “more dangerous opponents”—the higher critics.⁴

Sayce became a leading opponent of higher criticism and an advocate for the Mosaic authenticity of the Pentateuch. Sayce met the ‘scientific’ arguments of the higher critics with science: biblical history and archeology. He believed that biblical history and archeology provided the context by which to understand the results obtained through philology. In developing an argument against higher criticism, Sayce acknowledged the similarities between the biblical accounts in *Genesis* and the Babylonian accounts in the *Enuma Elish* and *Epic of Gilgamesh*. His belief that biblical history and more importantly archeology proved the validity of the bible was a welcomed addition to the religious debates in late-Victorian Britain by supporters of orthodoxy. Sayce argued that higher critics presented a flawed interpretation of the bible because they relied solely on philology and failed to incorporate historical and archeological research, which he believed to be more reliable—more scientific—than philology.

² Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 15.

³ Chadwick, *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement*, 51.

⁴ Glover, 235.

Critics, in his opinion, offered a one-dimensional critique of the bible. He firmly believed that the explorer, excavator and decipherer worked together to restore what “the critic fancied he had swept away.”⁵

In examining Sayce’s argument against higher criticism, this chapter is divided into seven sections. The time period treated in this chapter is from 1888, the year after the discovery of the Tel el Amarna tablets, to 1923, the year Sayce published his autobiography *Reminiscences*. It was during this period that Sayce wrote most of his work against higher criticism. Because Sayce was an Assyriologist and knowledgeable of ancient history and languages, many believers of orthodoxy viewed his counter arguments as significant—particularly during this period when the interpretations of biblical history were hotly debated.

The first section provides historical context by briefly exploring the development of higher criticism in Germany and Britain. Textual analysis was of interest to Germans since they were not as active in the areas of archeology as the French and British but also because of the long, Lutheran tradition of scriptural criticism, translation and reflection on the meaning of the Word; they instead focused on philology, resulting in their dominance in the field. German textual analysis of the bible was influenced by the combination of pietism and rationalism which “prevented higher criticism from being merely an iconoclastic attack on Christianity” but an exercise in biblical reason.⁶ Combining pietism and rationalism to better understand the bible resulted in the application of philosophical and analytical reasoning to religion, culminating in a more in-depth approach to biblical criticism. Those, among many, who left an indelible mark on higher criticism in Germany were J. G. Eichhorn, W. M. L. de Wette, Friedrich Delitzsch and

⁵ Sayce, “Answers from the Monuments,” *Is Christianity True?: Answers from History, the Monuments, the Bible, Nature, Experience, and Growth of Christianity* (Philadelphia: The American Sunday-School Union, 1897), 26.

⁶ Glover, 19-20.

Julius Wellhausen. It was Wellhausen's belief in the multiple authorship and late date of the Pentateuch with which Sayce took particular issue. In Britain, higher criticism won the support of some theologians who believed that textual criticism of the bible enhanced biblical knowledge. Even though higher criticism in Britain was slow to develop, evidence of critical examination of biblical texts by theologians extend as far back as 1800 with the publication of Alexander Geddes's *Critical Remarks on the Hebrew Scriptures*.

Building on the background section concerning the development of higher criticism in Britain and the growing influence of Wellhausen's arguments, section two examines the British response to higher criticism by comparing the beliefs of Edward Pusey and Samuel R. Driver to those of Sayce. Pusey was opposed to German higher criticism because of his fear that it would weaken Christian belief. Driver, however, became an outspoken supporter of Wellhausen's ideas and a critic of Sayce's reverence for archeology.

Section three examines Sayce's growing hostility toward higher criticism. Sayce acknowledged the virtues of higher criticism in his work *Higher Criticism and the Verdict of Monuments* published in 1893. He noted the role textual criticism played in biblical understanding, while at the same time emphasizing the importance of biblical history and archeology. However, after 1895 Rev. Sayce's arguments against higher criticism grew contemptuous. No longer did he identify any value in higher criticism as he had a few years earlier.

The fourth section treats Sayce's view of the Old Testament and the flaws of German higher criticism. It also examines his application of biblical history and archeological evidence to the Old Testament. In formulating his argument against higher criticism, Sayce focused on two topics – the authorship of the Pentateuch and the Mosaic authenticity of *Genesis*.

Section five examines Rev. Sayce's view of the authorship of the Pentateuch. Even though he believed that the Pentateuch in its present form was not original to the Mosaic period, he was adamant that Moses wrote the Pentateuch. In presenting a counter argument against higher criticism, he relied heavily on the Tel el Amarna tablets. Sayce was convinced that the cuneiform tablets proved that the ancient Near East was highly literate; hence the Hebrews, who also lived in this area, would have been exposed to and taken part in this literate world. He believed that the tablets showed that "all over the civilised world of Western Asia there was but one literary language, and that was the language of Babylon."⁷

In regards to *Genesis*, which is treated in section six, A. H. Sayce admitted that it was influenced by Babylonian works, particularly the newly discovered *Epic of Gilgamesh*, but he firmly insisted that it was inspired by God. He argued that the Hebraic writer removed elements of polytheism and replaced it with monotheism, making it a genuine Hebrew work.

The seventh and final section provides a critical examination of Sayce's views. It examines the flaws in his conclusions noted by critics and himself. Supporters of higher criticism believed that Sayce overemphasized the role archeology played in verifying the Old Testament. Sayce acknowledged that his research may have been flawed and that he may have been too quick to make judgments. But, he did not reject the belief that Moses was the original author of the Pentateuch or that *Genesis* was a divinely inspired work adapted from Babylonian texts. In the end, Sayce's scholarly critique of the higher criticism allowed him to put the Old Testament more firmly into the historical context of the Ancient Near East without exhausting its divinity. By this means, he may well have helped to preserve the faith of many of his readers, and to open the way for a larger set of attacks on German scientific criticism in postwar Britain.

⁷ Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 155-156.

Background

The examination of biblical texts was not unique to the nineteenth century nor was it exclusive to Britain. Prior to the Reformation, European Christians were interested in Hebrew texts; and in the early modern period, numerous scholars undertook critical studies of the Old Testament and other Hebrew texts to better understand the bible.⁸ By the nineteenth century, however, new forms of critical examination were taking place. With the discovery of various monuments connected to the Old Testament, scholars began investigating the bible in light of evidence uncovered in the Near East. Scholars began to treat the bible just as any other work of literature. This process of literary investigation was called higher criticism, which was a philological approach to biblical text to determine the date, origin and authenticity. Before it was employed in the examination of the bible and Hebrew history, higher criticism was applied to the writings of the Greeks and Romans, resulting in the differentiation between legends and historical narratives.

The textual analysis of the bible can be traced to France with Jean Astruc (1684-1766), a physician of Louis XV. In 1753 he published *Conjectures sur la Genèse* which argued that Moses wrote *Genesis*. He was one of the first to emphasize the importance of the textual analysis of biblical scriptures.

Later, textual criticism was introduced to Germany where it found a home among expert philologists. J. G. Eichhorn (1752-1827) was a theologian and Orientalist who argued that philology and biblical criticism could enhance knowledge of the bible, something Benjamin Jowett and S. R. Driver of England and William Robertson Smith of Scotland would later advocate. Eichhorn's study of the Old Testament resulted in his argument that the Pentateuch

⁸ Suzanne Marchand, *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750-1970* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 188.

was made up of two documents – the Jehovistic, also known as the Yahwistic because God is referred to as Yahweh, and the Elohistic, so named because of its use of the word “Elohim” for God. German theologian Johann Severin Vater (1771-1826) introduced the fragment theory which promoted the idea that the Pentateuch and other books of the Old Testament were made up of numerous fragments which had been combined by a redactor, or compiler. Theologian W. M. L. de Wette (1780-1849) believed that various law codes in the Pentateuch were not delivered by Moses at Sinai but were the result of different stages of development in the history of Israelite religion. Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918), German theologian and the object of much of Sayce’s criticism, argued that the writing style of the Pentateuch proved that the books were not written during the same time or by the same person. This brought into question the belief held by many that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch. In 1882 Wellhausen published *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* which argued that the *Book of Joshua* should be included with the Pentateuch because of literary similarities. Hence, the Hexateuch was composed of several sources from different historical times. Friedrich Delitzsch (1850-1922), German cuneiform philologist, argued that many ancient Egyptian and Israelite characteristics were taken from the Babylonians; hence, Babylonian studies should be incorporated in biblical understanding. He also stated in lectures given between 1902 and 1903 that the Old Testament was intellectually inferior to Babylonian texts.⁹

The German method of biblical criticism, focused on philology, became the model for nineteenth-century higher criticism, causing the area of study to be known as German higher criticism. To the chagrin of A. H. Sayce, German higher criticism omitted historical and archeological evidence. Even though he was a fierce critic of higher criticism, Rev. Sayce did

⁹ Chavales, 32. For a history of German orientalism see Marchand, *Down from Olympus*, 188, 220-227. For an explanation of the Hexateuch see Wilson, 112.

not view higher criticism as an absolute evil.¹⁰ He argued that he took issue not with higher criticism in and of itself but with the higher critic because the critic ignored archeological and historical evidence.¹¹ The objective of higher criticism was a positive, but the method used by critics distorted it, resulting in something negative.

Even though textual criticism of the bible took shape in Germany, there were traces of its presence in England prior to the dominance of German higher criticism. Alexander Geddes, a Scottish theologian, was critical of the orthodox account of the origin of the Old Testament and published *Critical Remarks on the Hebrew Scriptures* in 1800. Because the work was controversial, Geddes was suspended from his ecclesiastical functions. Samuel Coleridge presented a new approach to interpreting the bible in *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, which was published posthumously in 1840. In *Confessions* Coleridge noted the importance of reading the bible as one would read any other literary work, stressing that readers should not take the text literally. Geddes and Coleridge articulated very unorthodox views of the scriptures, but they did not reject the divine nature and significance of the bible. Even though Geddes was critical of the Old Testament, he still remained a faithful Catholic; and Coleridge, who argued that taking the bible literally caused errors in understanding, believed in the importance of faith and inspired scriptures.¹² In fact, the ideas of Coleridge became the foundation for liberal thought within the Anglican Church, which coalesced into the Broad Church.

By the 1860s traditionalists and religious leaders were no longer able to avoid the ensuing religious controversy which made higher criticism the main topic of conversation in religious circles in Britain. A minority of scholars claimed that events in the Old Testament were inaccurately dated and that German criticism should be incorporated in biblical studies. In 1860

¹⁰ Glover, 235.

¹¹ Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 6.

¹² Wheeler, 9.

controversy surrounded the release of the work *Essays and Reviews*. The work, which was made up of seven essays, examined various religious topics, including German higher criticism. Out of the seven contributors, also known as ‘The Seven Against Christ,’ Benjamin Jowett, Rowland Williams and Henry Bristow Wilson were charged with heresy but the judgments were not enforced.¹³ As evident in the Church’s response to *Essays and Reviews*, traditionalists were afraid that the influence of higher critics would overshadow the doctrinal “truth” of the bible because higher criticism was supported by theologians connected to the Church and universities.¹⁴ The threat of higher criticism moved traditional theologians “into a state of near panic.”¹⁵ In the midst of the debate concerning higher criticism was Sayce’s mentor E. B. Pusey and Samuel R. Driver, one of Sayce’s fiercest critics.

Comparing Sayce to Pusey and Driver

E. B. Pusey (1800-1882), who had studied for a short time in Germany, was determined to circumvent what he foresaw as the spread of German higher criticism to Britain. In objection to higher criticism, he “believed the bible could only be approached with the proper spirit of reverence” and not with the fallible intellect of the individual.¹⁶ Pusey also worried that the introduction of higher criticism to Britain would lead to a lack of faith in the biblical scriptures and reinforce secularism.¹⁷

Unlike Pusey, Sayce was not in total opposition to German higher criticism. In his opinion, higher criticism had virtues as well as flaws. His appreciation for higher criticism

¹³ See Victor Shea and William Whitla, eds., *Essays and Reviews: The 1860 Text and Its Reading* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000).

¹⁴ See Glover, 18.

¹⁵ Wheeler, 10.

¹⁶ Chadwick, *Spirit of the Oxford Movement*, 30.

¹⁷ In years following the Colenso controversy, Britain experienced an increase in agnosticism and atheism among the middle and upper classes. Also, Britons began to use their Sundays off as time to enjoy themselves and attend the theatre, sporting events or simply stay home and rest from a hard week at work. See McLeod, *Religion and Society in England*, 51, 176 and 196-197.

¹⁷ McLeod, *Religion and Society in England*, 176 and 196-197.

stemmed from his exposure to and admiration for Hegelian rationalism and his research on Assyria. Even though he agreed with some aspects of higher criticism, Sayce believed that its flaws dominated the field, leading to biblical misinterpretations. He argued that the more radical findings of the critics were unjustified and inadequately researched, causing needless hindrances for believers. Sayce was resolute in believing that critics should be satisfied with the answers drawn from history and archeology. He wrote:

To the historian the precise date of the narratives of *Genesis* in their present form matters but little. So long as he is assured that they are derived from ancient documents contemporaneous with the events they record he is fully satisfied. What he wants to know is, whether he can deal with a professedly historical statement in the Book of *Genesis* as he would deal with a statement in Gibbon or Macaulay? Let him be satisfied on this point and he asks no more.¹⁸

Like Pusey, Sayce revered the bible; this reverence grew more intense in the 1890s. Even though he labeled himself as an archeologist, he was still a Christian believer and ordained deacon of the Anglican Church. Sayce viewed the bible not as a guidebook for moral living, but as the foundation of Christianity. In his sermons, Christianity neither was a religion of morality nor a book of tales. The bible, for Sayce, was the inspired Word of God – transcribed by man. He argued that critics asked questions to which that no one had the answers. Archeology would uncover some answers, but other questions would remain unresolved, because the thoughts of humanity were limited and could never know as much as God. He wrote: “It is sufficient that if we are Christians we must accept the fact by the very nature of the case we who are finite cannot explain the mode of working of an infinite God.”¹⁹

Sayce stressed in his sermons the importance of faith, and he believed that the faithful should hold to the orthodox view of the bible rather than be persuaded by contradictions. More

¹⁸ Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 172-173.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Easter Sermon, 7.

notably after 1895 than before, he emphasized the experience of David Friedrich Strauss, a German scholar, who eventually stopped considering himself a Christian after dissecting the bible. In 1835 Strauss wrote *Leben Jesu (Life of Jesus)* which, Sayce believed, discredited the New Testament in an attempt to bring together philology and philosophy and show that biblical history was not necessary to Christianity.²⁰ When *Leben Jesu* was published, Strauss was still considering himself a Christian, but by the 1870s Strauss had become an atheist. Sayce feared that if Britons believed the arguments of the higher critics, then they too would turn away from the Christian faith. He believed that there came a point where critics had to stop critiquing and accept the orthodox interpretations of the bible. In 1874 Sayce's friend Max Müller expressed similar sentiments when he argued that theologians had broken down religion enough and the public should say "thus far but no farther."²¹

Sayce believed that the danger in doubting the Old Testament was the invariable harm it did to the orthodox view of the New Testament. The Old Testament is the backbone for the New. He unequivocally believed "that every act or word or thought that we do or speak or think is followed by consequences and those consequences by others again."²² The weakening of the Old Testament had a direct effect on the power and meaning of the New Testament. Sayce asked if the Old is based on myth and legend, then what was Christ's purpose for coming to earth? If the Pentateuch were "a delusion and fraud" as the critics described then for what reason would Christ have said: "Before Abraham was, I am?" Why would he have said, in reference to the Law of Moses, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to

²⁰ Sayce, "Answers from the Monuments," 22; Marchand, *Down from Olympus*, 221; and A. O. J. Cockshut, *Anglican Attitudes: A Study of Victorian Religious Controversies* (London: Collins, 1959), 26. Cockshut argues that *Leben Jesu* may be considered the work which caused many to doubt the bible and, in some cases reject Christianity.

²¹ Müller, *Memories*, 76-77

²² *Ibid.*, 8.

destroy, but to fulfill”?²³ According to Sayce, without the historical relevance of the Old Testament, the message of Jesus Christ cannot be understood. Christian theology assumes that Jesus Christ is the center that gives history a meaning.²⁴ Sayce believed that the future of Christianity was at stake in this debate.

Samuel R. Driver (1846-1914), on the other hand, did not see any tragedy waiting to befall Christianity because of higher criticism. Driver, Oxford professor of Hebrew, supported higher criticism and questioned Sayce’s emphasis on archeology. He stated in his *The Higher Criticism* published in 1912, that he “slowly and reluctantly” came to the conclusion that the bible was not free of errors.²⁵ Driver believed that the new interpretation of the bible and the contributions of the critics did not take away from the important role which the bible possessed as the guidebook for Christians. In Driver’s view, biblical criticism enhanced biblical knowledge and “increased the value of the bible for the ordinary Christian” in the pew.²⁶ He believed that “criticism in the hands of Christian scholars [did] not banish or destroy the inspiration of the Old Testament.” Driver believed that contemporary biblical criticism did not take away from the “belief that the Old Testament is the God-given record of God’s special revelation of Himself through Israel in preparation for the Incarnation, and as such of permanent significance for the Christian Church.”²⁷ From Driver’s perspective, if Christianity could not survive biblical criticism then it was not a strong religion from the beginning. He noted that what was believed fifty years ago could not still hold true but should be revised in relation to the

²³ Sayce, “Answers from the Monuments,” 22-23; *John* 8:58, KJV; and *Matthew* 5:17, KJV.

²⁴ Jesper Høgenhaven, *Problems and Prospects of Old Testament Theology* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1988), 31.

²⁵ S. R. Driver and A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Higher Criticism* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1912), 49.

²⁶ Barbara Zink MacHaffie, “Monument Facts and Higher Critical Fancies: Archaeology and the Popularization of Old Testament Criticism in Nineteenth-Century Britain,” vol. 50, no. 3, *Church History* (September 1981), 317.

²⁷ Driver, *The Higher Criticism*, 7.

critical arguments. He added that the clergy had to be willing to accept the findings of biblical criticism and prepare bible readers to accept these new ideas.²⁸

Driver claimed that the apostles of the New Testament used the Septuagint Version (Greek translation) of the bible. He noted that this version accepted the spirit of the Old Testament but not every word as fact. This conveyed to Driver that the apostles did not accept the idea of the inerrancy of the bible but accepted the spirit and the underlying meaning of the Old Testament.²⁹ A. H. Sayce disagreed with Driver's focus on the Septuagint and argued that critics were quick to point out the textual corruption of the bible in comparison to the Septuagint Version. He believed that undue weight was given to the text which was created by Jews of Alexandria "whose knowledge of the sacred language of their nation was not always complete or exact."³⁰

In examining Sayce's argument against the higher critics, it is unwise to characterize him as a traditionalist like Pusey, who approached biblical criticisms from a theological perspective. The traditionalists of the old Tractarian model found it difficult meeting the challenges posed by higher critics. Chadwick argues in *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement* that the next generation of Tractarians like Charles Gore moved away from Edward Pusey's ideas of biblical inerrancy. This new generation rejected the idea that the Church was without error.³¹

Growing Animosity toward Higher Criticism

Because of the appeal of higher criticism, Sayce found it crucial to point out the flaws of its arguments due to their lack of archeological and historical research. He acknowledged that

²⁸ Driver, *The Higher Criticism*, 7-8, 17 and Rev. C. W. Rishell, *The Higher Criticism: An Outline of Modern Biblical Study* (Cincinnati: Curts & Jennings, 1896), 32. Critics argued that if reverence for the bible was destroyed then it was unworthy of reverence from the start.

²⁹ Driver, *The Higher Criticism*, 28.

³⁰ Sayce, "The Composition of the Pentateuch," 136.

³¹ Chadwick, *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement*, 51.

many late-Victorian Britons found higher criticism appealing: “The arguments of the ‘higher critic’ seem so much more conclusive, so much more in accordance with the scientific requirements of the day, than the counter arguments of the ‘apologist,’ that the ordinary educated reader finds it difficult to resist them.”³² To combat this appeal, Sayce emphasized the use of archeology: “the results of recent oriental discovery, so far as they bear upon this ‘higher criticism,’ are either not known at all, or else only in a vague and indefinite way.”³³ He particularly stressed the success archeology had in defending the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.

In the late 1890s, he argued that in picking apart the Old Testament, critics were weakening Christianity and leading many away from religion. Because Sayce feared Britons would lose their faith and take the extreme path toward atheism, he argued passionately against what he described as the higher critics’ destruction of Christianity. It was his concern for the well-being of Christianity which provided the fuel for much of his religious works and critiques on higher criticism. Sayce’s argument against the higher critics was based on his fear that their interpretation of the bible would lead to the demise of Christianity in Britain. His method of countering biblical critics with their own weapons resulted in his literary popularity in both England and America. Religious and archeological societies requested articles by Sayce which described the relationship between the Old Testament and archeology.³⁴

But, religiosity in British society was by no means dead, as Sayce’s growing popularity suggested. Even though British society was gradually becoming more secular, religion still occupied a significant space. The President of the Society of Biblical Archaeology, Samuel Birch insisted that the word ‘biblical’ be added to the organization’s name in order “to attract

³² Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 25.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Cheyne, *Founders of Old Testament Criticism*, 236.

subscriptions.”³⁵ Another of Sayce’s friends, Amelia Edwards, was aware that her newly formed Society for the Promotion of Excavation in the Delta of the Nile would gain support from churches if it worked to prove the biblical accounts.³⁶ Edwards’s new organization, of which Sayce was a member, hoped to excavate sites affiliated with the Old Testament, uncover records of Hebrew presence in Egypt, and identify the capital of the Land of Goshen.³⁷ The Society also wanted Flinders Petrie to bring back Egyptian bricks made by Hebrew slaves. Petrie was reluctant because he worried about the difficulty in transporting the fragile bricks to England, but the Society continued to press the issue, believing that subscribers would “treasure a genuine brick.”³⁸

Sayce’s *Higher Criticism*, much-anticipated by traditionalists, was received with both praise and disappointment by defenders of orthodoxy. Traditionalists praised the work for providing proof that the conclusions of the higher critics were flawed.³⁹ Upon release the work was received with “rejoicing among the adherents of the traditional view,” and Sayce became known as the “defender of Holy Writ.”⁴⁰ Some traditionalists, however, were disappointed by the work because it failed to discredit higher criticism completely. According to the *Church Times*: “Much disappointment has risen on the appearance of the treatise from finding that at present Mr. Sayce is not so wholly on the side of traditionary interpretation of the Old Testament as was before supposed.”⁴¹ The article reflected Sayce’s acknowledgment of the virtues of higher criticism and his agreement with the critics on the Babylonian influence in *Genesis*. Sayce foresaw the dubious reception his work received and thought the work would not be

³⁵ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 55.

³⁶ Drower, *Flinders Petrie*, 58.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

³⁹ Rishell, 98.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 99 and Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 303.

⁴¹ *Church Times*, 9 February 1894, 161.

accepted because it would not please supporters of higher criticism or orthodoxy. He wrote: “I am well aware that the pages which follow will satisfy neither the ‘higher critics’ nor their extreme opponents...”⁴²

After the publication of *Higher Criticism* in 1893, Sayce’s views toward higher criticism became more intense and scathing. Sayce’s writings reflect gradually increasing hostility toward higher criticism; at times he became so passionate that he relied more on persuasion than fact.⁴³ Over time he ceased finding any virtue in criticism, emphasizing instead his concern for Christianity. *Higher Criticism* presents a detailed explanation of biblical text, examining *Genesis* chapter by chapter and verse by verse. Archeological and historical evidence is incorporated throughout the work. In 1895 Sayce made a shift away from moderate views of higher criticism. Acknowledging his change in attitude toward higher criticism in the article “Archaeology v. Old Testament Criticism,” Sayce wrote, “We have all committed follies in our youth, and one of the few compensations which old age is supposed to bring is that of growing out of them.”⁴⁴ Having recognized the error in his arguments presented in *Higher Criticism*, Sayce was now on a mission to discredit higher criticism entirely. His tone and approach differed sharply in an article written in 1897 entitled “Answers from the Monuments.” In this later piece, Sayce wrote with a forceful, polemical tone. He wrote not as a biblical scholar employing reason and research to prove the authenticity of the bible, but as a faithful Christian attempting to defend his faith. He declared that Christianity needed an accurate historical foundation or else it was a “house built upon sand.”⁴⁵

⁴² Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, v and *Reminiscences*, 304.

⁴³ MacHaffie, 327 and Cheyne, *Founders of Old Testament Criticism*, 237. In regards to Sayce’s polemic writing style, Cheyne wrote that “for the sake of historical truth let those who read Prof. Sayce be on their guard.”

⁴⁴ Sayce, “Archaeology v. Old Testament Criticism,” *The Contemporary Review*, October 1895, 478.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, “Answers from the Monuments,” 21-22.

His friend Thomas K. Cheyne stated that Sayce was “friendly to critical analysis” between 1873 and 1874. During those years, Cheyne believed that Sayce accurately examined the bible in light of archeology. The dates mentioned by Cheyne for Sayce’s conversion to biblical conservatism are important because they coincide roughly with George Smith’s discovery of the Babylonian version of the Flood. But if, as Cheyne argued, Sayce opposed the critics after 1874, he did not formulate a ‘solid’ argument against higher criticism until after the discovery of the Tel el Amarna tablets in 1887, the event Sayce characterized as the turning point in his intellectual life. After this period, Cheyne argued, Sayce became more interested in appealing to the public and made exaggerated claims against higher critics in his efforts to counter their arguments.⁴⁶

For Sayce, evidence to prove the authorship and authenticity of the Pentateuch rested in the Tel el Amarna tablets, which were correspondences written on clay tablets in cuneiform. The tablets, uncovered in 1887, detail the correspondence between Egypt and the kings of Babylonia, Assyria, Kappadokia and Northern Syria, yet not once is the Egyptian language or script used. A large portion of the correspondence came from Palestine and Phoenicia.⁴⁷

Sayce described Canaan as the “centre of the correspondence which was going on with the Egyptian court in the reign of Khu-n-Aten [Akenaton].” Sayce believed that the tablets bore witness to the continuation of writing in cuneiform that evidence shows occurred under the reign of Akenaton’s predecessor Amenophis III.⁴⁸ Rev. Sayce described Egypt as “the house of bondage” where art and literature flourished. In Egypt, writings were etched on the temples of

⁴⁶ Cheyne, *Founders of Old Testament Criticism*, 235. Cheyne claimed that he would not have had a problem with Sayce if he had approached higher criticism in an unbiased manner that stressed its strengths and weaknesses. Because Sayce chose an extreme tactic, Cheyne believed he presented “unfair charges against the higher critics” and their methods.

⁴⁷ Later in 1890 cuneiform tablets were uncovered at Tell el-Hesi (located in Palestine) by Flinders Petrie for the Palestine Exploration Fund. Sayce argued that not much scientific excavation of Palestine had been conducted until Petrie conducted excavations in 1890.

⁴⁸ Sayce, “The Composition of Pentateuch,” 117.

the gods and the homes of the rich and powerful.⁴⁹ Sayce believed that because of the prevalence of literature in Egypt, it would have been impossible for the Hebrews not to have been influenced by Egyptian culture or gained familiarity with cuneiform, if only on a rudimentary level. Sayce believed that the literary traditions of ancient Egypt influenced the Jews resulting in their development of a Hebrew literary tradition.

Problems with Criticism

Some traditionalists like Rev. C. W. Rishell, professor of historical theology at Boston University, agreed with Sayce and argued that examining the bible from only one perspective did an injustice to the ancient text and tarnished its religious significance. Rishell argued that because Wellhausen and Abraham Kuenen, a Dutch critic, examined the bible from an exclusively literary perspective, they excluded the possibility of recognizing its divine inspiration. They studied the literary attributes of the Old Testament as they would any historical work. Rishell wrote:

Their literary criticism is not for its own sake, but in order to elicit the historical facts. To them the bible is just like any other source of historical information. They cannot accept its statements simply because they are found in the Book. If other sources contradict, they weigh, sift, and decide, as though the bible had been written without any Divine help. There is no presumption in its favor drawn from religious considerations, nor is there any prejudice against it.⁵⁰

A similar view is seen in the writings of Brooke Foss Westcott, Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge from 1870 to 1890. He argued that religious faith was “a matter of insight, a ‘mystical’ apprehension of those ‘eternal realities which lie beneath and beyond the changeful shows of life.’” Criticism is a product of human knowledge; but to understand the spiritual, faith is needed. Westcott deduced:

⁴⁹ Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 59.

⁵⁰ Rishell, 23.

Science and history are lavish sources of purely human knowledge, but only revelation will add 'that element of infinity' which gives 'characteristic permanence to every work and thought,' although it is knowledge which supplies the material that faith uses.⁵¹

Sayce, however, incorporated the literary techniques of Wellhausen, Kuenen and other critics, which Rishell condemned, with historical analysis and archeological evidence to justify and prove the authenticity of the bible. He saw himself as a biblical historian and archeologist in search of the truth. He did not consider himself, nor did he want to be labeled, as a theologian.

Sayce, unlike Rishell, viewed the Old Testament as a fragment of oriental literature which he believed should be examined just as any other document of history; he was confident that "the arguments which are sound in the one case will be sound in the other."⁵² He asserted that:

Old Testament history has been treated unfairly, alike by friend and foe. They have both sought to defend a thesis, instead of endeavouring to discover what it actually has to tell us. Any argument, however trivial, which would throw discredit on it has been acceptable to the one, while the other has too often undertaken to defend the impossible. Had any other history been treated in the same way, the educated world would have protested long ago. But the biblical records have been put into a category by themselves, to their infinite harm and abuse. Commentators have been more anxious to discover their own ideas in them, than to discover what the statements contained in them really mean.⁵³

Sayce claimed that critics and traditionalists made mistakes in attempting to prove their individual points of view. He noted that the critics supported views which discredited the bible while traditionalists worked to "defend the impossible." Neither side, in his opinion, interpreted scripture from the point of view of the contemporaries, but rather chose to interpret scripture

⁵¹ Reardon, 352-353.

⁵² Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 26.

⁵³ Ibid.

with the goal of proving their own claims. As a result, the scriptures and biblical analysis suffered.

Rev. Sayce believed that a literary analysis via philology paved the way for a historical critique of the Old Testament. The investigative methods used to examine Greek and Roman texts were applied to biblical texts, which Sayce viewed as a positive and constructive. He wrote: “The method and principles of inquiry which were applicable to profane history were equally applicable to sacred history.” In the eyes of the historian there was not a difference between the two. Sayce argued that one document can not be held to a certain set of standards which may not also be applied to the other. He declared:

The critical standard was necessarily the same in both cases; we cannot admit that an argument which would be just and conclusive in the case of Herodotos would be unjust and inconclusive in the case of the Pentateuch. In so far as the critical analysis of Greek and Roman history had been a success, it was right to expect that the same critical analysis of Israelitish history would also be a success.⁵⁴

He argued that too often, the Old Testament is read as a fairytale, its readers “seldom realizing that its heroes were men of flesh and blood like ourselves, and that the world in which they lived and moved was the same world as that into which we were born.”⁵⁵ Sayce believed that too often passages were skimmed over, causing the reader not to realize the powerful meaning behind the words. He added that critics had resolved the Old Testament to be “distorted tradition or romance or else assigned [it to] purely mythical origin.”⁵⁶

Sayce’s approach to reading the bible may have been influenced by Hermann Gunkel and the Pan-Babylonians. As a result of the expansion of cuneiform studies, a new line of thought arose among Assyriologists which detractors called Pan-Babylonianism. The most outspoken

⁵⁴ Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 16.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, *The Witness of Ancient Monuments to the Old Testament Scriptures* (New York: American Tract Society), 3.

proponents of this school argued that all world myths, science and architecture were reflections of Babylonian religion and culture. Pan-Babylonians believed that Mesopotamia was the birth place of all folktales, including the bible. Because of Pan-Babylonianism critics focused on the literary quality of the Old Testament and not the religious or historical nature of it.⁵⁷ Gunkel, in a path-breaking book of 1895 (*Schöpfung und Chaos*) and in his later commentaries on the book of *Genesis* (1901), came to the conclusion that *Genesis* should be read as a compilation of literary stories. He noted the differences in mood, pointing to the humor in Jacob deceiving Isaac, the morality lesson in the story of Sodom and Gomorah and the fear in God in the story of the tower of Babel.⁵⁸ Rev. Sayce rejected Gunkel's view of the Pentateuch as a collection of cautionary tales. He strongly believed that the Old Testament was a chronicle of the lives of actual people. He opposed the notion that the twelve sons of Jacob were equivalent to the twelve zodiac signs, or the conquest of Canaan by Joshua was a version of the struggle between night and dawn.⁵⁹

Sayce's argument that the Pentateuch should be examined as any other historical work was shared by his intellectual opponent S. R. Driver, who believed that the bible should be submitted to the same criticisms as other literary texts; its sacredness did not exempt it.⁶⁰ Their views diverged, however, on the degree of importance given to archeological research. Driver argued that Sayce exaggerated the evidence from archeology. As mentioned in chapter two, Gladstone appointed Driver rather than Sayce to the chair of Hebrew after the death of Pusey because Driver was viewed as a champion of traditional biblical interpretations. Unforeseen by Gladstone and even Sayce, Driver became an advocate of the higher critical while Sayce became

⁵⁷ Chavalas, 34 and Marchand, *Down from Olympus*, 223.

⁵⁸ Ernest Nicholson, *The Pentateuch in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 39.

⁵⁹ Sayce, *The Witness of Ancient Monuments*, 4.

⁶⁰ Driver, *The Higher Criticism*, 20.

the champion of biblical authenticity and accuracy. Sayce thought it ironic that Driver who was the orthodox in the past “had become the dangerous heretic whose biblical position the ‘heretic’ of the past was now united with Gladstone in opposing.”⁶¹

Sayce further added that the research conducted must be verified by the history and archeological research before it could be identified as fact. In Sayce’s view this was the quintessence of research – using science (i.e. archeology) and historical evidence to prove theories. He insisted that in order to scientifically and thoroughly study the biblical text, it needed to be compared to contemporaneous historical and archeological evidence.⁶² He wrote:

Science teaches us that we can attain to truth only by the help of comparison; we can know things scientifically only in so far as they can be compared and measured one with another. Where there is no comparison there can be no scientific result.⁶³

He believed that the Old Testament should be compared to other historical events in the ancient world and put in the context of the monuments uncovered through excavations. In Sayce’s opinion, those who were promoting higher criticism were “men who [had] little or no practical acquaintance with Oriental modes of thought.” He characterized the critics as men who were specialized in the Old Testament but had not expanded their interest into other areas, such as history and archeology. He warned that if the Old Testament was examined exclusively in the area of Israel, then what the critics analyzed was “a single instance, and from a single instance we can draw no conclusions of permanent scientific value.”⁶⁴ Because the truth, which critics sought after was historical and not theological, historians must also abide by the factual evidence. History, like science, is not built on subjective judgments. It must be proven and collaborated by factual evidence.

⁶¹ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 304.

⁶² *Ibid.*, “Answers from the Monuments,” 26.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, “The Composition of the Pentateuch,” 107.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, “Answers from the Monuments,” 25-26.

Let this accordingly be the rule of the historian: to believe all things, to hope all things, but at the same time to test and try all things. And the test must be scientific, not what we assume to be probable or natural, but external testimony in the shape of archaeological and geographical facts. The history of the past is not what ought to have happened according to the ideas of the critic, but what actually did happen.⁶⁵

Sayce reiterated his view that the arguments of the historian should be based on the evidence uncovered by archeology. Here, he emphasized the significance of employing the scientific method, which in his opinion consisted of comparisons and analysis, to reveal what he considered to be the truth concerning biblical texts.

Sayce credited the work accomplished by archeologists such as Heinrich Schliemann, who excavated Troy; A. H. Layard, who worked at Nimrud; and Flinders Petrie for adding to historical and biblical knowledge. Sayce asserted that “before we can accept” the conclusions of the higher critics “we must test them, and this can only be done by the help of the monuments of the ancient oriental world.”⁶⁶ He believed that archeology complemented philology and the two together enhanced biblical understanding. He wrote: “In the East the decipherer of the hieroglyphics of Egypt and the cuneiform characters of Assyria and Babylonia walks hand in hand with the excavator. The one assists and supplements the work of the other.”⁶⁷ Archeology provided the litmus test for philology. If the two agreed with the historical evidence, then truth prevailed. Once archeology provided an answer, then “its verdict, whatever it may be” must be accepted.⁶⁸

Sayce strongly believed that monuments provided the best confirmation of literary evidence because they provided contemporary records that presented a picture of the past.⁶⁹ He

⁶⁵ Sayce, “The Composition of the Pentateuch,” 139.

⁶⁶ Ibid., *Higher Criticism*, 10.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 28.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 10.

believed artifacts and evidence were waiting to be uncovered to shed light on the mysterious the higher critics had misinterpreted. Sayce claimed that researchers were unaware of the evidence beneath the ground waiting to be excavated. It is fair to say that Sayce idealized archeology and archeologists. He wrote:

The archaeologist is happily attached to no party; he has no theories to defend, no preconceived theory to uphold. He is bound to follow the facts brought to light by the progress of discovery and research, wherever they may lead him. Whether they support the views of the “higher critic” or the upholders of traditional opinions is no concern of his. His duty is to state and explain them regardless of their consequences for theological controversy. All he is bound to do is to point out clearly where practical certainty ends and mere probability begins, where the facts tell their own tale and where their broken and dislocated character demands the hypothesis of the interpreter.⁷⁰

Sayce believed that archeologists were immune from political and religious controversies. In fact, he argued that while critics worked to destroy the Old Testament, the archeologist worked to diligently “build [it] up again.”⁷¹ He was convinced that archeologists were impartial, since they could not control what was uncovered through excavations. But, he failed to acknowledge that the interpretations of their findings could be explained from a bias perspective.

What Sayce deemed as dangerous was the critics’ eagerness to label an idea contrary to theirs as untrue. He declared that higher criticism had “adopted a more arrogant tone” and “refuse[d] to listen to archaeological science except where its results [were] in accordance with its own.” Sayce argued that just because evidence had not been uncovered yet did not necessary prove that the contradictory argument was false. A. H. Sayce believed that the ignorance of critics could be alleviated if only they waited for the results from historical analysis and archeological research. He declared: “No one could even dream that a vast literature was lying

⁷⁰ Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 28.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, “Answers from the Monuments,” 26.

under the mounds of Assyria, waiting only for the spade of the excavator.”⁷² Sayce argued that in presenting an argument, the critic made “his own ignorance the measure of the credibility of an ancient document.”⁷³ He further added that the truth could be gained “not by the assumptions and subjective fantasies or ignorance of the critic, but by archaeological research.”⁷⁴ Rev. C. W. Rishell echoed Sayce’s sentiments and reiterated that the higher critics had become too confident “in their individual opinions” and held “contempt for others” who argued differently.⁷⁵ Sayce noted that before the contributions of archeologists, critics were ignorant of various incidents of the bible, labeling them as untrue. Before evidence was uncovered which collaborated the existence of the priest-king Melchizedek, the higher critics considered the biblical account unhistorical, just as they had labeled the Hittite kings mentioned in *2 Kings 7:6* as an error or an invention. He argued that it was “only the ignorance of the critic himself that was at fault” for such false claims.⁷⁶

Sayce claimed that it had been found more than once that “the critics have been too ingenious, and have arranged past events more cleverly than they actually arranged themselves.”⁷⁷ He noted that a common mistake made by critics was applying contemporary beliefs and modes of thought to the ancients. He asserted that critics forgot about the “conditions under which they [ancients] lived, and the point of view from which they wrote.” Sayce expressed that the critics “expected that an ancient oriental annalist should express himself with the sobriety of a Western European and the precision of a modern man of science.” This examination of the ancient world through the lens of the modern Europe led to a false

⁷² Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 36. In the 1840s Paul-Émile Botta and A. H. Layard uncovered places in Assyria and hundreds of written tablets which made up the Library of Nineveh. Prior to this the British Museum’s entire collection of Assyrian and Babylonian antiquities fit in a small case.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, *Reminiscences*, 273.

⁷⁵ Rishell, 16.

⁷⁶ Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 16.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

interpretation of the biblical narrative. Expressing the extreme and what he considered the ridiculous measures of the higher critics, he argued that critics treated the biblical texts as if they were modern day literature, written by a German scholar in a library.⁷⁸ He wrote:

A good deal of the historical criticism which has been passed on the Old Testament is criticism which seems to imagine that the compiler of the Book of Judges or the Books of Kings was a German scholar surrounded by the volumes of his library, and writing in awe of the reviewers. What may be called historical hair-splitting has been the bane of scientific criticism.⁷⁹

Sayce stressed that much time and research must be undertaken in order to arrive at the correct biblical interpretation. The Old Testament was written in the East for an Eastern audience, not in Germany for nineteenth-century European scholars. Because the text was originally written in a dead language and the ability to fully understand the text “verse by verse, and even word by word, into its several elements, and fix the approximate date and relation of each” is almost an impossible feat. To attempt to interpret what is not fully understood “is to sin as much against common sense as against the laws of science.”⁸⁰ He further added:

The Hebrew literature that has come down to him [the critic] is but a fragment of what once existed, and the interpretation of a good deal of it is doubtful. Our knowledge of the Hebrew language is in the highest degree imperfect; our Hebrew lexicons contain but a fraction of the words once possessed by it, and the meaning of many of the words which have been preserved, as well as the idioms of the grammar, is merely a matter of conjecture.⁸¹

In Sayce’s opinion, the arguments of the higher critics were defective since the latter strived to use philology alone to interpret the meaning of an old, extinct language spoken by people who lived thousands of years ago.

⁷⁸ Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 15.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., “The Composition of the Pentateuch,” 107.

⁸¹ Ibid., “Answers from the Monuments,” 25.

As mentioned before, prior to 1893 Sayce did not find higher criticism to be completely in error, but what he did deem harmful were the conclusions drawn from erroneous facts. Sayce believed that critics disrupted the church by asking questions to which they themselves did not have the answers or by putting forth radical theories.⁸² He believed that higher critics incorporated too much speculation and displayed a “lack of vigorous common sense and knowledge of real life.”⁸³ Sayce believed that the weaknesses of higher criticism were evident in the discussion of the authorship of the Pentateuch.

Did Moses Write It?

One point of contention between Sayce and the critics was the authorship of the Pentateuch. Christians traditionally believed that Moses wrote the Pentateuch. Higher critics argued that because of the dissimilar writing styles in the Pentateuch, it could not have been written by one person alone and that the books were written much later than the Mosaic era. The critics argued that the ancient Hebrews did not have a writing tradition before the reign of David; some critics argued the Hebrew literary tradition began during the reign of Solomon.

Sayce, on the other hand, advocated the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. He argued that the ancient Hebrews had a writing tradition that dated back to their arrival in Canaan during the Exodus period. Sayce reasoned that since Moses was reared in Pharaoh’s court, he would have been exposed to the literature of Egypt and Babylon, even learning cuneiform. He further argued that after their exit from Egypt, the Hebrews carried the knowledge learned in Egypt with them to Canaan. There they contributed to the literary tradition already present in Canaan. Because the Hebrews were exposed to culture and literature in Egypt, Sayce believed that Moses

⁸² Glover, 225.

⁸³ Rishell, 16.

wrote the Pentateuch. It was not, as the critics purported it to be, an impossible feat for Moses to accomplish.

The Tel el Amarna tablets provided Sayce with the necessary ammunition to attack the higher critics. A. H. Sayce believed that the tablets proved that Moses could have written the first books of the bible. He described the tablets as having “had such momentous consequences for biblical criticism.”⁸⁴ Sayce argued that the Tel el Amarna tablets proved that a century before the Exodus, the Babylonian language was the common language of diplomacy throughout the civilized East.⁸⁵ He deduced that since the people of Canaan were familiar with cuneiform, then the Hebrews were exposed to Babylonian text in Canaan.⁸⁶ He figured that “Babylonian traditions and legends must have been almost as well known in Canaan as they were in Babylonia itself.”⁸⁷ The tablets proved that Babylonian texts were not utilized by one exclusive group but shared by scholars and scribes across the Orient, becoming the first international script. For Sayce, the Tel el Amarna tablets showed that the Near East was influenced by Babylonian culture, and that a century before the Exodus the Near East was as literate as Renaissance Europe.⁸⁸

For the Babylonian language to be used throughout the Orient, it had to be learned and taught, which would not have been an easy task. Sayce imagined that it would have been difficult for foreigners to learn cuneiform because of the complexity of the script. There were 500 different characters, each with at least two different phonetic values. Also each character could be used ideographically to denote an object or idea; and unlike hieroglyphics, cuneiform

⁸⁴ Sayce, “The Composition of the Pentateuch,” 128-129.

⁸⁵ Ibid., *Higher Criticism*, 49.

⁸⁶ Sayce’s belief that the Jews were introduced to Babylonian text in Egypt and Canaan was shared by Gunkel and German Assyriologist and Pan-Babylonian Hugo Winckler.

⁸⁷ Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 78.

⁸⁸ Ibid., “The Composition of the Pentateuch,” 116.

script was not pictorial and therefore could provide the learner no assistance in remembrance. Sayce concluded that learning cuneiform was a labor intensive exercise.⁸⁹ He believed that schools must have existed.⁹⁰

Also libraries had to have housed cuneiform text by which scribes and scholar could study. Sayce deduced that anyone who was educated and of high social rank, like Moses, knew the script. He added that there were cases where cuneiform was transformed and meshed with the dialect of the country. This proved to Sayce that Babylonian culture had a large impact on the ancient Near East.⁹¹ Since cuneiform script had an influential role in ancient cultures, then it is not impossible to presume that Moses was exposed to Babylonian culture and script. Sayce argued that the time in which the Exodus occurred was an age of literature and books. He wrote:

The Old Testament and the discoveries of oriental archaeology alike tell us that the age of the Exodus was throughout the world of Western Asia an age of literature and books, of readers and writers, and that the cities of Palestine were stored with the contemporaneous records of past events inscribed on imperishable clay.⁹²

Sayce reasoned that Moses would have been exposed to Babylonian culture and script and hence could have drawn on the examples of Babylon to write the Pentateuch. Because of the abundance in literature, Sayce believed that it would have been more of a miracle if Moses had not written the Pentateuch.⁹³

Sayce noted that the Israelites had leaders and overseers who would have been educated men, hence perpetuating the idea that the Jews were educated and could have possibly been able to read cuneiform. The Hebrews of the Mosaic period were not illiterate as the critics argued.

⁸⁹ Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 50-51.

⁹⁰ Ibid., "Answers from the Monuments," 32. See also Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 78. Among the information in the Tel el Amarna tablets is a copy of a Babylonian myth, which Sayce believed was used by Egyptian scribes as an exercise in learning cuneiform.

⁹¹ Ibid., *Higher Criticism*, 49.

⁹² Ibid., 59.

⁹³ Ibid., "Answers from the Monuments," 28.

Sayce found it absurd to believe that the Jews were surrounded by literate societies that read cuneiform and yet they remained illiterate. He asserted: “They were no islet of illiterate barbarism in the midst of a great sea of literary culture and activity, nor were they obstinately asleep while all about them were writing and reading.”⁹⁴

Sayce noted Egyptian similarities in the Pentateuch, which also pointed to authorship of Moses. Moses, who spent his early years in Pharaoh’s court, applied Egyptian cultural aspects to the Levitical Code. The division of the place of worship into a porch, a holy place and a holy of holies, the use of incense in religious worship and the distinction between clean and unclean meat all had Egyptian counterparts.⁹⁵

In arguing the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, Sayce was particularly critical of the work of Julius Wellhausen. The German theologian promoted the theory of multiple authors. Because he noted the similar styles in writing in both the Pentateuch and the *Book of Joshua*, Wellhausen argued that focus should be placed on the Hexateuch, which he viewed as a compilation, put together by a redactor, or compiler, of a post-Mosaic period. Wellhausen divided the Hexateuch into four versions – the Jehovistic, Elohist, Priestly and Deuteronomistic. Wellhausen’s biblical criticisms dominated higher criticism, and as a sign of Wellhausen’s influence in higher criticism, Sayce resolved to call the field “the school of Wellhausen.”⁹⁶ To support his theories, Wellhausen pointed out that the account of the Flood

⁹⁴ Sayce, “The Composition of the Pentateuch,” 122.

⁹⁵ Rishell, 80.

⁹⁶ Cheyne, *Founders of Old Testament Criticism*, 241. See also Nicholson, *The Pentateuch in the Twentieth Century*. Wellhausen divided the Hexateuch into four main divisions labeled P, E, J and D. P represented the Priestly Code, which was the first Elohist portion of the Old Testament, also known as The Book of Origins. Wellhausen argued that P was the youngest portion of the Pentateuch even though it detailed the beginnings of creation. The Elohist was presented by the letter E. The Jehovist was denoted by the letter J, and the Deuteronomist texts were signified by the letter D. Wellhausen believed that from all four of these sources, editors combined writings to create the Hexateuch. He also deduced that P, E and J originated in the tenth or ninth century B.C., with P being the youngest. Here, Wellhausen may have been influenced by Eichhorn, who deduced that the Jehovistic portion of the Pentateuch ended before the death of Joseph, where as the Elohist portion begins with the first

was changed from its original Jehovist version to the Priestly Code's version which is recorded in *Genesis* 9. The redactor responsible for this change, in Wellhausen's opinion, is responsible for the Pentateuch in its present form.⁹⁷

Even though Sayce strongly believed that Moses wrote the original Pentateuch, he agreed with the critics that redactors edited the Pentateuch and that its present form was not its original Mosaic form.⁹⁸ Sayce argued that Ezra may have been the final redactor who combined everything and smoothed out the text to make it flow. He believed that because Ezra may have modified the Pentateuch, readers should not be surprised to see aspects of the Babylonian captivity in the work. Even though Ezra may have contributed to the Pentateuch in its present form, Sayce was convinced that Moses could have written the original Pentateuch because critics had not proven without a shadow of doubt that he had not.⁹⁹ Sayce admitted that the account of Moses' death in the text was added by a compiler and proved that the present form of the Pentateuch was not original to the Mosaic period.¹⁰⁰ He argued that archeological evidence showed that the Pentateuch was influenced by Babylonian text, which Moses possibly learned having been a member of pharaoh's court. In Sayce's view the weight of archeological and historical evidence came down on the side of Mosaic authorship. Sayce wrote: "The Pentateuch

public appearance of Moses. For more information on when the books of the Pentateuch were written see Sayce, *Composition of the Pentateuch*.

Late nineteenth-century critics believed that the redactor of the Priestly Code (R^P) was not an individual but a school, and the redaction occurred in stages. This idea coincided with that presented by Hermann Gunkel, a student of Wellhausen, who also believed that the Pentateuch was a collection of stories taken from various sources. He also agreed with fellow critics that R^P was not an individual. Gunkel strived to answer for what audience were the texts written and in what context.

⁹⁷ See Rishell, 68. Critics believed that Ezra in 444 B.C. gave the Pentateuch public recognition and later scribes dealt with portions of the Pentateuch without adding any new laws or historical data.

⁹⁸ Sayce noted textual revisions in the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* and the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. These books were also revised over time just as was the Pentateuch.

⁹⁹ Sayce, "The Composition of the Pentateuch," 108 and 132.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 136.

substantially belongs to the Mosaic age, and may therefore be accepted as, in the bulk, the work of Moses himself.”¹⁰¹

Sayce agreed with Driver and the critics that the Old Testament in its present form was a later compilation and revision of writings, but he disagreed with the critics on the idea that the material in the books of the Old Testament was mischaracterized. Sayce reasoned that just because the books may have been revised did not justify the conclusion that the original unrevised material did not accurately represent the contemporaneous events it recorded.¹⁰² Sayce conceded that critics were correct in arguing that the final form of the books of the Old Testament may have been written later, but they ignored the fact that what was written was based on contemporaneous sources. The Hebrews of Moses’ day, like their surroundings neighbors, had historiographers; but unlike the historiographers in other societies, Hebrew historiographers were inspired by God.¹⁰³ These sources which Sayce described as the basis for Old Testament writings were the writings of Moses. Sayce strongly believed that the revisions made to the Pentateuch were the modifications of Moses’ accounts.

Even though Sayce acknowledged that the earliest known surviving manuscript was from the reign of Hezekiah which spanned from about 727 to 698 B.C., he argued that the late date of the text “should not be pressed too far.” Petrie’s excavation of Tell el Hesi in 1890 indicated that there was still more yet to be excavated in Phoenicia, Syria and east of the Jordan. Sayce noted that before the discovery of the hundreds of written tablets which made up the library of

¹⁰¹ Sayce, “The Composition of the Pentateuch,” 133-134.

¹⁰² Ibid., *Higher Criticism*, 60.

¹⁰³ Rishell, 49. Richard Simon wrote *Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament (Critical History of the Old Testament)*. In it he argued that the Pentateuch in its current form was not written by Moses. He formulated the theory that Oriental societies had historiographers whose duties also included editing or expounding on the works of their predecessors. He further went on to argue that Ezra or later writers combined these historiographical works to write the Old Testament.

Nineveh, very little was known about cuneiform and even less about Hebrew literature.¹⁰⁴ Even though Sayce believed that some of the history concerning the Pentateuch had been proven by archeology, he acknowledged that archeology was “still in its infancy.” Only a few sites had been uncovered and “thousands of cuneiform texts in the museums of Europe and America which have not as yet been deciphered.”¹⁰⁵ Hence, Sayce believed that the evidence, which in his opinion would validate the bible, had yet to be uncovered. In his opinion it was premature of higher critics to assert arguments that lacked concrete archeological evidence. Sayce maintained that the lack of thorough research led to a misunderstanding of biblical texts, particularly *Genesis*.

Problems with *Genesis*

Another aspect of the Pentateuch which fell under heavy criticism was the *Book of Genesis*. Higher critics emphasized its obvious similarities to the Babylonian work *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which was translated by George Smith in 1872 and believed to predate *Genesis*. As I mentioned in the previous chapters, interest in the relationship between the bible and archeology grew with Smith’s translation of the Babylonian account. Critics argued that the biblical story of the great flood was lifted from the cuneiform text, leading many to believe that such an event never occurred. Sayce noted the Babylonian influence evident in *Genesis*, but he argued that the book was inspired by God. He argued that the Hebrews removed pagan elements of the stories to reflect the power and will of God. Both Smith’s discovery of a Babylonian version of the biblical Flood and the uncovering of the Tel el Amarna tablets in 1887 were significant events that shaped Sayce’s understanding of *Genesis*.

¹⁰⁴ Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 36.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., “The Composition of the Pentateuch,” 128.

In *Chaldaeian Genesis* (1876) George Smith related a Babylonian account of the flood which was very similar to *Genesis* and predated the biblical version. The Babylonian version came to be known as the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and is one of the earliest forms of literature now known. Smith's achievement brought attention to the field of Assyriology but also raised doubts about the authority of *Genesis* and subsequently the Old Testament. The problem which Smith inadvertently brought forth was that the bible was supposed to hold the oldest records of humanity, but evidence showed the contrary.¹⁰⁶

Sayce was persuaded by Smith's finding of Babylonian influence on the biblical text. *Gilgamesh*, which relays the adventures of the hero by the same name, is divided into twelve books. Smith pointed out the similarities in the two works, noting that the books of the epic paralleled with the days of creation in *Genesis*.¹⁰⁷ Sayce also did not deny the similarities between the two documents, stating that the resemblances were "too great to be purely accidental."¹⁰⁸ Similarities were also found between *Genesis* and other Babylonian texts not connected with *Gilgamesh*. Sayce himself discovered a fragment of a story, which may have dated back to Sumerian times, which described the first man named Adapa or Adama. He was made the son of Ea with the resemblance of an animal. Anu (god of heaven) raised Adapa into an upright position. Sayce also noted that the Tel el-Amarna had a portion of the myth of Adapa. In it Adapa was called before Anu for "breaking the wings of the southern wind." He was offered "the food of life" and "the water of life." Ea told Adapa not to touch them. Adapa instead put on a garment and placed oil on his head. When asked by Anu why he did not eat or drink, Adapa said he was warned by "his father Ea" that it would be "the food and water of death" to him.

¹⁰⁶ Chavalas, 28.

¹⁰⁷ Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 62.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 71 and 94.

Also in text not related to *Gilgamesh*, Sayce noticed similarities to the bible. In comparing the description of the Garden of Eden in *Genesis* with the Babylonian text, Sayce acknowledged that the biblical account was “entirely Babylonian.” Cuneiform text called the garden ‘Edinu’ which Sayce deduced was derived from the Accado-Sumerian word ‘edin’ which meant “the fertile plain.” The garden was watered by a river which Sayce described as the Persian Gulf because the Babylonians referred to it as “the river.” This river was divided into four heads, two of which were the Tigris and Euphrates. In the garden was the tree of life which supported the world. In examining *Genesis* further, Sayce recognized that Adam is a common Babylonian word for ‘man’ and Eve is a derivative of *ivat* which means ‘breath.’ The ‘living soul’ in *Genesis* relates to the Babylonian *napsat* meaning ‘life’ “which was bestowed upon man by the gods.”¹⁰⁹

He believed that the writer of *Genesis* was acquainted with Assyrian and Babylonian traditions, but the Hebrew writer, in Sayce’s view, removed signs of paganism and created “a sober narrative, breathing a spirit of the purest and most exalted monotheism.”¹¹⁰ Even though Sayce believed in the divine inspiration of *Genesis* and that it described an actual flood, he recognized the Babylonian influence. He wrote: “In passing from the Assyrian poem to the biblical narrative we seem to pass from romance to reality. But this ought not to blind us to the fact that the narrative is ultimately of Babylonian origin.”¹¹¹

Both the first chapter of *Genesis* and the first book of *Gilgamesh* describe the beginning of creation. Sayce wrote: “It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the biblical writer had the Babylonian story of creation before him, and, while preserving it in the letter, intentionally

¹⁰⁹ Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 95-96 and 104.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 71 and “Babylonian and Biblical Accounts of the Creation,” *The American Journal of Theology*, vol. 9, no. 1, January 1905, 4.

changed it in the spirit.”¹¹² Sayce pointed out that *Genesis* opened with “in the beginning” while the poem expresses that the “the watery deep was the ‘beginning’ of heaven and earth.”¹¹³ He noted that the Chaldean poem was written in honor of the god Bel-Merodach, who later Babylonians labeled as the creator of the world.¹¹⁴ Gilgamesh depicts the beginning as developing out of the watery abyss of chaos. The Babylonian text reads:

When on high the heavens proclaimed not,
(and) earth beneath recorded not, a name,
then the abyss of waters was in the beginning their generator,
the chaos of the deep (Tiamat) was she who bore them all.
Their waters were embosomed together, and
the plant was ungathered, the herb (of the field) ungrown.
When the gods had not appeared, any one (of them),
by no name were they recorded; no destiny [had they fixed].¹¹⁵

In the Babylonian account, the “abyss of waters” was turbulent and dangerous. If not controlled by Merodach, the waters would “swallow up the earth and all that it contain[ed].” Sayce further argued that Tiamat was the dragon of the deep and was identified as chaos and anarchy.

Additionally, “the deep” represented the primeval origin of all things. After this period of water chaos, the gods were created. This symbolizes the move from chaos to order, darkness to light and anarchy to law.¹¹⁶ Sayce noted that creation in *Genesis* does not begin out of chaos as the Babylonian text describes, but out of order established by God. *Genesis* reads:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness.

¹¹² Sayce, “The Babylonian and Biblical Accounts of the Creation,” 6.

¹¹³ Ibid., *Higher Criticism*, 71 and “The Babylonian and Biblical Accounts of Creation,” 4. Sayce believed that the first portion of Gilgamesh was written by an Assyrian who may have lived during the reign of Assur-banipal.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., “The Babylonian and Biblical Accounts of the Creation,” 1-2. After Smith’s death more Babylonian tablets were found which revealed that it was a poem written in honor of Bel-Merodach, who was the creator of both heaven and earth.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., *Higher Criticism*, 63.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., “The Babylonian and Biblical Accounts of Creation,” 2-3.

And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.¹¹⁷

Even though the accounts appear similar, Sayce noted the monotheistic tone of *Genesis* and the polytheistic sentiments of the Babylonian text. He described the biblical story as “intensely – we might almost say aggressively – monotheistic.”¹¹⁸ Whereas the one ‘true’ God began creation in the bible, the gods Lakhmu, Sar, Kisar, Anu, Ea and Bel are present in the Epic of Gilgamesh. This was an example of the Hebrews taking the cuneiform text and applying their own religious interpretation, which he emphasized, was inspired by “the one supreme God.”¹¹⁹

The fifth book mentioned the division of day and night. In the Babylonian version the sun and moon were given the duties to light the sky.

He founded the mansion of the Sun-god who passes along the ecliptic,
that they might know their bounds,
that they might not err, that they might not go astray in any way.
He illuminated the Moon-god that he might be watchman of the night,
and ordained for him the ending of the night that the day may be
known, (saying): “Month by month, without break, keep watch in
(thy) disk.”¹²⁰

This is similar to *Genesis* which describes the establishment of the sun and moon on the fourth day. It reads:

And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ *Genesis* 1:1-5, KJV.

¹¹⁸ Sayce, “Babylonian and Biblical Accounts of Creation,” 6.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, *Higher Criticism*, 71.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹²¹ *Genesis* 1:16-18, KJV.

The sixth book of the *Epic* detailed the creation of all animals, which resembles the biblical account which described the creation of all the creatures of the earth on the sixth day. The Babylonian account states:

They caused the living creatures [of the field] to come forth,
the cattle of the field, [the wild beasts] of the field, and the creeping
things [of the field].
[They fixed their habitations] for the living creatures of the field.
They distributed [in their dwelling-places] the cattle and the creeping
things of the city.
[They made strong] the multitude of creeping things, all the offspring
[of the ground].¹²²

The account in *Genesis* incorporates some of the same terminology and phrases. It reads: “And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so.”¹²³

Even though Smith’s discovery related to *Genesis*, Sayce stressed that scholars could not conclude that *Genesis* was derived solely from the text translated by Smith. He asked: “Can we go further and say that it [*Genesis*] is derived from the Babylonian version of it discovered by Mr. George Smith? This cannot be maintained.” Sayce believed that there were several versions of *Gilgamesh* in Babylonia. Even if that deciphered by Smith had been the most popular, it was still “one out of many.”¹²⁴ He noted that versions of the story had been uncovered which changed the name of the hero from Xisuthros to Adra-khasis and speeches by the gods were wholly different.

Sayce also noted that the Babylonian epic does not mention the Sabbath or a day of rest, but its concept was a common characteristic in Chaldean society, where it originated. Even though the ancient Hebrews would incorporate the Sabbath into their religion and society,

¹²² Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 70-71.

¹²³ *Genesis* 1:24, KJV.

¹²⁴ Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 117.

Sabbath derived from two Sumerian or pre-Semitic words – *sa* and *bat*, which meant ‘heart’ and ‘ceasing’ respectively. The Sabbath during Accadian times was “a day on which certain work was forbidden to be done.” Every seventh day was considered a day of rest. In Babylonian society, seven was a significant number. There were seven planets and seven days of the week. Seven evil spirits were born out of the watery chaos and the dragon of darkness had seven heads. Sayce stressed that the Hebrew Sabbath is void of astrological and polytheistic connections to the Chaldean Sabbath. The Hebrews, in his opinion, saw the week and the division of the week as “a mere space of time and nothing more.” He further argued that the Hebrews removed the pagan qualities of the Sabbath and transformed it “into a means of binding together more closely the chosen people, and keeping them apart from the rest of mankind.” In his view, the adjustments made to the religious connotations of the Sabbath were also made to the underlying tone of *Genesis*, making it the foundation for Judeo-Christian beliefs.¹²⁵

Because critics and archeology proved that Israel was influenced by Babylonian text, *Genesis* could not be viewed as a “literal account” of the way the universe came into being. Science proved that it took millions of years and not six days to create the universe and everything in it. Driver asserted that even though the first chapter of *Genesis* is not literal history, it was still important for religious reasons because the *Book of Genesis* had the religious authority which geology and astronomy never had—such as enforcing the omnipotence of God.¹²⁶ But also Driver added that the bible can not be seen as an infallible work.¹²⁷ Here Driver seemed to share the same attitudes toward divine inspiration which Sayce held. Sayce and Driver both believed that, due to its connection to Babylonian texts, the first chapter of *Genesis* was not a literal account of actual historical events. But even though it had been proven

¹²⁵ Sayce, *Higher Criticism.*, 74, 76 and 77.

¹²⁶ Driver, *The Higher Criticism*, 4.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

as myth, Sayce strongly believed, may be more so than Driver, that the writer was inspired to see the magnificence of God in the work.

With all the Babylonian influences present in *Genesis*, there was one section of the book which was unique to itself; that was chapter four. Sayce noted that critics “search[ed] in vain” but had not found the Babylonian counterpart. He and critics both agreed that Abel may be Babylonian for *abil* which means “son.” Also the name Methusael is a “purely Babylonian name.” Other than the Babylonian derivatives of names, chapter four seems to be a solely Hebrew contribution; not even a cuneiform narrative of Cain and Abel had been uncovered.¹²⁸

The eleventh book of the epic poem describes a great flood, very similar to the one in the biblical account. Scholars questioned the notion that a flood covered the entire earth and all perished except Noah and his family, causing many to doubt that the account was factual.¹²⁹ Sayce came to two conclusions concerning the similarities between the Flood of *Genesis* and the Deluge of *Gilgamesh* – either a Babylonian poet copied the redacted *Genesis* or the Elohist or Jehovist copied the Babylonian text. Later, Sayce concluded that the Babylonian account had to have been known by the Elohist and Jehovist writers.¹³⁰

In *Gilgamesh* Xisuthros possesses the characteristics of Noah. He and his family are saved in the same manner as Noah and his family. All living things are destroyed in the devastation except those safe on the ship which Ea commanded Xisuthros to build. It reads:

13. O man of Surippak, son of Ubara-Tutu,
14. fame the house, build a ship: leave what thou canst; seek life!
15. Resign (thy) goods, and cause (thy) soul to live,
16. and bring all the seed of life into the midst of the ship.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 105.

¹²⁹ Ernest Bunsen, *The Chronology of the Bible Connected with Contemporaneous Events in the History of Babylonians, Assyrians, and Egyptians* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1874), 2.

¹³⁰ Sayce, “Answers from the Monuments,” 34.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, *Higher Criticism*, 108.

Ea detailed the dimensions of the ship which was divided into rooms and stories. Xisuthros was then ordered to take every living thing including his family into the ship, including his earthy possessions.

66. With all the gold I possessed I filled it;
67. with all the gold I possessed I filled it;
68. with all that I possessed of the seed of life of all kinds I filled it.
69. I brought into the ship all my slaves and my handmaids,
70. the cattle of the field, the beasts of the field, the sons of my people, all of them did I bring into it.
71. The Sun-god appointed the time and
72. utters the oracle: In the night will I cause the heavens to rain destruction;
73. enter into the ship and close thy door.
74. That time drew near (whereof) he utters the oracle:
75. In this night I will cause the heavens to rain destruction.¹³²

As the oracle foretold, a great flood came and covered the earth. Numerous gods participated in the storm. Storm-god Rimmon “thundered in the midst, the god of death released a whirlwind and the spirits of the underworld caused the lightening. When the waters had subsided Xisuthros offered a sacrifice on the top of a mountain.

134. When the seventh day came I sent forth a dove and let it go.
135. The dove went and returned; a resting-place it found not and it turned back.
136. I sent forth a swallow and let it go; the swallow went and returned;
137. a resting-place it found not and it turned back.
138. I sent forth a raven and let it go.
139. The raven went and saw the going down of the waters, and
140. it approached, it waded, it croaked and did not turn back
141. Then I sent forth (everything) to the four points of the compass; I offered sacrifices,
142. I built an alter on the summit of the mountain.¹³³

After this act of worship, the gods were pleased. Bel blessed Xisuthros and promised not to destroy the earth by a flood again.¹³⁴

¹³² Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 109-110.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 111-112.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, “The Composition of the Pentateuch,” 124.

179. Instead of causing a deluge let lions come and minish mankind;
 180. instead of causing a deluge let hyaenas come and minish mankind;
 181. instead of causing a deluge let there be a famine and let it [devour] the land;
 182. instead of causing a deluge let the plague-god come and minish mankind!¹³⁵

Even though the Babylonian text shares many features with *Genesis*, Sayce pointed out the differences between the texts, emphasizing the transposition of monotheism and Judeo-Christian values. The differences caused Sayce to conclude that *Genesis*, even with its correlations to Babylonian text, has the fingerprints of Hebrew and Jewish traditions throughout. The Chaldean epic uses the word ‘ship,’ whereas the Hebrew account replaced ‘ship’ with ‘ark.’ Sayce reasoned that the Babylonians may have chosen the word ‘ship’ because they lived close to the Persian Gulf and along the coast unlike the Hebrews who lived in Palestine where there were no great rivers and few ships. Also *Genesis* does not mention Noah taking slaves, handmaids, gold or silver with him on the ark. Most importantly, Noah does not close the door of the ark, as Xisuthros does in the Chaldean epic, but rather, God closes the door. This places emphasis on God and His divine nature. In *Genesis* Noah did not send a swallow, but sent a dove out in search for land twice; it is the dove and not the raven that indicates to Noah that the ground is dry.¹³⁶ He believed that the Hebrew writer replaced the swallow with the dove because the former was connected to Babylonian heathenism, and the raven was considered an unclean bird. In Sayce’s opinion it made sense for God to inspire the Hebraic writers to use the dove to show His mercy.¹³⁷ Sayce acknowledged the Babylonian influence in biblical texts as seen in *Genesis*, which reflects his combination of traditional and liberal religious views.

¹³⁵ Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 12-13.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 115-117.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 119.

Critiquing Sayce

Sayce believed that biblical research and criticism should lift the bible to greater reverence rather than break it down.¹³⁸ Because Sayce believed higher criticism was threatening Christianity, he was a fervent defender of the authenticity of the bible. He embodied the words of Rev. Rishell:

The Christian should not lightly yield a point which affects his faith, even when the adverse conclusion seems to be supported by sufficient argument. It is impossible for the genuine Christian to be indifferent as to the outcome of a dispute concerning his faith or its foundations. While it is not justifiable to give one's self up blindly to a creed, some things must be regarded as fixed if chaos is to be prevented in thought and life.¹³⁹

Even though Sayce said he utilized reason, archeology and history to prove the authenticity of the Old Testament, he could not hide his Christian beliefs. He frowned on being labeled a theologian, but his theology could not be fully separated from his critical view of the bible.¹⁴⁰ The fact that he believed in the divine inspiration of the scriptures reflected his Christian beliefs. He may have written with more passion and opinion than some (i.e. Cheyne) would have liked; but because he was a renowned Assyriologist, the public (traditionalists and critics alike) paid attention to his arguments.

By the end of the nineteenth century the ideas of the higher critics had resonated within the Church and many religious intellectuals no longer based their conviction of the bible's authority on its infallibility. The Church emphasized the inspiration behind the scriptures and stressed the significance of God's role in generating divine in scripture. Also the argument for inspiration was also Sayce's ultimate argument concerning the Pentateuch.¹⁴¹ Even though

¹³⁸ Rishell, 268.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 270.

¹⁴⁰ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 303.

¹⁴¹ Wheeler, 11.

Genesis was influenced by Babylonian texts and the present form of the Pentateuch was the result of edits by redactors, the Pentateuch was still viewed as an inspired document in the eyes of Sayce and his supporters. The Pentateuch conveys the message that sins bring punishment and righteous action is rewarded with a blessing. Moses and the compilers wrote with God's divineness in mind and emphasized His omnipotence. In this respect the Pentateuch is a theological work, but its spiritual significance does not prevent it from being a historical work also.

But their theological point of view did not prevent them from being historians as well. It did not interfere with their honestly recording the course of events as it had been handed down to them, or reproducing their authorities without intentional change. Doubtless they may have made mistakes at times, their judgment may not always have been strictly critical or correct, and want of sufficient materials may now and then have led them into error. But when we find that no attempt is made to palliate or conceal the sins and shortcomings of their most cherished national heroes, that even the reverses of the nation are chronicled equally with its successes, and that the early period of its history is confessed to have been one of anarchy and crime, and not the golden age of which popular (and even historical) imagination loves to dream, we are justified in according to them, in spite of their theological 'tendencies,' a considerable measure of confidence.¹⁴²

Sayce believed in the accuracy of the bible and argued that critics should be content with being 'confident' in the events of the bible.

Sayce believed that the Pentateuch survived the comparative method, which proved that it contains accurate history which should be dealt with like any other piece of historical literature.¹⁴³ He was essential in shaping an argument which countered the higher critics, but his argument was complex and he admitted not to have "paid much attention" in later years "to

¹⁴² Sayce, "The Composition of the Pentateuch," 141.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 129.

biblical criticism.” Sayce did not deem it necessary to keep abreast of the latest happenings in higher criticism, choosing instead to get his information through hearsay.¹⁴⁴

A particular question that arose out of the debate over higher criticism was the significance of the Hebrews in history. The idea that Jews were the chosen people of God for whom He revealed Himself was brought into question. Many scholars believed that the Hebrews were not part of a divine plan, but just one of many ancient societies. Sayce argued that such a question was beyond the competence of scholarship. Even though he thoroughly addressed the issues presented by the higher critics in his attempt to ‘save’ orthodoxy, he was satisfied to push the issue of biblical examination so far. He believed that critics should stay within the realms of archeology and history. Each has its role in enhancing biblical understanding. The philologist, archeologist, historian and critic, who are responsible of bringing all concentrations together, played a part in biblical understanding. What had not been solved through those means should rest and be left alone. He wrote:

The critic had resolved the narratives of *Genesis* into a series of myths or idealistic fictions; the Assyriologist has rescued some at least of them for the historian of the past. With this result let us be content.¹⁴⁵

Despite his great contributions made in the name of orthodoxy, Sayce’s method of research was found wanting by his critics. Even Sayce himself admitted in *Reminiscences* that he lacked the attention span to continue researching a particular topic for an extended period of time. One weakness of his, which is crucial when looking back over his participation in the debate over higher criticism, was that he did not follow through on his research. He tended to make grand statements and to publish synthetic and popular works, like *Higher Criticism*, but he did not continue the research or stay informed on the latest findings. Many of his works are

¹⁴⁴ Cheyne, *Founders of Old Testament Criticism*, 241.

¹⁴⁵ Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 173.

regurgitations of arguments he had presented previously. Did he believe that further study was not necessary if he had achieved an adequate solution? He may have presumed that it was not essential to revisit a topic, thinking that only one thorough investigation was needed. Also he may have been of the opinion that his argument was sufficient and answered all questions, or possibly he was worried that further study would undermine his own faith. Whatever the reason, Sayce was not an avid researcher. John Wilson wrote of Sayce: “A distaste for continuous hard work and for the rough-and-tumble of controversy made him supple enough to escape hard and fast conclusions.”¹⁴⁶ A milder articulation is found in his obituary published in 1933 in *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*. It reads:

His vivid imagination and insight framed pictures of events and of interpretation in which he too often mistook the sharp lines of the picture for fact, and before he could establish or subvert his discoveries by argument, he had passed to some other field of research. His was the joyful existence of a brilliant butterfly tasting the delicious flowers of a great garden but never dwelling long enough in one spot to realize wholly its sweetness. His width of knowledge and interests was amazing, and he had little liking for the laboriousness of a specialist. Thus he attacked or swept aside the fine scholarship of the Higher Critics of the bible by arguments which perhaps satisfied himself, but did not touch the real matter of their criticism, although the results of archaeological research could well have been utilized for improving the background of their knowledge and the detail of their discoveries.¹⁴⁷

Cheyne, his friend and harsh critic, saw a danger in Sayce’s reluctance to continue research.

T.K. wrote: “From a layman [Sayce’s views] would be an interesting proof of the gradual filtration of critical views, but from one who is well known to have been long interested in theology [his views] are only an additional obstacle to progress.”¹⁴⁸ This comment may be the most telling on Sayce’s contributions to biblical criticism. Cheyne drew a distinction between layman and specialist, arguing that specialists would be more likely to find flaws in Sayce’s

¹⁴⁶ Wilson, *Signs and Wonders*, 100.

¹⁴⁷ F. M. G., “A. H. Sayce [Obituary],” *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* (1933): 65-6.

¹⁴⁸ Cheyne, *Founders of Old Testament Criticism*, 241.

arguments than would laymen. But as pointed out earlier in this chapter, Sayce appealed to the general public. It was their praise and admiration he sought, not that of specialists or critics. He presented his reasoning against the higher critics in the arena of popular opinion, and he was successful. One could argue that, more than wanting to admonish higher critics, Sayce strove to capture the minds of the British laity. During a time when British society was becoming more secularized, Sayce warned the public of the flaws of higher criticism and reinforced the importance of faith in orthodoxy.

Sayce was willing to acknowledge his intellectual weaknesses and the unintentional mistakes he may have made in countering the higher critics. He self-deprecatingly pointed out that some of his work had been “very good and some of it [had been] very bad.” Sayce acknowledged that he may have been “quick to see the results of evidence,” but he justified this behavior by blaming it on his physical deficiencies. He claimed that “this quickness of perception, coupled with defective eyesight, [had] often led [him] to hasty and false conclusions, carelessness about unimportant details, and occasional inaccuracy of observation.”¹⁴⁹ As Sayce reassessed his scholarship, he asserted:

My attitude towards of the so-called higher criticism of the Old Testament after the discovery of the Tel el-Amarna tablets brought upon me showers of controversy and abuse. The excavation of Troy and Mykenae and the discovery of the tablets were sufficient proof to me that merely subjective criticism of ancient literary documents was a worthless pastime. But it has taken a quarter of a century to convince the literary world in general of the truth of this.¹⁵⁰

Even though Sayce acknowledged that some of his findings may have been flawed, he firmly believed in the unworthiness of subjective biblical criticism, and believed that he himself has discovered Christianity’s objective truth.

¹⁴⁹ Sayce, *Reminiscences*, 474.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 474-475.

Conclusion

Sayce's participation in the debates concerning biblical authenticity reveals the continuing importance of religion to late-Victorian Britain. Sayce's approach to higher criticism was an example of the new type of scholar and theologian who combined religion and science (i.e. archeology, biblical history and philology). Sayce cannot be labeled either a higher critic or a traditionalist. The importance of his work *Higher Criticism* was that it emphasized the importance of archeology and noted the flaws of higher criticism; however, Sayce disappointed those who hoped the work would denounce higher criticism and advocate orthodoxy. It was not until the late 1890s that Sayce fervently argued in favor of orthodoxy and focused on higher criticism's effect on Christianity. Sayce's work provided hope and optimism to the late-Victorian supporters of orthodoxy. Because Sayce provided archeological evidence which countered the critics and seemed to validate the Old Testament, he was able to show—to the satisfaction, especially, of supporters of orthodoxy—that archeology had exonerated the bible from the charges of higher critics. His use of archeological evidence, in addition to philology and history, led many traditionalists to believe that biblical validity had been restored, and this made his work a welcome addition to the traditionalists' campaign to restore their credibility in the wake of so many liberal and 'scientific' challenges to Christian faith. A review of *Fresh Light from the Ancient Monuments* stated that Sayce's work was “a necessity in the library of every minister who wishes to be at all up with the times in sacred archaeology.”¹⁵¹

Through Sayce's writings we learn that he not only desired to appeal to scholars but more importantly to the lay men and women of Britain. He worked to bring to the public's attention the evidence uncovered by archeology. He contributed articles, *Fresh Light from the Ancient*

¹⁵¹ Review of *Fresh Light from the Ancient Monuments*, by A. H. Sayce, *The Old Testament Student*, vol. 4, no. 1 (September 1884), 45.

Monuments and Monument Facts and Higher Critical Fancies, to a popular series published by The Religious Tract Society of London entitled *By-Paths of Bible Knowledge*. The volumes were compact and inexpensive, which made them helpful teaching aids “to all bible students who have little leisure for more thorough study” and “of great value and assistance to many.”¹⁵² The articles’ easy accessibility added to their popularity. Sayce also wrote for the *Times* series in their six-penny Essays. In both volumes the articles were clear and concise, making the topics easy to understand by the lay public, hence contributing to the appeal and spread of Sayce’s views.

Sayce used the findings of archeology, philology and history to advocate the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and the reliability of *Genesis*. Sayce’s use of scholarly methods to defend the Old Testament also characterized his study of the races of the Old Testament. However, as chapter five will show, Sayce incorporated the pseudo-science of the period to prove that those who played a role in biblical history were of Aryan descent. His determination to define the races of the ancient world was shaped by his belief that the bible detailed actual accounts.

¹⁵² Review of *Fresh Light from the Ancient Monuments*, 44.

CHAPTER 5 SAYCE THE RACIALIST

During the eighteenth century, scholars began to define race and view it as “a new category of human variety.”¹ Race became the category for self and group identification.² Racial perceptions of the nineteenth century were greatly influenced by aesthetic considerations as well as the researcher’s own social and moral outlooks. Scholars had difficulty separating their research from their culturally inspired views.³ Edward Said in *Orientalism* argued that Western scholars and intellectuals sought to hold the Near East and the rest of the world to the standards of the West, and in so doing attempted to understand the non-West through European, and especially imperialist, lenses. As a result what formed were misconceptions and ill defined concepts of civilization and progress.⁴

An example of a late Victorian scholar who combined racist ideology with science and religion was Rev. A. H. Sayce. As argued in the previous chapters, Sayce was an eminent scholar who supported a revamping of the curricula at Oxford and utilized historical and archeological research to argue for the Mosaic authenticity of the Pentateuch. His role as an intellectual also influenced his interpretation of the relationship between biblical history and race. Sayce held to the racist views presented by nineteenth-century Europeans and was influenced by contemporary discussions on race. Not only did he rely on the common perceptions of race, but he also attempted to define race and its origins more fully, examining it in the context of biblical history and archeology.

¹ David Bindman, *Ape to Apollo: Aesthetics and the Idea of Race in the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 11.

² Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain 1800-1960* (Hamden: Connecticut, Archon Books, 1982), xii.

³ Bindman, 11.

⁴ See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978) and *Cultural Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

In analyzing Sayce's views on race, I share the opinion of Nancy Stepan that most Victorian scientists "were not consciously racist."⁵ I attempt to show in this chapter that even though Sayce held racialist views, he did not promote race hatred. Just as he had done in arguing the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, Sayce employed science and biblical interpretation to explain the significant roles of non-blacks in biblical history, while at the same time acknowledging the role of Africa in biblical history. Even though Sayce noted Africa's contributions to biblical and ancient history, he interpreted this role through racialist ideology and, albeit unconsciously, promoted racialist thinking.

Although Sayce did interpret various races through the prism of racialist thought, his theories challenge the argument presented by Martin Bernal in *Black Athena*. Bernal argues that during and after the nineteenth century European scholars de-emphasized ancient Egypt and ignored its philosophical contributions to Greek culture. Sayce, however, revered ancient Egypt not only for its philosophical contributions but more so for its religion. He firmly believed that Christianity is indebted to ancient Egypt because it was Egyptian religion that laid the foundation for Christianity through its emphasis on the three religious figures of Osiris, Isis and Horus. The reign of Akenaten introduced monotheism to Egyptian religion well before it was introduced to the Hebrews. Because he believed that Judeo-Christian beliefs had roots in Egyptian religion, Sayce was determined to define the Egyptian race as white. As Martin Bernal noted: "Research on the question [of Egypt's race] usually reveal[ed] far more about the predisposition of the researcher than about the question itself."⁶

In treating Sayce's view of race, the chapter is divided into four sections. The first section analyzes the racial sentiments of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in order to

⁵ Stepan, xvi.

⁶ Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, Volume I The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 241.

understand the context in which Sayce shaped his views. The development of methods of examining skulls and interpreting the research was promoted by scholars such as Pieter Camper (1722-89) and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752-1840). The racialist research of the Enlightenment and early nineteenth century gained popularity in Britain due to British society's attempt to justify Britain's dominant role.

The second section treats Sayce's racial arguments. In defining race Sayce incorporated the pseudo-scientific research methods such as measuring skulls, in addition to comparing other physical features such as hair type, hair color, eye color and skin color. He also incorporated his knowledge of philology. Sayce strongly asserted that language did not denote race, only social interaction. Beginning in the late 1870s Sayce opposed the idea that language was an indication of race. He argued that language was an extension of society. It could be learned and it could become extinct. In an effort to bolster his argument, Sayce noted that people of different races could speak the same language, making language a result of social interaction, not race.

The third section which treats the races of the ancient world will show that Rev. Sayce argued that the characters of the bible and the advanced ancient civilizations were white. Because Sayce believed that Egyptian religion laid the foundation for Christianity and because of Egypt's dominant role in biblical history, he was determined to prove that the Egyptians, and other groups of the ancient Near East, were white. He further believed that the people of Cush were neither white nor black, but a special race that exhibited features that were aesthetically pleasing. In examining race, he divided humanity into large divisions and further divided the sections into stocks, tribes, people and nations. He believed that all the divisions of people were white with the exception of the Nubian (Cush) and Negro.⁷

⁷ Sayce, *The Races of the Old Testament* (Religious Tract Society, 1891), 167-168.

Section four shows that even though Sayce advocated the Mosaic authorship of the bible, he did not believe that the bible detailed how races were divided. Hence, the tenth chapter of *Genesis* did not describe the racial make-up of the ancient world. In his opinion, physiology and anatomy, not the bible, explained race variations. Sayce strongly believed that: “God [had] marked on each race of man their designation with the characteristic which best suit[ed] them.”⁸ He asserted that scientific research analyzed the physical features which define race.

The Context of Sayce’s Thought: Victorian Racialism

During the Enlightenment, scholars were interested in the physical features of races as signs of distinction and indicators of morality. The German scholar Johann Joachim Wincklemann (1717-1768) related physical appearance to virtue and masculinity, resulting in the idea that race denoted character. Wincklemann, an eighteenth-century art critic, was obsessed with Greek art and believed that it represented the ideal in aesthetics. He argued that too much physical strength, like that possessed by black Africans and American slaves, indicated lascivious behavior, lack of virtue and animalistic qualities.⁹

The views expressed during the Enlightenment helped shape the opinions of late Victorian scholars such as Sayce, who—in detailing the distinctions between races—took into account the shape and measurements of the human skulls. The practice of skull measuring was popularized by Dutch anatomist and naturalist Pieter Camper, who measured the shape and the size of the angle which measured the head from forehead. Before phrenology was popularized in Britain, Camper compared the facial angles of different races to those of an ape during the eighteenth century. Camper’s research was enhanced by Franz Joseph Gall (1776-1832) who argued that intellectual capabilities and moral values were connected to the shape of the skull.

⁸ Sayce, Diary for 1864, entry 2 December 1864.

⁹ See George Mosse, *Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) and Bernal, *Black Athena*.

Gall's views won the interest of the British, who used the idea to promote the inferiority of non-British subjects of the empire. German physiologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach also conducted skull measurements. Blumenbach believed that beauty and symmetry were connected to climate; hence, those in milder climates were most beautiful.¹⁰ This is similar to the view presented by Montesquieu, who argued that climate influenced the type of government an area had. Warmer climates were more conducive to tyrannical governments while cooler climates were more suited for a democratic government. Herder, too, believed that environment played a role in defining race.¹¹

Pre-Victorian British scholar George Combe became very active in promoting phrenology, resulting in increased interest in the topic. In 1819 Combe published *Essays on Phrenology* and in 1820 founded the Phrenological Society in Edinburgh. During the 1820s phrenological societies sprung up which reflect the popularity of phrenology. In 1828 Combe published *Of the Constitution of Man and Its Relations to External Objects*, which became one of the most popular works of the nineteenth century. By 1860 100,000 copies had been sold.¹²

Interest in phrenology came at a pivotal point in British history when Britain was being transformed into an empire which spanned the globe. In understanding their role as ruler over foreign subjects, the British embraced racialist views. The British characterized themselves as the “ruling race” in charge of an empire.¹³ The combining of race and culture led the British

¹⁰ George Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1978), 11.

¹¹ Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise: Aryans and Semites, A Match Made in Heaven*, translated from French by Arthur Goldhammer (NY: Other Press, 2002, first published in 1989), 45.

¹² Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 146-147.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 155.

people to consider themselves a ‘master race,’ which possessed superior features and a superior language.¹⁴

Building on the ideas of the eighteenth century and the racial views promoted during the nineteenth century, late Victorians applied racial distinctions to social development and progress. Many scholars of the late nineteenth century accepted the ideas promoted by French philosophers Comte Gobineau (1853-55) and Ernest Renan (1823-1892). In his work *Essay on the Inequality of Races* Gobineau outlined the Aryan myth which argued that Aryans were the bearers of civilization; therefore, Aryans should not mix with other races because it resulted in the degeneration of the Aryan race and civilization. The writings of Gobineau’s friend Ernest Renan also reflected pro-Aryan sentiments and were accepted by Victorians like Matthew Arnold. Renan believed that all the positives and negatives of a group were related to race and that the civilized people were the Aryans who, as Renan argued, had taken the place of the Semitic race as the “chosen ones.”¹⁵

Some Victorian scholars who asserted the inferiority of black Africans at the same time rejected the institution of slavery, regarding it to be inhumane and brutal. In 1808 the slave trade within the British Empire was abolished and in 1833 slavery was declared illegal throughout the Empire. However, after 1833 blacks on the islands were not completely free; a transitional period employed the apprenticeship system which extended a slave-type system for an additional six years.¹⁶ In 1865 Britain was consumed with the rebellion in Jamaica, which made it difficult to elicit money for the cause against injustice in both Jamaica and the American south.¹⁷ The events in Jamaica and America coincided with the popular definition of gentleman which was

¹⁴ Christine Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes to Race* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), 9.

¹⁵ Olender, 59-60 and van der Veer, 139.

¹⁶ Bolt, 78-79.

¹⁷ Part of the British interest in the American Civil War was whether freed blacks could compete with whites. See Bolt, 40.

equated with white and not dark skin. During the later quarter of the nineteenth century the status of gentleman was no longer determined by merit or the middle-class view of hard work, but rather by skin color. The growing empire and prevalent racial thought which focused on skin color resulted in some Victorians exhibiting racist opinions.¹⁸

The growing interest in racist thought may be seen in the ideas promoted by academic societies. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, academic societies like the Anthropological Society of London (1863) embraced the idea that Aryans were superior and promoted the idea that the cranial features of Negroes hindered their intellectual progress.¹⁹ The founding president of the Society, James Hunt (1833-69), and Scottish anatomist Robert Knox (1798-1862) both believed that blacks did not intellectually advance beyond age fourteen.²⁰

Racial distinctions were further enhanced by late nineteenth century writers who advocated the inferiority of non-white races. The prominent *fin de siècle* racist, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, stated that:

Horses and especially dogs give us every chance of observing that the intellectual gifts go hand in hand with the physical; this is specially true of the moral qualities: a mongrel is frequently very clever, but never reliable; morally he is always a weed. Continual promiscuity between two pre-eminent animal races leads without exception to the destruction of the pre-eminent characteristics of both. Why should the human race form an exception?²¹

¹⁸ Douglas A. Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians: English Attitudes to the Negro in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978), 15-17.

¹⁹ Mosse, *Culture of Western Europe: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), 89.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, *Toward the Final Solution*, 71. Even though Hunt characterized those of Sub-Saharan descent as intellectually inadequate, he opposed slavery and mistreatment of blacks. Hunt favored a paternalistic approach toward those of black African descent. He believed that paternalism would keep them in their place and possibly that "pride in Empire meant, at best, a paternal attitude to darker people." See Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, ed., *Black Victorians/Black Victoriana* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 44.

²¹ Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 1, translated from German by John Lees (Elibron Classics, 1911; reprint Elibron Classics, 2005; first appeared in 1899), 261.

Chamberlain applied his observations of animals to humans. Because animals have distinct physical differences and levels of intelligence, then so should these same types of distinctions apply to humanity. Chamberlain believed that: “In spite of the broad common foundation, the human races are, in reality, as different from one another in character, qualities, and above all, in the degree of their individual capacities, as greyhound, bulldog, poodle and Newfoundland dog.”²²

This is similar to the views Charles Darwin and Mary Kingsley, a Victorian traveler to Africa, who believed in the cultural inferiority of Africa. She noted that the sub-Saharan Africans did not have a developed sense of art or artistic sophistication. Kingsley who concluded, after visiting the people of West Africa, that they could not produce an artist as gifted as those of the Renaissance or writer as talented as Shakespeare.²³ Darwin wrote:

Judging from the hideous ornaments, and the equally hideous music admired by most savages, it might be urged that their aesthetic faculty was not so highly developed as in certain animals, for instance, as in birds. Obviously no animal would be capable of admiring such scenes as the heavens at night, a beautiful landscape, or refined music; but such high tastes are acquired through culture, and depend on complex associations; they are not enjoyed by barbarians or by uneducated persons.²⁴

Both Darwin and Kingsley believed that certain groups lacked culture and were inferior. This view coincides with the popular nineteenth century view that blacks did not have a history. On the other hand, Sayce, unlike most Victorians, did not believe that Africa was populated exclusively by Negroes.²⁵ He reasoned that other groups such as Semites and Cushites also resided in Africa, making it a noteworthy place in ancient history. Nor did Sayce share the

²² Chamberlain, 261.

²³ See Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa* (London: Folio Society, 1976).

²⁴ Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection and The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, Edited by Robert Maynard Hutchins, *Great Books of the Western World* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), 302.

²⁵ Bolt, 209.

popular opinion that Africa did not have a history. He did, however, believe that those who participated in biblical history were non-black even if they were located in Africa.

Sayce's Contributions to Victorian Racialism

Historian and journalist Henry T. Aubin described the last quarter of the nineteenth century as a period of archeological discovery which placed the world “in a position to know more about [the] ancient [Near Eastern] civilization than ever.”²⁶ Reiterating this point, Sayce wrote: “The veil that has so long concealed the innermost shrine of the past has been lifted at last, and we have been permitted to enter, though it be as yet but a little way.”²⁷ Even though archeology had shed light on the mysteries of the past, Sayce noted the obstacles concerning interpretation which faced the historian. He wrote: “The more distant the past and the more scanty the literary remains which belong to it, the more doubtful and open to suspicion must the verdict of the historian be.”²⁸ Lack of information and the failure to combine philology with history and archeology, he acknowledged, led to the misinterpretation of Old Testament history and, he charged, the higher critics' ill-informed conclusions.

Since Sayce believed that portions of history were open to suggestion, he reasoned that the historian's interpretation was subjective and influenced by assumptions and prejudices of his or her own time.²⁹ Here, Sayce acknowledged the powerful influence of contemporaneous thought on history, an opinion also shared by his friend and archeologist Flinders Petrie. Petrie believed that perhaps the most challenging aspect of researching an entirely different time and people was the task of fighting the temptation to interpret history through the historian's own contemporary perceptions. He wrote: “The present standard is always asserting its claims over

²⁶ Aubin, 264.

²⁷ Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 24.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, “The Antiquity of Civilized Man,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 60 (London: Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 1930), 271.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

all others in their [historians'] minds."³⁰ Petrie argued that modern Europeans had to put aside their contemporary views concerning society and morality in order to properly understand the period and people studied. Sayce expressed a similar view concerning European attitudes toward ancient beliefs. He proclaimed:

But it must be remembered that all such descriptions of ancient belief must be approximate only. We could not put ourselves in the position of those who held it; our inherited experiences, our social tendencies, our education, and religious ideas all alike forbade it.³¹

Sayce understood that contemporary thought and environment influenced how scholars interpreted the evidence, conceding that scholars may never adequately be able to explain some aspects of the past.

Ironically, Sayce's opinions concerning race fell victim to the precise method he admonished. In his interpretation of race, Sayce was a product of his time, influenced by popular racial beliefs. Such beliefs depicted those who were white, which Sayce labeled as Aryan, as culturally and intellectually superior while black Africans (Negroes) were viewed as the most inferior group. This view reflected the lack of research on sub-Saharan Africa. A few nineteenth-century scholars acknowledged that the human species may have begun in Africa, but they ignored the activities in Africa between the origin of homo sapiens and the arrival of European and Arab explorers.³² Westerners believed that during these periods African history was at a standstill—non-progressive and irrelevant in comparison to Europe and ancient Near East.

³⁰ Flinders Petrie, *Egypt and Israel* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1911), 21-22.

³¹ The Gifford Lectures, subtitled "Egyptian Religion in Modern Theology" and "Parallels between Christianity and the Egyptian Creeds" taken from Newsclippings 1900-01.

³² Before the mid-twentieth century, most scholars believed that the origins of humanity began in Asia; only a few thought that humanity began in Africa.

Most Victorians, including Sayce, believed Africans, like all human beings, were made in God's likeness. Monogenists argued that all of humanity descended from Adam but variations occurred which resulted in the different races. It is accurate to label Sayce as a monogenist since he argued in favor of the notion of racial variations. Monogenists differed from polygenists, who believed that blacks were created during a separate creation event whereas whites descended from Adam.³³ However, even monogenists connected Africans' supposed lack of intelligence to their level of social advancement which provided a justification for the West's rise above the rest of the world. Because of the civility of Aryans, they managed to advance, hence justifying superiority over the non-Aryans. If the descendants of the West were the civilized ones, then this would explain why Sayce was determined to define the races of the Old Testament and adamantly claim that black Africans had no role in the bible.

Sayce believed that physiology was a better determinate of race than language. As mentioned previously, Sayce believed that language changed but race did not, which is a view also implied in the bible. *Jeremiah 13:23* asked: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" This conveyed to many nineteenth-century scholars that the physical characteristics of races were permanent and hence a more accurate indication of race than were written documents or oral traditions.

Sayce acknowledged the effective role phrenology (reading the skull) and physiognomy (reading the face) had in explaining racial differences. He believed that the shape of the skull determined cerebral capacity, which in turn determined race.³⁴ The brain was smaller in lower races but larger in more intelligent, advanced races.³⁵ He also argued that the brains of the more

³³ Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution*, 32.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

³⁵ Sayce, *Races of the OT*, 14-16.

advanced racial type showed far more “complex convolutions” than inferior types.³⁶ Sayce acknowledged that the measurement of cranial capacities was faulty and hence might serve as “little use to the ethnologist.” But even with its flaws, Sayce believed this method was important and should be employed.

Sayce emphasized facial measurements as a racial marker. As scientists searched the different races in connection to evolution, they noted the physical similarities between Africans and monkeys. Nineteenth-century scholars believed that the development of man from monkey to ideal Aryan went as such: monkey to African to Hottentot, followed by Bushman, then Aborigines, next those of the ‘yellow race,’ then the Slavs followed by the ideal white race.³⁷ One facial feature which was scrutinized was the projection of the jaw—a very common idea during the Victorian period. Sayce believed that the larger the jaw projection from the face, the more animal-like and less civilized was the race. He stated:

Next to the shape of the skull the position of the jaws is perhaps the most valuable of ethnological tests. The greater the projection of the jaws beyond the line of the face, the more animal-like is the latter. Man alone has a true chin, as the chin disappears where prognathism or projection of the jaws exists to any serious extent.³⁸

Here Sayce equated facial features, such as the extension of the jaws, to progress. Those with large jaw extensions were uncultured and less civilized. He went further to state that the angle of the jaw projection was not difficult to find. This measurement is called “the maxillary angle,” which is taken from the forehead to the most protrusive part of the jaw and then to the chin. A lower degree angle signified an animalistic characteristic which Sayce argued inferior races possessed. He noted that the European maxillary angle was 160°, while the Negro had an angle of 140° and the orangutan 110°. The facial angle of those descended from black Africans was

³⁶ Sayce, *Races of the OT*, 16.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 14-16.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

below that of the European but closer to that of the orangutan, hence explaining the race's inferiority. He wrote:

It is not difficult to determine the degree of prognathism in a given skull. By drawing a line from the forehead to the most protrusive part of the jaws, and from that again to the point of the chin, we obtain what is termed 'the maxillary angle.' the acuteness of the angle necessarily depends on the prominence of the jaws. The ethnological importance of the measurement may be judged when we find that whereas in each of the average European the angle is one of 160°, in the case of the negro it is only 140°. The negro, in fact, stands almost as much below the European as he stands above the orang-outang, whose maxillary angle is 110°. ³⁹

Sayce noted that races with physical appearances which resembled that of an animal were socially inferior, and the jaw features of inferior races were similar to the skulls of early man. He also believed that prominent jaw lines represented "physical strength and appetite at the expense of the intellectual faculties." The larger the jaw line the less intelligent a race was. He wrote:

Prominent jaws imply the development of physical strength and appetite at the expense of the intellectual faculties. A race which is characterized by prognathism may be expected to be characterized also by powerful appetites, muscular vigour, and poverty of thought and imagination. ⁴⁰

Here Sayce equated a prominent jaw line with the lack of intelligence. He further determined that this physical characteristic also denoted "powerful appetites, muscular vigour, and poverty of thought and imagination." Sayce embraced the racial physical distinctions by Swedish Anders Retzius (1796-1860) who was known for labeling long and narrow heads as dolichociphalic and broad heads as brachycephalic. Long and narrow heads were considered the ideal, symbolic of European features and in turn viewed as beautiful. ⁴¹

³⁹ Sayce, *Races of the OT*, 16-17.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴¹ Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution*, 27.

Sayce did not equate race with either nationality or language group. In Sayce's view, nationality dealt with government and common language, whereas race centered on a common blood line. He believed that language groups "reflect national characteristics" and depended on "the influences surrounding the community."⁴² Language, in Sayce's view, was the most astounding invention ever made.⁴³ He further differentiated between language and race, believing that it was a fallacy to accept language as a sure test of race because language was not a physiological necessity. Sayce wrote:

it is not one of those physical marks which characterize race, and, like the colour of the skin or the shape of the skull, are inseparable from man. We cannot help having hair of a particular character, or even, perhaps a disposition of a particular kind, but we can help having language.⁴⁴

Sayce argued that language was learned and dependent on the environment which was influenced by the surrounding community. He was convinced that: "Languages change readily, racial types are extraordinarily permanent."⁴⁵ Rev. Sayce believed that, unlike races, languages changed and could possibly disappear. The examples on which he drew were the dead language of Latin, Arabic no longer spoken in Sicily and Visigothic no longer spoken in Spain.

Sayce believed that language was something that the simplest societies had; but some languages were more cultivated than others, indicating the degree of civilization of the speakers.

In *Language and Race* (1876) Sayce wrote that:

...civilisation tends to unity, combining and centralizing diversified societies, languages, and customs; and the other is that savage societies are in a constant state of flux. In an uncultivated age, therefore, we

⁴² Sayce, Diary for 1865, entry 27 March 1865; *Language and Race*, Assyrian Pamphlet box, 1904-1933, Sackler Library, Oxford University, Oxford, England, United Kingdom, 213; and *The Primitive Home of the Aryans*, Philological Society Council, 1887-88, Assyrian Pamphlet box, Sackler Library, Oxford University, Oxford, England, United Kingdom, 1.

⁴³ Ibid., "The Antiquity of Civilized Man," 274.

⁴⁴ Ibid., *Language and Race*, 211.

⁴⁵ Ibid., "The Kingdom of Van or Ararat," Sayce Papers, Miscellaneous Fragments, 1:16:4, Queens College Library, Oxford University, England, United Kingdom.

have to deal more with dialects, in a civilised age with language.⁴⁶

Even though he argued that language did not indicate race, he did believe that language suggested the level of civilization displayed by the speakers; hence in Sayce's opinion, language was an indicator of social progress. He believed that nations with related languages had social contact.⁴⁷ Sayce stated that:

Aborigines of America have exchanged their native language for an European language. The inhabitants of S. Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, S. Margaretha, Baradéro, Quilmos, Calchaguy, and Chiloe, have exchanged their own idioms for Spanish, the inhabitants of Rio Janeiro for Portuguese.⁴⁸

He asserted that even "lower" races could learn the language of the dominate race. Because two races may speak the same language only proved the social interaction between the groups.

Sayce pointed out that two distinct races could speak the same language or two individuals of the same race could speak two different languages, further disassociating language and race.⁴⁹ He insisted that "language [was] a test of social contact only, not of race." English, for example, was spoken in the United States and had "become the mother-tongue of the white European, the black-skinned Negro, and the aboriginal Red Indians."⁵⁰ He observed that France, too, was racially diverse and yet embraced a common language. The French people included Celts, Franks, Basques and Ligurians; this diverse society was perpetuated through "cross-marriages and subdivisions."⁵¹ Many of the Semitic race did not speak Semitic languages and many with Arabic dialects were not Semitic.⁵² Sayce emphasized the versatility of language: "It [language] is perpetually changing in the mouths of its speakers; nay, the individual can even

⁴⁶ Sayce, *Language and Race*, 216.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, *Races of the OT*, 10-13.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, *Language and Race*, 215.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 214-215.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, *The Primitive Home of the Aryans*, 1.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, "Brittany during the War," Sayce Papers, Miscellaneous Fragments, 1:4, Queens College Library, Oxford University, England, United Kingdom.

⁵² Sayce, *Races of the OT*, 70.

forget the language of his childhood and acquire another which has not the remotest connection with it. A man cannot rid himself of the characteristics of race, but his language is like his clothing which he can strip off and change almost at will.”⁵³ Race, on the other hand, is a constant and cannot be changed.

Sayce saw the Jews as a prime example of the disassociation between language and race. Even though Jews shared similar customs, they lived in different parts of the world and spoke different languages.⁵⁴ He argued that Jews had mixed with other groups, resulting in different races among Jews. There were black Jews from Malabar, who came from the Dravidian natives of southern India, and white Jews of Europe “whose type is European rather than Jewish.”⁵⁵ From this example Sayce argued that language had no bearing on race, reiterating the notion that “identity of social relations may imply – and often does imply – identity of race; but to learn this we must go elsewhere than to language.”⁵⁶

Sayce further added that in addition to skull size and hair texture, skin color was an obvious, if not best, indication of race. Color, he argued, attested to the racial differences between the Englishman and Hindu Indian. Sayce argued that the fact that their speech had been categorized together as Indo-European only meant that their ancestors came in contact with the Indo-European family of speech.⁵⁷ He deduced that centuries ago the speakers of the Indo-European language “must have lived together in a district of limited extent in an age when the world was not thickly populated.”⁵⁸ Hence, the English and Indians may be linguistically related

⁵³ Sayce, “Address to the Anthropological Section of the British Association at Manchester,” *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 17 (1888), 168.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, *Language and Race*, 214.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, *Races of the OT*, 74.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, *Language and Race*, 216. Sayce added that the first to point out that language and race were not related was Rev. G. C. Geldart in a paper entitled “Language No Test of Race,” which looked at the military, religion and intellect of races. It was read before the British Association at Leeds in 1857.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, *The Primitive Home of the Aryans*, 1-2.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

but racially different, belonging to the same Aryan stock but divided into Aryan sub-groups. It was once believed that differences in skin complexion were due to exposure to the sun, but Sayce, along with Charles Darwin, disagreed with this point. Darwin noted that the Dutch lived in South Africa for centuries and had not experienced skin color deviation. This further proved Sayce's point that races were a constant, whereas language may change or disappear.

Sayce's view that language did not suggest race was not shared by all scholars. The British philologist and author Hyde Clarke (1815-1895) was a critic of Sayce's ideas concerning the relationship between language and race, noting that Sayce's argument omitted certain exceptions. Whereas Sayce argued that language was not indicative to race, Clarke asserted that the gypsies exemplified the opposite. Clarke remarked that the gypsies were an example of a race of people who had adopted the languages of the areas in which they lived but also retained their own language. Also in opposition to Sayce's insistence that Jews were an example of a race of people who spoke different languages, Clarke declared that Jews had managed to maintain parts of their Semitic speech. In Clarke's view, language was a useful indicator of race under "due conditions."⁵⁹ Clarke's assertion that language and race were associated may have stemmed from Herder's promotion of the idea of the *Volk* who were nationally connected through aesthetics, history and language; hence, language acted "as the expression of a shared past" and as an indicator of race.⁶⁰

Even though Sayce did not agree with Clarke's and other scholars' efforts to marry language and race, he believed it was too late to try to reverse the damage done by combining the two distinct concepts of language and race since "the Semitic race' had become, as it were, a household term of ethnological science." Sayce resolved to believe that "all [scholars could] do

⁵⁹ Sayce, *Language and Race*, 218-219.

⁶⁰ Mosse, *The Culture of Western Europe*, 86.

[was] to define it accurately and distinguish it carefully from the philological term, ‘the Semitic family of speech.’”⁶¹

Sayce shared his view with his friend Max Müller, who also believed that language was a characteristic of a society but not an indication of race. By 1870 Müller rejected language as determining race.⁶² Müller employed the Sanskrit term *arya*, which means “honorable man,” to refer to the Indo-European language family. Prior to Müller, those who researched scientific philology, such as August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767-1845), Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829) and Franz Bopp (1791-1867), pointed out that Europe and Asia spoke languages that were derived from the same source. The commonalities between the two areas were grouped together into the Indo-European language. Because Müller found references of the term *arya* in various languages, Müller defended his choice of employing the term Aryan in reference to Indo-European languages:

As Comparative Philology has thus traced the ancient name of Arya from India to Europe, as the original title assumed by the Aryans before they left their common home, it is but natural that it should have been chosen as the technical term for the family of languages which was formerly designated as Indo-Germanic, Indo-European, Caucasian, or Japhetic.⁶³

As mentioned in chapter two, Müller promoted the study of the Orient to better equip British diplomats, administrators and political leaders to govern India. Müller categorized British activity in India as a cultural mission, an exchange of social beliefs and attributes. He believed that knowledge and understanding of the Indian language helped the British comprehend the culture and values of the Indian people, resulting in compassion and effective rule. In turn, Müller was convinced that the Indians should learn the English language and

⁶¹ Sayce, *Races of the OT*, 69-70.

⁶² Olender, 89 and van der Veer, 135.

⁶³ Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, vol. 1 (London: Longmans, Green, 1861), 289, quoted in van der Veer, 138.

culture. He believed that India needed to be conquered in two ways – by land and through education. Max Müller claimed that Britain had accomplished the former by occupying the area. In his opinion, the imprinting of English culture on the minds of Indians was still a work in progress, though signs of it were evident in India. He acknowledged the presence of the Young Bengal, which was made up of young people of Bengal who received a western education and, in his view, were developing into ideal Indian subjects of the empire.⁶⁴ For Müller, the Young Bengal was the key to effective British rule in India. Even though Müller advocated the westernizing of young Indians, he believed in the idea of a “brotherhood of Aryan peoples” which included the connection between Europeans and Indians. He noted that Indians were “our [Europeans] brothers in language and thought.”⁶⁵

Even though Sayce did not believe that language indicated race, he did, however, label speakers of the primitive Indo-European language as Aryan and noted that the majority of these speakers had belonged to the same race. Hence, Sayce deduced that possibly the fair-skinned European and dark-skinned native of India descended from common ancestry.⁶⁶ He added, however, that not all who spoke an Aryan language had typical Aryan (European) features.⁶⁷ Sayce further added that the cradle of Indo-European language and Aryan race was some part of central Asia encompassing most of Hindu-Kush.⁶⁸

He argued that “a comparison of the names of objects common to the eastern and western branches of the Indo-European family showed that the speakers of the parent-language [had to have] lived in a cold region.” Sayce believed that the Aryan invaders of India came from the

⁶⁴ Chaudhuri, 208-209.

⁶⁵ *Address delivered at the opening of the Ninth International Congress of Orientalists held in London, September 5, 1892.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, quoted in Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2004), 178.

⁶⁶ Sayce, *Primitive Home of the Aryans*, 1

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 12

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 3

cold, mountainous districts of the north-west. He argued that a branch of the Indo-Europeans moved to Northern Europe and the other remained around Indo-Iran, forming the Indo-Iranians. Drawing on Sayce's explanation of how the Indo-European family may have begun, one sees that he believed that Hindu-Kush was the starting-point of the Indo-European clans, before moving westward.⁶⁹ Hence, the languages of European Aryans and Indians had the same origin.

The widespread interest in Indo-European languages and its relationship to race, turned scholars' attention to Sanskrit. Sanskrit became the foundation for comparative philology, comparative mythology, comparative religion and comparative law. Even the British public became fascinated with Sanskrit, believing it to be "the mother of all the [spoken] languages." Because of the honor bestowed on Sanskrit as the earliest language, it replaced Hebrew as the earliest known language, and Sayce noted that Vedic Sanskrit was analyzed more than the Old Testament.⁷⁰

Ambiguities and contradictions characterized Sayce's position on race. Sayce acknowledged exceptions to racial discussions. Even though blacks were deemed unintelligent, nineteenth-century scholars could not explain the accomplishments of Toussaint L'Overture, and some contemporary Europeans even speculated that Africans could be more intelligent than Russian serfs.⁷¹ The negative view of black intelligence was also contradicted by Sally Forbes, Queen Victoria's 'adopted daughter.'⁷² In the words of Cpt. Frederick F. Forbes, who presented her to the Queen, Sally was "a perfect genius." He wrote in his journal concerning the young

⁶⁹ Sayce, *Primitive Home of the Aryans*, 6-7.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, *Races of the OT*, 25.

⁷² See *Black Victorians/Black Victoriana*. Even the actions of Queen Victoria reflected the new view held toward blacks. She concerned herself with the well-being of a young African girl named Sally Bonetta Forbes, a gift to the Queen from an African king. Forbes was considered 'property of the crown;' and Victoria remained concerned about her until Forbes's death after which, exemplifying her maternal qualities, Victoria transferred her concern to that of Forbes's daughter Victoria – named after the Queen.⁷² Drawing on the relationship between Queen Victoria and Sally, it is accurate to argue that blacks in nineteenth-century Britain were viewed as humans and not animals.⁷² Even though scholars frowned on the cruelty of slavery, some still held antiquated views on race.

African girl: “For her age, supposed to be eight years, she is a perfect genius; she now speaks English well, and has a great talent for music. She is far in advance of any white child of her age, in aptness of learning, and strength of mind and affection...”⁷³

The African-American classicist William Sanders Scarborough (1852-1926) communicated with Sayce and sought his assistance on a paper he presented at the Columbian Exposition associated with the World’s Congress Auxiliary in 1893. Scarborough’s paper treated the influences of modern European languages such as French, German and Italian on the native languages of Africa to see whether or not language assimilation had taken place. Scarborough’s position as a ‘learned’ black male was significant. The label ‘learned’ not simply “educated,” alludes to the fact that he was knowledgeable in Latin and Greek, marking him as a true member of the Victorian elite. Scarborough’s talents and achievements as an accomplished classicist and later Wilberforce University (Ohio) president was a testament to the inaccuracy of the common belief in black imperceptiveness among nineteenth-century scholars.⁷⁴ Sayce’s reaction to Scarborough and his accomplishments is not known. Sayce believed so firmly in the unattractiveness and unintelligence of blacks that he most likely chose to categorize Scarborough and the others such as Toussaint L’Overture and Sally Forbes as anomalies and not representatives of the general black population. He wrote:

Individual exceptions will of course be found to the general rule; thinkers may arise among prognathic races, and ‘men of brutish mind’ may exist among orthognathic races, but science is concerned, not

⁷³ Frederick F. Forbes, *Dahomey and the Dahomians: Being the Journals of Two Missions to the King of Dahomey and Residence at His Capital in the Years 1849 and 1850* (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longman, 1851) 208, quoted in *Black Victorians/Black Victoriana*, 14-15.

⁷⁴ Michele Valerie Ronnick, ed., *The Autobiography of William Sanders Scarborough: An American Journey from Slavery to Scholarship* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005) 123 and 125. In addition to corresponding with Sayce he communicated with the English Orientalist and Africanist Dr. Robert Needham Cust. Scarborough was born a slave in Macon, GA in 1852. As a slave he secretly learned to read. After the American Civil War he attended Oberlin College where he earned a B.A. and M.A. During his career he gained membership to various organizations which included the American Philological Association, Archaeological Institute of America and Modern Language Association.

with individual exceptions, but with the general rule.⁷⁵

Coincidentally, Sayce acknowledged the flaws in defining race and noted the inability of science to determine character. He further wrote:

Attempts have often been made to determine the moral and intellectual traits which distinguish the various races of mankind. That such distinguishing traits exist is admitted on all sides. We talk about ‘the impulsive Kelt,’ ‘the dogged Anglo-Saxon,’ ‘the brilliant but unstable Greek.’ But anything like a scientific determination of the psychological character of a race is at present exceedingly difficult, if not impossible; the materials for making it are still wanting. We cannot even gauge the intellectual capacity of a race. It is generally asserted; for instance, that the intellectual growth of a negro ceases after the age of thirteen; and yet there have been negroes like Toussaint or a recent ambassador from Liberia who have shown themselves the equals in intellectual power of the most cultivated Europeans. The members of the white European race are apt to consider themselves the intellectual leaders of mankind; nevertheless their appearance on the scene of history was relatively late, and the elements of their civilisation were derived from the natives of the East.⁷⁶

Because of his background in Assyriology, Sayce acknowledged the advancements made by non-European areas. This view of Sayce is connected to his opinion of the important role the ancient Near East had on biblical history. In Sayce’s opinion, Africa was also included in the rich history of the Near East.

Races of the Ancient World

Sayce divided the ancient world into three zones. The northern zone spanned from the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea and to the island of Cyprus. The central zone included Western Asia, excluding Canaan and western and southwestern Arabia. Egypt and northern Sudan made up the southern zone. Some of the people that lived in these zones were the Alarodian, who was described as pale skinned with dark hair; the Egyptian, who Sayce portrayed as having “thick lips and [a] good tempered smile;” and the Cushite, who many described as “black-skinned

⁷⁵ Sayce, *Races of the OT*, 17.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

negroes” but who Sayce categorized as being a part of a unique race which was neither black nor white.⁷⁷

Sayce used the term Aryan was the term used to describe those who were connected to the white race. Sayce believed there were four types of Aryan - the blond, red-head, brunette and Basque (dark hair and eyes).⁷⁸ Evidence for the existence of the blond-haired people, which were the fairest of all the races, date back to the pre-Sumerian period. Sayce argued that Sumerians called themselves “the black headed people.” This implied to Rev. Sayce that there must have been blond-haired people in the area with which to compare. He also noted the Aryan figures on Egyptian monuments, such as the Amorites of Palestine, were depicted as tall blonds with fair hair and blue eyes. The ancient Libyans, the ancestors of the modern day Algerians and Moroccans, and the Murri, neighbors of the Hittites, were also depicted as descending from Caucasian origin.⁷⁹ In examining the races of the ancient world, Sayce observed that there had not been many changes in the races since the ancient period. He believed that the white race of the people of Palestine remained relatively unchanged. Also the Armenians of the nineteenth century looked much like the people of the ancient Vannic Kingdom who physically resembled the Hittites and whose racial type passed to the Armenians unaltered.⁸⁰

Even though their presence was evident throughout the Near East, the Aryans were most dominant in Greece and Italy. Sayce argued that the Medic (Persian) communities, which were small communities founded by Sargon and headed by city lords, were characteristically Aryan. In the event that the cities were threatened, they might unite together but mostly acted

⁷⁷ Sayce, *Races of the OT*, 42-43.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 160-161.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, “The Antiquity of Civilized Man,” 277-278 and *Higher Criticism*, 138-139.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, “The Kingdom of Van or Ararat.”

independent of each other. The system of government based on city independence, Sayce argued, was characteristic of the Aryan race.

In Sayce's view, the Semites, too, belonged to the white race, "using the term 'race' in its broadest sense."⁸¹ This falls in line with Blumenbach, who placed the Egyptians along with the Arabs and Jews as members of the Caucasian race.⁸² Sayce, however, believed that the Semitic group included not only Jews of the Middle East but also Arabs, Assyrians, Egyptians and European Jews.⁸³ Scholars contemplated the precise origin of Semitism, speculating that it had begun in northeast Africa with its form and vocabulary being almost Aryan.⁸⁴ Even though Sayce classified Semites as white, he acknowledged that the Jews were not of pure blood, nor were they of pure blood in biblical times.⁸⁵ He pointed out that David is described as "ruddy" and having a "fair countenance."⁸⁶ Because variations, such as hair color and complexion, existed within the white race, Sayce believed a special race or 'sub-race' was needed. Hence from his point of view, there were divisions within the white race.⁸⁷ Rev. Sayce pointed out that: "Semites, Aryans, and Alarodians represent[ed] different races of mankind, they nevertheless all alike belong to the white stock, and may thus be said to be but varieties of one and the same original race." Even after describing all the groups considered to be Aryan, Sayce deduced that it could not be proven that whites descended from one same race.⁸⁸ He wrote:

Semitic race must be distinguished from the Aryan, and the Aryan probably from the Kelto-Libyan; both again are separate from the Hittite with his Mongoloid features, or from the Egyptian who claims

⁸¹ Sayce, *Races of the OT*, 77.

⁸² Bernal, 244.

⁸³ Sayce, *Races of the OT*, 77.

⁸⁴ Correspondence of A. H. Sayce, 1871, vol I, MSS. Eng. Letters, d. 62, fol. 61. Bodleian Library, Oxford University, England, United Kingdom.

⁸⁵ Sayce, *Races of the OT*, 74.

⁸⁶ *I Samuel* 17:42.

⁸⁷ Sayce, *Races of the OT*, 78.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

connection with the population of Southern Arabia.⁸⁹

Here, Sayce emphasized that divisions within the white stock were necessary to distinguish between various groups.

Sayce considered Hittites were to be white, but he insisted their features were unattractive, resembling more Mongolian than Aryan.⁹⁰ Even though the Hittites were neighbors to the Syrians and both were a part of the white stock, their features varied.⁹¹ Sayce divided the races of the Old Testament into four groups. The Aryan race (or stock as Sayce referred to it) consisted of Semitic peoples, the Assyro-Babylonians and Israelites; the Mediterranean peoples, the Greeks and Latins; and the Hamitic peoples (Egyptians and Phoenicians). Negroes were part of the black race or stock. The Nubians, also known as the Cushites, made up the “dark”—but not black—race. Hittites, Elamites and Akkado-Sumerians were labeled as the yellow race; but Sayce emphasized that the yellow race could also be grouped with the white race, hence using Sayce’s racial divisions, the Hittites could be a part of the white race but possess non-Aryan features. He added that the white race had varieties which ethnologists were not absolutely able to “trace back to a single original type.”⁹² The Assyriologist went on to argue:

But within the white race there are many races which the ethnologist is unable to unite. They are like the separate families of speech which exist within the same morphological group of languages. Each race, like each family of speech, has its own distinct individuality which it is the purpose of ethnology to define and accentuate.⁹³

He believed that the various branches of the white stock had the same origin but developed differently as they mixed with groups of other stocks.

⁸⁹ Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 121.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, *Witness of Ancient Monuments*, 30.

⁹² *Ibid.*, *Higher Criticism*, 120-121.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, *Races of the OT*, 81.

The Semite, in Sayce's point of view, had glossy-black, curly and strong hair with a dolichocephalic skull (long headed). Brachycephalism (broad headedness) occurred in 25 percent of the brunettes in central Europe. Sayce argued that this brachycephalism was the result of the Semites mixing with other races. Race mixing was a topic which Sayce also explored. He believed that the mixing of races resulted in atavism, not a new race, and that those who were of mixed race were sterile. Paradoxically, Sayce acknowledged that the majority of races are the product of race mixing and that 'pure-blood' is more of an exception than rule. In defending this argument Sayce noted that race mixing may have begun when the savage tribes and clans mixed with captured slaves.⁹⁴

Sayce observed that those Jews who symbolize the purest in their race had prominent noses, thick lips, oval faces, dark eyes and dull white skin that tanned rather than reddened when exposed to the sun. He further described the Jews as clever and versatile with a "special aptitude for finance." Rev. Sayce went on to describe the Jews as having little interest in agriculture and a disdain for military life.⁹⁵ Paradoxically, he stated that originally the Semite race may have come from Africa, but its physical features changed to adapt to the new surroundings and "to efface the proof of its original descent."⁹⁶ Here Sayce acknowledged the genealogical relationship between Jews and Africans, specifically black Africans, but he asserted that in to the their new Arabian home, the Jews were transformed by nature, becoming 'white' and erasing features that once identified them as African.

Sayce believed that the Egyptians were of the white race but not Semitic. He based his conclusion on Egyptian art which showed pale skinned women working inside and darker skinned men working outside. He deduced that the men darkened due to exposure to sunlight;

⁹⁴ Sayce, "Language and Race," 214.

⁹⁵ Ibid., *Races of the OT*, 78.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 80.

hence, they were originally pale like the women.⁹⁷ Other nineteenth-century academics shared his view that Egyptians and Canaanites belonged to the white race, with those from Canaan being a darker version of white race. As Sayce explained: “He [Canaanite] was a member of the white race, but of that darker portion of the white race which has its seat on the shores of the Mediterranean, and his eyes, and probably also his hair, were black.”⁹⁸ Sayce concluded that the darkened skin of the Canaanites was the result of exposure to the sun. He described the Egyptian as having black eyes and non-blond hair. The complexion of the Egyptians was lighter than the “ordinary Spaniard or South-Italian.” The physical features of the ancient Egyptians were well proportioned and their physique was muscular with delicate feet and hands. Their nostrils and lips were full and their faces expressed good-temperedness and light heartedness. Their hair was straight and they seldom had hair on their faces or bodies. Sayce’s depiction of the ancient Egyptians portrays a positive image of an aesthetically-pleasing group.⁹⁹

Various scholars debated whether the pharaohs were of pure blood. Sayce argued that research showed that there had to have been two races that occupied Egypt: Paleolithic weapons from the original race had been uncovered; in addition, and the rulers possessed features which led Sayce and others to believe that the Egyptians were not a monolithic group. Sayce pointed out that members of the eighteenth dynasty, like Thutmose III, were mesocephalism (moderate shaped head). Rev. Sayce noted that older pictures and monuments show brachycephalism among the population, but he asserted that the statues of King Khephren (Khafra), builder of the second pyramid, were mesocephalic. He noted that rulers of the nineteenth dynasty which included Ramses II and Ramses III were long-headed (dolichocephalism). In Sayce’s view, the Egyptian middle and lower classes had brachycephalism, while the higher caste already tended

⁹⁷ Sayce, *Races of the OT*, 21.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 103-104.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 83-84.

toward dolichocephalism (long headed). This provided the basis for Sayce to conclude that the ruling class displayed features of the typical Egyptian but the lower classes belonged to a “different and a lower race.”¹⁰⁰

The idea that Egyptian pharaohs were of Asiatic descent was to erase Egypt’s connection to black Africa even though pharaohs of Ethiopian descent ruled Egypt beginning with the twenty-second dynasty. European humanists deemed black Africans as uncivilized; therefore, they chose to depict Egyptians as Asiatic and not African.¹⁰¹ Hence Sayce’s interest in Amenophis IV: Sayce emphasized the Asiatic ancestry of Amenophis IV to explain Egypt’s practice of monotheism during the pharaoh’s reign. Amenophis, who changed his name to Akenaten, promoted the worship of the deity Aten, which Sayce related to the Asiatic Baal.¹⁰² Rev. Sayce noted that most of the followers of Aten were Asiatic.¹⁰³ His mother Queen Tiye was Asiatic, and government positions were held by foreigners who were mostly Semites from Palestine and Syria.¹⁰⁴ Sayce pointed out that the intermingling with Asiatic groups was not new. The mother of Amenophis III was of Asiatic descent. Amenophis III married not only Queen Tiye but also two other Asiatic wives.¹⁰⁵ Egyptian art depicted these Asiatics as having light red skin, blue eyes and black hair.¹⁰⁶

Sayce also noted the practice of Egyptian artists who depicted their Ethiopian rulers as Egyptian. He said that Egyptian artists refused to acknowledge the Negro features of their kings,

¹⁰⁰ Sayce, *Races of the OT*, 89-90.

¹⁰¹ Suzanne Marchand and Anthony Grafton, “Martin Bernal and His Critics,” *Arion*, September, 1997, 17.

¹⁰² Sayce, *The Egypt of the Hebrews and Herodotos* (London: Rivington, Percival & Co., 1895), 55.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, *Races of the OT*, 100.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, *The Egypt of the Hebrews and Herodotos*, 58.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, *Races of the OT*, 113-114. Sayce pointed out that the tomb of Meneptah showed the European with pale yellow skin and blue eye. The tomb of Seti I depicted Europe as yellow with blue eyes and dark hair and the Asiatic had dark yellow or red skin or white. Ramses III tomb’s showed European as yellow with red eyes and black hair, and the Asiatic with light red skin with blue eyes and black hair.

and instead painted them with Egyptian features. Even though they had the physical characteristics of the Negro, Sayce believed that the Ethiopian rulers were welcomed because they had “a vigour and a strength of will that had long been wanting among the rulers” of Egypt during the latter years of its independent history.¹⁰⁷

Sayce concluded that over time the archetypal Egyptians mixed with the lower classes of Egypt, resulting in dolichocephalic characteristics becoming dominant over brachycephalic features. He believed that the dominant group emigrated from Arabia to the area and made Egypt what it is today. Rev. Sayce pointed to evidence offered by German ethnologist Georg Schweinfurth (1836-1925) that the people of Arabia migrated to Egypt. Schweinfurth argued that the sycamores planted around temples came from Arabia, proving to Sayce that the plants were not native to Egypt and kept alive by artificial means. The Egyptian deities were also transplanted from Arabia. Sayce argued that Hathor was the goddess of Pun, an area on the southern coast of Arabia. Petrie uncovered monuments showing a close connection between the Egyptians and the people of Pun, who looked like the Egyptians. The only difference noted by Sayce regarding the two groups was that the people of Pun were burned red by the sun. Sayce believed that the Egyptians, particularly the upper, white class, were related to the people of Pun. All men of Pun wore beards, similar to the pharaohs of Egypt. They are both depicted the same in art. In addition the language of the Egyptians and Punites reflected a similarity to Semitic idioms causing Sayce to believe that they were sister tongues, once spoken in close proximity.¹⁰⁸

Sayce argued that the reason why the Nubians were depicted as physically pleasant was because of their positions as pharaohs. Sayce noted that ancient Egyptian history abounds with foreigners who took the throne. The Hyksos, who Sayce believed were Asiatic and not of pure

¹⁰⁷ Sayce, *Egypt of Hebrews and Herodotos*, 112-113.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, *Races of the OT*, 91-94.

blood, were driven out by Ahmose, the founder of the eighteenth dynasty and of Nubian descent.¹⁰⁹ Sayce argued that later the Nubians of Egypt intermarried with those of the Mitanni, who were neither Semitic nor Indo-European.¹¹⁰ The Nubian rulers were replaced with the Asiatic foreigners, who, Sayce acknowledged, were probably of mixed heritage but their features were more European than Egyptian. Because foreigners ascended to the Egyptian throne, Sayce deduced that scribes and peasants represented the true race of Egypt and pharaohs tended to be Egyptianized foreigners.¹¹¹ Sayce shared the idea that foreigners were Egyptianized with Petrie, who believed that the Hyksos turned Egyptian by adopting Egyptian customs and habits.¹¹²

Martin Bernal argues that the nineteenth century saw a movement to de-emphasize the Egyptians' role in history so not to address their blackness, but Sayce's work clearly does not fit Bernal's argument. Sayce engaged in what was clearly a widely-interesting nineteenth-century discussion of Egypt and its races. Sayce did not play down the importance of Egypt's role in history, and spilt much ink describing Egyptian culture and religion. But Bernal is right that the possibility that the Egyptians were black troubled Europeans like Sayce. Indeed, Sayce found it

¹⁰⁹ See Petrie, *Egypt and Israel*. Petrie believed that the Hyksos race was Semitic. He came to this conclusion because of the pastoral and nomadic nature of Hyksos civilization which was similar to that of the Semites.

¹¹⁰ Sayce, *Races of the OT*, 90.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 97-99. See *Egypt of Hebrews and Herodotos*. At the same time that Sayce argued that foreigners sat on the Egyptian throne, he also reasoned that Ramses III was the last pharaoh to have had some native Egyptian ancestry.

¹¹² Petrie, *Egypt and Israel*, 21. See pages 14-15 and 20-21. Petrie disagreed with Sayce's view of the Egyptians because he figured them to have Semitic origins. He proposed that the fusion between Egyptians and Semites occurred from 2256 to 1738 B.C. Petrie described the amalgamation as similar to that which the Roman Empire experienced with the northern barbarians. Just as the barbarians who invaded Rome stayed and eventually became rulers, Petrie believed the same had happened in ancient Egypt with the arrival of Semites. He argued that the Semites naturally migrated up the Euphrates, through Syria and into Egypt. Flinders Petrie described it as a "general racial drift like that of the Eastern races into the Roman Empire through the south of Russia, when a dozen different peoples poured in between 400 and 900 A.D."

Like Sayce, Petrie believed that *Genesis* provided evidence that the Egyptians interacted and mixed with Semites. Petrie noted that Hagar, Abram's handmaid, was probably an Egyptian slave either bought by Abram himself or given to him. Their son Ishmael was half Semitic and half Egyptian. Ishmael went on to marry an Egyptian woman, making their descendents three quarters Egyptian and a quarter Semitic. These descendents occupied Gilead and Moab. Further recognition of the relationship between the Egyptians and Semites was the practice of circumcision, which Petrie noted was an Egyptian custom that went all the way back two hundred years before Abram.

necessary to assert the Egyptians' whiteness as part and parcel of his claims that Egypt was a foundational moment in the history of western, Christian civilization.

Sayce characterized the ancient Egyptians as attractive since they created an advanced civilization and, from his point of view, laid the ground work for monotheism and Christianity. He recognized that after the Hellenization of Egypt through Alexander and his successors and its subsequent takeover by Rome, Christianity in Egypt was classified as Greek. Christianity became associated with the Greek language, the language of the New Testament, and the city of Alexandria, where Christianity was influenced.¹¹³ Even though Christianity became classified as Greek, Egyptian religion left its mark on the faith as well. Sayce argued that Christianity and Egyptian religion were similar in that both focused on the soul and spirit, both believed in the resurrection of the material body and both interpreted heaven as a “glorified counter part of...earth.” Both also outlined the doctrine of the Trinity.¹¹⁴ He wrote, concerning the Egyptians: “It was given to the Egyptians to be among the few inventive races of mankind. They were pioneers of civilization; above all they were the inventors of religious ideas.”¹¹⁵

In the southern part of Egypt, Sayce contended the Egyptians interacted and mixed with two black races, the Negro and the Nubian, resulting in a people “which [was] but a few degrees lighter than that of the Nubian.”¹¹⁶ Sayce considered the intellect of the Negro as simpler than the European, but with a resistance to disease much stronger than that of the European.¹¹⁷ Sayce believed that the Negroes extended further north the Nile Valley and may have lived in Cush and

¹¹³ Sayce, *Egypt of the Hebrews and Herodotos*, 169 and Gifford Lectures “Egyptian Religion in Modern Theology” and “Parallels between Christianity and the Egyptian Creed” taken from Newsclippings 1900-01.

¹¹⁴ Gifford Lectures, “Egyptian Religion in Modern Theology” and “Parallels between Christianity and the Egyptian Creeds” taken from Newsclippings 1900-01.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Sayce, *Races of the OT*, 83.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 51.

the Nubians. The Negro was limited by the equator on the south and the Tropic of Cancer in the north.

Contrasted to the Negro, the ancient Nubians were the most attractive of humanity, even though darker than the European:

The Nubians, in spite of their black skins, are usually classed among the handsomest of mankind, just as the negroes are among the ugliest. They are tall, spare, and well-proportioned. The hair is black and fairly straight, and there is very little of it on the body. The nostrils and lips are thin, the eyes dark, the nose somewhat aquiline. The flat feet with which they are credited are not a racial characteristic, but are due to their walking without shoes.¹¹⁸

Sharing the views of Wincklemann, Sayce identified beauty as “perfect symmetry” and ugliness as “absolute disproportion, i.e. want of correctness.” Because of the influential role of the Nubians in Egypt, they were depicted as attractive by Sayce. To further strengthen his claim of Nubian aesthetic exquisiteness, Sayce described the Nubians as having fairly straight hair, thin noses and lips. The Negroes, on the other hand, had woolly hair, large noses with wide nostrils and lower jaws which extended outward. Sayce noted that the dark coloring was even evident in the muscles and brain.¹¹⁹

Sayce’s thesis of the attractive Nubian can be interpreted in various ways. One could argue that Sayce was open minded about the racial makeup, hence the compliment given to ancient Nubian beauty, but that notion contradicts his vehement assertion that Negroes were the most unattractive people. It is far more likely that Sayce viewed the Nubians as attractive because of their geographical proximity to Egypt and their contributions to and influences on Egyptian society. The physical appearance of the Nubians influenced Sayce’s view of their

¹¹⁸ Sayce, *Races of the OT*, 51.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Dairy for 1865, entry 7 April 1865. Similarly, nineteenth-century Europeans used “Abyssinia” instead of “Ethiopia” because Ethiopia reflected blackness (i.e. negativity) whereas Abyssinia seemed to be more palpable and pleasing to the Europeans. See Bernal, 242-243.

history and vice versa—his view of Nubian history influenced his reconstruction of their physical appearance. Just as eighteenth-century Europeans admired the intellect of the Chinese, particularly their examination system, and depicted the Native Americans as the “founders of civilization,”¹²⁰ Sayce showed the Nubians, at least for a brief moment in history, in a positive light.

Sayce’s racial views complicate Bernal’s theory that nineteenth-century scholars did not study the African continent because of its connection to blackness.¹²¹ Sayce did view Africa through the lens of racial ideology and believed that the facial features of the Negro were unattractive because they were so dissimilar to that of the European. But he was deeply interested in Egypt’s role in biblical history and the founding of Christianity, even though he did not consider the majority of the Egyptian population to be Aryans. Sayce acknowledged the important role of Egypt in biblical history but in defining the races of Africa, he implemented a racist method which classified all the people of the Near East as white except the Negro and Nubian.

After Sayce defined the race of the Egyptians, he then sought to describe the race of the people of Cush. In the Tel el Amarna tables Cush is called Ka’si and in Assyrian inscription it is Ku’si.¹²² Cush consisted of Ethiopia and the southwestern coast of Arabia. Even though the area included people of a darker skin color, Sayce believed the Cushites were not Negro or white, but a special, favorable race—between black and white. Sayce wrote: “Racially and linguistically they [Nubians] stand apart from the rest of mankind. Just as their languages from

¹²⁰ Bindman, 12.

¹²¹ See Bernal, 241. Bernal argues that late Victorians viewed blacks as inferior. He further argues that Europeans had difficulty grasping the Egyptians’ role in history since Africa symbolized inferiority. Bernal states that Europeans had three options. They could deny that the Egyptians were black, deny the Egyptians had developed a prosperous civilization or deny both. According to Bernal, European historians chose the last.

¹²² Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 132.

an isolated family of speech, so too, on the ethnological side, they form a separate race.”¹²³ He argued that the Cushites were of Nubian descent. He described the area of Cush as being “inhabited for the most part by a white race whose physical characteristics connect them with the Egyptians,”¹²⁴ whom Sayce classified as white. He argued that Mizraim, who is mentioned in the tenth chapter of *Genesis* and connected to Noah’s son Ham, was the brother of Cush. In Hebrew Mizraim means Egypt; hence the Egyptians, who were white, were akin to the Cushites.¹²⁵

In explaining the relationship between the Cushites and the Egyptians, Sayce noted that after the conquest of the eighteenth dynasty, the pharaoh’s eldest son took the title Prince of Kash, hence reflecting the political relationship between the two. After the destruction of the twentieth dynasty, surviving members of the dynasty fled to Cush where they founded another kingdom at Napata near the Gebel Barkal Mountain. The new kingdom was similar to Egypt in various ways. The temple was built in resemblance of the one at Karnack, and its kings claimed to be the high-priests of Amon. Sayce argued that over time the “Egyptian emigrants lost the purity of their blood, and the court became more and more barbarized;” the “royal names ceased to be Egyptian.”¹²⁶ The kings of Cush belonged to the white race and brought Egyptian language and habits, but the language and habits were influenced by the Nubians. Because Sayce deemed the negro mind as simple, he believed the negro had no grasp of art with the exception of music “which he [was] passionately fond.”¹²⁷

Because sub-Saharan Africa had not progressed, it lacked culture and the inhabitants and descendents of the area lacked intellectual sophistication. And if the Africans lacked cultural

¹²³ Sayce, *Races of the OT*, 145.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 52 and *Higher Criticism*, 132.

¹²⁶ Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 132.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, *Races of the OT*, 145-146.

and intellectual attainments, from Sayce's point of view, they had no role in influencing history, particularly biblical history which is the cornerstone of Judo-Christian beliefs. Sayce characterized Africans as moved by emotion and not thought; they did not advance intellectually past age fourteen.¹²⁸ He further described blacks as indolent, superstitious, affectionate and faithful. He believed that the last two qualities made black Africans exemplary slaves; hence, a large number of blacks in Egypt were slaves.¹²⁹

Rev. Sayce noted that history revealed the accomplishments of the Arabs going to Egypt and influencing African kingdoms. He added that history did not provide evidence of Africans venturing to Arabia.¹³⁰ This reflects Sayce's blatant omission of the accomplishments of black Africans to history. He believed that scholars must be content to trace Semitic history to Arabia and no further, hence excluding the Semitic influence from Africa and vice versa. He added that any efforts to connect Semites to Negroes were accusations and guesses. He wrote: "All attempts to connect it [Semitic race] with Egyptians or Libyans, and to pass beyond the boundaries of its primitive desert home, are but guesses unsupported by the solid evidence which science demands."¹³¹

Tenth Chapter of *Genesis*

The traditional and long utilized source for understanding the origins of the various races of the world was the Old Testament. Sayce firmly believed in the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and the historical reliability of the Old Testament text. Nevertheless, he interpreted the tenth chapter of *Genesis* in a way which opposed the common, contemporary belief. Most educated Victorians regarded the tenth chapter of *Genesis* as the "oldest ethnological record in

¹²⁸ Sayce, *Races of the OT*, 146.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

existence,” one that provided an explanation for the origins of the various races: Noah’s sons Japheth, Shem and Ham populated the three areas of the world: Europe, Asia and Africa.¹³² The sixteenth-century belief that Noah’s sons founded nations and that God’s curse against Ham and his son Canaan accounted for the dark skin color of Africans was still accepted by nineteenth-century Europeans. Victorians also accepted the seventeenth-century idea that the curse of Ham justified the separation of the races.

Sayce, however, disagreed with both these ideas. Even though *Genesis* then was known by Victorians as “the ethnological table,” Sayce argued that such a title was a misnomer. He claimed that the “tenth chapter of *Genesis* [was] a geographical chart of the world as it was known,” not a dissection of races. Rev. Sayce was convinced that *Genesis* 10 was “not ethnological, and consequently [threw] no light on the racial relations of the populations to which it refer[ed].” Instead, Sayce contended, “all the tribes and nations mentioned in the chapter belonged to the white race.”¹³³ He asserted this claim because he believed that the cities mentioned in the chapter were populated by those who were characterized as white. Sayce argued that the tenth chapter did not reveal a “scientific division of mankind into their several races.” The “sons of Canaan” mentioned in *Genesis* were the Canaanites, and Canaan’s first born was not a person but rather the city of Sidon. The “daughter of Jerusalem” was the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Likewise the “Semitic Assyrian and non-Semitic Elamite were both the children of Shem.”¹³⁴ He also deduced that: “In Hebrew, as in other Semitic languages, the relation between a mother-state to its colony, or of a town or country to its inhabitants, was expressed in a genealogical form.” Rev. Sayce believed that the ethnological description of

¹³² Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution*, 32.

¹³³ Sayce, *Archaeological Commentary on Genesis* (1896), Sackler Library, Oxford University, England, United Kingdom, 1 and *Higher Criticism*, 119-120.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, *Races of the OT*, 39-40.

Genesis is a geographical analysis of the ancient world. To say that Canaan begot Sidon and Hittites, meant that the two originated from Canaan.¹³⁵ Shem begot Elam and Asshur which were the areas of Assyria, Elam and Babylonia. The cities in these areas were Nineveh, Susa and Babylon. Sayce emphasized that these cities were related through their locations, political history and not genealogy. By arguing that the descendents of Noah's sons could not be described as members of isolated races, Sayce did not share the view that Shem's descendents represented the free, Japheth's descendents the soldiers and Ham's lineage the servants.¹³⁶ Sayce's interpretation of the tenth chapter of *Genesis* was unique in that he argued that Noah's three sons were the fathers of nations and cities, not people. Japheth represented the north, Ham the south and Shem the center. Sayce noted that Sheba had two fathers because the area was large and occupied the north and south.

Sayce argued that the Egyptian wall paintings at Thebes offered a better portrait of the races of the Near East. He argued that the tomb of Rekh-mâ-Ra, an Egyptian prince, depicted the races of the world, "with all their modern features." This is significant in Sayce's view since Rekh-mâ-Ra lived a century before the Exodus; hence the wall painting provides an ethnological record of the known world that predated the Exodus. The paintings showed that the south was inhabited by the "black-skinned negro," the north and west occupied by the "white-skinned European and Libyan," and the east by the "Asiatic with olive complexion and somewhat aquiline nose." The "valley of the Nile" was occupied by a race whose skin had been burnt red by the sun, and who displayed all the traits that distinguished contemporary Egyptians. Sayce noted that the Egyptians and Canaanites were classed together

¹³⁵ Sayce, *Races of the OT*, 40.

¹³⁶ Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 30.

The western Semitic tribes occupied the region west of the Euphrates and became known as the Aramaeans, the Semitic tribes of Mesopotamia and northern Arabia. Sayce believed that the western Semitic language was called Canaanitish or Hebrew. In the tenth chapter of *Genesis*, Babylonia is not mentioned among the sons of Shem, but Sayce theorized that Babylonia appeared as Arphaxad, mentioned in the eleventh chapter of *Genesis*. The ancestors of the Arphaxad, Sayce deduced, were western Semitic; hence, the sons of Shem represented the western Semites. He further argued that “biblical Shem was the ancestral god of the dynasty to which Khammurabi belonged.” In Sayce’s view: “The Book of *Genesis* turn[ed] out to be strictly accurate in its ethnology: Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Nod (or Lud), and Aram all formed one family, and traced their decent from Shem.”¹³⁷

Sayce also closely examined the passage that was the most problematic for his theory concerning the tenth chapter of *Genesis*. He meticulously dissected *Genesis* 10:8, which states that Cush begot Nimrod. Among the names of cities was the name of a person—Nimrod. Nimrod’s name appears in the middle of the list of southern zones even though his kingdom was affiliated with the central zone. To explain away this inconsistency, Sayce argued that it was “interpolation” added later and “had no place in the original design of the tenth chapter.”¹³⁸ He asserted that Nimrod was not part of Cush. Between 1806 and 1230 B.C. Kassite conquerors of Chaldea ruled Babylonia. As a result, the surrounding neighbors called the Babylonians Kassites, which in the Tel el Amarna texts is written as ‘Kasi’ or Cush. In light of this interpretation, Sayce concluded that the biblical writers of *Genesis* 10:8 were identifying Nimrod as a Babylonian and not a Cushite.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Sayce, “Recent Biblical Archaeology,” (1901) Sackler Library, Oxford University, England, United Kingdom, 1-3.

¹³⁸ Ibid., *Higher Criticism*, 123.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 148-149.

Some racialists had attempted a linguistic argument to identify the names of Noah's sons with skin color. Japhet was equated with Assyrian *ippatu* which meant 'white.' Shem was believed to be Assyrian for *samu* which meant 'olive-coloured.' Ham was equated with the Hebrew word *khâm* which was translated as 'to be hot.'¹⁴⁰ Sayce found this theory doubtful. He believed that Ham's "descendants"—the regions of Phut, Mizraim and Canaan—were not peopled by dark-skinned races, as many presumed. Only one of the nations of Ham's "descendants," Cush, contained dark-skinned inhabitants.¹⁴¹

During the fifteenth century biblical scholars described one of the magi as black, which is an idea which lasts to this very day.¹⁴² Other Christians too believed that blacks—such as the Cushites—played a role in biblical history. But Sayce argued that blacks did not have a role in the bible. The Cushites, in his unorthodox view, were neither white nor black but a special race. Sayce argued that there were two different Cushes – an African Cush and an Arabian Cush. Sayce emphasized that the biblical Cush was the Cush which originated from Arabia; but he added that the two Cushes interacted, making it difficult to distinguish between the two.¹⁴³

Sayce, who was an ardent believer in the bible, did not believe that the scriptures detailed the creation and division of human races. In his opinion, one had to look to physiology and anatomy to understand the various races and their moral and intellectual capacities. In this context, Sayce turned to the work of noted researchers like Blumenbach, Camper and others. To

¹⁴⁰ Sayce, *Races of the OT*, 41.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 42 & 51.

¹⁴² Haynes, 5.

¹⁴³ Sayce, *Higher Criticism*, 133 and David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 18-19. David Goldenberg argues a similar point. In *The Curse of Ham*, Goldenberg notes that the people that lived on both sides of the Red Sea were probably of the same heritage - Cushites. He further adds that during biblical times Arabians crossed over to the other side of the Red Sea and that the Nile was the boundary between Asia and Africa. From this analysis a portion of Egypt would have been considered part of Asia, which strengthens Sayce's claim that the Egyptians were white along with the people of Cush.

understand race from a supposedly scientific perspective, Sayce relied on the research of the eighteenth century and applied it to the ancient world.

Conclusion

Although Sayce was well-read in the most recent ‘scientific’ studies of his era, for the most part, his racial views coincided with the popular racist ideas of the period. He believed blacks to be inferior in intelligence to white Europeans. In pointing out the contributions made by Africa, Sayce emphasized that Africans that contributed in biblical and ancient history were non-black.

Sayce’s view of race was unique in some respects. He applied his knowledge of philology and archeology in defining race, emphasizing that language did not denote race but rather social interaction. He acknowledged that race could not conclusively determine morality or intellectual capacity. Also, Sayce supported a new reading of *Genesis*. Even though Rev. Sayce relied on pseudo-science to define race, he did provide a new interpretation to the bible’s explanation of race. He argued that chapters nine, ten and eleven of *Genesis* were geographical descriptions and not racial interpretations. This idea is very unique in that many late Victorians embraced the theory that Ham’s descendents were black. He was a firm believer that the bible did not detail the origins of race; rather ethnological research and pseudo-science explained racial differences.

Sayce based his views on race, like his opposition to the higher critics, on his scientific and religious beliefs. Even though he provided new interpretations of race and the bible, he retained the racist views held by most late-Victorian Britons. For Sayce, those who played a role in biblical history were connected to the Aryan race; even the people of Cush were given a

special category which labeled them as neither white nor black. Because of his religious and racist beliefs, Sayce determined that those who participated in biblical history were white.

Sayce's contributions to the racial debates in late-Victorian Britain are representative of his views on liberal theology and orthodoxy. Because of Sayce's orthodox views and belief in the truthfulness of biblical accounts, he strived to label Africans who participated in biblical history as white. In attempting to define the racial makeup of the people of biblical times, Sayce relied on his knowledge as an Assyriologist and on his orthodox convictions.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

Examining Sayce's thought trajectory is complex and at times esoteric. Readers may find contradictions in his views, particularly when comparing earlier to later works. As he himself admitted, Sayce did not devote himself to extensive research—nor did he often conduct continuous research on a topic. As the decades passed, his work grew more and more out of touch with the latest findings in ethnology, theology, philology and ancient history. He did keep up to date in archeology, and relied on it for central parts of his arguments. But he was not an archeologist, either. He viewed himself first of all as an intellectual/scientist and secondly as a theologian. But perhaps in retrospect, he can say that these two professions were of equal importance in shaping worldview. Sayce was a scholar—but he was, too, a convinced and devoted Christian, and religious views shaped his work throughout his very long career.

The shaping of his religious views began during his childhood, which was the beginning of Sayce's intellectual development and ideological contemplation. It was during his youth that he was influenced by the views of both the Broad Church and High Church. His religious beliefs were further molded by his years at Oxford where he befriended Tractarian E. B. Pusey and philologist Max Müller. Also, it was at Oxford that he furthered his interest in the Near East, becoming an advocate for reforming university curricula. But, it is after his studies at Oxford that Sayce became active in the debates concerning higher criticism and race. His contributions to the debates prove that Sayce is important to Victorian history in that he used science to prove the Mosaic authenticity of the Pentateuch and scientific research to define the races of the ancient world.

As a defender of the bible and a scientist, Sayce was heavily relied on by supporters of religious orthodoxy. He opposed higher criticism and provided an argument which initially

supporters of orthodoxy hesitantly welcomed because, in the opinions of traditionalists, it did not blatantly support orthodoxy. However, Sayce did point out the weaknesses in the higher critical argument which enforced doubt in higher criticism. Traditionalists believed that Sayce's views restored the validity of the Pentateuch as an authentic Mosaic work because he argued that higher critics misinterpreted evidence and relied too heavily on textual criticism and not biblical history and archeology.

Even though Sayce supported orthodoxy, I chose the title *A Non-Traditional Traditionalist* to emphasize Sayce's paradoxical views. On one hand, he asserted that Moses wrote the Pentateuch; and on the other, he accepted the view that the Pentateuch in its contemporary form was not written by Moses. Sayce supported the idea that the Pentateuch was compiled by redactors, but he enforced the idea that the original source was written by Moses. The argument which supported the idea of redactors contradicted the opinions of some traditionalists who believed that the Pentateuch, in its contemporary form, was written by Moses. However, Sayce gained the support of these traditionalists because he provided the best counter argument to higher criticism.

Another example of Sayce's non-traditional approach to theology was his acknowledgment of Babylonian influences in the Pentateuch. He noted the similarities between *Genesis* and the Babylonian texts *Epic of Gilgamesh* and *Enuma Elish*. However, Sayce used the Babylonian texts to prove that Moses could and probably did write the Pentateuch. Sayce asserted that the early Hebrews were exposed to the literary traditions of the ancient Near East and would have come across the Babylonian texts. Hence, Sayce promoted a new interpretation of Mosaic history by disproving the higher critical argument that the early Hebrews did not have a prior literary tradition.

Sayce was convinced that archeology proved the validity of the Pentateuch. His confidence in archeology became the cornerstone for his arguments against higher criticism. Sayce held archeology in high esteem and believed that archeology was more reliable than textual criticism. Sayce, also, emphasized that evidence is still left to be unearthed and that critics should be patient and wait for evidence to be uncovered.

Sayce's views toward higher criticism progressively grew more hostile. There were two notable points of Sayce's progressive shift—1887 and 1895. The Tel el Amarna tablets of 1887 put Sayce on the path of doubting higher criticism and became the crux for his arguments against higher criticism. For Sayce, the tablets were archeological evidence that proved that the Hebrews were exposed to the literary traditions of the ancient Near East. The second mark in his intellectual development was in 1895 when Sayce became more hostile toward higher criticism, to the point of being scathing. Prior to 1895 Sayce acknowledged the virtues of textual criticism and believed that it had a role in understanding biblical history. After 1895 Sayce's views emphasized Christianity and his concern for the future of Christianity.

His intellectual views were not just limited to higher criticism but also the roles races played in shaping biblical history. Sayce employed his knowledge of ancient history and philology to define the races of the ancient world. Just as he had used science to discredit the higher critics, Sayce also employed science to determine race and interpreted biblical history to conclude that blacks were not involved in shaping biblical history. In explaining race, Sayce embraced racist views while at the same time acknowledging the exceptions to race and the inability for physical features to denote character.

Sayce reflected the sentiments of the Victorian period, particularly the complexities of the relationship between science and religion in Britain. Sayce was frequently asked to

contribute works concerning the relationship between archeology and the Old Testament, and his popular works went through edition after edition. Not only were Sayce's works read by specialists in the field of archeology and higher criticism, but they also appealed to the general public and non-specialist ministers. From this, one may conclude that even during a time when society was moving toward secularization and professionalization, the veracity of the Christian scriptures continued to be of great interest to the late-Victorian reading public.

Sayce, who lived from 1845-1933, contributed much to the areas of Assyriology and philology, however, there are still specific areas that, if explored, could further enhance the study of Sayce's life and intellectual contributions. An exploration into Sayce's opinion of the Anglican Church would further highlight his religious beliefs. His post 1895 writings emphasize the core beliefs of Christianity and not the dogmas of the Church. Such an analysis would include Sayce's critique of the Anglican Church and his view of non-conformity. This examination would provide a new perspective on his late nineteenth and early twentieth century writings. Also, a critique of Sayce's views would benefit from an exploration into his impact on both British and American orientalisists. For example, it would be beneficial to measure the impact Sayce may have had on the American twentieth-century orientalist William F. Albright, who believed that biblical archeology depended on the study of the ancient world and its culture.

Interest in the relationship between religion and science in late-Victorian Britain is immense. The dynamics between the two are evident in the career and beliefs of A. H. Sayce. He was a man wedged between liberal ideologies and religious orthodoxy. Sayce walked a fine line between the two which is reflected in his opposition to higher criticism and his understanding of biblical history. As a non-traditional traditionalist, Sayce utilized 'science' in his effort to prove biblical orthodoxy.

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