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3. Certain General Matters

Writing

Before we take up a survey of the archaeological material that has been discovered in the three main regions with which we are to concern ourselves, it is necessary that we examine a few general matters. The first of these is the origin of writing. As long as it was thought that a great number of the events of the Old Testament occurred at a time when writing was unknown and the people illiterate it was easy to build up theories of the development of the history which took it for granted that the material was transmitted by word of mouth for many centuries and that the actual writing occurred long after the time at which the events were supposed to have occurred. One of the great discoveries which archaeology has made is that actually the Near East in Bible times was a region in which writing was very common. In Egypt and in Palestine, where most of the writing was on papyrus, this papyrus has largely disappeared, and comparatively little of the written materials of daily life have remained to this day. Only in Egypt has any papyrus from ^{very early} ~~the earliest~~ times been preserved, and there only in graves in the drier portions of ~~the~~ land. In the inscriptions which have been preserved on the Egyptian monuments there is ample witness to the common use of writing ever since about 3000 B.C. In Mesopotamia we are in a more fortunate position, because the lack of such a convenient writing material as papyrus led to the use of clay tablets. ~~As~~ This more cumbersome material is much more lasting, and ~~many~~ thousands of these tablets have been found. Among them are many tablets of the most casual type, containing records of transactions of all sorts from daily life.