

Deuel, Leo, Testaments of Time The Search for Lost Manuscripts and Records.
(New York: Alfred A. Knopf) 1965

p. 223 Throughout the nineteenth century, while neighboring Egypt and Mesopotamia so lavishly yielded documents and lost literary works on papyrus and clay, virtually nothing came out of the Syrian lands. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, some learned men were quick to contend that written literature was unknown in these lands in the Bronze Age. And there were the extremists of the German "liberal" school of Bible studies (called Higher Criticism), like Julius Wellhausen, who insisted that the Hebrews did not practice any writing until at least their Age of Kings - a thesis which was meant to imply that all Biblical books were of late composition.

Wellhausen's and kindred arguments lost some ground with the appearance of the Tell el Amarna tablets in Upper Egypt in 1887, which included the correspondence of pharaohs of the Eighteenth Dynasty (about fourteenth century B.C.) with their Syrian vassals. Written in Akkadian, the international language of that time, these cuneiform records showed that Syrian rulers employed scribes. The Wenamun papyrus, found in the 1890's, added to this evidence. Yet no materials to speak of from Syria itself seriously challenged the Wellhausen thesis until 1929. Then, as a result of a chance discovery on the coast of northern Syria, French archaeologists uncovered a Canaanite temple library of clay tablets from the fourteenth or the fifteenth century B. C. All at once it became obvious that Syria-Palestine had an advanced literary tradition long before the coming of the Hebrews. From their contents, the Syrian tablets were soon recognized as representing an entirely new chapter of literature - indeed, as Cyrus H. Gordon, one of the leading American scholars in this field, has said, "the most important addition . . . since the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphics and Mesopotamian cuneiform in the last century."²

² Cyrus H. Gordon: Adventures in the Nearest East (Fair Lawn, N. J.: Essential Books; 1957), p. 104.