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Edwin Tribble, Sunday Editor
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FOUR THOUSAND YEARS AGO

by Geoffrey Bibby (Knopf, \$6.95)

Children today bear the names of their fathers rather than their mothers, learn to write by the alphabet, raise their eyes to a deity in the sky rather than lower them to one in the earth, and see headstones placed on the graves of the dead; all of these customs go back to events in Europe during the thousand year period from 2000 B.C. to 1000 B.C. The events of that millen^m_Aium, on a world-wide basis, have been arranged and interlinked in terms of fourteen successive generations (each of seventy years) by Geoffrey Bibby in his new book, Four Thousand Years Ago.

Bibby, British-born Director of the Prehistoric Museum of Aarhus, Denmark, is well-qualified for writing this book and goes at his task with verve and imagination (some scholars might say, too much imagination). Well-known to the general reader for his Testimony of the Spade (1956), which tried to reconstruct the pre-history of northern Europe, Bibby won his archaeological reputation in excavation of the newly-discovered prehistoric civilization on Bahrain Island in the Persian Gulf.

Four Thousand Years Ago skillfully reconstructs the relationships among events which, to most of us, drift in a fog of uncertainty. Abraham, the migrations of the Indo-Europeans, the building

of Stonehenge, Tutankhamon, the invention of the alphabet, the Hyksos, the Trojan war, Moses and the fall of Jericho, Hammurabi the Law-giver----names such as these which we all recognize more or less vaguely are here placed together, each in its own generation, with the lines of influence which link them together, carefully drawn. The whole story is kept on a vividly concrete basis by frequent reference to the activities of ordinary individuals of the generation in question.

Such a detailed narrative could not be made without interpreting events beyond the existing evidence, since the latter is always incomplete. Bibby has not hesitated to do this, but I find no significant errors in his tale, and in almost every case I agree with his interpretation even when it goes far beyond the evidence. The only exception lies in Bibby's story (chapter 13) of a voyage by Scandinavian sailors to Crete and Egypt in the generation 1510-1440 B.C. Most historians would find it easier to imagine a voyage of Cretans to the North.

The one fundamental objection which could be made of this book is in regard to its arbitrary chronology. By this I do not mean the division of the millennium into seventy-year generations; this is a useful device for organizational purposes and for chapter divisions. It is the millennium itself, 2000-1000 B.C., which lacks

historical unity. The essential theme of the book is the process by which the Indo-European peoples poured out of the Pontic steppes and the Semitic peoples pushed out of Arabia to conquer and even destroy the city-civilizations (Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Indus Valley, the Hittite, and the Cretan) and to almost completely obliterate the ancient Highland Zone peoples (Sumerians, Elamites, Hurrians, etc.), whose sole linguistic survivors today are the Basques and some small Caucasian groups. These great movements of warlike pastoral, grass-land peoples were caused by the sudden onset of a drier climate known to prehistorians as the "Sub-Boreal." This drier climate, falling in the period 2500-1000, is the real chronological division which dominated the events of Bibby's book. By failing to mention it and by taking as his unit the historically meaningless period 2000-1000 B.C., Bibby has missed the underlying cause and unifying element in the many concrete episodes he so vividly describes.

Four Thousand Years Ago is a beautifully made book embellished with thirty-two pla^tes, six maps, and forty-five line drawings.