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PALESTINE BEFORE THE HEBREWS By Emmanuel Anati, 453 pp.
(Knopf, \$8.95)

This splendid book provides an informed, judicious, and well-written account of the history of the most significant area on the globe in the half million years before 1200 B.C.; it ends when the Hebrews, led by Joshua, began the conquest of Palestine. Several hundred reproductions of the archaeological evidence assist the clear and straightforward narration. The area is of critical significance for human history even in this period, long before the events of the New and much of the Old Testaments. The sole land passage from Africa to Asia, close to the place where men of modern physical type originated or where grain-growing agriculture began, it is the site of the first walled city in human history and of the alphabetic form of writing which made it possible for all men to become literate. The archaeological evidence for these events is presented in this book in a way which could hardly be improved.

The weakness of the book is one which seems to be inevitable when archaeologists (even one as broadly read as Anati) write prehistory: non-archaeological evidence, such as that from botany or ecology is relatively neglected. For example, Anati accepts the presence of flint sickles as evidence that

mesolithic peoples cut wild wheat for its grain. He does not realize that all wild grain crops drop their seeds when ripe and could not possibly be harvested with sickles but must be harvested by hand-pulling. Like Kathleen Kenyon, he regards Jericho as a possible site for "incipient agriculture", and ignores the fact that the earliest cultivated wheat in the Near East grew only between 2000 and 4300 feet above sea level and could not have been cultivated at Jericho, which is 900 feet below sea level. Or again, Anati implies that swine might have been first domesticated in the Levant, an impossible assumption since the pig is of humid forest origin and universally detested by Semite peoples. Or again, like most archaeologists, Anati is puzzled by the abandonment of the Jericho oasis for long periods and does not realize that all fields cultivated by irrigation from wells eventually become too saline for crops and must be abandoned until the salts are washed out by years or centuries of rainfall. Weaknesses such as this is bound to occur in all prehistory archaeology until it is generally recognized that archaeology is only one of the sources of prehistory. Until then Anati's book may stand as a model of the narrower approach and the best available book on this significant subject.

Carroll Quigley

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