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THE TIDES OF HISTORY. Volume I: From the Beginnings to Islam. By Jacques Pirenne, with 35 maps by Pierre Pirenne and E. G. Morton. Translated from Les Grands Courants de l'Histoire Universelle (revised 1959). E. P. Dutton. 580 pp. \$8.95.

This is the first of seven volumes in which Jacques Pirenne, Professor of Egyptology at the University of Brussels, has tried to cover universal history. The author, son of the great Belgian historian, Henri Pirenne, does not equal his father either in skill of exposition or in mastery of his materials. Of course, the latter could hardly be expected, for no single individual can write a universal history --not today, when such detailed knowledge has been accumulated on every special area, topic, and period. Professor Pirenne has met this problem by ignoring substantial portions of all three of these divisions and by allowing his special knowledge and private interests, rather than any intrinsic merit, to determine his space allotments.

In this volume the quality improves fairly consistently as it moves forward in time, so that the prehistoric period (before 3000 B.C.) is totally inadequate, the Bronze Age (roughly 3000-1000 B.C.) has many deficiencies, while the Iron Age (after 1000 B.C.) has observable merits. Since the whole work is based on

literary evidence only and shows almost no familiarity with archaeological evidence, it is not surprising that the important advances in human history before written evidence (about 3000 B.C.) are ignored. The same inadequacy seriously distorts the Bronze Age, a period where archaeological and other material evidence is at least as significant as the literary remains. As a consequence, this book has nothing to say on such important events as the origins of agriculture, the movements of peoples and languages in the prehistoric period, the advent of the plow, the wheel, number systems, or the sailing ship. Even stranger, in view of Pirenne's exclusive reliance on written evidence, is that there is almost nothing here on the Sumerian invention of writing about 3200 B.C. or the Canaanite invention of the alphabet about 1600 B.C. It would seem from this book and from Pirenne's other writings that he is a rather narrow specialist in Egyptian public and private law as revealed by papyrological evidence, who has, late in life, suddenly decided to write broad multivolume works for which he is not equipped. This is shown very clearly in the comparison between his specialist work, Histoire des Institutions et du Droit Prive de l'Ancienne Egypte (3 vol., Brussels, 1932-1935), and the recently published (1961) first volume of his projected three volume Histoire de la Civilisation de l'Egypte Ancienne. This last book

dealing with the period before 2200 B.C., has had the misfortune to appear about the same time as Sir Alan Gardiner's Egypt of the Pharaohs and W. B. Emery's Archaic Egypt. Sir Alan's unrivaled knowledge of the Monumental written evidence and Professor Emery's unique familiarity with the archaeological evidence of the early Egyptian dynasties turn a glaring light on the inadequacy of Pirenne's effort to write an account of a whole civilization from his knowledge of one kind of written sources.

Pirenne's inadequacy in the present work is less obvious for the period after 800 B.C., and, in this section, the real merit of this volume appears. This lies, as it should in a universal history, in delineation of the interrelationships between cultures. The exposition of the period down to 31 B.C. shows the inter-linking, so frequently ignored, between events in the western Mediterranean and those in the Near East, or Asia. This volume has a certain measure of novelty from the fact that it tries to make Egypt the focal point of the events of this last pre-Christian millennium. It is probably salutary for us to push Solon and Pericles to the side of the historical stage occasionally, although I am not convinced by Pirenne's argument that Greek science or the administrative reforms (such as Solon's) which led toward Greek democracy were of Egyptian inspiration (pp. 147-155).

This same merit appears in the last half of the volume in its indication of the relations between the Mediterranean and India or the Far East. Pirenne throughout concentrates his attention on economic and political history and especially on commercial and legal (including class) relationships. There is nothing on military organization and little on intellectual or religious history. The whole work is suffused with the ideology of nineteenth century democratic liberalism and most events are judged from this rather old fashioned standard. No effort is made to get into the minds or emotions of the people of the past, and even the earliest of these are presented as motivated by the values of John Stuart Mill. A comparison of Pirenne's ancient Egyptian outlook with that described by John Wilson in Henri Frankfort's Before Philosophy (Penguin Books) will show the inadequacy of the former.

The most valuable part of this book is the maps, although these have not been revised along with the text (compare the dates of Sargon on p. 51 with that four centuries earlier on p. 53). The text itself contains scores of factual errors (there are seven major ones on two facing pages, 66-67, alone), only a slight reduction from the greater number in the original French edition.