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## Achan's Wedge of Gold.

BY THE REV. HUGH MACMILLAN, D.D., LL.D., F.R.S.E.

'When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them.'—JOSHUA vii. 21.

WHAT was this wedge of gold which Achan secretly abstracted from the sack of Jericho, and appropriated to his own use? If we give the matter a thought at all, we hastily suppose that it must have been a mere lump of gold, valuable for its material only, and that its shape was of no consequence. The wedge could not have been an implement; for gold is too soft a substance to be employed for such a purpose; and its shape and weight would prevent it from being used as a personal ornament. It has been suggested by Dr. A. Götze that it was a coin well known at the time, and in general currency; and the mention of its exact weight, and its association with two hundred shekels of silver, give much plausibility to this suggestion.

In that case its shape is full of significance, and opens up a most interesting vista of antiquarian speculation. The gold was moulded or beaten into the form of a wedge; and, in that respect, it reminds us of the remarkable discovery made by Dr. Schliemann in his excavations at Hissarlik, the site of ancient Troy. In the second lowest layer of ruins he found a number of pieces of silver of a similar shape to the golden wedge of Jericho, which, in the same way, could not have been implements or personal ornaments, on account of the softness of the metal and the peculiarity of the form, and which competent authorities have therefore regarded as a form of money currency.

We can easily understand how the peculiar shape of these primitive coins had originated. Among the native tribes of Australia at the present day the tough green stone peculiar to one district, which is valuable for making axes, is carried often for long distances to another district, and there exchanged for the red ochre that is found in that district with which to paint their bodies. This was the mode of trading that existed at one time in our own and in other countries. Before the use of metal brought in a higher civilization, celts, or stone axes, on account of the difficulty

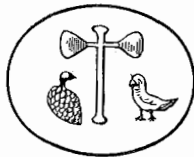
of finding the material suitable for making them, and the great amount of labour bestowed in polishing them and giving them a sharp edge, were highly prized. They formed, therefore, a most popular unit of value. For a stone axe could be got, in exchange, a certain quantity of goods that were of use in the simple life of the aborigines.

After a time, the stone age passed away, and the bronze period succeeded, when the arts of life made considerable progress. The celts were no longer made of polished stone, but were moulded in bronze, and yet they still preserved the primitive shape down to the minutest details. What had been a necessity in the stone implement reappeared in exact imitation as an ornament in the more accommodating metal; showing how conservative the artists were. And just as the stone axes had formed a popular unit of value for barter, so their bronze substitutes served the people of the bronze period as a most useful currency to trade with.

Bronze axe-heads have been found in many places so closely associated with ring-money as to indicate that they too had been used as a rough and ready kind of coinage. This ring-money, it may be mentioned by the way, was made of gold and silver. It was used, in the first instance for ornamentation—women often wearing their dowry on their persons in that form. It was afterwards used as substitutes for money,—when the rings were made of a particular weight,—all multiples of the same unit, but not multiples of one another. The gold rings found in Celtic cemeteries were regulated with respect to their weight like a true coinage. The fashion was probably introduced from the East by the Phœnician traders, who purchased with this kind of money the tin from the south of England, which they used in the manufacture of bronze. At a very remote period we find representations on the Egyptian monuments of such rings being weighed when it was necessary to pay a fixed amount.

After a time the primitive method of barter gave place to purchase by money, which, in the first instance, consisted of ingots or lumps of gold and silver, weighed in scales on the occasion of each

transaction. Then by degrees these lumps of precious metal were made of a fixed weight and standard, and marked with a figure or inscription stamped upon them, which was the guarantee that they were of the proper value, and might be taken at once without the trouble of again weighing or testing them. The material gave the reality of value; the stamp its assurance. Here came in the conservative instincts of humanity; and as each age copied the characteristics of the previous age in its own more advanced forms, so the shape of the primitive stone or bronze axe-heads was copied in gold and silver, and made of a particular weight, and served as a regular currency. At a later period, still another and higher stage in the process of evolution was reached. Instead of the coin of gold or silver being made of the shape of the primitive celt or stone axe, the coin assumed a circular shape, and the figure of the stone or bronze axe was stamped in the middle of it. The money coined at a very early period in the island of Tenedos, off the coast of Troy, had the figure of a double axe impressed upon it, to preserve its connexion with the rude beginnings out of which the complex commercial system of this important region arose. Tenedos played a very prominent part in the Trojan legend; and the double-headed axe represented on its older coinage connected itself with the silver wedges which Schliemann discovered in the ruins of Troy. The obverse of all the silver pieces of Tenedos had on it a combination of the head of Zeus and Hera; and the reverse was stamped with a two-headed axe, with an owl on one side, and a bunch of grapes on the other.



The golden wedge looted by Achan must have belonged to the third stage of the evolution of metal currency, when the real bronze axe-head used for barter was displaced by gold and silver coinage, made in the shape of an axe-head, and of a certain certified weight. The weight of Achan's wedge, we are told in the sacred narrative, was fifty shekels, which must have represented a very large sum of money in those days. That the ingot was Babylonish is indicated by the fact that it was

of gold. In Palestine, the uncoined money in use was made of silver; gold being employed for sacred and ornamental purposes, but not as a medium of exchange. Throughout the law we read of silver money only; and the distinction seems to be preserved in the passage which describes Achan's loot, where the native money seems to be the two hundred shekels of silver, and the foreign, the golden wedge. It admits of suggestion at least, whether the shape of the golden wedge may not have been closely associated with the cuneiform characters of the Babylonish language. Whether the idea of these cuneiform characters was derived from arrows or axes, it is difficult to say, for the shape resembles both. It is supposed by some authorities that as the flight of arrows was used by the Babylonians in divination, so the shape of the arrow was given to the letters of the alphabet, thus imparting to them a significance in the expression and interpretation of thought. One ingenious author asserts that the wedge shape of the Babylonian characters originated from the tally mark made in the wet clay tablets by the corner of a hard burnt brick, when they were counted up; and this impression would be exactly that of a wedge. Be this as it may be, the wedge of gold found in Jericho, and which, being associated with a Babylonish garment, must, in all likelihood, have come from Babylon, proves that the old supposition that the ancient Babylonians had not found out the art of making coin, simple as the matter seemed, had no foundation in fact. For the wedge was to all intents and purposes a coin.

The Babylonish garment, or literally, the 'mantle of Shinar,' was a robe composed of a texture in which gold thread was interwoven with woollen and silken threads of various colours, and embroidered with groups of men and animals; the whole, from its glossiness and tasteful combination of hues, producing a very rich effect. Such robes were very costly and only worn by persons of the highest rank. The garment in question probably belonged to the regal family of Jericho. The Babylonians were celebrated for their skill in weaving such garments at a very early period; and the presence of the wedge of gold, and of such a robe in the city of Jericho, along with the two hundred shekels of silver, shows conclusively that there must have been an active trade at this time between the south of Palestine and the

ancient city of the Chaldean Empire. Neither of these objects, however, affords any certain clue to the date of the conquest of Jericho by Joshua. For although the rich and costly garment might belong to the foundation of Babylon, which was laid long before the time of Joshua, it might also be equally appropriate to the later period of its greatest luxury and refinement, when, after the fall of Nineveh, it became the capital of the Mesopotamian Empire; and though the wedge-shaped bullion was very archaic in itself, and marked a very early date, it does not follow that it disappeared completely when true coinage was introduced. The force of habit and familiarity might cause the old form of money to be still retained and circulated in many places. We have a remarkable instance of this in the survival, during a long period of years, of the coarsest and most archaic forms of Athenian coins, even among the most exquisite specimens of Greek art; for the half-civilized nations with whom the Athenians traded were suspicious of these new and beautiful medals, and preferred the older and ruder mintage with which they were familiar, and whose weight and purity they were sure of. And we know how the beautiful Greek coins, which Alexander the Great and his successors introduced into the Eastern provinces which they ruled, became gradually debased, passing by quick gradations to purely Oriental coins, barbarous alike in design and execution. The old Eastern half

civilization was not competent to keep the art to which it had been cultivated by external force, but which was not native to the Oriental soil.

We can draw no sure inference, therefore, from the presence of the golden wedge and the Babylonish garment in the sack of Jericho regarding the date of the destruction of the city. But this, at least, we can say, that the association together of the two objects is not inconsistent in the least degree with the date usually accepted. Indeed, the whole air of the story of Achan is very antique. Not only is the golden wedge a survival and representation of the stone axe, the earliest object of barter or exchange, but the way in which Achan was detected points to one of the most primitive of human customs, the process of 'counting out.' Lots were drawn to detect the guilty one; and after eliminating by successive drawings, tribes, families, and individuals, the culprit was at last reached. 'So Joshua rose up early in the morning, and brought Israel near by their tribes; and the tribe of Judah was taken: and he brought near the families of Judah; and he took the family of the Zarhites: and he brought near the family of the Zarhites man by man; and Zabdi was taken: and he brought near his household man by man; and Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken.'

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## Recent Foreign Theology.

### Poels on a 'Central Sanctuary.'<sup>1</sup>

It has come to be practically an axiom of Old Testament criticism, that previous to the Deuteronomic Code on which Josiah acted, a plurality of sanctuaries had a legitimate existence. Alike the silence of the historical books and the incidents they record are held to militate against the early institution of a central sanctuary. Yet in the dissertation before us Dr. Poels does not hesitate to maintain that a single legitimatesanctuary

can be traced throughout Israel's history from Joshua to Solomon, the period that is covered by the first volume of his work. A second volume will carry the history down to the Exile.

The Mosaic origin of the *ark* is accepted by the great majority of critics, and is here assumed. The outward conditions in the time of the Judges and Samuel were not likely to lead to the institution of a single sanctuary, if this was an innovation. On the other hand, if we find such an ordinance in force in those days, this will be an argument in favour of its institution by Moses. Now in Jg 20<sup>1</sup> the 'congregation' (*'edah*) assemble 'unto the LORD at Mizpah.' Here the latter

<sup>1</sup> *Examen critique de l'histoire du Sanctuaire de l'Arche.*  
Par H. A. Poels. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1897.