

OBITUARY

Donald Wiseman [1918-2010]



Donald Wiseman, the well-known Assyriologist and member of the Editorial Board of *Science and Christian Belief* since its inception in 1989, died on 2 February 2010 aged 91. Donald Wiseman was the first student to study Hebrew with Assyrian at London University. Following a distinguished career in the Second World War, Wiseman went to Wadham College, Oxford, to study Oriental Languages. From there he took up a position in the British Museum where he was much involved in the deciphering of cuneiform tablets excavated by Leonard Woolley in Syria. In later life, a frequent visitor to my own childhood home, he would casually remove a cuneiform tablet from his jacket pocket and translate for us a commercial contract from ancient Syria. Wiseman had a life-long interest in biblical archaeology, drawing particular attention to the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh*. 'As the story unfolds it is impossible not to be struck by the resemblances with Genesis 6-9,' Wiseman noted. 'As with the creation story, it may also be argued that this "myth" also reflects an historic fact.'

Wiseman was much involved in archaeological excavations in Turkey, Syria, Israel and Iraq and became closely connected with the British School of Archaeology in Iraq. His work in the Near East included excavations with the archaeologist Max Mallowan and his wife, the novelist Agatha Christie, who became close personal friends. He was a founder member of the British Institute in Amman for Archaeology and History. After hearing of his death this year, HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan, wrote warmly of Wiseman's contributions to textual studies, commenting that 'Ever a devout Christian, Wiseman was nonetheless prepared to be courageous in his re-examination of religious texts, refusing to countenance unjustified dogmatism in defence of even the most favoured theories.'

Wiseman left the British Museum in 1961 to take up the Chair of Assyriology at London University, a post which he held until his retirement in 1982. He was instrumental in the founding of Tyndale House in Cambridge, did much to promote Old Testament studies, and was elected to the British Academy, serving as its Vice-President in 1982 under Sir Isaiah Berlin. His influence on the evangelical world during the latter half of the twentieth century, as on the broader world of Near Eastern studies, was substantial. Donald Wiseman was someone who held the Book of God's Word and the Book of God's Works firmly with both hands.

The Editor has compiled this obituary with thanks to The Daily Telegraph and to the Tyndale House web-site (www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk).