

ARCHAEOLOGY
AND BIBLICAL
INTERPRETATION

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CONTENTS

<i>List of figures</i>	vii
<i>List of contributors</i>	ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xiv
1 WHAT HAS ARCHAEOLOGY TO DO WITH THE BIBLE – OR VICE VERSA?	1
<i>John R. Bartlett</i>	
2 ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE EMERGENCE OF EARLY ISRAEL	20
<i>William G. Dever</i>	
3 UNTILLET 'AJRUD AND THE HISTORY OF ISRAELITE RELIGION	51
<i>Andrew D. H. Mayes</i>	
4 THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF QUMRAN	67
<i>John R. Bartlett</i>	
5 THE TEMPLE MOUNT OF HEROD THE GREAT AT JERUSALEM: RECENT EXCAVATIONS AND LITERARY SOURCES	95
<i>Brian Lalor</i>	
6 ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE HISTORICAL JESUS	117
<i>Sean V. Freyne</i>	
7 ON THE PILGRIM'S WAY TO THE HOLY CITY OF JERUSALEM: THE BASILICA OF DOR IN ISRAEL	145
<i>Claudine Dauphin</i>	
<i>Index of authors</i>	167
<i>Index of places</i>	170
<i>General index</i>	173
<i>Index of references to biblical texts and works of Josephus</i>	176

WHAT HAS ARCHAEOLOGY TO DO WITH THE BIBLE – OR VICE VERSA?

John R. Bartlett

INTRODUCTION

I must begin by saying something about the nature of the Bible, and the nature of archaeology, which will at least reveal my starting point. Like all other written books, including other holy books, the Bible is in the first place (whatever value we set upon it) a human artefact, with a human history. It is the product of many different human minds of varying ability, written by human hands of varied powers of co-ordination, copied and recopied by scribes of varied intelligence, printed and bound by craftsmen of varying standards of skill, read and interpreted by Jews and Christians and agnostics and atheists of differing hermeneutical approaches. It is also a book of very varied origins and contents. It is an anthology containing ancient Jewish laws, legends, myths, hymns, songs, love lyrics, proverbs, prophecies, stories, biographies, histories, letters, visions, philosophical reflection and so on, written at different times between, let us say, the eighth century BCE and the early second century of this era. Its many authors wrote to meet the needs of their own times rather than our own. The historians among them wrote history as they saw it, and they presented the past of Israel in terms designed to meet their own political or religious agenda, not our agenda. Divine inspiration may have led them to write better than they knew, but nevertheless they were writing as human beings for their own human situation, and could not have known what use later generations might make of their work or what interpretations they might put on it. And their work is itself part of history, and the historical books of the Bible are part of ancient historiography, to be read and studied alongside other ancient writings and other evidence of that past. And among that 'other' evidence is, of course, what we loosely call 'archaeology'.

'Archaeology' was once a general term referring to study of the past; so Josephus entitled his twenty-volume history of the Jews 'The archaeology of the Jews'. Archaeology now popularly describes the activity of those who excavate ancient sites. The best definition is perhaps that of R. J. Braidwood: 'the study of things men made and did, in order that their whole way of life may be understood' (in *Archaeologists and What They Do* (New York 1960), quoted in Daniel 1967: 17). This is not mere antiquarianism, but an intellectual enquiry into human experience. The professional archaeologist, using a wide range of techniques, studies systematically the material remains of the past and thus contributes to the general historical task along with other scholars who study the literary, inscriptional, artistic or other recorded evidence. The archaeological evidence from the ancient states of Israel and Judah and the ancient writings enshrined in our modern Bible are perhaps the two most important sources for the history of the people of ancient Israel and of the early Christian church; but evidence both archaeological and literary from the ancient surrounding nations – Egypt, Syria, Babylonia, Assyria and the Graeco-Roman world – must not be ignored. Correct assessment of the relative value of evidence from these different sources is the concern of the historian, but correct assessment has always been difficult; the literary scholar has not always understood the limitations of the archaeological evidence, and the archaeologist has not always understood the complexities of the literary evidence. Further, the biblical student and the archaeologist do not always share the same historical aims (let alone theological presuppositions). And some recent scholars would say that archaeological and literary sources simply do not meet, and cannot be synthesised; they are like apples and oranges, two completely different species. Axel Knauf argues that you have to know the history (from artefactual sources) before you can interpret the documents (1991: 26–64); T. L. Thompson argues that you have to establish an independent narrative of ancient Palestine as the context from which the text might speak (1991: 65–92); while J. M. Miller argues contrarily that you cannot interpret the artefacts without the written sources (1991: 93–102). The struggle continues, and we will return to it.

DEVELOPMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGY IN RELATION TO BIBLICAL STUDIES

It is in fact hard to say when archaeological observation relating to biblical material began. For example, the ancient writer who noted

the contemporary ruins of the ancient city of Ai (Josh 8:28) had an archaeologist's eye. So perhaps did Helena, wife of the emperor Constantine, who in 326 CE visited Palestine and founded basilicas at sites associated with Christ's life and death (but for her motivation, see Hunt 1982: 22–49), and the Bordeaux Pilgrim, who in 333 CE distinguished between the modern Jericho and the earlier city of Jericho by Elisha's fountain (Wilkinson 1971: 153–63 [160–1]). From the Byzantine age to the time of the Crusades, most western travellers to the Holy Land were pilgrims, interested in locating places associated with Christ or other famous biblical figures. Particularly important were the early fourth-century onomastikon of Eusebius (a gazetteer of biblical place names), the early fifth-century travelogue of the Spanish nun Egeria (Wilkinson 1971: 89–147), a mine of topographical information, and the sixth-century mosaic map of the Holy Land on the floor of a church in Madaba, east of the Dead Sea (Jenkins 1930; Avi-Yonah 1954; Wilken 1992: 174–81). These all reveal minds that were not simply pietistic; whatever the travellers' motivations, it will not do to deny the presence of academic observation before the Renaissance (Peters 1985; Wilkinson 1977). The tenth-century Islamic scholar, Mukaddasi, and the late twelfth-century Jewish rabbi, Benjamin of Tudela in Spain, and others, explored and described Palestine with critical eyes, but their works were not known in the west, and so did not influence western scholarship, until much later. The Crusades renewed western interest in the geography and topography of the Holy Land, at least among the participants and pilgrims who followed in their wake; such pilgrims did not travel as archaeologists, but their writings frequently show that they were not unobservant or without concern for historical detail (see, for example, North 1979: 93–110).

A whole series of papers might be written about the development of western intellectual and scientific interest in the Holy Land from the Crusades to the nineteenth century, and about the progression of travellers, some more curious and discerning than others, who began to observe and report the material remains of earlier ages, but that is not our object here. The nineteenth century is a major study in itself (cf. Ben-Arieh 1979), but there is no time to pursue it in this paper. The nineteenth century saw the dramatic expansion of archaeological and biblical study. This expansion owed much to political and economic factors such as the quest for a land route from the eastern Mediterranean to India, the imperial designs of Napoleon (whose surveyors mapped Palestine), the arrival of the

steam ship and the steam locomotive, the development of photography and of a cheaper printing technology, and the growth of education for all. In an era when the Protestant churches set a high premium on biblical knowledge and Sunday Schools flourished, there was increasing interest in biblical geography, biblical peoples and their customs, and a ready market for the hundreds of books, especially illustrated books, published on Palestinian travel (see Searight 1979; Ben-Arieh 1979; Silberman 1982; North 1979).

Probably the most important contribution for biblical scholars and archaeologists alike was Edward Robinson's *Biblical Researches in Palestine* (1841, 1856). With Eli Smith, a Protestant missionary and fluent Arabist, Robinson travelled the length and breadth of Palestine in 1838–9 and 1852 in order to locate places mentioned in the Bible. He based many of his identifications on the modern Arabic place-names, which, he argued, preserved the Semitic name from biblical times. Albrecht Alt later commented that 'in Robinson's footnotes are forever buried the errors of many generations' (Alt 1939: 374). Robinson had his limitations – he did not recognise that the tells which dotted the Palestinian plains were not natural hillocks but the remains of city mounds – and he was occasionally wrong, but his work is the foundation of all biblical toponymy and is still an essential reference work.

By 1850 the initial European exploration of Palestine and Transjordan had been achieved; there remained the accurate surveying and the excavation of important biblical sites. First Jerusalem (1865), then Sinai (1868–9), then the whole of western Palestine (1871–7) were surveyed by British army engineers. An important step was the foundation in 1865 of the Palestine Exploration Fund, whose aim was the scientific investigation of 'the Archaeology, Geography, Geology and Natural History of Palestine' (Besant 1886; Watson 1915; cf. *PEQ* 100, 1965: 1–2; Hodson 1993: 6–8). Although at first heavily supported and subscribed to by church leaders, the Fund kept to its scientific aims and flourishes still, especially through its journal, *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*. A younger sister, the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem, was founded in 1919, modelled on similar schools in Rome and Athens (Auld 1993: 23–6). In France, Germany, America, Israel and elsewhere, similar societies and journals appeared: for example, the first institute of the American Schools of Oriental Research was founded in Jerusalem in 1900 (King 1992: 186–8; 1988: 15–35; 1993: 13–16), followed shortly by its *Bulletin*. In Germany a number of important societies

arose, of which the two most important, the Deutsches evangelisches Institut für Altertumswissenschaft des Heiligen Landes (1900) and the Deutscher Verein für Erforschung Palästinas (1877) produced the *Palästina-Jahrbuch* and the *Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins* respectively (Weippert and Weippert 1988: 87–9; Strobel 1993: 17–19). The French Dominicans established the Ecole biblique (1890) and its journal, *Revue biblique*, in 1891 (Benoit 1988: 63–86; Puech 1993: 9–12). In Israel, the Israel Exploration Society (formerly the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society, founded 1914) has produced the *Israel Exploration Journal* from 1951 (Mazar 1988: 109–14).

The first excavation in Palestine was F. de Saulcy's investigation of the 'Tombs of the Kings' in 1863 (Ben-Arieh 1979: 175; Macalister 1925: 26–8). This turned out to be the family tomb of Queen Helena of Adiabene, a first-century convert to Judaism (Prag 1989: 272–4); excavation of a Jewish tomb gave some offence to Jews in Jerusalem. In 1867–8 Charles Warren, RE, dug shafts and tunnels to explore the Herodian temple platform of the Haram area, and he too met some opposition on religious grounds. Sensitivity to the feelings of the present has not always been the first thought of those who explore the past, and it remains important. Warren went on to excavate at Jericho (1868). One notes that the first excavations were directed, quite naturally, at famous biblical cities, and it was largely, though not entirely, the pull of these famous places which set the agenda and helped provide the public contributions which paid for the excavation.

The thing that captured the public imagination and changed the whole perspective on archaeology was the series of astonishing discoveries throughout the nineteenth century in Egypt and Mesopotamia. Scholarly study of Egypt really began with Napoleon's expedition in 1799. Egypt, with its great pyramids and temples, was fun in itself, but for many it was important as the scene of the biblical Exodus, and much scholarly time was given to identifying the 'store cities', Pithom and Ramses, of Exodus 1:12 and to dating the Exodus and identifying 'the Pharaoh of the Exodus' (James 1982). The discovery of the fourteenth-century BCE Amarna Letters, written to the ruling Pharaoh from Canaan, with their reference to the military activity in Palestine of the *habiru*, who sounded suspiciously like the Hebrews, influenced scholarly debate on the date of the Exodus from the 1890s to the 1960s, by which time it was generally accepted that neither the equation of Hebrew with *habiru* nor the nature of the Exodus story was as simple as previously thought (see, for

example, Albright 1966: 3–23; Bruce 1967: 3–20; Hayes and Miller 1977: 248–51; Miller and Hayes 1986: 54–79; Coote 1990: 33–93; Na’aman 1992: 174–81).

In Mesopotamia, the identification of Assyrian and Babylonian sites, with their dramatic carved monuments, by explorers and excavators like A. H. Layard (1817–94), and the decipherment of their inscriptions by scholars like Edward Hincks (1792–1866), H. C. Rawlinson (1810–95) and George Smith (1840–76), who discovered a tablet giving an account of a flood remarkably similar to the account in Genesis 6–9, stirred even greater popular enthusiasm. Interest was maintained by Leonard Woolley’s claim (1929) to have discovered evidence of the biblical flood at Ur, by the discovery of second-millennium BCE archives at Mari, Nuzi (1925–31) and elsewhere, by the discovery (1911–13) of Hittite records in north-central Turkey, by the discovery (1929) of Canaanite documents at Ras Shamra on the Syrian coast, and by the discovery in 1974 of a huge archive of third-millennium BCE texts from Tell Mardikh (ancient Ebla) in Syria. Such discoveries raised both public and scholarly interest in biblical history; but they illuminated the near-eastern background to the Bible rather than the Bible itself, and are now the concern primarily of specialists in these fields. When exploration of Egypt and Mesopotamia began, Egypt and Mesopotamia were known primarily from the Bible; as Egyptian and Mesopotamian archaeology progressed, Palestine, the land of Israel, began to be seen in the much wider context of the whole near east, and this changed fundamentally the way scholars began to look at ancient Israel. Ancient Israel, and the Bible, became part of a much larger scene.

ARCHAEOLOGY AND BIBLICAL STUDIES IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

A new era began with the work of Flinders Petrie at Tell el-Hesi in 1890 (Moorey 1991: 28–9; Drower 1985: 159–63). Petrie discovered from his examination of the mound of Tell el-Hesi, first, that tells were artificial, not natural mounds, formed by the accumulated strata of building debris over long periods of time; and, second, that each visible stratum of deposit contained its own distinctive types of pottery. Petrie produced a classified typology of the pottery taken from the different levels exposed on the mound. This gave a relative dating for the sequence of pottery, which could then be used as an

aid to dating similar levels elsewhere in Palestine; the discovery of Egyptian inscriptions or royal scarabs in a stratified context made it possible to link the scheme with the accepted Egyptian chronology and so produce a basic chronology for Palestinian material. The cross-linkage of stratified pottery with Egyptian and Assyrian inscriptional evidence remains vital to the establishment of the chronology of biblical history to this day. Though Petrie was a pioneer, his stratigraphy has not escaped serious criticism (for example Wheeler 1956: 29–34; Davies 1988: 49). Petrie, however, went on to correlate the strata excavated at Tell el-Hesi with the biblical evidence for the history of Lachish (Petrie 1891). This was a dangerous procedure, liable to distort interpretation of the history of the site, for subsequent research has shown that Tell el-Hesi was not Lachish (Doermann 1987: 129–56). The direct association of biblical texts and archaeological evidence has always tempted scholars, and is fraught with risk.

However, stratigraphy and pottery sequences had come to stay. Thirty years later the American scholar W. F. Albright at Tell Beit Mirsim (1926–32) began to refine Petrie's pottery chronology. Albright has been accused of using his knowledge of pottery typology – that is, the observed development of forms of pottery – to determine the stratification of the site, rather than using the observed stratification to determine the pottery typology, and of producing inadequate stratification, but he did construct a new and generally accepted ceramic index for Palestine. His polymathic control of historical and linguistic as well as archaeological data established him as the leading interpreter of biblical history and archaeology in his generation. He valued the evidence of both biblical text and excavated artefacts equally, and thus produced a synthesis which influenced a whole generation of American scholars, in particular biblical scholars and theologians like George Ernest Wright and John Bright, whose books *Biblical Archaeology* (1957) and *A History of Israel* (1960) respectively were standard textbooks for biblical students through the 1960s and 1970s. Albright used this synthesis to support the essential accuracy of the Bible's picture of the patriarchal age, the Exodus and conquest, the period of the Judges and the early monarchy, in opposition to the radical reconstruction of the biblical tradition by German scholars like Wellhausen and Alt and Noth. This synthesis was of course very popular in more conservative quarters, where any archaeological evidence which appeared to give support to the biblical picture was welcomed; but Albright's 'biblical archaeology'

synthesis has in turn suffered serious criticism from archaeologists and biblical scholars alike in the last twenty years (see, for example, Moorey 1981: 26–8; 1991: 67–75; Dever 1993: 23–35).

In America, Albright combined the roles of archaeologist and biblical scholar (though his field experience was comparatively limited); in Britain, with rare exceptions, the biblical scholars and archaeologists kept to their separate trades. John Crowfoot, John Garstang, James Starkey, R. W. Hamilton and C. N. Johns were primarily archaeologists, though concerned with biblical history; Kathleen Kenyon studied modern history, and became a protégée of Sir Mortimer Wheeler and, like him, a highly professional archaeologist. Kenyon developed what became known as the Wheeler-Kenyon technique; this used the trench method, but refined it by meticulous observation and recording of the stratigraphy. She checked her stratigraphy by preserving the baulk and drawing its vertical section as a record of what had been dug (Kenyon 1939: 29–37; 1953). Kenyon's excavation of Jericho (1952–9), by careful observation of stratigraphy (see especially Kenyon 1951: 101–38, written before her excavation began), corrected Garstang's dating of his so-called 'double' wall from the Late Bronze to the Early Bronze Age, denied the existence of any but the smallest settlement at Jericho in the Late Bronze Age, and so undermined an influential view of the dating of the Exodus and conquest of Canaan. More importantly in purely archaeological terms, Kenyon revealed at Jericho flourishing Middle Bronze and Early Bronze cities, and a history of the Neolithic period extending back to the tenth millennium BCE (Kenyon 1957). In another major excavation (1961–7) at Jerusalem Kenyon continued the century-old exploration of the topography and history of the city (Kenyon 1974), work continued in the 1970s and 1980s with dramatic success by the Israeli archaeologists Nahman Avigad, Yigael Shiloh, Benjamin Mazar and others. Kenyon was in no way a biblical scholar, and in excavating had no biblical axe to grind. She was concerned to present what the archaeological evidence told her, and took the biblical evidence mostly at face value, without critical analysis; if it fitted, well and good. (For a critique of Kenyon's work, see Moorey 1979: 3–10; Davies 1988: 49–54; Dever 1980: 41–8; Prag 1992: 109–23.) Israeli scholars, understandably, have tended to give greater credence to the biblical traditions and to national history; 'Quite naturally, every opportunity is taken to relate archaeological evidence to the biblical text' (Mazar 1988: 127). In this, as also in their approach to pottery

analysis and stratification, they have been closer to the Albright tradition than to the British or German scholarly tradition.

Kenyon was professionally independent of the Bible, and was probably more interested in Neolithic than in biblical material; but she was not quite indifferent to the Bible. In some ways she was part of the era of 'biblical archaeology'; her historical approach reveals the same limitations in scope as does that of her predecessors. For a century the Bible had influenced the choice of sites for excavation, and the aims of the excavators. Concern to establish dates and to verify the biblical presentation of history led to the search for city walls and palaces, temples and their cult vessels, inscriptions and coins; evidence of destruction or cultural change in Palestinian cities at the end of the Late Bronze Age, for example, was promptly related to the biblical account of the Israelite conquest of Canaan, without more ado. This was not necessarily from motives of biblical fundamentalism (though this element was sometimes present), but rather from an uncritical acceptance of the familiar outline of the biblical story, of which we cannot quite acquit Kenyon. But today's archaeologists have learned that biblical narratives must be treated critically.

Archaeology has also discovered other interests apart from the illustration of biblical political history. Archaeology's present concern is with understanding the settlement patterns in ancient times, the ancient use of land and methods of agriculture, food production, hydrology and ancient technologies, and with the structures of ancient societies – eco-facts as well as artefacts. Site excavation is accompanied by the detailed survey of the surrounding land so that the site can be seen in a wider context; and interest is no longer limited primarily to the biblical period but extended to all periods from palaeolithic times to the present. The number of regional studies is growing rapidly; one might note the Shechem area survey (E. F. Campbell 1968), work in the Negev (R. Cohen and W. G. Dever 1972, 1979), the central coastal plain (R. Gophna 1977), the Hesban region (R. Ibach 1976–8), Judaea, Samaria and the Golan (M. Kochavi 1967–8), Galilee and the Golan (E. Meyers 1978), and so on. Work of this nature – for example, I. Finkelstein's survey (1988) of Late Bronze–Iron Age sites in the hill country of Israel – has affected the interpretation of the biblical narratives of Israel's settlement in Canaan; it has completely undermined archaeological support for the idea of a conquest of the hill country from outside the land. On the other hand, it has been pointed out that Finkelstein's identification

of these Late Bronze–Iron Age indigenous new settlements as ‘Israelite’ depends on an uncritical application of the biblical story to interpret his archaeological observations (as Horace said, you can expel nature with a fork but it always comes creeping back) (Bartlett 1989: 290–5; cf. Dever 1991a: 77–90). The surveys of Transjordan from Nelson Glueck’s in the 1930s to those of Max Miller, Burton MacDonald and others in the 1970s and 1980s have greatly improved our picture, drawn hitherto mainly from biblical sources, of the history and culture of the Iron Age kingdoms of the Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites (see, for example, MacDonald 1988; Bartlett 1989; Miller 1991; Bienkowski 1992). The modern archaeologist has also learned to look for answers to questions about ancient populations and their political, economic, cultural and religious organisation and activities by beginning from observation of similar societies today, as well as by drawing inferences from observed patterns of ancient settlements. The dangers of reading back from the present are obvious, but nevertheless the questions raised are pertinent. The interests of classical historiography have been replaced by the concerns of anthropology and the social sciences. Someone has commented that the confidence now put in such social reconstruction is not unlike the confidence previously put in artefactual evidence by Albright and his colleagues. Not surprisingly, debates about method fill the journals.

THE VALUE OF ARCHAEOLOGY FOR BIBLICAL STUDIES

What value, then, has archaeology for biblical studies? Clearly, archaeology has thrown light on Israel’s material culture – buildings, architecture, city planning, city defences, burial customs, religious cult, temples, synagogues, *mikva’oth*, water supplies, costume and jewellery, writing, trading, agriculture, domestic life, and so on. We can set Israel firmly in the wider context of the ancient near-eastern culture and understand Israel as part of the wider world. But few archaeological finds bear directly on the biblical narrative. The water pool at el-Jib discovered by J. B. Pritchard may be the pool by Gibeon of 2 Samuel 2:13. The Siloam tunnel in Jerusalem with its inscription perhaps speaks eloquently of Hezekiah’s preparation for an Assyrian siege in 701 BCE – though a recent conference paper by P. R. Davies and J. Rogerson argued that the tunnel was built in the Maccabean period. The tomb inscription of one Shebna

in the village of Silwan across the Kedron valley from Jerusalem may be from the tomb of the man criticised by Isaiah (Is 22:6). The famous Moabite stone was erected in honour of king Mesha of Moab (cf. 2 Kgs 3), but while it witnesses to Mesha's existence it does not relate easily to 2 Kgs 3 (Dearman 1989). From Assyria we have pictorial records of such events as the payment of tribute by king Jehu in 841 BCE and the capture of Lachish by Sennacherib in 701 BCE (which the Bible does not actually mention), and from Babylon records relating to the imprisonment of king Jehoiachin of Judah and his sons. Such evidence does at least confirm that the Bible's historical records speak of real people and real events, even if they do not confirm the biblical reports in every detail.

Many, however, have tried to use archaeology to prove 'the truth of the Bible'. If Albright did not claim quite so much, he did use archaeological evidence to attempt to restore confidence in the essential historicity of the biblical tradition, and to discredit the scepticism of some biblical historians. The problems here are, first, that such attempts reveal a simplistic view of the nature of 'history' in the Bible, and, second, that archaeology, while it might provide evidence for the site of Solomon's temple, or evidence for popular cultic practices, has nothing to say about the validity of such ideas as the kingdom of God, or the meaning of the poem about the servant in Isaiah 53. The biblical student has to realise that the discovery of a ship on Mount Ararat or of the broken tablets of the law at the foot of Mount Sinai will not prove the existence of Yahweh or the validity of the interpretation put on the historical events (whatever they were) by the biblical authors. Archaeological research may once have found the tomb of Jesus and may yet find the grave of Moses, but such discoveries will not demonstrate the uniqueness of Yahweh or the resurrection of Jesus. And, thirdly, archaeological research has often offered more evidence, or less evidence, than was desired, at least in some quarters. The Bible, for example, totally ignores the existence of any female consort for Yahweh; yet recent evidence from Kuntillet 'Ajrud has suggested to many scholars that at least in one place a female consort of Yahweh was worshipped (Meshel 1992: 103–9; Dever 1984: 21–37; 1990b: 140–9). (Against this, however, see the paper by A. D. H. Mayes in the present volume.) The biblical picture of the patriarchal age does not give a modern historian's picture of the archaeologist's Early, Middle or Late Bronze Age (whichever one you take to be the 'patriarchal' age); archaeological evidence has not supported the biblical picture of the 'conquest' of the land, and it has

suggested that the Omride dynasty in the ninth century had more wealth and power than David and Solomon a century earlier (see, for example, Dever 1992: 354–67). The picture given by the archaeologist is not necessarily the same picture as that given by the biblical historian; the two are interested in different things. Neither archaeology nor biblical criticism, in fact, can really be apologists for the biblical faith, though they may provide evidence of the material context in which we believe God acted or the incarnation took place. We may not equate truth with factuality, nor history with theology, though we may find physical remains of places where we believe or our ancestors believed God was present, and we preserve writings which contain our Hebrew or Christian ancestors' interpretation of the work of God.

A major debate has focused round the term 'biblical archaeology'. W. F. Albright approved the term, at least in a geographical sense, arguing that biblical archaeology covered all lands mentioned in the Bible. It was for him a wider term than 'Palestinian archaeology'; it was that archaeology which had any bearing on biblical studies (Albright 1969: 1). G. E. Wright, a pupil of Albright's, held a similar view; he identified biblical archaeology as 'a special "armchair" variety of general archaeology' and the biblical archaeologist as one who

studies the discoveries of excavations in order to glean from them every fact that throws a direct, indirect, or even diffused light upon the Bible. He must be intelligently concerned with stratigraphy and typology, upon which the methodology of modern archaeology rests. . . . Yet his chief concern is not with methods or pots or weapons in themselves alone. His central and absorbing interest is the understanding and exposition of the scriptures.

(Wright 1957, 1962: 17; see also Wright 1971: 70–6)

Professor Dever has objected strongly to the term 'biblical archaeology' because it suggests apologetic attempts to use archaeology to prove the Bible true. He has argued for the descriptive, regional designation 'Syro-Palestinian archaeology' (for example Dever 1985: 31–74; 1992: 354–67). This is not the same thing at all as 'biblical archaeology'. 'Biblical archaeology', he has argued, does not describe what he and his professional colleagues do. They are professional archaeologists who happen to exercise their professional archaeological skills in one part of the world rather than another. Archaeology exists as a discipline independently of the Bible, alongside other disciplines such as anthropology, philology, philosophy and so on. It provides an

alternative perspective, which allows us to bring to light things with which the Bible does not concern itself – for example, folk religion, architecture, land use, etc. Archaeology has established itself as a separate, independent academic discipline, with its own scholarly agenda; it should no longer be regarded simply as the handmaid of historians or theologians. However, scholars such as Darrell Lance (1982: 97–101) and Alfred Glock (1986: 85–101) have argued vigorously that ‘biblical archaeology’ is still a legitimate term. Syro-Palestinian archaeology is concerned with Palestinian history; biblical archaeology is ‘that subspecies of biblical studies which seeks to bring to bear on the interpretation of the Bible all the information gained through archaeological research and discovery’ (Lance 1982: 100). It is concerned with the elucidation of the biblical text, and to be a biblical archaeologist is not to eschew scholarship. Dirt-archaeologists should not scorn the biblical scholar – though doubtless biblical scholars would do well to keep out of dirt-archaeologists’ hair.

This leaves us with the question of how the apples and oranges of archaeology and biblical studies might relate. They are certainly two different, separate disciplines, and in fact two separate histories of ancient Israel, or ancient anywhere, can be written from the archaeological or literary, textual evidence. The artefacts need interpreting, the texts need interpreting. Artefacts and texts each have different origins, different contexts, and speak of different things. But both artefacts and texts are needed, even if they do not each necessarily throw direct light on the other. Axel Knauf argues that archaeology and texts do not meet, and wants to write a history of ancient Israel on the basis of objective archaeological evidence, which can be used as a context from which to interpret the literary texts (Knauf 1991: 26–64). But that is surely just as bad as using the texts as a context from which to interpret the archaeology. We must also remember that we put meaning on artefacts just as the biblical writers put meaning on events. The basic answer must be that the reconstruction of all aspects of biblical history is an interdisciplinary affair in which linguists, philologists, palaeographers, textual critics, literary historians, archaeologists and others all share. The archaeologist is no autonomous super-being; the archaeologist also needs the help of other specialists – architects, radio-carbon dating technologists, palaeobotanists, chemists, epigraphists, and so on. Archaeology is a discipline which, like all other academic disciplines, thrives only in the company of others; biblical archaeology, in so far as it exists, refers to that archaeology which has relevance to the field of biblical studies. One

might speak similarly of industrial archaeology. In turn, the biblical scholar needs the expertise of the professional archaeologist to illuminate the biblical record. As Morton Smith observed in a famous presidential address to the Society for Biblical Literature in 1968, 'for a correct history of the Israelites we must have the archaeological facts determined quite objectively and independently by competent archaeologists, and the biblical texts likewise by competent philologists, and then we can begin to compare them' (Smith 1969: 34). I would qualify his word 'facts' to include interpretation, and I would not limit biblical scholars to philologists, but in principle Morton Smith was right. Misunderstandings occur when an archaeologist interprets an excavated biblical site by uncritical use of the bible, or when, conversely, a biblical scholar reconstructs history with the help of an equally uncritical use of archaeology. The history of biblical interpretation contains many examples of both errors; it is to be hoped that in future students of the text and students of the soil will develop mutual respect for each other's disciplines, and so will be able to cooperate in meaningful and productive dialogue.

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