

## APPENDIX IV

### ARCHAEOLOGY

The Bible contains much historical material. Evidence that the Judaism is true must also apply to this material. Questions have been raised about the factual accuracy of the Bible as an account of ancient history, especially in the light of archeology. It is impossible to do full justice to this vast subject here. In this Appendix I will present the views of two archeologists who argue against wholesale rejection of Biblical history, and a few of the discoveries that support the truth of some of the historical descriptions in the Book of Genesis. I hope that his material will encourage the caution and critical skepticism that are appropriate when confronting the latest announcement that archeology has conclusively refuted the Bible.

Let us start by formulating the method that should be used to assess the reliability of the Biblical description of ancient history. The Bible describes the lives of the Patriarchs, wars, migrations, famines, the rise and fall of empires and so on. How should we test the reliability of that record? Some people suggest the test should be this. If archeology reveals other ancient records, for example, Egyptian hieroglyphics, or Assyrian or Babylonian records, then we can check the Bible against them. If the Bible agrees with them, that is evidence that the Bible is correct. If the Bible disagrees with them, then that shows that the Bible is incorrect. These people feel that this is an objective, neutral way of assessing whether the Bible's account of history is reliable.

In fact, this method is not at all objective. A contradiction between the Bible and other ancient records shows only that (at least) *one* of the records is wrong. It does not prove that the Bible is wrong - maybe the other records are wrong! To assume that the Bible is wrong is just a hidden prejudice against the Bible. When there is a contradiction between the Bible and other ancient sources, then the question has to be raised: How can we best understand the nature of the contradiction, and which source is more reliable?

When we evaluate the reliability of a source, one key fact must be kept in mind - *all ancient histories other than the Bible were written as propaganda*. This is something upon which historians and archaeologists of all stripes agree.<sup>1</sup> The function of ancient histories was to glorify contemporary powers. For that reason they would not record their own defeats. Often the sequence of events has to be pieced together from the one-sided accounts of the victors. An Egyptian defeat will be recorded only in the annals of the Babylonians who won the war.

As an example, consider the Exodus. Why is it that no ancient Egyptian records mention the Exodus? The answer is that this was a spectacular defeat for Egypt, and Egypt *never* recorded its defeats.<sup>2</sup> Therefore the absence of the Exodus from their records is not evidence against the occurrence of the events.

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<sup>1</sup> In his survey of sources for information concerning political history in the ancient Orient, Von Soden says (p. 46): "...accounts of events through ...various types of chronicles...and further statements in the Old Testament and by ancient writers; outside of Israel, however, there was no historical writing in the ancient Orient in the strict sense of the term..." Baron, p.25-6: "But a consecutive historical literature with that fine combination of factual statement, pragmatic interpretation, and charming presentation, as composed by the Hebrew writers and compilers between the tenth and eighth centuries, finds no parallel whatever in other ancient literatures before the Greeks...the universal treatment of history by these early writers...start[ing] out with the admission that twenty generations preceded Abraham...was in sharp contrast to the assumptions of the Babylonians and the Egyptians that they were the first to be created by their gods. Nowhere else, at that time or before, was such a sympathetic treatment of "world history" possible as is found in Chapter 10 of the first book of Moses." See also Berment and Weizman, p. 61; Bright, p. 122. And see De Burgh, pp. 156-157: "the Greeks created history...for they were the first to grasp its two essentials, the distinction...between fact and fiction, and the necessity of a reasoned interpretation of recorded fact...Hebrew history was anonymous, the product of a group; even the prophets preface their message, not with 'Thus saith Isaiah...' but with 'Thus saith the Lord.' The Greek historian spoke in his own name..." And footnote 4: "thus the Semites, for all their sense of the religious significance of historical events, left no history that deserves the name. The historical books of the Old Testament (e.g.) are mere chronicle, the expression of corporate rather than individual judgment." In other words, De Burgh has no complaint against the factual truth of the Bible. He denies it the title "history" only on the grounds that it does not include the interpretation an identified author.

<sup>2</sup> We are speaking here of official court records. It may happen that as individual records local disasters, and it is conceivable that this may be recovered by archeology, though this will be much less likely to happen than finding the royal records. The Ipiwur papyrus is a case in point. This was authored by some individual and records events that bear

In addition to having an open mind in dealing with contradictions between the Bible and other ancient literary sources, we need to have a balanced appreciation for the strengths and weaknesses of archeology as a whole. The best example of which I am aware for such a balanced introduction to archeology is the lecture by George Athas of the University of Sydney, from which excerpts are reproduced below.<sup>3</sup> It is used here by permission of the author; emphasis is in all cases my addition to his text.

<sup>1</sup> **Abstract:** The Copenhagen School of Thought, popularly known ‘Minimalism,’ is an identifiable method of scholarship within biblical studies. It arose out of the need for scholars to account for the discrepancies between the biblical texts and the discoveries of archaeologists. It proposes seeing the biblical literature as purely story rather than as historiographical literature which can shed light on actual history. The ‘Minimalist’ method proposes using archaeology alone for the purpose of reconstructing history. This approach has many attractive features but fails to present a method of investigation which is entirely free of problems, including bias. It is just one paradigm among others which can be used to investigate the history of Syria-Palestine.

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some resemblance to the Ten Plagues. However it is difficult to date both the plagues and the papyrus. It is therefore not unambiguous evidence for the plagues.

<sup>3</sup> The following is an edited transcript of a lecture given by [George Athas](#) to students at the University of Sydney in the first year course "Biblical Studies" on April 29th, 1999. Since this paper is a transcript note, it is not to be read as a literary article, but as the notes used by George Athas in the giving of the lecture. However, much of the text of this lecture has been reworked for greater ease in reading (rather than listening). This paper may be freely quoted for the purposes of research, but it must be referenced in the following way:

ATHAS, George, 'Minimalism': The Copenhagen School of Thought In Biblical Studies, Edited Transcript of Lecture, 3rd Ed, University of Sydney, 1999  
(<http://members.xoom.com/gathas/copensch.htm>).3

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‘Minimalism’ says that the Bible is very close to irrelevant for reconstructing the history of Ancient Palestine, especially of the people we know as the Ancient Israelites.

Now, essentially, Minimalism arose out of the need to account for some of the major discrepancies between the Bible and what archaeologists have failed to dig up in Israel and Palestine. For decades... scholars interpreted archaeology in light of what the Bible said. But then, historians and archaeologists started to encounter difficulties. The evidence they were looking for to confirm various aspects of the biblical records just simply were not turning up. What made the problem worse was that archaeologists were refining their techniques, honing and sharpening their skills, so that methods were becoming more accurate, more precise. So suddenly, the old conclusions had to be reassessed.

It was these types of discrepancies between what the Bible said and what archaeologists said that started the ball rolling towards what we today know as the Copenhagen School of thought, or colloquially as “Minimalism”.

We have archaeology on the one hand, and on the other, we have the Bible as a corpus of literary texts .... Logically, then, the quest to find Ancient Israel – to find the history of the people who lived in Syria-Palestine some 3000 years ago – was to see how much archaeology and the literary texts of the Bible overlapped. If they overlapped, then we could come to one firm conclusion: The biblical texts are historically reliable and accurate....This could lead to 2 other conclusions:

- (i) It meant that either the Biblical texts were written very close to the events they describe; or
- (ii) The memory of these events was transmitted through history orally with a remarkable accuracy, and then written down faithfully. Now that would be astonishing accuracy.

*[Notice that Athas, taking the position of a neutral scholar, does not even mention the possibility the accuracy is due to the fact that these texts record prophecy from G-d. – D. G.]*

Yet, we have already seen that archaeology and the literary texts of the Bible did not overlap completely. So, scholars' task in reconstructing Ancient Israel became snagged on trying to account for the discrepancies – for the parts where archaeology and the texts did not overlap. They had to ask “If they overlap in some areas, why do they not overlap in others?” The School of Copenhagen (or ‘Minimalism’) attacks these questions and it comes up with a possible answer.

How do Minimalists do history? Firstly, we have to understand their framework – their basis for doing things the way they do.

(1) The Bible is a corpus of literary texts, first and foremost.... It is a mistake, say ‘Minimalist’ scholars, to claim...that they record history.... No, ‘Minimalists’ say that the Bible must firstly be treated as story, not history, because the authors of the biblical texts created stories – they did not write objective history.

(2) ...One of the favourite past-times of ‘Minimalist’ scholars is to ask (and this is an all-important question), “What would we conclude about these artifacts that we find, if we did not have the Bible?” Would we make the same conclusions?

So, say people like Philip Davies, scholars have created a false Ancient Israel...a figment of scholars’ imaginations. They have taken the Bible and illegitimately used it to interpret archaeology....

(3) This is why ‘Minimalist’ scholars advocate the reverse approach. Thomas Thompson, among others, says that we should not be using the Bible to enlighten us about our archaeological discoveries. Rather, we should be using our archaeological discoveries to enlighten us about the Bible....

Archaeological artifacts...do not carry an author’s bias, say ‘Minimalist’ scholars. When we dig up an ancient city, we don’t find bias. We find objective artifacts.... So, logically, where archaeology and the

Bible differ, more weight has to be given to the archaeology and the artifacts, because they are the primary source and they are by nature more objective than written texts that have a purpose of influencing a reader....

This policy of “Artifacts first, Bible last”...allows us to evaluate the Bible in new objective light. If the artifacts and the Bible just do not match up, then ‘Minimalist’ scholars say we must choose the artifacts to help us reconstruct history.

‘Minimalist’ scholars provide an answer in 3 parts [to the question] “Why are there discrepancies between archaeology and the biblical texts?”

(a) The first answer we have already looked at. It is because the biblical texts are works of literature, not historiography....

(b) The second reason, say ‘Minimalist’ scholars, for why we find discrepancies between history and the Bible is that the biblical texts are all late documents, written many years, probably centuries after the events they are supposed to portray

(c) ...the third reason why ‘Minimalist’ scholars say there are discrepancies between the Bible and archaeology...the biblical literature reflects a particular ideology.

...Now, let us look at the weaknesses – what the ‘Minimalist’ approach has against it....

(1) Firstly, since ‘Minimalist’ scholars have put all their eggs in one basket, namely archaeology, if there are any faults with archaeology, then we have to say that many ‘Minimalist’ eggs will get smashed. And, indeed, there are many problems with archaeology so this is where we find most of the chinks.

(i) *Firstly, it is a fundamental mistake to think that archaeology is an exact science. It is not....* One of the catchcries of ‘Minimalist’ scholars, we will remember, is that biblical texts are biased and subjective, whereas artifacts are mute, unbiased, and objective.... The truth of it, though, is that an archaeologist is just digging up something that exists in the here and now. The only real firm concrete conclusion that an

archaeologist can arrive at, is to say, “This is the way we found the ruins”. The job of archaeologists is to see if they can somehow piece together how the artifacts and the ruins got into the state that the archaeologists found them in. Archaeologists are digging up yesterday and *only trying to figure out* how things looked 3000 years ago from these items....

(ii) ...Historians reach conclusions by looking at the data the archaeologists find and applying certain logical equations to them. For example, if a city was conquered, we should expect to find some evidence of this, like burnt debris from fires, bones strewn here and there, some walls knocked down, and so on. One of the points that actually led many scholars to claim that there was no such thing as an Israelite Conquest of Canaan under Joshua in about 1220 B.C.E., is that we do not find any evidence for it – no debris, no bones, no broken walls. How could it possibly have happened, this mammoth blitzkrieg, if we do not have the signs of one? This led to some scholars looking to other interpretations. Perhaps the Israelites came into Canaan peacefully and not with war? Perhaps they did not come in at all – maybe they were there all along as the Canaanites. Yet now, thanks to ‘Minimalist’ methods, more and more scholars are coming to the conclusion that there was no Israelite Conquest of Canaan under Joshua and that it is just epic myth or legend. **But what ‘Minimalist’ scholars and those they have influenced have not considered is the possibility that a conquest can occur without debris, strewn bones, and broken walls.**

In 1066, William the Conqueror conquered England. There are very few doubts about it. Yet there is no debris, no strewn bones, no broken walls to show us that that is indeed what he did. However, no one doubts it. In about 539 B.C.E., the Babylonian Empire which spanned a huge area, the biggest of its day, ceased to exist. The empire was conquered by another, that of the Persians, but we do not find any rubble or debris amongst the ruins of Babylon to show it. In fact, if the ruins are all we had to go by, we’d be forgiven for thinking that Babylon never was conquered because it continued to flourish as a city with hardly any change. Yet, it was conquered. It was conquered by Cyrus, king of Persia.

...If we apply 'Minimalist' scholars' own principle – "What would we say about the artifacts if we did not have the literary texts?" – to the example of Ancient Babylon or Medieval England, what would we come up with? We would probably never come up with the idea that neither of them was conquered.

Sometimes the equations come undone the other way. We say that if a city was conquered, we expect to find debris, bones, and broken walls. So when we do find those things in an ancient city, we say, "Someone must have come past and conquered this city. And look, no one was living there afterwards, all the people are gone." However, *perhaps there are other explanations for the debris?* Maybe such a scenario was actually caused by an earthquake? Perhaps all the people died off because of some plague or disease, and in the anarchy which followed, things got destroyed? Or maybe the two kids living near the city gate started a fire and it got out of control?

So, we see that there are a heap of explanations for the way the artifacts get into the shape that archaeologists find them in. *'Minimalist' scholars have a tendency to opt for the 'minimal approach' which will yield results different to what the Bible says.*

(iii) *Many things in archaeology are relative and dependent on circular arguments.* One of the biggest areas that we can see this in, is dating. Most dating in archaeology is done by examining the pottery. We look at a pot, observe certain features and say, "These features are datable to this particular people at this particular time." *Yet quite often, the pottery is inconclusive. And quite often, the date of pottery in one area is dependent on the pottery of another area whose dating is not fixed, making the whole dating for both areas unstable.* However, this situation quite often becomes lost in the volumes and volumes of work written by archaeologists and historians. *Scholars forget that these dates are relative to other things and often treat them as though the dates are absolute when they are not.* And quite often, new discoveries mean we have to reassess the dating of certain items yet quite often there is an inertia in this process of re-evaluation. *Quite often we just interpret new evidence with the conclusions we formed 10 years ago, instead*



*of reassessing all the evidence to incorporate new findings.* We say, “But we found this 10 years ago, so how can you say this new thing?” And quite often, the conclusions we reached 10 years ago were based on relative datings, not absolutes. Yet we often forget that.<sup>4</sup>

One of the most prominent archaeologist in Israel is Israel Finkelstein. At the moment, Finkelstein is proposing redating all our chronologies for 10th and 9th century BCE Israel down by one century to the 9th and 8th centuries BCE. *Other scholars, though, equally prominent and good at what they do (eg., Amihai Mazar), completely disagree with Finkelstein. It serves to demonstrate that nothing in archaeology is fixed.* Not all dates are set in concrete.

(iv) *...In fact, most sites in Israel today have only been excavated to an extent between about 5-30% of what is there.... That means that our picture of Ancient Israel, even if we are painting it from the artifacts and ruins as ‘Minimalist’ scholars want us to do, is incomplete....* On top of this, the artifacts are subject to the forces of time and nature, as well as the minds of archaeologists, historians, anthropologists and scholars, all of whom are subjective. *Just as a written document is subject to an author’s mind as well as a reader’s, so artifacts are subject to the minds of archaeologists and historians....*

Jerusalem is a prime example. What has been dug up is open to very different interpretations. *Some say the excavations prove that Jerusalem was uninhabited in the 10th century B.C.E.. Others look at the evidence and say there is a flourishing town there at the time – without any recourse to their Bibles. Who is right? Who knows? Artifacts are subject to peoples’ bias.*

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<sup>4</sup> For another general caution in trusting pottery as an indicator of historical events, consider this statement by Von Soden, pp. 13-4: “For a long time scholars have sought to deduce especially important developments...from cultural changes which can be read in archaeological remains, particularly in ceramic materials. Thus, archaeological evidence has long been interpreted in a strongly historical fashion. Yet there can be frequent and substantial changes in ceramic style, even if no other people has come onto the scene. In other cases, very important events, such as the invasion of Asia Minor by the people later known as the Hittites, cannot be read at all in the contemporary archaeological finds. Conclusions based on ceramic evidence and miniature sculpture can be drawn only in rare cases, and then only with great care.

Yet regardless of whether there was and how we can interpret the evidence, we can see the equation that ‘Minimalist’ scholars make. *‘Minimalist’ scholars often say that because we do not find the evidence for ‘X’, there probably never was an ‘X’....*

The problems with this are numerous. *Firstly, we have not dug up everything.... Secondly... just because we have not found ‘X’ does not mean ‘X’ did not exist. Perhaps ‘X’ was destroyed? Perhaps ‘X’ was reused by people centuries later?* ‘Minimalist’ scholars would say that such speculation has no place in serious scholarship. They would claim that as scholars they are dealing with reality, not hypotheticals....[But] the only reason why someone would conclude that because we did not find ‘X’ so ‘X’ never existed, is bias. Of course, it is also bias to conclude that perhaps we just have not found ‘X’ yet.

An example is Jerusalem in the early 14th century B.C.E., before the Israelites came onto the scene. From correspondence in the Amarna Letters from Egypt, we know that Jerusalem was ruled by someone called Abdi-Hepa, and that he was considered by some of the other rulers in the region to be a trouble maker. However, there is not much evidence for a 14th century BCE Jerusalem. If we did not have the Amarna Letters, we probably would have said that Jerusalem was an unimportant village in the 14th century BCE, if it was inhabited at all. Yet, just because we have not found much in the way of 14th century BCE Jerusalem does not mean Abdi-Hepa never existed and never lived to cause trouble.

(2) This brings us to another chink in ‘Minimalist’ scholars’ armour and it is very close to their heart. The only reason we know of Abdi-Hepa is because of the actual written documents. The very question that ‘Minimalist’ scholars ask – “What would we say if we had no Bible?” – is perhaps their biggest chink....

*Let us go back to 1066 in England. If we did not have the written texts to tell us that William conquered England, we would not have known about it. **So the written texts are indispensable.** Similarly, if it was not for the written texts, we would not have known that Cyrus walked into Babylon in 539 B.C.E. in a*

*bloodless conquest. The written documents are indispensable.* We just cannot do away with the Bible as 'Minimalist' scholars want us to in one fell swoop. Yet, say 'Minimalist' scholars, the Bible is not historiography....[But] *even though the Bible was not written as historiography does not mean we cannot extract any history from it.*

*This is further confirmed by the fact that quite often the Bible gets it right....*

'Minimalist' scholars generally take the approach that if we cannot confirm a story in the Bible with archaeology, then we can probably conclude that it did not happen in history. They take this stance especially for the period we call the United Monarchy, the time when David and Solomon are said to have reigned in the 10th century B.C.E.. *Yet, if the Bible does contain some real history in it, then how can we judge whether any incident for which we have not found anything never did happen? Just because we cannot corroborate it here and now does not mean it never happened.* It is a value judgment stemming from bias to say that it did or it did not happen.

'Minimalism' is just one model or framework with which to do history.... It claims to eliminate many of the biases, but it just creates new ones. It is just one model and scholars must make a value judgment, a decision based on their own bias and their own perspective, as to whether they will use it or not. It has its pro's and con's like other models.... It offers just one of many possible solutions to our problem of reconstructing the history of Ancient Israel.

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For another critical evaluation of the results of the minimalist school, consider the following evaluation of the newest book by Thomas Thompson (of the Minimalist school) by Charles David Isbell.<sup>5</sup>

To scholars familiar with his previous works, the words with which Thompson opens this latest book will not be surprising. "Today we no longer have a history of Israel. Not only have Adam and Eve and the flood story passed over to mythology,[1] but we can no longer talk about a time of the patriarchs. There never was a 'United Monarchy' in history and it is meaningless to speak of pre-exilic prophets and their writings." In short, *"the Bible is not a history of anyone's past"* (p. xv). And again: *"In history, neither Jerusalem nor Judah ever shared an identity with Israel before the rule of the Hasmoneans in the Hellenistic period"* (p. 105). "The stories of Solomon and David, and even the story of good king Josiah, must wait for a second-century John Hyrcanus before they can find an historical context that makes sense" (p. 149). "It is only a Hellenistic Bible that we know" (p. xv). Why? The answer to this question is the reason for Thompson's publication of this book.

It is not difficult to summarize the basic thesis of Thompson. *For him, if it were not for archaeology and the physical artifacts it recovers, there would be no history of the ancient Near East.* Reading archaeology through the lens of the Hebrew Bible yields a distorted and inaccurate picture because it assumes the basic historicity of the biblical narratives. The process should work the other way. *The ideology of the Bible must be read through the unbiased and objective lens of archaeology.* We may find that once in a while the Bible luckily gets something correct, but *archaeology will receive the last word on every point at which the two disagree.[5] ....*

To maintain his posture that everything in Scripture is Hellenistic or Hasmonean, Thompson declines throughout to reckon with the possibility of a complex literary tradition or to address the redaction

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<sup>5</sup> H-Net Review: Charles David Isbell <cisbell@home.com> on Thomas L. Thompson, *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel*, London: Random House Basic Books, 1999.

history behind the final form of a piece of biblical literature. He also declines to consider examples of inner biblical exegesis that demand a fairly long period of development among the professional guilds (like the prophets) that produced them.

Ultimately, any method must be judged by the results it produces. While it can be admitted that Thompson has done biblical scholarship a service by calling for rigor, denouncing blind ideology, re-examining many hallowed theories, it must also be said that *his own examples of the validity of his method leave more to be corrected than the theories he would replace*. That is, *when Thompson turns from criticizing everybody else to the task of offering his own exegeses of specific biblical texts, the results are not only unsatisfying, but may be seen to rest on ideological foundations that seem to this reviewer to be virtually indefensible*. Further, ***his own biblical interpretations do not conform to the standards Thompson wishes to impose on everyone else***.

At this point I hope the reader is convinced that there is widespread controversy concerning the methods and results of archeology.<sup>6</sup> The investigator whose “results” we read relies heavily on his personal ideology in arriving at those results. It is also obvious that the whole discipline is still in its early stages with respect to Biblical studies, since only 5-30% of the relevant material has been recovered. Nevertheless, it is instructive to see what some archeologists report as evidence which does confirm some of the information from the earliest sections of the Bible.

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<sup>6</sup> It is instructive to read the views of William Dever on the question of minimalism. Dever is one of the world's most respected archeologists. With a Ph. D. from Harvard, he is professor of Near Eastern Archeology and Anthropology and the University of Arizona. His scholarly positions include serving as the director of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archeology in Jerusalem and of the W.F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research in Jerusalem. He is editor to *Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research*. He rejects minimalism as a prejudiced position, one that fails to acknowledge clear archeological findings that demonstrate the existence of a Jewish state long before the Hellenistic period of the Second Temple. The discovery of an inscription reading “House of David” from at least as early as the ninth century B.C.E. is sufficient for Dever to refute the claims of the minimalists. He also accepts the Merneptah Stele from the late thirteenth century B.C.E. that mentions Israel as evidence that at least what he calls “proto-Israel” did exist at that time.

As we have seen above (and see Appendix III), there is a wide variety of opinions concerning the accuracy of the historical records of the Bible. In particular, the stories of the patriarchs have been regarded by many as myths – stories invented to create a pre-history of the Jewish people. These myths were supposed to have been authored hundreds of years after the times they describe. They are thus assumed to have no genuine historical content.

One of the key symptoms of this myth-making is that the people writing the myth project their own conditions of life onto the past. They did not know that 500-1000 years earlier the conditions of life were very different from their own. They therefore copied their own conditions of life into the stories that they invented for the distant past. This is called “anachronism.” When this happens, sometimes archaeology will show us that the real conditions of life at the time of the story were quite different from what was described in the myth. For example, the writers may attribute to their ancestors weapons, trade routes, settlements and domesticated animals which exist in their own time, but not in the time of the story. From these contradictions we have evidence that the story is a myth.

But now suppose we find a story that is assumed to be myth, and yet agrees in detail with the conditions of life which really existed at the time the story describes. Then we do not have this reason – the reason of anachronism – to support the conclusion that the story is a myth. On the contrary, one would have to conclude, as George Athas puts it [see above], that either the Biblical texts were written very close to the events they describe, or the memory of these events was transmitted through history orally with a remarkable accuracy, and then written down faithfully. Or, as I remarked above, one might conclude that the text is prophetic. Each of these explanations rules out the origin of the story as a myth composed at a later date.

Here are some examples of the accuracy of the text as confirmed by archeology. We start with some of the material collected in Bronner.

(a) The book of Genesis describes Abraham's residence and travels in the land of Israel. He is described throughout as living in only the southern part of the land. As a matter of fact, during the period to which Abraham is assigned by the Bible, the northern part of Israel was not settled. Later, when supposedly the story was being written, it was settled. If someone invented Abraham's life later and projected his own conditions of existence on the past, there would be no reason for him to leave the Northern part of Israel out of the story. [P. 16]

(b) The names Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Lavan, and Joseph were in common usage in the patriarchal period and dropped out of usage thereafter. These names appear in archaeological inscriptions from that period and no later period.<sup>7</sup> In the Bible those names are used only in the book of Genesis. If the story was written hundreds of years later, how did the author get the right names for that period of time? [P. 18]

(c) It was long assumed, and some continue to believe, that the story of the patriarchs using camels for domestic labor was an anachronism. They believe that the domestication of the camel took place much later. However, some evidence has been discovered which indicates that there was at least some domestic use of camels even in the patriarchal period. There are eighteenth century B.C.E. Canophorin tablets in Northern Syria which list the domesticated animals and in which the camel is specifically mentioned. Another archaeological discovery depicts a camel in a kneeling position. A seal dating back to this period depicts a rider sitting on a camel. [Pp. 21-2].

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<sup>7</sup> One reader objected that this is a mistake, since Numbers 13: 7 records the name Joseph from the period following the Exodus, long after the Patriarchs. This is an elementary confusion. The point in the text is that if the stories of Genesis were written centuries after the times the stories describe, they could not have guessed the names current at the earlier time since *archeological findings show* that the names dropped out of use. This is an objection against the critic using the critic's own assumptions. Now the book of Numbers is not an archeological source. It is part of the text that the critic says was composed much later. For the critic, the use of the name Joseph in Numbers means only that the author of Numbers, whoever that might be, used the name Joseph in that story, just as the author of Genesis, whoever that might be, used that name in the book of Genesis. The critic cannot use it to show that the name was really used after the exodus.

(d) The book of Genesis says that Joseph was sold for twenty pieces of silver. That was the accurate price of a slave in Joseph's time, and at no other time. Slaves were cheaper beforehand, and they got increasingly more and more expensive later. Imagine the writer of the story putting in that detail hundreds years later. How would he know the price of slaves at the time of the story? [P. 38]

(e) The investiture of Joseph as viceroy in Egypt follows the pattern from that period. He stood before Pharaoh and had to be shaved because the Pharaohs in that period were shaved. He had a collar put around his neck and a ring put on his finger. He rode in a chariot second to the king. According to the hieroglyphics of that period, all these details are accurate. [P. 39]

In addition, Kitchen adds the following Biblical descriptions of the patriarchs that have been confirmed by archeology.

(f) The agreements made with foreign powers by Abraham and Jacob follow the pattern for such agreements found for the early second millennium B.C.E. [P. 52]

(g) The war of the four kings against the five kings in Genesis 14 reflects the geo-political conditions in Mesopotamia in only one period – the period of the patriarchs. The description of the alliance among the kings, and even the placement of the names of the kings, fit the archeological records from that period. [P. 56]

(h) References to the conditions in Egypt – the location of the capital and royal palaces – fit the patriarchal period and not later periods. [Pp. 57, 88-9]

Kitchen also confirms Bronner's appeal to the price of slaves and the names appearing in Genesis as evidence for the correctness of the Biblical account of the patriarchs.

The accuracy of these details of the conditions of life from the patriarchal period (and many others documented by Bronner) does not prove that Genesis was written by G-d. But it does show that the



usual proof of myth fails here. It also indicates how precarious a judgment is when it is based upon not finding archeological confirmation. As George Athas emphasizes above, *absence of evidence is not evidence of absence*. Thus the earlier judgments that the book of Genesis contains anachronisms needed to be revised in the face of the new discoveries.

Of course, there are still outstanding problems. For example, the war between the four kings and the five kings [Genesis 14] seems to have left no remains, and many are concerned with the lack of evidence of the Exodus from Egypt. But even here, a little reflection may at least reduce the severity of the problems.

Concerning the war, recall the observation of George Athas that wars need not leave behind physical remains. William the Conqueror and the conquest of Babylon are admitted historical realities, and yet their wars left no archeological remains. After all, a war may consist of the victory of one army over another without large-scale destruction of property. Genesis does not record destruction of cities or other details of the war that could be expected to leave remains to be discovered by archaeology. The main battle is described as occurring at what is today the Dead Sea [Genesis 14: 8]. This is the one location that the Biblical account would expect us to find remains. It has yet to be excavated.

Concerning the Exodus, we first must ask what kind of archaeological remains we should expect to find. If you consider the story abstractly, without attention to the Biblical details, you might expect to find implements, clothing, vessels and weapons scattered all over the desert. You might expect a forty-year trek through the desert to produce human remains. Over a forty-year period many people will die. It should be possible to discover their bones. The truth is that, so far, none of these remains has been discovered.

Is this then evidence against the Biblical account? *Not at all*. The reason is that the Biblical story does not imply that such things will be found. On the contrary, it implies that they will *not* be found.

For example, the Torah says explicitly that *during the forty year period their clothing did not wear out* (Deut. 8:4). The Biblical story tells us that they did not leave behind any clothing, thus there will not be

any clothing to find. Indeed, if we *did* find clothing that would *contradict* the Biblical account! The fact that no clothing has been found *supports* the Biblical story.

This point is often missed. It is assumed that if there was a trek through the desert then they must have left clothes behind. But this assumption is a mistake. It is the result of marrying apples and oranges. If you take the general idea of the Exodus, and then you graft to it naturalistic assumptions about what such an event would involve, then from this combination you might deduce the expectation of discarded clothing. *But the combination represents a position that no one holds.* Those who adopt the Biblical position will adopt it as a whole, including the Bible's statement that the clothing did not wear account. To test their position, one cannot substitute an element that contradicts the Biblical account and then show that the newly minted half-Biblical account contradicts the evidence. If we are attempting to test the truth of the Biblical story, then we should include the details of the story itself. Once we do that, we see that finding no clothes is not evidence against the story.

Similar caution must be exercised with respect to the "missing" human remains. The Bible gives no details of how the people died. But Jewish tradition<sup>8</sup> records the following. Each year on the ninth of Av they dug a mass grave. All the people spent the night in the grave. In the morning, the survivors left the grave. Those who died were buried there. When we take into account the fact that they stayed in one location for nineteen of the forty years, and that the deaths in mass graves occurred on 37 years, we have a total of nineteen gravesites scattered in the Sinai.

That is what the story says should be somewhere in the Sinai. But now where should we look to find them? The Sinai desert is a big place and sands shift over time. We are talking about sands shifting over a period of three thousand years. Where exactly should we dig? How deep should we dig? How many holes do we need to put down to have a reasonable probability of finding twenty burial places, each burial

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<sup>8</sup> Bab. Talmud, Taanis, 30b, Rashi "Shekalu".

place being approximately two and one quarter blocks square [and one a half-mile square] in size?<sup>9</sup> There is no practical plan that could give even a low probability of finding those burial sites. So, the fact that they haven't found them is no evidence against the Exodus.

As a final example, let us consider Kathleen Kenyan's excavations at Jericho. She says the best date we have for the entry of the Jewish people into the land of Israel is 1400 B.C.E.<sup>10</sup> But the archeological evidence indicates that Jericho was destroyed about 150 years before. Therefore she concludes that the Jews couldn't have been the ones responsible for destroying Jericho. The Biblical account of Joshua's conquest of Jericho must be a myth.

Now how does she arrive at her conclusion that Jericho was destroyed no later than 1550 B.C.E.? She based her argument on the absence of imported Cypriot pottery. A certain style of pottery from Cyprus was imported into the area from 1550 to 1400 B.C.E., and she found none of it at Jericho. Therefore she concluded that Jericho must have been destroyed earlier than 1550 B.C.E.

But this conclusion is very weak.<sup>11</sup> It can be attacked in at least five different ways. (1) Method: conclusions based on what you don't find are always weak. (Remember: absence of evidence is not evidence of absence!) (2) Recall the caution urged above by both Athas and Von Soden in using pottery as a method of dating. (3) Kenyon herself says that Jericho was not on any of the major trade routes - is that where you expect to find imported pottery? Even if we allow for local distribution of the imported pottery, this will not be a primary location for such pottery. (4) She sank two shafts into what she herself describes as the poor section of the city. Is that where you expect to find imported pottery? (5) She totally ignored the dating of local pottery that had been found in earlier excavations that do come from dates later than 1550

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<sup>9</sup> Allow 2'x6' for each grave. On the average, 15,000 men died each year. [The women did not die - see Rashi, Numbers 26:64.] That is 180,000 square feet for the graves. Allow an equal area for perimeters for each grave - 360,000 square feet. That makes a square 600' per side. At twenty blocks per mile, a block is 264' long. Thus two and one quarter blocks per side give a square which can accommodate all the graves. And in where they stayed for nineteen years, a square with a side of 2625', or one-half a mile will be sufficient.

<sup>10</sup>This is not the Biblical date. I am concerned here only with her position that the conquest of Jericho by Joshua is against the archeological evidence.

<sup>11</sup>For the details of what follows, see *Biblical Archeological Review*, March/April 1990 pp. 44-56.

B.C.E. Thus even Kenyan's work, which enjoys a good reputation in the field, is not established beyond reasonable doubt.

What conclusions can we draw from the survey of archaeology presented in this Appendix? First, there is widespread disagreement concerning the accuracy, reliability, and stability of archeological "findings." The extent to which the positions archeologists hold are affected by bias, lack of imagination, the incompleteness of the available evidence, ideology and inordinate defense of received views, is a matter of heated dispute. There are even arguments over appropriate methods of research and analysis.

Second, reasonable caution would emphasize the inherent ambiguity of using the remains of artifacts from 2500+ years ago to infer the events and living conditions of those times. A war might not leave behind rubble, and rubble might not come from war. Pottery is not generally reliable as an indication of historical events. Written records cannot be dismissed, but must be treated with extreme caution since they reflect both the limited perspectives and the particular purposes of their authors.

Third, insofar as one is inclined to trust archeological findings, there are a number of surprising confirmations of the general conditions of life as described in Genesis. These confirmations would not have been expected if the text had been written hundreds of years later as a myth.

Fourth, as a consequence of the above, it is reasonable to understand the remaining cases in which archeology at present disagrees with the Biblical account as the result of the limited scope of the material found so far, or mistakes in interpretation of what has been found (due to faulty methods, entrenched views, bias, ideology, lack of imagination, etc.).

In sum: some Biblical descriptions have been confirmed by archeology; for some archeology lacks relevant evidence; for some archeology seems to have contradictory evidence, but even here the evidence is far short of positive refutation.<sup>12</sup>

I will end this chapter with one little insight that is due to William Albright that I think is fascinating for a general picture of ancient history. Albright has a proof that there was an influence of the Jews on the Greeks. The names of the Hebrew letters are words in Hebrew. Aleph, Bet, Gimmel, Dalet and so on all have meanings in the Hebrew. The names of the letters in Greek are obviously related to the names of the letters in Hebrew: alpha, beta, gamma, delta and so on. But, those sounds in Greek have no meaning in Greek. Alpha and Beta are not Greek words. Where did they get those names for their letters? Albright says they got them from the Jews. Perhaps indirectly the Phoenicians took them to Greece and gave the letters to them, but it ultimately comes from the Jews.

Now if the names of the letters of the Greek alphabet came from the Jews, what else came? In addition to studying the influence of the Greeks on the Jews, perhaps there needs to be a study of the opposite – the influence of the Jews on the Greeks!

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<sup>12</sup> G. Ernest Wright, founder of Biblical Archeologist and president of the American Schools of Oriental Research wrote in 1962: “The biblical scholar no longer bothers to ask whether archeology proves the Bible...He knows that such a question certainly to be answered in the affirmative.” Cf. Davis, “Faith and Archeology,” *Biblical Archeological Review*, (1993):57. William Albright, *Archeology and the Religion of Israel*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1942-68), 96 writes: “The Mosaic tradition is so consistent, so well attested by different pentateuchal documents, and so congruent with our independent knowledge of the religious development of the Near East in the late second millennium B.C., that only hyper-critical pseudo-rationalism can reject its essential historicity. John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1981), 130 writes: “The Biblical narrative, at least in all major points, is rooted in history.” John J. Bimson, *Redating the Exodus and the Conquest*, (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1981), 215-6 writes: “The biblical traditions and the archeological evidence relate with striking accuracy.” [Taken from *Permission to Receive* by Lawrence Keleman.]

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