

Layer by Layer: A Primer on Biblical Archaeology, by Ellen White
(Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2019).
Copyright © 2019 by Ellen White. All rights reserved.
www.anselmacademic.org.

Ellen White's *Layer by Layer* is lively, informative, and accessible. Reading it is like sitting in on a lecture with your favorite professor, who keeps the class engaged with well-chosen examples, anecdotes, and slides. These features keep the book grounded in the concrete realities of archaeology and biblical studies, and they also help build the case White is making for a partnership between the two disciplines. As she demonstrates in her final chapter, both are foundational for interpreting biblical texts. White's experience in both disciplines makes her an ideal guide and a model of the scholarly approach she advocates.

—Andrew Davis
Boston College

Romantic, controversial, myth-making, myth-breaking. Ellen White's introduction opens a window onto the fascinating world of biblical archaeology and some of its most famous proponents. Every reader will have their appetite whetted for more.

—Nathan MacDonald
University of Cambridge

Layer by Layer is a helpful and engaging primer on the intersection of archaeology and biblical studies. Pictures, charts, and pop culture references will engage students while providing professors plenty of resources for the classroom. Ellen White makes a convincing case that the disciplines of archaeology and biblical studies are stronger when in dialogue. *Layer by Layer* not only introduces the methods of archaeology, but also explores the basics of biblical exegesis. Respect for both disciplines is evident throughout the book and the final chapter ably demonstrates the advantages biblical archaeology provides by considering the origins of Israel.

—Heather Macumber
Providence University

One could scarcely hope for a more helpful introduction to biblical archaeology, a field subject to much sensationalism and misunderstanding. Ellen White explains what archaeologists really do and how their work relates to biblical studies. Her clear writing and judicious examples will engage students and laypeople alike. I foresee lots of students signing up for summer digs.

—Greg Carey
Lancaster Theological Seminary

Layer by Layer is an excellent companion to courses in either biblical studies or archaeology, introducing students of both disciplines to methodology used by their colleagues that will benefit their own studies. Ellen White draws upon her own experiences to vividly and candidly describe what it is like to do archaeological fieldwork and what such work has contributed to answering some of the major questions posed by the Bible. The book's lively, engaging, and humorous style makes reading enjoyable for both students and instructors.

—Tony Burke
York University Toronto

Author Acknowledgments

There are many people to thank for bringing this labor of love to fruition. First, I am grateful to the incredible staff at Anselm Academic for accepting and supporting this project: Maura Hagarty, for seeing my vision and providing me with the resources that I needed to deliver it. Penny Koehler, for keeping the administrative elements on track. Paul Peterson, for his insights as the development editor and making me wrestle with my assumptions to ultimately produce a better book. Though no longer with Anselm full time, Brad Harmon, for listening to me talk about the need for this book for about a decade, encouraging me to pursue it, and ultimately guiding me through the acceptance process. I also thank the three peer reviewers who provided immensely helpful feedback. Finally, thanks to the Anselm production and marketing teams. It was a privilege to work with Anselm!

If gratitude could be seen and measured, then the amount that I have for Corrine Carvalho would appear as a mountain. Her guidance has made for a clearer and more useful text. Moreover, her friendship and mentorship has made me a better scholar and person! In a similar vein, I extend my thanks to John L. McLaughlin, for encouraging me to explore biblical archaeology and for his ongoing assistance and direction with my work.

Thanks also go to Hershel Shanks, Susan Laden, and the team at the Biblical Archaeology Society for exposing me to more of the biblical archaeology world and demanding nothing less than perfection. Hershel especially pushed me to do things well the first time and then make them even better, and I appreciate that. Sue gave me the freedom to take on projects and run with them, to explore and develop a vision and see it through.

When it comes to teaching and student needs, Regina Edmonds taught me more than years of courses and classroom experience. She was my much-needed rock on which I built my teaching foundation in the midst of quicksand. I am perhaps most grateful to my former students, who taught me how to teach as I tried to teach them. You all taught me about how to connect and effectively communicate often complex material. I thank you for your patience and generosity as I experimented with you.

Dan Bahat, Amihai Mazar, Nava Panitz-Cohen, and Uri Davidovich all taught me about archaeology and fueled a passion for this subject within me. Field work is not a natural fit for me, but their tutelage, dedication, and stellar teaching skills made me yearn for my trowel.

Finally, I must thank my families (birth and created) for putting up with me, supporting me, and loving me. I especially appreciate my parents, who taught me that the best way to learn something was to see it for myself (and for enabling me to do just that). And deep gratitude goes to my perfect husband, Sven, who took over parenting while I locked myself in the office for days at a time to write this book. Sven, you are a great blessing and partner; there is no one better!

Publisher Acknowledgments

Thank you to the individuals who reviewed this work in progress including:
Randall Younker, *Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI*

LAYER
BY
LAYER

A PRIMER ON
BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

ELLEN WHITE



Dedication

It only seems appropriate to dedicate a book on archaeology
to all the precious Petrys (even though it is spelled differently) in my life.
To Sven and our children for all their love and support.

Created by the publishing team of Anselm Academic.

The scriptural quotations contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Copyright © 1993 and 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. All rights reserved.

Cover image: © Openfinal / Shutterstock.com

Copyright © 2019 by Ellen White. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced by any means without the written permission of the publisher, Anselm Academic, Christian Brothers Publications, 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, Minnesota 55987-1320, www.anselmacademic.org.

Printed in the United States of America

7088

ISBN 978-1-59982-959-3

CONTENTS

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Preface | 7 |
| 1. Mythbusters | 11 |
| 2. The Bible and the Spade | 22 |
| 3. Archaeology 101 | 39 |
| 4. Engaging Exegesis | 65 |
| 5. Biblical Exegesis and Archaeology: Stronger Together | 87 |
| Glossary of Terms | 103 |
| Index | 111 |

PREFACE

The name *biblical archaeology* may appear straightforward and, even if unfamiliar with the phrase, most people will think they understand what it means. The name likely suggests archaeology with a biblical focus and, while this was once an accurate understanding, the current model of biblical archaeology is more complex than this. Today, biblical archaeology is not a subdiscipline of archaeology but a field of inquiry that occupies the intersection between archaeology and biblical studies. Biblical archaeology is by nature an interdisciplinary dialogue between archaeology and biblical studies rather than an independent discipline. Therefore, to engage in biblical archaeology, one must become familiar with two disciplines and develop a basic understanding of the methods of both. This book provides just such an introduction.

Sometimes it is necessary to understand what something is not, in order to understand what it is. Biblical archaeology is a name that is often misunderstood and misapplied. For this reason, chapter 1 addresses common “myths” surrounding biblical archaeology and separates fact from fiction. Chapter 2 defines biblical archaeology in the modern era (post-millennium) and explores why this phrase became controversial (and remains so for some scholars).

Chapters 3 and 4 introduce the basic methods of both archaeology and biblical studies. This will help you gain insight into the primary disciplines involved in the dialogue and understand the types of data and questions each discipline produces. Chapter 5 explores the benefits of dialogue between these disciplines through an extended example that is still an open and evolving question in both fields.

This book is unique in focusing on the methods of both archaeology and biblical studies, and the method for engaging in biblical archaeology. While it uses real examples of biblical archaeology (places where the field and the text merge or collide), it is not merely a collection of such examples. This text assumes no prior knowledge of archaeology or biblical studies and explains key terms in both fields; thus it could be useful in both archaeology and biblical studies

8 LAYER BY LAYER

courses. This text explains what biblical archaeology is and walks the reader through how to do it, while emphasizing the foundational importance of archaeology and biblical studies.

A Note to Students

Few things are worse than being forced to read a boring book. With this in mind, I have attempted to make this one interesting as well as informative, with real-world examples, pop-culture references, and entertaining anecdotes. This doesn't mean that this text is nothing but light-hearted fun, but it does mean I have tried to make the experience pleasurable as well as meaningful. Other features designed to help facilitate learning are pictures and graphs to help you visualize some of the things described, key terms¹ (with a glossary at the end of the book) to help you identify what to study (the "these will be on the test" things), further readings to give you a starting point should your professor create assignments based on a particular chapter, and finally, study questions to help you digest the material in each chapter.

One more thing that I have tried to do is to assume nothing about you. You need not have prior knowledge of archaeology or biblical studies (including the Bible) to read this book and understand it. I have no expectations regarding your faith tradition or even whether you espouse a religious faith. Neither the interdisciplinary dialogue that is biblical archaeology nor archaeology nor biblical studies require religious faith.

A Note to Professors

I devoted ten years to thinking about this book before moving forward. Conference after conference, I would discuss with Brad Harmon of Anselm Academic what I was looking for in a biblical archaeology textbook. In the beginning, he was searching for someone to write this book and I was teaching biblical archaeology and looking for a good textbook. I remember saying, "There are good histories, there are good archaeological or biblical studies method books, and there are some detailed discovery compilations,

1. Each chapter's key terms are set in bold once and defined in the glossary.

but there isn't a book that does all these things." I wanted a text that introduced all of these elements and would be accessible to beginning students. I never found one, so this book is my attempt to create one.

In addition, we wanted something that would work as a supplemental text in a biblical studies course. The interdisciplinary dialogue that is biblical archaeology is often important when engaging various questions in biblical courses, but rarely are our students prepared to evaluate or even understand the relevance of archaeological finds. This text contains the basics of biblical studies methodology, an introduction to archaeological method, and a detailed explanation of how to undergo biblical archaeology, ending with an extended current example.

The pedagogical resources included to aid students will also help you design your classes, assignments, and tests. Throughout writing this book, I considered what would help me as a professor and included all the resources that occurred to me.

Independently, the disciplines of archaeology and biblical studies are enriching and rewarding. When these are brought into dialogue, one can also appreciate the contribution each makes to the other. The interdisciplinary dialogue necessary for biblical archaeology leads to better conclusions, as the hypotheses generated therein must stand up to the rigors of two demanding disciplines. By the end of this book, my hope is that it will be clear that engaging in biblical archaeology enhances one's analyses in archaeology or biblical studies.

MYTHBUSTERS

Movie legend Indiana Jones dashes through ancient temples battling evil foes in his quest to recover treasures from the past. Somehow he manages to defeat his enemies, win the affection of his love interest, and salvage all the ancient booty without ever picking up a trowel or setting foot in a lab. Well done indeed! This popular franchise might leave one with the impression this is what **archaeology** is all about, but actual archaeologists leave the whips and fedoras at home in their quest to learn about our ancient ancestors.

Biblical scholarship has not been embraced by Hollywood as a fascinating and sexy career. There are no blockbusters about biblical scholars defeating the latest terrorist group with their stunning ability to parse biblical Hebrew. Despite their absence from popular culture, biblical scholars know the joy of discovery and the rich reward of hard work.

These two fields—archaeology and **biblical studies**—have more in common than the media might have one believe. Both fields need each other; their relationship is symbiotic. This might not appear true on the surface. It might be easier to imagine a parasitic relationship in which biblical studies sucks the marrow of archaeology's hard-won results from the lands of the Bible. Or one might imagine the reverse is true, that archaeology can mine the Bible's historical insights, but that biblical studies transcends the truths of this world and thus has nothing to learn from archaeology.

Everyone comes to this topic with preconceived ideas, conscious or not. These opinions may be formed through the media, the language used to talk about these disciplines, a person's religious (or nonreligious) background, or other less obvious means. Some of these assumptions will be accurate and some will not. In this chapter, several of the most common misconceptions (**myths**) are exposed for what they are, even though they are prevalent and pervasive. Then biblical archaeology can be approached with a clean slate, and these disciplines and their dialogue can be explored without all the distracting external noise.

Here are six myths¹ about archaeology and biblical studies that often interfere with **interdisciplinary** research.

Myth #1: Archaeology Is Pure Science

Take a moment to picture the archaeological process in your mind (try to avoid thinking of the movie version). Likely you'll envision the meticulous fieldwork and detailed processing of a site, followed by the careful packing and transportation of finds to a sterile, technologically advanced lab for analysis. If so, good for you, as this is accurate for the most part. Yet this is only the beginning of the archaeological process. While it is true that archaeology is considered a social **science** that uses many techniques from technology and the hard sciences, archaeology is also an interpretive art.² The scientific initial stages provide **data**, but the data then needs to be interpreted and **interpretation** is an art. It is quite possible to misinterpret data. That's where the science of sociology enters.

1. The term *myth* as used here refers to something that might be widely believed but is not completely accurate. In a course on biblical studies, the term *myth* might be used in a more formal way to discuss the legends that were common in a region and the various cultural expressions of this larger metamyth. Though both uses share a similar meaning as far as accuracy goes, the first use has negative connotations because the inaccuracy is unintentional and doesn't serve a useful purpose, but the second use has positive connotations because the inaccuracies serve a useful purpose.

2. The use of technology and hard science in archaeology has grown rapidly in the last twenty to thirty years. This has resulted in subdisciplines such as metallurgy, archaeozoology, and petrographic analysis, among others, which are almost completely scientific. A good example of this scientific focus is the Scientific Archaeology Unit at the Weizmann Institute in Israel.

There are many famous historical instances of data being misinterpreted. For example, humans used to believe the sun revolved around Earth. Modern language in reference to the sun still reflects the data that the ancients observed: “The sun rises in the East and sets in the West.” The data is clear and unchanged; sometimes the sun can be observed and sometimes it can’t. Therefore, the ancients determined the earth was unmoving and the sun was revolving around it. Yet Copernicus, using new instruments for measuring the movement of the planets, discovered more data that changed the long-held interpretive view. Copernicus’s new data demonstrated that the previous data had been misinterpreted, not that it was false. From one’s fixed position on the earth, the sun does appear to be moving, but in fact it is the earth that is moving. The first interpretation of the data was the simplest (usually the best), but the addition of incompatible data required a more complex interpretation. However, the introduction and incorporation of new data is where true archaeological advancement arises.

Excavations generate a plethora of data, literally millions of pieces of information that need to be processed and interpreted. Everything from the placement and number of **sherds**—small broken pieces of pottery—to the city planning of the settlement is mapped and cataloged, but this data alone says little about the civilization and those who comprised it. For example, during my first season in the field I uncovered a foundation deposit (an oil lamp nestled between two bowls under the cornerstone of a building). Archaeological data shows that burying materials under the foundation of a building was common practice in ancient Israel. The data, however, does not show why people did this. Did they believe this practice would ward off demons? Did they see it as a sacrificial act to protect the building? Was it a token of thanksgiving to the divine for blessing them with a new building? Was it a way to get rid of wedding gifts they thought were ugly? Was it a tradition they no longer understood themselves? Did it mean different things at different times to different people? All of these are possible interpretations of the data. The archaeologist is looking for the best possible interpretation given the combination of available data. The process is thoughtful and serious, but not all of its aspects are scientific.

Why begin this conversation by demonstrating that archaeology is not a hard science? The reason is simple. Empty your mind of all thoughts and play the free association game. Think about the word *science* and write down every word that pops into your head. Having played this game with many groups over the years, I know that some of the most common words people say are *facts*, *proven*, *objective*, and perhaps most poignantly and dangerously *truth*. Playing the same game with the word *interpretation* leads to answers such as *subjective*, *opinion*, and *unreliable*. Both sets of associations are probably unfair to a certain extent, but if one begins an interdisciplinary discussion with one discipline being a *science* and the other involving *interpretation*, then one begins with a false dichotomy. This brings us to myth #2.

Myth #2: Biblical Studies Is an Act of Faith

The Bible, being a sacred text in three major world religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), holds a unique position. Because of the Bible's central role in living religions, the study of its text is more complex than that of the complete works of Shakespeare or even the theological hieroglyphics of the Egyptians. With the Bible's religious role often comes the assumption that **faith** must factor into the interpretation of Scripture or that only believers would be interested in biblical studies. However, just as it is not true that only Wiccans are interested in studying the Druids or only Greeks are interested in studying ancient Greek philosophy, neither is faith a prerequisite for biblical studies. Many scholars study the Bible for reasons completely removed from faith.

What does one see when imagining a biblical scholar? A pious believer praying before meditating on a small portion of Scripture? Or perhaps a member of the clergy preparing a Sunday sermon? Maybe a dusty relic wasting away in the basement of a decrepit library as the modern world passes him by? Regardless of the image that comes to mind regarding a biblical scholar, the reality of the scholar's work is probably quite different. Biblical studies is an academic discipline subject to the academic rigor expected of all the **humanities**. Biblical studies has more in common with the study

of Homer, Chaucer, and Aristotle than the message of the latest televangelist. Biblical studies is an interpretive art, but the interpretations are not based on subjective opinions. They are based on scientific data—similar to archaeology.

The data used in biblical studies differs from that in archaeology in that it is linguistic and literary rather than material; however, both disciplines begin with a set of data requiring interpretation. Here is an example from biblical studies.

The most common word in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) is the *waw* conjunction (the combination of a consonant [*waw* (ו)] and a vowel [*shewa* (:) or *patach* (-)]) and this word is translated in many different ways. It can mean “and,” “but,” “then,” “or,” “also,” “even,” and so on. Most of the time the meaning is clear from the context, but sometimes it is not and requires interpretation. One such example can be found in Song of Songs 1:5. The **genre** of this verse is an erotic love poem. The verse reads “I am black *waw-conjunction* beautiful. . . .” The data is that this word most often means “and,” but those other meanings are not infrequent. The woman is talking about herself and trying to entice her lover to her. The two most common translations are “and” or “but.” Yet these two meanings lead to opposite understandings. Thus the interpretation of this word in this context directly affects the understanding of this verse and the characters involved. Issues of biblical interpretation can be necessary on a grand scale or they can involve the smallest word in the Bible, as in this example. However, all interpretations begin with questions that arise from the data, just as in archaeology.

Archaeology and biblical studies are similar at their core, despite being categorized as two different types of discipline, one a social science and the other a humanities. Both disciplines generate a set of data from which questions arise, and interpretations (i.e., conclusions) are generated to answer these questions. Also, in both disciplines these interpretations require reexamination as new data arises. This new data is often generated through interdisciplinary dialogue. For example, a new discovery in archaeology can affect an interpretation in biblical studies and the reverse can also be true. Thus the data and interpretations of one discipline are important for the continued growth and development of the other.

Myth #3: Archaeology Is about Big Exciting Finds, Treasure, and Glory

One of the first questions people ask when meeting someone new is “What do you do?” When the answer is “I’m an archaeologist,” this is usually met with excitement and the question, “What’s the most interesting thing you have found?” An understandable question for sure but one that misses the point of modern archaeology. Archaeology today is more interested in understanding daily life in a particular place and time—the daily routine, in a way the mundane. This doesn’t mean the big finds aren’t valued and newsworthy; they’re just not the primary purpose of investigation.

In philosophy, there is a principle that one should not make rules based on special categories (unique or unusual circumstances), but rather the rules should be based on the most common situation and special categories should be accounted for in other ways (perhaps as exceptions). The same applies to understanding ancient life. The best way to get a sense of life in the ancient world is to discover what it was like for the average citizen, to gain a sense of the majority,



The land of the Bible was known as “a land flowing with milk and honey” (e.g., Exod. 3:8), but industrial-scale honey production in the area was known only from pictographic renderings and written descriptions prior to the discovery of this tenth-century BCE plant at Tel Rehov in the Jordan Valley. Honey was used for medicine, religious ceremonies, eating, and writing.

and only after that to account for the minorities and extraordinaries. Certainly, kings and queens make interesting fodder for historical accounts, but such a small sample is not helpful in answering questions of ethnic development, evolutionary biology, or even societal structure in many cases.

Because of this, the seemingly innocent question “What’s the most interesting thing you have found?” is very difficult for an archaeologist to answer. Likely, the stranger is hoping to hear something about royal jewels or an ancient palace, but the archaeologist is more likely recalling a manufacturing center, such as the honey production plant found at Tel Rehov in Israel’s Jordan Valley, or a cache of administrative texts, such as those found on Elephantine on the Nile River in Egypt. For the archaeologist, the mundane *is* the dramatic.

Myth #4: Biblical Archaeology Is an Independent Discipline

The Bible includes many geographical regions (e.g., from the Middle East to Italy) and spans many centuries (at least fourteen). The sheer scope of the material and the expertise required to cover such an enormous geographic and historical span would far exceed modern disciplines, which focus on much smaller regions and time periods. In addition, the Bible is only interested in a narrow sliver of life in these places during the various time periods, and since archaeology is interested in garnering insight into the holistic lifestyle of the people being explored, the Bible would not serve as a good foundation for most ancient Near Eastern archaeological investigations. With that said, it might serve as a tool to assist in some investigations.³

The following chapter explores the concept of “biblical archaeology” and how that name has evolved in academic and popular understanding. For now, suffice to say, there is no one definition of biblical

3. Archaeological disciplines are usually defined by geographical regions (e.g., Syro-Palestinian, North American, Indo-European) and sometimes time periods, especially in areas where there is a long settlement history (e.g., Paleozoic, Classical, Islamic). This allows archaeologists to specialize in a people group and really begin to understand it (this will be explored further in chapter 2).

archaeology. For the purposes of this book, the phrase best applies to a context in which both archaeological and biblical data are involved.

Myth #5: Archaeology Is Undertaken to Prove the Bible

As the next chapter shows, in the history of archaeology there have been times when expeditions set out to do precisely this: prove the Bible, or at least use the Bible as a roadmap to understand their results. Yet most archaeologists today (or biblical scholars for that matter) have a different intent. This comes partly from a better understanding of **historiography** (as opposed to **history**) and the modern focus on daily life (as discussed in myth #3).

In the modern Western world, most people have an enlightenment view of history. When one reads history, one expects to read about things that are factually true, that is, things that actually happened in the way they are described. This statement may seem painfully obvious, but such an expectation is relatively new when one considers the entire span of human existence. In fact, even in the modern world, this expectation is beginning to be challenged as people question whether an objective account of events can be written (indeed, phrases like “history is written by the victors” note there may be more to the past than what the dominant culture recounts). In the ancient world, prioritizing fact over fiction was foreign. Thus, while the term *history* today typically refers to a modern practice of recording accounts of events as objectively and truthfully as possible, the term *historiography* describes the older practice of writing history to make a certain point. For example, classical historians such as Herodotus and Livy wrote the latter kind of history. Their texts are not objective, and they record events and speeches that were far removed from their experience. Historiography is free to adjust the “facts” when they do not correspond to a particular theme or purpose desired by the author.

The Bible contains many genres—law, poetry, legend, to name a few—but the overarching genre that governs them all is **theology**. Theology—literally, “the study of god(s)”—is governed by its own rules. Foremost among these is that the writing is intended to reveal something of the divine. All other genres, including those the

Christian churches consider the Historical Books of the Bible, are subject to this overarching genre.⁴

What does this mean for archaeology? Simply put, sometimes the texts and the archaeological data will be compatible and sometimes they won't. Sometimes the biblical authors are using historical facts and realities to convey their thoughts and other times they are taking liberties with these "truths" in order to present what they view as a different kind of truth.

Myth #6: Archaeology Disproves the Bible

In light of what has been discussed so far, it should be clear that archaeology does not have an agenda when it comes to the Bible (granted, individual archaeologists might, but the field as a whole does not). When what is recorded in the Bible and what archaeology reveals do not correspond, the biblical scholar is invited to explore further. For example, the historiographical book of Joshua (chapter 6) gives an account of how Israelite warriors, with seven priests and the Ark of the Covenant, under the direction of their leader Joshua and following the command of God, march around the walls of Jericho once a day for six days. On the seventh day, they march around the walls seven times, all the people shout to the sound of seven trumpets, and the walls fall down, guaranteeing the Israelites a victory. Archaeological findings from the excavations of Jericho, however, yield no wall remains from Joshua's time. Now some have argued that archaeologists should not expect to find any such remains, as the narrative is meant to indicate total destruction. Yet this "solution" will not suffice as the prevailing interpretation of the archaeology of the site is that the city was mostly unoccupied at the time of Joshua's conquest. This appears to be a case of archaeology "proving" the Bible false.

Before adopting this conclusion, however, two things must be noted. The first is that disproving the Bible was not the intention of the excavations at Jericho; if anything, the opposite was true. It is

4. The agreed upon Historical Books in the Christian churches are Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, and 1–2 Kings. Some Christian traditions might add other books to this list. Differing from Christians, the Jewish traditions assign these books to the category of Prophets.

probably fair to say that for every biblical element that archaeology cannot prove accurate, there is a biblical element that can be. The second thing to keep in mind is that the Bible, even the so-called Historical Books, is not intended to reveal an accurate recounting of past events but rather to provide insight into God. When archaeology appears to contradict the biblical account, the biblical scholar is presented with a wonderful interpretive opportunity. For now it is clear that the biblical author is not merely describing a situation or recounting facts, but rather taking liberties with the past in order to say something about God. When archaeology and the Bible concur, on the other hand, it is much more difficult to ascertain whether the biblical author(s) included the information for a theological purpose or a historical one.

Going Forward

Having dispelled certain common misconceptions and myths about biblical archaeology, we now turn to the methods used in biblical studies and archaeology and the ways in which these disciplines interact.

In chapter 2, the concept of biblical archaeology will be explored from its inception, through the controversies surrounding its existence, to the modern period and the variety of definitions scholars use today to define this interdisciplinary subject.

Chapter 3 will introduce the development of the basic excavation methods and the key figures in this development. It will also provide a rudimentary understanding of what happens in the field and later in the laboratories as archaeologists prepare to publish their results. Similarly, chapter 4 provides the basics for completing an exegesis—the method by which one draws meaning out of a text, which is still the backbone of most biblical scholarship and the method most used and relevant for interdisciplinary work with archaeology.

The disciplines of archaeology and biblical studies are brought together in chapter 5. Here the reader will encounter the framework for the interdisciplinary dialogue that can occur between biblical studies and archaeology. This approach to biblical archaeology will be presented through an extended current example.

Questions for Review and Discussion

1. Have you encountered any of the misconceptions described in this chapter? How so?
2. If any of these myths were familiar to you, has your thinking about them changed after reading this chapter? Why or why not?
3. How do you currently understand or define archaeology as a discipline? How do you currently understand or define biblical studies as a discipline?
4. Describe what you think the relationship between archaeology and biblical studies should be.

Key Terms

| | |
|------------------|-----------------------------|
| archaeology | humanities |
| biblical studies | interdisciplinary |
| data | interpretation |
| faith | myths |
| genre | science (social v. natural) |
| historiography | sherds |
| history | theology |

Further Reading

- Currid, John D. *Doing Archaeology in the Land of the Bible: A Basic Guide*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999.
- Frigge, Marielle. *Beginning Biblical Studies*. Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2009.
- Kaltner, John. *Reading the Old Testament Anew: Biblical Perspectives on Today's Issues*. Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2017.
- Shafer-Elliott, Cynthia. *The Five Minute Archaeologist in the Southern Levant*. Sheffield, UK: Equinox, 2016.

2 CHAPTER

THE BIBLE AND THE SPADE

Defining Biblical Archaeology

From its origins, **biblical** archaeology was dominated by scholars who dug “with the **Bible** in one hand and the spade in the other.”¹ That is, those conducting excavations explored and interpreted what they discovered in light of what they read in the biblical text. In theory, the phrase *biblical archaeology* meant that the Bible and the **spade (trowel)** were the primary tools used by archaeologists and that both were used with equal weight. In practice, it often meant that the tools of mainstream archaeology were subservient to biblical interests.

G. Ernest Wright, one of the founders of modern Syro-Palestinian archaeology, defined biblical archaeology this way:

To me, at least, biblical archaeology is a special “armchair” variety of general archaeology, which studies the discoveries of the excavators and gleans from them every fact that throws a direct, indirect, or even diffused light upon the Bible. It must be intelligently concerned with stratigraphy

1. Where this commonly used phrase originated is uncertain, but it seems to have first been uttered by legendary Israeli archaeologist Yigael Yadin (for more on Yadin’s career, see chapter 3); however, it has now become a common trope that serves as a warning to archaeologists about the dangers inherent in this approach.

and typology,² upon which the method of modern archaeology rests; but its chief concern is not with strata or pots or methodology. Its central and absorbing interest is the understanding and exposition of the Scriptures.

For Wright the primary concern of biblical archaeology is always the biblical text. Excavations yield significant amounts of data that do not relate to the Bible and thus are of little interest to the biblical archaeologist. This understanding was considered acceptable at the time, but as archaeological methods advanced and as the discipline of archaeology became more self-reflective, the narrowness of the biblical archaeological approach was questioned and criticized.

Biblical archaeology also suffered from expansiveness. If, as Wright says, the goal of biblical archaeology is to provide insight that connects to the Bible in a “direct, indirect, or even diffused” way, then the number of sites relevant to the discipline is overwhelming. One might assume biblical archaeology would be limited to modern Israel, but the Bible refers to many places outside of this region.

The father of modern biblical archaeology and perhaps its most influential practitioner, **William Foxwell Albright**, once claimed,

Biblical archaeology is a much wider term than Palestinian archaeology, though Palestine itself is of course central, and is rightly regarded as peculiarly the land of the Bible. But biblical archaeology covers all the lands mentioned in the Bible and is thus co-extensive with the cradle of civilization. This region extends from the Western Mediterranean to India, and from southern Russia to Ethiopia and the Indian Ocean. Excavations in every part of this extensive area throw some light, directly or indirectly, on the Bible.³

2. *Stratigraphy* refers to the settlement layers that represent the various time periods on a site, and *typology* is the idea that pieces of material culture, such as pottery, change and develop with each generation and, therefore, a type characterizes an era. G. Ernest Wright, “The Present State of Biblical Archaeology,” in *The Study of the Bible Today and Tomorrow* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 1947), 74. To learn more about Wright and the other luminaries mentioned in this chapter, see chapter 3.

3. William F. Albright, *New Horizons in Biblical Research* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 1.