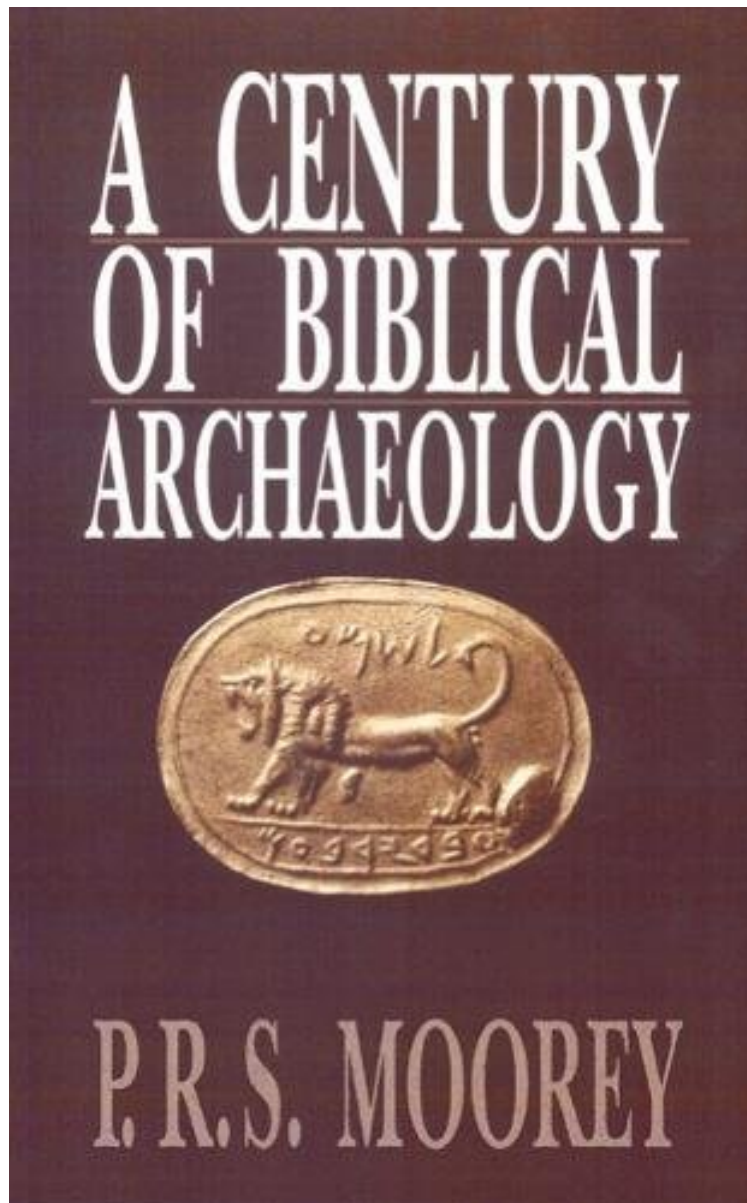


A Century of Biblical Archaeology

P. R. S. Moorey

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P. R. S. Moorey : A Century of Biblical Archaeology before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Century of Biblical Archaeology:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A MARVELOUS SURVEY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF 20TH CENTURY BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY By Steven H Propp Peter Roger Stuart Moorey (1937-2004) was a British archaeologist and historian, and former Keeper of Antiquities at the Ashmolean Museum of the University of Oxford;

he also served as Vicegerent of the University's Wolfson College. He wrote many other books, such as *The Biblical Lands, Ancient Mesopotamian Materials and Industries: The Archaeological Evidence*, etc. He wrote in the Introduction to this 1991 book, This concise historical survey of the relationship between Near Eastern archaeology and Biblical Studies, conventionally termed biblical archaeology, belongs to a series addressed in the first instance to students of theology rather than archaeologists. But, since it is written by an archaeologist not by a biblical scholar, it inevitably has the bias of that particular side of the relationship. In the last fifty years, archaeologists, and others, have come to regard biblical archaeology as a byword for prejudice and unscientific procedures it has all too often been assessed rather more than is just from its popular idiocies and blatant shortcomings. These have recurrently obscured its primary achievement in restoring the Bible to the world whence it came after centuries isolated in a cultural vacuum it will remain unusually vulnerable to prejudice. It may never avoid the value judgments of those for whom specific religious beliefs and scholarship are inseparable and those for whom such conjunctions are anathema. Nor is it likely that it will for long avoid one of those sporadic bursts of popular enthusiasm for sensational and speculative discoveries, which have marked its history. (Pg. xv-xvii) He says of Sir William Ramsay, [he] was almost alone in sustaining the necessary fieldwork. His long series of journeys through Turkey, using Paul's travels as the basis for his explorations, were marked by unusual physical energy and scholarly insight. Many inscriptions were recorded fundamental to modern understanding of the historical topography and cultural settings of the Pauline narratives and the epistles, even if they did not always throw direct light on them. The results of his work were not only published in the usual learned journals, but reached a much wider public through a remarkable sequence of books subsequently unmatched in the popular literature of New Testament archaeology. (Pg. 21) He comments on William Foxwell Albright, For almost half a century after his first visit to Palestine in 1919, through a remarkable series of books, lectures and articles, Albright (1891-1971) redefined the relationship between archaeology and biblical scholarship. Before the advent of Albright the archaeology of Palestine had played little part in the controversies provoked by Wellhausen and his School. Albright rapidly drew it into the debate alongside a steady flow of new information, primarily from texts, recovered through continuing excavation in other Near Eastern countries. From first to last he assume the widest possible definition for biblical archaeology. (Pg. 54) He continues, In retrospect the years between the World Wars have come to be seen as the time when biblical archaeology, particularly through men like Albright and [Nelson] Glueck, had an academic status and a self-confidence that it had not enjoyed before and was rarely to achieve again the advocates and optimists proposed simple archaeological answers to complex Biblical questions. It may now be seen that premature or immature conclusions were drawn from the necessarily restricted range of information offered by the new fieldwork. There was a tendency to jump to conclusions when new discoveries were announced, often in the most preliminary way. Ingenious hypotheses based upon a minimal sample of the archaeological evidence all too easily appeared to be persuasive solutions to long debated biblical issues. It was to take another generation before accumulating date tempered claims that the historicity of literary traditions might readily be established through a few excavations or through widely ranging surface surveys. It also took time for those involved to distinguish the questions which might reasonably be answered by archaeology from those which might not. Nor was it immediately apparent that archaeology was already posing problems and introducing questions which the literary traditions did not even suggest. (Pg. 55) He notes that John Garstang responded in 1930 by re-opening excavations at Jericho. A year later, in his publication *Joshua, Judges*, Garstang was using the results to argue that all three places still had vigorous settlements as late as 1400 B.C. Garstang's Jericho excavations were compromised by his inadequate field techniques. Glueck was subsequently to describe them as an ideal example of how now to proceed. Poor stratigraphical control was compounded in both popular and scholarly publications of the latest Canaanite levels by a very literal reading of the Old Testament. (Pg. 64) He points out, For [Albright] the study of all the relevant extra-biblical sources established the accuracy of innumerable details, and has brought increased recognition of the Bible as a source of history. It was a view welcome to theological conservatives who, at least initially, sometimes made the mistake of taking him for a fundamentalist. Positive as his view of biblical traditions was, it rested not on dogmatic assumptions, but on restless critical inquiry, particularly of every fresh piece of information. If time would show his methods to be faulty and his solutions sometimes simplistic, his intellectual vigour and integrity have never been doubted. Albright was well aware that archaeological evidence is at times equivocal and biblical narratives not all seem. (Pg. 72) He observes that [G. Ernest] Wright (1909-1974), the student who above all others carried Albright's ideas forward into a new generation, had established himself as the heir apparent. Like Albright he had combined a training in biblical scholarship with a very practical apprenticeship in archaeology in Palestine, but a greater interest in theology was to distinguish much of what he later wrote. In Wright's career it was biblical theology specifically that converged with biblical archaeology. For him, much more than for Albright, archaeology's role was to expose the historical basis of the Judeo-Christian faith, to demonstrate how revelation had come through history. In 1938 Wright founded a periodical, *The Biblical Archaeologist*, to raise popular consciousness [and since] has become in the following half century the primary source for current information, no less than the arena for topical debate, in all areas where the Bible and archaeology interact. The academic integrity established by Wright has ensured its enduring value to layman and scholar alike. (Pg. 77-78) He comments, New sites were all, to a marked degree, biblical choices, since

the excavators were still predominantly ordained Protestant clergymen or biblical specialists teaching in theological seminaries or in departments of religion in colleges and universities. It was not until 1956, when Wright returned to fieldwork that new ideas and new procedures were generated within the American field tradition. It was a major part of Wright's purpose to confound the growing view among archaeologists and ancient historians at large that excavations in the Holy Land represented everything that was unscientific in contemporary archaeology. He strove to create a broadly based expertise and a carefully coordinated team effort among the experienced and the less experienced (Pg. 99-100). He states, Wright placed himself in a particularly exposed position when he appeared to argue that recent archaeological research had established the reliability of the biblical history that was central to his faith. Archaeologists doubted his objectivity. Meanwhile the general reader was encouraged in the view that biblical archaeology was indeed primarily concerned to prove the truth of the Bible. By the later 1950s Wright found himself defending both his own position and that of Nelson Glueck, with apologetic arguments rather than hard facts. The charge that biblical archaeologists could be neither objective nor properly scientific was one that Wright was thereafter to wrestle with to the end of his life in 1974 [Glueck] epitomized the pejorative view of the biblical archaeologist as the explorer with a Bible in his hand whenever he went declaring it to be the most reliable guide to ancient Palestine. (Pg. 102-103). He explains, The years between the publication of Wright's *Biblical Archaeology* (1957) and [Thomas L.] Thompson's *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham* (1974), from which Albright's reputation has never fully recovered, was a time of transition. A new generation of biblical scholars was no less forceful than their teachers in scrutinizing the claims of archaeological evidence in the continuing debate of historicity. The goals of the new generation of field archaeologists were now more often unrelated to Biblical Studies, even when applied to sites or regions insignificant for Israel's early history. To an unprecedented degree it was being appreciated that archaeology allowed questions to be posed which the literary tradition did not even suggest. (Pg. 114-115). Later, he notes that Thompson's book exposed the fundamental weakness in Albright's model, which combined two distinct hypotheses: the ultimately text-based concept of an incursion of Amorite-speaking peoples into Palestine and the separate archaeological explanation of the material culture of Palestine as an intrusive, non-urban nomadic phenomenon. It virtually destroyed the archaeological case for a history of the Patriarchs in the terms proposed by Albright. (Pg. 153). He recounts, Many biblical scholars, [William G.] Dever argued in 1972, were now skeptical of the role of archaeology in biblical scholarship. Biblical archaeology had been irredeemably tainted by its popularity with fundamentalists and its evidently poor field methods, to the point where responsible and irresponsible claims for its achievements were inextricably confused. This had inevitably lowered the whole subject's reputation among amateurs and professionals alike. He was arguing that there was no hope that biblical archaeology itself might evolve, developing a new legitimacy in America as a scientific discipline. His apparent assumption that a pre-occupation with Biblical Studies necessarily made one's fieldwork unscientific was to prove particularly contentious. Over the next ten years Dever sustained this pessimistic argument. His disillusion only increased when appointment to a professorship in the University of Arizona at Tucson took him to one of the centres of the so-called new archaeology [which] even more severely tested what remained of Albright and Wright's legacy in his thinking. (Pg. 139-140). He summarizes, It is also now possible to detect a growing relationship between archaeologists and New Testament scholars, who had for so long tended to ignore archaeology. Archaeologists had for their part remained indifferent to the neglect, happy to operate within classical archaeology. Even discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls had not really broken the mold. They were predominantly an aspect of Jewish Studies to which the archaeology of the Herodian period was now making significant independent contributions. It was not until Dead Sea Scrolls studies that archaeology really began to impinge upon New Testament research. In many ways the new archaeological approach facilitated this change as it began to modify traditional classical archaeology in Syro-Palestine. (Pg. 148). This is an excellent survey of the development of Biblical Archaeology during the 20th century, that will be of great interest to anyone studying this field.

This historical survey of the relationship between archaeology and biblical studies in the archaeological excavations in Palestine at Tell el-Hesi from 1840 to 1990 concentrates on the work of major excavators and scholars. It is a panoramic overview of the methods and theories that served to illuminate the archaeology of the Holy Land, beginning with an introductory chapter that covers the early pioneering years before the work of Pitt Rivers and Petrie.

About the Author: P. R. S. Moorey was a British archaeologist and historian of Mesopotamia and the Ancient Near East. He was Keeper of Antiquities at the Ashmolean Museum of the University of Oxford, where he also served as Vicegerent of Wolfson College.