



Gottschall, A. 2010. 'Review: Eric H. Cline, Biblical Archaeology. A Very Short Introduction. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009.'
***Rosetta* 8: 117-120.**

<http://rosetta.bham.ac.uk/issue8/reviews/gottschall-cline.pdf>

Eric H. Cline, *Biblical Archaeology. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009. Pp. xi and 156. Price £7.99. ISBN 978 0 1953 4263 5.

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This text, as its title suggests, has selected the main issues in biblical archaeology from a vast and complex field of study and presented them in a simple and easy to follow chronological discussion. The production of this text, as a beginners guide to the role that modern science and archaeology can play in providing context for biblical accounts, was facilitated by a growing fascination with biblical archaeology which is described as at an 'all time high' (p.1). This book is part of the *Very Short Introductions* series which aims to cater to the needs of non-specialist and new readers. Cline succeeds in explaining the history of this discipline, the important sites and finds, the problems of potential forgeries and the prospects for future research in terms suitable to non-specialist readers. He successfully merges detailed descriptions of archaeological and methodological advances with his analysis of key sites and finds to provide a fuller picture of practical archaeology.

Within the Introduction, Cline appropriately defines biblical archaeology (subset of Syro-Palestinean archaeology dating from the early second millennium BEC to the first millennium CE) and explains that archaeologists do not 'deliberately set out to either prove or disprove' the Hebrew Bible or New Testament, but investigate the material culture of biblical times to reconstruct the culture and history of the region (p.3).

The book is divided into two parts; the first part focuses on the 'Evolution of the Discipline' whilst the second part presents the relationship between 'Archaeology and the Bible'. This works quite successfully although the second section would benefit from further examples and expansion.

The 'Evolution of Biblical Archaeology' is broken down into six chapters. Chapter One explains how the roots of the discipline derive from the initial endeavours undertaken by theologians, scholars and engineers primarily interested in locating places mentioned in the Bible. It details the important contribution made by men like

Robinson, Conder and Smith who assisted in initially surveying the geography of the Holy Land before excavations could begin. Chapter Two considers the initial excavations. It focuses upon the role of Petrie as the first person in Palestine to excavate stratigraphically and use pottery typology and seriation to determine the date of the chronological levels. Cline continues his discussion of excavation methodology and stratigraphy in Chapter Three in which two new archaeological techniques are explained. The first, 'horizontal excavation', employed by Breasted during exploration of Megiddos, consisted of removing each layer of soil individually, however, this method was soon abandoned due to its time consuming nature and cost (p.36). The second, the 'Kenyon-Walker method of vertical excavation', provided a more precise form of excavation using soil colour and texture to define stratigraphic layers. Cline then proceeds to explain the division of the history of the Holy Land into specific time periods, as influenced by Albright, and presents the proper archaeological chronology usefully summarised in tabular form (pp.33-4).

Chapter Four discusses the new phase of biblical archaeology which emerged after the declaration of the state of Israel (1948). From this point onward sites were re-examined in order to attempt to construct a national narrative and identity for the "New" State of Israel based upon perceived links between ancient Israelites and modern Israelis. This is then followed by Chapter Five which chronicles the expansion of the geographical area available for excavation after the Six Day War (1967) to include areas previously belonging to Jordan, Syria and Egypt and also the possibility of excavating in the Old City of Jerusalem, an area previously inaccessible. It also explores the new emphasis on surveys which became part of a larger worldwide movement in the late 1960's and early 1970's known as 'New Archaeology' or 'Processualism'.

Chapter Six completes the evolution of the discipline up to the present day. It considers the emergence of biblical minimalism (the suggestion that much of the Hebrew Bible and history of ancient Israel was a fabrication) which provided stark opposition to the maximalist standpoint (biblical stories are completely factual and historically correct even if they cannot be proved by archaeology). This section also focuses upon methodological advances including the decision to investigate specific topics such as ethnicity, migration, gender, feasting, rulership and other anthropological themes rather than to continue to give general context to the Bible.

Chapter Seven begins the second part of the book which focuses specifically on 'Archaeology and the Bible'. This part is broken into two sub-sections: chapters seven to nine focus on the Hebrew Bible and chapters ten and eleven focus on the New Testament. Chapter Seven successfully explains the discrepancy between the archaeologist's desire to provide context for the Bible and the lay desire to prove or disprove biblical accounts. Many of the original questions, such as whether there is any evidence of the Great Flood or the Exodus from Egypt, still remain unanswered today. The following chapters address some of the remaining unanswered questions and seek to demonstrate what can be determined from archaeological excavations. Chapter Eight questions the existence of King David and Solomon, issues popular in the 1990s, and Chapter Nine chronicles the existence of the two oldest extant biblical texts from the Hebrew Bible found on silver amulets buried in a cave (Ketef Hinnom) dating to c.586 BCE and written in the Dead Sea Scrolls dating from third century BCE to the first century CE.

The focus of chapters ten to twelve is on the New Testament. Chapter Ten defines the period of New Testament study as being approximately 200 years, from the time of Herod in 40 BCE to the deaths of the apostles towards the end of the first century CE. It records the building projects undertaken by Herod and the possibility that his tomb was uncovered in Herodium during an excavation in 2006. It also explains that although an inscription survives which testifies to the existence of Pontius Pilate, there is no archaeological evidence for Jesus or the apostles. The excavation of a boat dating to the late first century BCE to c.70 CE at the Sea of Galilee (Lake Tiberias), the possible Ossuary of Caiaphus (High Priest of Jerusalem) and the Magiddo Prison Mosaic provide the archaeological examples explored within Chapter Eleven. The boat provides evidence of fishing activity during Jesus' lifetime and the mosaic contains the earliest known inscription to Jesus found in Israel, however, the Ossuary does not provide conclusive evidence that the human remains belong to the biblical Caiaphus.

The final chapter explores three forgeries exposed during the 1990s. These include an ivory pomegranate from the Temple of Solomon, the James Ossuary (containing the bones of Jesus' brother) and the Jehoash Tablet (recorded the repairs made to Solomon's Temple by King Jehoash) all of which were proved to be authentic objects

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with false inscriptions added at a later date. These forgeries were purchased rather than excavated and therefore their historical context was lost.

Cline uses the Epilogue to suggest that future research, and especially the use of new tools and methodologies, will uncover further finds and assist in redefining those previously discovered. Thus the quest will continue to reconstruct the history, politics and culture of the Holy Land. Biblical archaeology not only persists in developing our understanding of the context of biblical stories, but provides a fascinating and worthwhile insight into how science and religion can unite to answers many of the questions that have puzzled generations.