

Archaeology & the Patriarchs

Introduction

Archaeology has undoubtedly “added a tremendous amount to our knowledge and understanding of the Bible”.(1) Indeed it is the only means we have of widening our knowledge of the peoples and places of history mentioned in Scripture, and in so doing ‘bringing them to life’(2) by allowing us to enter, albeit partially into contemporary thought.(3) The non-literary evidence furnished by archaeology gives an additional perspective that written evidence alone cannot give.(4)

The science of Biblical Archaeology owes its existence to a plethora of scholars from many nations (including America, Britain, France, Germany and Israel) who have painstakingly worked at recovering and reconstructing the relics of the past.(5) The first systematic study of the Bible lands began in the 19th century with the work of the American E. Robinson, the British ‘Palestine Exploration Fund’(6) and the Frenchman Ch. Clermont-Ganneau.(7) It was Sir Flinders Petrie, however, who in 1890 made the most significant breakthrough in archaeological methodology.(8) His insights into the structure of *tells* and use of pottery to ascertain relative chronology earned him the epithet ‘the father of Palestinian archaeology’.(9)

Significant among the many who took part in these studies since Petrie, and especially as far as the archaeological search for evidence of the patriarchs is concerned, is William Foxwell Albright. He is remembered not so much for his own excavations, but for his ability to integrate archaeological data into the wider framework of biblical research, historical geography and general Near Eastern studies.(10) If Petrie was the ‘father of Palestinian archaeology’ then it may be said that Albright was the father of ‘Biblical’ Archaeology. That is, that branch of archaeology that sheds light upon “the social and political structure, the religious concepts and practices and other human activities and relationships that are found in the Bible or pertain to peoples mentioned in the Bible.(11)

It is virtually universally agreed that the purpose of biblical archaeology is not to ‘prove’ the Bible.(12) However, Yahweh is uniquely the God who acts in history, and in as much as archaeology sheds light on that history it is important to biblical studies. Faith, Lasor points out, does not ask for proof, but archaeology provides “a context of reality for the biblical story and a reasonability for biblical faith”.(13)

Much of the early work done by OT critics was done in complete isolation from any comparative materials. Wellhausen consciously ignored the early archaeological finds “believing that Israel’s development was essentially independent of the development of Egypt or Babylonia”.(14) Gunkel(15) writing only 17 years after the publication of Wellhausen’s *Prolegomena* found himself disagreeing with the latter’s conclusions because he took into account extra-biblical

parallels, such as the *Gilgamesh Epic*. Lance concludes that after Gunkel:

Old Testament research would follow many paths... but at least one thing was clear: no longer could the Old Testament be reliably interpreted as a self-contained system in isolation from the rest of the ancient Near East. Those who would understand the Bible in depth would have to read it as an organic part of its context.(16)

Archaeological discoveries have led to the modification of the Documentary Hypothesis, rather than to its abandonment. The various sources of the hypothesis are now held to be historical,(17) but transmitted orally for a long period, so affecting the preliterate stage rather than the sources themselves,(18) Selman notes that only a few writers have argued for the abandonment of the Documentary Hypothesis on the basis of archaeological data.(19)

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There is much disagreement as to the exact period into which the so called 'Patriarchal Age' fits.(20) Although some scholars opt for a first millennium date,(21) most hold to a date in the early 2nd millennium, in the Middle Bronze age (henceforth MB).(22) Albright and his colleague Nelson Glueck felt that they had found irrefutable evidence for Abraham in the Middle Bronze age (MBI: 2 100 - 1 900 BC.). Albright associated Abraham with the Amorite migrations of this period, arguing that he was a donkey caravaner who plied his trade in Canaan.(23) John Bimson argues for an earlier dating (Abraham c.2 092 - 1 992; Jacob's entry into Egypt c.1 877).(24) on the basis that while not being completely satisfactory, it does at least avoid some of the problems associated with assigning the Patriarchs either to MBI or MBII. He argues that the length of the Patriarchal age is sufficient to span the major changes in settlement patterns that occurred during the transition between these periods.(25) Cornfield *et al* opt for a Late Bronze Age (LBA) date for Abraham(26) and place Joseph in the Iron Age,(27) because of the mention of Philistines,(28) as well as certain references in the poetic passages in Genesis 49, Isaac's blessing of his sons (Gen. 27), and Noah's curse on Canaan.(29) Their dating runs into difficulty because it is out of line with the biblical chronology. The patriarchs must be placed somewhere between 2 100 - 1 700 BC if the chronologies are to be regarded as anything other than artificial, which seems unlikely.(30)

Much evidence has been put forward for a dating of 1 950 - 1 700: The alliances between Mesopotamian powers are typical for this period.(31) as are the personal names of the patriarchs.(32) Seasonal occupation of the Negev has been substantiated,(33) as have the presence of city states(34) and certain social customs.(35)

This evidence is not as strong as it was once considered to be. Van Seters, for example, claims that the Arabian names in Genesis 25 must be from the 1st millennium.(36) In his view vv.1-4 "under a guise of genealogy, gives a picture of the wide-ranging incense trade carried on by the various Arab tribes and localities in the sixth century BC."(37) This argument rests on Van Seter's claim that none of these Arabian names occur in Mesopotamian documents before the

reign of Shalmaneser III (8th century BC). Hamilton points out that this absence is most likely due to the lack of contact between the Tigris-Euphrates and Canaan before that time. Van Seters' reasoning thus over extends an argument from silence.(38)

On the basis of this evidence the milieu of the patriarchal narratives is more likely to be of the 2nd millennium than of the first,(39) so I am arguing for a dating of 1 950 - 1 700 BC.

Limitations of Archaeology

Archaeology is, like all sciences, is not without limitations. As mentioned above, it cannot verify spiritual truth, and data it provides can often be interpreted in different ways.(40) There is always the possibility that data will be misused, and some of the ways that this has happened will be discussed further below.

A second problem is simply the vast amount of information still to be collected. Wiseman & Yamauchi point out that:

in Palestine alone, of more than 6 000 sites surveyed, fewer than 200 have been excavated, and of these only 28 to any major extent... some sites are still occupied (e.g. Damascus, Jerusalem, Erbil) and therefore can only be partially examined. The precise location of some prominent OT places (e.g. Jericho & Ai) is still questioned. Only a fraction of the objects retrieved from some sites have been published. In Palestine the high water table may have caused its perishable writing materials (papyrus & parchment) to perish. Yet of the estimated half a million documents from OT times... fewer than 10% have been published.(41)

It would be too much to expect, even if the data were less fragmentary, that we would find any direct evidence of the biblical patriarchs, and indeed none has been discovered.(42) Nor indeed has any historical figure from Genesis 12-50 been identified.(43) It would be wrong to conclude from this that the stories are fictional,(44) or to suggest, as some scholars have,(45) that the biblical narrative teaches us things about God and ourselves, without concerning itself with historical accuracy.(46) Lance points out that the vast amount of data being collected has caused archaeology and OT study to become separated simply because no one man can be an expert in both areas. Specialisation, the only way round this problem may mean that important facts are not passed between the various fields of study.(47)

The material contained in Genesis 14 is the most sharply debated area of patriarchal archaeology.(48) The mention of so many characters and events that would be expected to appear in extra-biblical accounts have made this chapter a focus of special attention. Many scholars regard the account as late and unhistorical.(49) Attempts at the beginning of the 20th century to identify the four Kings (most famously Amraphel with Hammurabi, King of Babylon) have been now generally rejected on both philological(50) and historical grounds.(51) Any positive identification, G.W. Anderson asserts, is "beset by difficulties".(52)

Van Seters rejects the historicity of the accounts on the basis of the lack of any evidence for such a military alliance in a 2nd millennium context.(53) He further argues that Abraham, with an

army of 318 men would hardly have been able to defeat a force that he reckons to number several thousand.(54) However our knowledge of this period of history is still so patchy that these events could have gone undetected in extra-biblical finds,(55) especially the difficult problem of Elamite rule in the Dead Sea area.(56) Wenham points out that the armies in the ancient world of 2nd millennium were small, more on the level of raiding party than of an invasion force.(57) Although there is no direct archaeological confirmation of this account, the names of the Kings (which are well attested in the 2nd millennium), the route taken by the armies and incidental references to Canaanite religion and certain legal terms give it “at least a ring of authenticity”.(58) Due to the weakness of the evidence on both sides, the best solution appears to be to hold this area of the discussion in abeyance, and allow archaeological research to fill the gaps on our knowledge.(59)

The Hyksos Period (c.1 700 - 1 550 BCE) has received a great deal of attention because the rise of Joseph to power and the entry of Jacob and his family into Egypt is often linked with it.(60) The identity of the Hyksos is uncertain. Some identify them with a Hurrian ruling class who, through superior weaponry and strategy dominated Syria, Canaan and the Lower Kingdom of Egypt.(61) Bright argues that they were of essentially Semitic origin, their earlier rulers apparently being “Canaanite and Amorite princes from Palestine and Southern Syria”.(62) The subjugation of the confused and weakened Lower Kingdom was more likely to have been more by infiltration than by conquest.(63) Although the expulsion of the Hyksos from Egypt cannot be made to fit chronologically with the expulsion of Israel from Egypt, Devries points out that Israel must have been in Egypt throughout the Hyksos period.(64)

There is no direct evidence of Joseph’s administration available from archaeology. However, a number of incidental features of the Joseph narrative (Gen. 37-50) have been shown to be consistent with the Hyksos period. The price of 20 shekels was the average slave price in the 18th century BC (cf. Gen. 37:28), later the price rose until it was 40-50 shekels in the 15th-14th centuries. The technical terms used in Pharaoh’s court (‘Butler’, ‘Baker’), as well as court (Gen. 41:14) and prison procedure and etiquette have been shown to be accurate.(65) The Vizier of Egypt was known as the “Sealbearer of the King of Lower Egypt” (cf.Gen. 41:42) and the gold chain sanctioned “a Vizier’s control over regulation of food supply.” (Gen .41:42).(66)

Although Cornfield argues that the mention of Rameses (Gen. 47:11) before the rise of the Nineteenth Dynasty in the 14th century is anachronistic,(67) it is possible that the name is accurate, being interpreted ‘Re has created it’.(68) Certain of the Egyptian names are not attested elsewhere until the 12th or 10th centuries BC (e.g. Potiphar, Asenath, Zephanath-Peneah), but this is probably due to lack of documentary evidence rather than their non-use.(69)

Discoveries

Discoveries at Nuzi, Mari(70) and Ebla have proved to be the most significant as far as the archaeological study of the patriarchal period is concerned. These consist of ancient texts rather

than artefacts.

Excavations in the mound of Yorghan, near Kirkuk, Iraq during 1925-31 unearthed more than 4 000 clay tablets, many dating from the 15th-14th centuries BC, when the city there was known as Nuzi, part of a province of the Mitanni Kingdom. These tablets include many kinds of documents, from marriage contracts to wills and agreements of sale for land and slaves(71) and are the source of the striking parallels to the patriarchal stories.(72)

Many of the texts only record the basic information necessary for the transactions they describe, omitting that which was understood by both parties. This has meant that the texts are capable of being interpreted in a number of ways, as we shall see below.(73)

Mari (Tell-el-Harari) is located 25km from the border of Iraq, on the West bank of the Euphrates. Excavations there began in 1925, revealing the city to have been a prosperous city in the patriarchal period.(74) Among the finds were the famous 'Mari Letters' from the Royal archive. Although they do mention some OT names (e.g. 'Nahor' and cities Haran, Hazor & Laish) their significance is more general than those from Nuzi in that they provide us with general information about the 2nd millennium world rather than many specific parallels, although some have been drawn from them.(75) The mention of tribes of pastoral nomads, known as Amorites, has proved particularly relevant.(76)

Of all the claims of archaeological substantiation of Biblical events and characters, those initially made for the discoveries at Tell Mardikh (in Northern Syria) were the most fantastic.(77) One of these claims was that the five cities of the plain had been found named on the same tablet in the same order as in the Bible. This claim was later withdrawn.(78) 16 000 Sumerian texts were discovered, many, as with those from Nuzi, dealt with economic and commercial matters, but Royal decrees, lexical and religious texts have also been found.(79) Again problems in translation mean that some texts are open to interpretation. However, they do point to a 2nd millennium rather than a 1st millennium context for Genesis as a whole, showing that names such as Abraham, Israel, Esau and places like Salim were all current at this time.(80)

This extrabiblical data has been used in three ways to furnish parallels to Biblical events.(81) Firstly, to give further examples of practices already known in Genesis (e.g. the supposed introductory formula used in death-bed dispositions (Gen.27:2) and the sale of a birthright (Gen. 25:29-34).(82) The second was to provide background information on such things as shepherding contracts (Gen. 31) or the practice of a barren wife having children by one of her slave-girls (Gen.16:1-4; 30:1-13). The third method was to interpret a little understood biblical practice using archaeological data. Three examples of this are the 'adoption' of Eliezer by Abraham (Gen. 15:1-4), Abraham's purchase of the Cave of Machpelah (Gen. 23) and Rachel's theft of 'the household gods' (Heb. *teraphim*) (Gen.31:19,30-34). The means by which these parallels were arrived at owes more, at times, to enthusiasm than to scientific method. Millard points out that the selection of information was eclectic, being based solely on its similarity to a Biblical passage, regardless of whether it was representative of practices recorded in other texts found at the same location.(83) Often a single text was used for comparison. Millard concludes:

When all is said these ‘parallels’ [those based on unbalanced or distorted data] prove nothing. At worst, they can be misleading as additional evidence shows a custom to be local or commonplace. At best they show the possibility that the Patriarchal Narratives exhibit some [of the same] practices, so permitting us to conclude that they may tell of the same times. They are not to be neglected, however, when they are thoroughly understood in their context.(84) [Brackets mine.]

Rejected Parallels

At least two texts from Nuzi have been used to explain Abraham’s fear that his servant Eliezer would become his heir (Gen. 15:1-4).(85) These texts describe how childless couples might adopt a son to serve them in their old age and in turn inherit their property upon their demise, after fulfilling the appropriate mourning rites.(86) This practice was widespread in the Ancient Near East,(87) but despite the popularity of this explanation it has now been largely rejected.

The main difficulty, apart from the translational difficulties inherent in the text of vv. 2-3 (which are great), is that the Nuzi tablets state that once adoption had been carried out the adoptee could never be completely excluded from the inheritance, even if a son were born to his adopted parents - he would then take second place to the natural son. However, this shared inheritance is never mentioned in Genesis, but, as Van Seters points out, is clearly excluded.(88)

Rather than argue that Abraham was flouting the accepted practice of his day it is easier to accept Wenham’s observation that too much is being read into the text from the supposed parallel. Eliezer is not called ‘a slave’ (the servant in Gen. 24 is not named) and the text does not say that he had been adopted, although Abraham may well have been planning to do so if he had had no son of his own.(89)

In Genesis 23 Abraham buys the Cave of Machpelah from Ephron the Hittite as a burial place for his dead wife Sarah. The resemblance between this account and Laws 46 and 47 of the Hittite Laws has led to another incident of parallelomania - as it is sometimes called by its critics. According to these laws, the sale of a man’s entire property freed him from all feudal responsibilities connected with the land, whereas if he disposed of only part of it, these would remain his.(90) Barker(91) and Wright(92) therefore conclude that Ephron took advantage of Abraham’s predicament to free himself from taxes (or whatever form these feudal responsibilities took). According to Van Seters, the main problem is that this interpretation must supply the story with missing point of comparison and then reconstruct the text to agree with it.(93) These missing parts in the account are any references to feudal service, and any indication that Ephron was selling his entire property,(94) which was unlikely.(95) This passage is not a precise parallel with a Neo-Babylonian ‘dialogue document’(96) but it is more likely that it represents an early form of bargaining, which later developed into the sophisticated ritual of the Neo-Babylonian period suggested by Van Seters.(97) Despite this at least three recent articles still maintain that there is a parallel with the Hittite law code.(98)

Faced with the unpalatable idea that Rachel stole Laban’s household gods because of her

attachment to the deities of her home.(99) Many scholars, including Bright,(100) Cornfield,(101) Kidner,(102) Mellor,(103) Thompson(104) and Wright(105) prefer to link the theft with a tablet from Nuzi, which implies that the possessor of teraphim had the right to inherit the household property.(106) Rachel's motive in stealing them was therefore an attempt to ensure that Jacob would receive Laban's estate.(107)

Unfortunately this view is one of several that is based on "an interpretation of no more than twelve, most frequently only four or five of the approximately 300 Nuzi family law-texts known".(108) It would be foolish to think that the will of the still-living father could be thwarted by such a theft; the idols would only prove to be a liability.(109) Indeed, there is nothing in the text to indicate that either Rachel or Jacob had any designs on Laban's estate.(110) The more difficult explanation - Rachel's personal loyalty to the teraphim - still seems to be the best.(111)

Anachronisms

The presence of a series of demonstrable anachronisms within the patriarchal narratives would be strong evidence that they do not reflect a second millennium context.(112) Several anachronisms have been put forward to this end, and although they have been the subject of much discussion in recent years(113) it is worth summarising the main arguments.

The mention of 'camels' (*Camelus dromedarius*) in the Genesis narrative (12:16; 24; 30:43; 31:17,34; 32:7,15; 37:25 - 28 references in all[114]) has long been viewed with scepticism; many scholars still citing it as a clear example of an anachronism.(115) Bright(116) uses the mention of camels to support a first millennium date for the final form of the narratives - an example of what Yamauchi describes as a 'deliberate' substitution.(117) Bright states that "the references to camels (e.g. chs. 12:16; 24) seem to be no more than anachronistic touches introduced to make the stories more vivid to later hearers."(118)

The author of account, he argues, therefore substituted 'camels' for 'asses'. Van Seters rejects this view as 'entirely unconvincing'.(119) Instead he maintains out that "only with the first millennium BC. was the Camel fully domesticated as a riding and burden carrying animal".(120) The writer was therefore not being anachronistic, but rather being consistent with Abraham's 1st millennium context. Despite the many dogmatic claims there is now a great deal of evidence for the accuracy of the references to camels. The debate has its roots in some basic facts of archaeological history.

Before 1950 animal bones found on digs were regarded as having little or no importance. In addition most of the early sites were in interior hill country in which the camel played a very small role.(121) With the recent increase in interest in faunal remains a number of writers now place the domestication of the camel in the fourth millennium BC. Evidence discovered so far includes a mention of a Camel in a list of domesticated animals during the Old Babylonian period (1950-1600 BC) in a Sumerian Lexical Text from Ugarit; reference to camel's milk in another Old Babylonian text.(122) Pierre Montet found a 2nd millennium stone container in the

form of a camel in Egypt.(123) Parrot uncovered a picture of the hindquarters of a camel on a jar at Mari, also c.2 000 BC, and camel bones dating from the pre-Sargonid era (c.2400 BC).(124) Wiseman asserts by the 3rd millennium BC camels were in use, together with donkeys, as slow moving beasts of burden, but were not domesticated on a large scale until c.1500-1250 BC.(125) Harrison,(126) Kitchen(127) and Yamauchi(128) cite further examples. Day *et al*(129) conclude that there is now no necessity to regard the patriarchal references to camels as anachronisms. Wenham indicates that the camel's relative rarity probably made them something of a luxury - a factor that emphasises the wealth of the patriarchs.(130)

The controversy over camels has tended to overshadow a far more important fact.(131) That is that the first reference to horses in Scripture is not until the time of Joseph's administration in Egypt (Gen. 47:17) some time in 18th - 16th centuries BC.(132) When it was first introduced to the Middle East in about 2 300 BC, the horse was very valuable, serving as a beast of burden as well as being used for riding.(133) The Amarna letters (14th century BC) mention horses in Canaan, but they do not appear to have been widely used (in warfare at least) until the time of Solomon.(134) A writer in the 1st millennium wishing to emphasise the wealth of the patriarchs would have been more likely to have substituted 'horse' into the account rather than 'camel' as by the 1st millennium camels had become much more commonplace, while horses were still expensive.(135)

A second alleged anachronism is the record of 'Philistines' in the patriarchal narratives (Gen.21:32,34; 26:1,8,14,15,18), as the fierce race of warriors from Caphtor(136) settled on the coastal plains of Canaan in the 12th century BC.(137) Therefore references to 'Philistines' in this region earlier than this date must represent an example of an 'unconscious' anachronism.(138) However, Kitchen has argued persuasively that the name is a replacement for an earlier race of immigrants from Caphtor. These people were different to the 12th century Philistines in that they dwelt around Gerar under a king (Heb. *Melek*), rather than in the five cities of the plain, which were governed by a 'ruler' (Heb. *seranim*).(139) Lasor argues that the earlier 'Philistines' were identified with the Canaanites, and may have inherited the name of a southern Canaanite people group called 'Palishti'.(140) 'Palishti' was later transferred to the 'prst', the Egyptian name for the 12th century Philistines.(141) Most conservative scholars follow Kitchen's explanation.(142) Lasor adds as an alternative that the name may have been proleptic.(143) Either way there is no longer any valid reason to claim that the name is anachronistic.

Van Seters and the 1st Millennium Context (?)

I have already discussed some of the arguments put forward by John Van Seters in his book *Abraham In History And Tradition*, but at this point it is necessary to examine his main points. In the first half of his book, entitled 'Abraham in History', Van Seters sets out to demonstrate that the names, places, peoples,(144) social customs(145) and archaeology of the Abraham narratives were composed in the exilic period.(146) For him there is no recoverable Abraham of history, or indeed, any indications of antiquity in the account.(147) Reacting to the abuses of

extra-biblical parallels he points out that there is a prejudice against a 1st millennium dating for the patriarchal narratives, which means that only early or mid 2nd millennium documents are considered in comparative studies,(148) anything later than this being regarded as irrelevant.(149)

Van Seters makes many valid points concerning the abuse of parallels, especially those found at Nuzi. Unfortunately throughout the first section he repeatedly makes broad assertions to justify a 1st millennium context which do not stand close examination.(150) I will consider three examples briefly below.

When considering Gen. 12:10-20; 20; 26:1-11, in which the patriarch pretends that his wife is really his sister, Van Seters draws on 6th century Egyptian marriage contracts that refer to a man's wife as his sister.(151) This would then explain why the patriarchs acted as the did.(152) Moving on from here Van Seters falls into an error that he earlier condemned(153) by importing a meaning into the text that is clearly not there, by arguing that in Egyptian law a man's wife was also known idiomatically as his sister. The explanation is rendered unnecessary by the comment of Gen. 20:12, but more seriously in Genesis 12 an Egyptian Pharaoh misunderstands what Abraham meant by calling Sarah his 'sister'. Surely, if Van Seters is correct, we could expect him to be familiar with one of his own country's idioms?(154) The more reasonable explanation (and the one supported by the text) is that while a brother was likely to be at least tolerated by a rival male, a husband was not.(155)

There have been parallels drawn between Esau's sale of his birthright to Jacob (Gen. 25:29-34) and texts from Nuzi that describe the transfer of birthright amongst members of a family.(156) Rejecting these Van Seters bases his preferred parallel on one damaged text.(157) Even if it were possible to be certain about this text, the transfer of birthright was not just a 1st millennium phenomenon, but occurred in several periods.(158)

Examples of a childless wife presenting her slave girl to her husband (cf. Gen. 16; 30:3, 9) are linked by Van Seters to a Neo-Assyrian text from Nimrod.(159) He is correct in his assertion that this custom cannot prove a 2nd millennium context, but neither can it be used in evidence for a 1st millennium context any more conclusively.(160) However his distinction between the children of the wife and those of the husband is considered by Selman to be unrealistic.(161) Also erroneous is the idea that the wife retains full control over the slave girl. In fact the text is nearer to the 2nd millennium parallel cited because it is Abraham who has to dismiss Hagar, an act that he performs reluctantly and only with divine consent and encouragement (Gen. 21:9-14). The implication could be fairly made that Abraham knew that the custom of the day forbade the expulsion of a slave girl under these circumstances.(162)

Once again the establishment of a 1st millennium parallel does not dismiss the 2nd millennium parallels because here, and in many other of Van Seters examples, the practices involved are not restricted to one period.(163) Rather than being unfairly biased in their rejection of 1st millennium data, scholars are being true to the chronological demands of the text (which Van Seters is able to ignore)(164) and are accurate when they claim evidence of 2nd millennium

parallels.

In many instances in seeking to correct the bias towards a 2nd millennium dating Van Seters simply replaces this with his own bias to a 1st millennium context. As Hamilton points out, in order to do this Van Seters repeatedly makes broad statements that do not stand up to close examination.(165)

Conclusion

The many mistakes made in interpreting extrabiblical material should warn us to be more cautious in future. Selman urges that any text being considered as a possible 'parallel' must be properly understood in its own context. Questions to be asked should include: Do we understand this text's literary characteristics, purpose and dating? Is it typical of other texts on the same subject from the same site? Finally the text should be compared with others from a variety of locations to establish how widespread the practice is.(166)

On the other hand we must also be judicious in our treatment of the biblical material itself. Misapplication of a parallel to a text can totally change the text's meaning, as in the case of Rachel and the household gods. We have to ask: Does the text itself demand the use of the parallel to explain it? It has to be admitted that a view of the patriarchal age based on these 'parallels' owes more to the ingenuity of 'parallelogists' than to the biblical record.(167)

In many areas the archaeological study of the patriarchal period it has to be conceded that we simply do not have the evidence to make any statement as to the historicity of events one way or the other. The best that can be said is that they have a ring of authenticity and that they do not now appear as far-fetched as was once thought. Charges of provable anachronisms no longer carry the weight that they once had. We may conclude therefore that the burden of proof is very much on those who would deny a second millennium context for the patriarchs.

References

(1) W.S. Lasor, "Archaeology," G.W. Bromiley, gen. ed. *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [ISBE]*, rev., Vol. 1. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 243.

(2) G.E. Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 18; Edwin Yamauchi, *The Stones And The Scriptures*. (London: IVP, 1973), 11. W.G. Dever, "Archaeology And The Bible - Understanding Their Special Relationship," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Vol. 16, No. 3, (1990): 53: "Nowhere in the Bible do we have more than a passing hint about what the people looked like, what they wore or ate, what their houses and furniture was like, what went on in the streets and plazas of the average town, how agriculture and trade were conducted, how people wrote and kept records, how they went about their daily chores and entertained themselves, how long they

lived and what they died of and how they were buried. These are precisely the details that archaeology can supply.”

(3) D.J. Wiseman, “Archaeology & The Old Testament,” F.E. Gaebelein, Gen. Ed. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 309.

(4) Though it is, of course, still open to different interpretations. H.D. Lance, *The Old Testament & The Archaeologist*. (London: SPCK, 1983), 66.

(5) Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, 10 000 - 586 B.C.E.* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 12.

(6) Founded in 1865. “Historical Survey of Archaeology,” *New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology* [NIDBA] (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 49

(7) Mazar, 10; *NIDBA*, 50

(8) W.F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1949), 29; *NIDBA*, 49; Wright, 24.

(9) Mazar, 11; Wiseman, “Archaeology,” 311.

(10) Mazar, 12.

(11) Lasor, 235; Wright, 17.

(12) Lance, 65; Lasor, 243; Yamauchi, 12: “If by ‘proof’ is meant irrefutable evidence that everything in the Bible happened ‘just so’ this ‘proof’ cannot be provided by archaeology.”

(13) Lasor, 244.

(14) Lance, 4.

(15) “...Gunkel was... very conscious of the importance of examining and comparing the literary and religious background of Israel’s neighbours... For Gunkel these were not looked upon as the source of Biblical ideas, but rather as the background of thought and customs which illustrated what we find in the OT. To deny the relationship of the religion of ancient Israel to those of its neighbours would have been for Gunkel a denial of the real historical context in which the Bible had arisen.” R.E. Clements, *A Century Of Old Testament Study*. (London: Lutterworth Press, 1976), 16.

(16) Lance, 4-5.

(17) J.A. Thompson, *The Bible And Archaeology*, revised. (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1973), 35: “The fact that Bible customs are so close to contemporary customs [discovered through archaeological research] is a strong argument either for written records, or for reliable oral traditions. We are compelled to conclude that the narratives of Genesis 12-50 have a solid historical basis.”

(18) M.J. Selman, “Comparative Customs and the Patriarchal Age,” A.R. Millard, & D.J. Wiseman, eds. *Essays On The Patriarchal Narratives*. (Leicester: IVP, 1980), 121-122; John Bright, *A History Of Israel*, 3rd edn. (London: SCM, 1980), 69-70.

(19) E.g. R.K. Harrison, *An Introduction To The Old Testament*. (Tyndale Press: London, 1970), 79-80, 515-516, 531-541; K.A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient And The Old Testament*. (Chicago: IVP, 1966), 17-34, 41-56, 112-135; Yamauchi, 21-41.

(20) Chapman & Tubb argue that the narratives do contain elements of fact, but also other unreliable material from a

long period of history that has been telescoped down to produce a coherent narrative, spanning about four generations. They conclude that it is therefore incorrect in their view to speak of a 'Patriarchal Period' as such. R.L. Chapman, & J.N. Tubb, *Archaeology & The Bible*. (London: British Museum Publications Ltd., 1990), 62.

(21) John van Seters, *Abraham In History And Tradition*. (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1975), 121. See further discussion of van Seter's views below.

(22) W.F. Albright, *From Stone Age To Christianity*, 3rd edn. (Doubleday & Co. Ltd., 1957), 200 (1900-1750 BC); Kitchen, 56; Mazar, 225-226; Roland De Vaux, *Early History Of Israel*. (London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978), 265 (Abraham 19-18th century BC); G.J. Wenham, "Genesis 1-15," *WBC*, Vol. 1. (Waco: Word, 1987), xliii-xliv; Wiseman, "Archaeology," 315-316 (1 950 - 1 750 BC); Wright, 50 (c.2 000 - 1 700 BC).

(23) Victor P. Hamilton, "The Book Of Genesis Chapters 1-17," *New International Commentary on the Old Testament*. [NICOT] (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 60-61; *NIDBA*, 60.

(24) J.J. Bimson, "Archaeological Data and the Dating of the Patriarchs," *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*, 84.

(25) Bimson, 85.

(26) G. Cornfield, & D.N. Freedman, *Archaeology Of The Bible Book By Book*, (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendricksen, 1989), 28.

(27) Cornfield & Freedman, 32.

(28) See further below.

(29) Cornfield & Freedman, 22.

(30) Bimson, 65-66.

(31) Kitchen, *Orient*, 45, 47; Wiseman, 316.

(32) Bright, 77-78; Kitchen, *Orient*, 48-49; Wiseman, "Archaeology," 316.

(33) Kitchen, *Orient*, 49-50; Wiseman, "Archaeology," 315-316.

(34) Bright, 33-34; Wiseman, 315.

(35) Bright, 78-80; Kitchen, *Orient*, 51-53; Wiseman, "Archaeology," 316. See further detailed discussion below.

(36) van Seters, 60-64.

(37) van Seters, 62; George W. Ramsey, *The Quest For The Historical Israel*. (London: SCM, 1982), 33-34 follows van Seters.

(38) Hamilton, 65.

(39) Wenham, xliv.

(40) Wiseman, 310.

(41) Wiseman, D.J. & E. Yamauchi, *Archaeology And The Bible*. (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1980), 4-5.

(42) Dever, 52; Enid Mellor, ed. *The Making Of The Old Testament*. (Cambridge: CUP, 1972), 8.

- (43) Bright, 74; Chapman & Tubb, 61; Mellor, 10-11.
- (44) A.R. Millard, "Methods Of Studying The Patriarchal Narratives As Ancient Texts," *Essays On The Patriarchal Narratives*, 48.
- (45) Ramsey, 123.
- (46) Lasor, 243-244.
- (47) Lance, 94-96.
- (48) Roland De Vaux, 216.
- (49) Martin Noth, *The History Of Israel*. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1960), 124; Van Seters, 112-120; John Skinner, "Genesis," *International Critical Commentary*. (Edinburgh: T.& T. Clark, 1930), 271-276; De Vaux, 219.
- (50) J.H. Hayes, & J.M. Miller, *A History Of Israel & Judah*. (London: SCM, 1986), 64.
- (51) Wenham, 308.
- (52) G.W. Anderson, *The History and Religion of Israel*. (Oxford: OUP, 1989), 17.
- (53) van Seters, 114.
- (54) van Seters, 115.
- (55) Bimson, 60.
- (56) Wenham, 319.
- (57) Wenham, 320.
- (58) Hayes & Miller, 64.
- (59) Albright, *Archaeology*, 237; Wright, 50-51.
- (60) Anderson, 17; M.A. Beek & K.R. Veenhof, "The History of the Ancient Near East," A.S. van der Woude, gen. ed. *The World of the Bible*, translated by Sierd Woudesa. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 231.
- (61) van der Woude, 231.
- (62) Bright, 60.
- (63) Bright, 59-60; C.E. Devries, "Hyksos," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [ISBE]*, rev., Vol. 2. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 787.
- (64) Devries, 787.
- (65) James B. Pritchard, *The Times Concise Atlas Of The Bible*. (London: Time Books, 1991), 18; Thompson, 48-49; Wiseman & Yamauchi, 19-20; Wright, 53.
- (66) Cornfield, 31; Thompson, 45. Against this G.W. Anderson points out that "It is improbable that a Hyksos King would have given the daughter of the priest of On (Heliopolis) to Joseph as his wife (Gen.41:45) since the Hyksos despised the sun-God Ra, whose great temple was at On.", 25.

(67) Cornfield, 32.

(68) R.W. Pierce, "Rameses," *ISBE*, Vol. 4, 1988, 39. Alternatively the writer could simply have used a later name familiar to his contemporaries.

(69) Wiseman & Yamauchi, 20.

(70) Anderson, 17.

(71) F.W. Bush, "Nuzi," *ISBE*, Vol. 3, 569; *NIDBA*, 54.

(72) Anderson, 17. Hamilton [62] provides a helpful summary of some of the suggested parallels that have been made between Biblical and Nuzi practices:

- 1). Marriage to a niece (11:29).
- 2). A husband obtains the status of a brother by adopting his wife (12:1-20; 21:1-34; 26:1-35)
- 3). A childless couple might adopt someone, even a servant, to take care of them; in the end this person would inherit their property. Any naturally born son, however, replaces the adoptee (15:2-3).
- 4). A barren wife must provide her husband with a surrogate, normally the wife's slave girl (16:1-2; 30:1-13).
- 5). The status of the slave girl and her offspring is protected against the jealousy or whims of either wife or husband (21:9-14).
- 6). A brother may adopt his sister in order to give her in marriage to someone else, providing she agrees (24:1-67).
- 7). A birthright might be sold to another (25:29-34).
- 8). A patriarchal blessing carries the weight of law and is not to be subjected to revision (27:35-37; 48:8-22).
- 9). A couple might adopt a son-in-law as their own son (30:1-2).
- 10). Possession of the household gods was seen as legal title to an inheritance (31:34).

(73) Bush, 569.

(74) Bright, 57-58; P.W. Gaebelien, Jr., *ISBE*, Vol. 3, 246-7.

(75) Hamilton, 61.

(76) Albright, *Archaeology*, 204, 236; Anderson, 17; P.W. Gaebelien, 247.

(77) Lasor, "Tell Mardikh," *ISBE*, Vol. 4, 751, 757.

(78) Bright, 84; Lasor, "Tell Mardikh," 757.

(79) Bright, 37.

(80) LaSor, 757.

(81) Selman, 97.

(82) Harrison, *OT Intro.*, 109.

(83) Millard, 47.

(84) Millard, 47.

(85) Bush, 569.

- (86) Harrison, *OT Intro.*, 107; Bright, 79; Thompson, 28-30; Wright, 43.
- (87) W.J. Dumbrell, *Covenant & Creation*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 52; Van Seters, 86.
- (88) Dumbrell, 87; Selman, 109. He goes on to argue that servants were able to inherit property (cf. Prov. 17:2 & 2 Sam. 16:1-4; 19:29), and that the text has nothing to do with extra-Biblical parallels. Van Seters, 87; Hamilton, 420; Selman, 109.
- (89) De Vaux, 249; Wenham, 329.
- (90) Ramsey, 33; van Seters, 98.
- (91) Kenneth L. Barker, "The Antiquity And Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives," Walter C. Kaiser & Ronald F. Youngblood, eds. *A Tribute To Gleason Archer*. (Chicago, Moody Press, 1986), 134.
- (92) Wright, 51.
- (93) van Seters, 99; Selman, 111.
- (94) Ramsey, 33.
- (95) van Seters, 99 "This would certainly have given ... [Ephron] an inferior status in the city."
- (96) Pacé Ramsey, 33 & van Seters, 100.
- (97) Selman, 117.
- (98) R.K. Harrison, "Abraham," *ISBE*, Vol. 1, 15-18; A.A. Saarisalo, "Machpelah," *ISBE*, Vol. 3, 210; Wiseman, 316.
- (99) Harrison, R.K. "Teraphim," *ISBE*, Vol. 4, 793. On this point Harrison has moved from his earlier position, which linked *teraphim* with inheritance. *O.T. Intro.* 110.
- (100) Wright, 79.
- (101) Cornfield, 23.
- (102) Derek Kidner, "Genesis," *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*. (Leicester: IVP, 1967), 165.
- (103) Mellor, 10.
- (104) Thompson, 31.
- (105) Wright, 44.
- (106) Harrison, "Teraphim," 793.
- (107) van Seters, 93.
- (108) Bush, "Nuzi," 570.
- (109) van Seters, 93-94; De Vaux, 252.
- (110) Ramsey, 32; Selman, 110.

- (111) van Seters, 94; Ramsey, 32; Harrison, "Teraphim," 793 notes that "the purpose of the story... may be to ridicule the importance both Rachel and Laban attach to the idols. Note that when they have arrived safely in Canaan, Jacob admonishes his household to rid themselves of foreign gods that have brought back with them (Gen. 35:2)." So also De Vaux, 253.
- (112) Millard, 49.
- (113) John J. Davis, "The Camel In Biblical Narratives," *A Tribute To Gleason Archer*, 144.
- (114) Davis, 147.
- (115) R.E. Brown, J.A. Fitzmyer, & R.E. Murphy, eds. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. (London: Prentice-Hall International, 1990), 27.
- (116) Bright, 81-82.
- (117) Yamauchi, 35: "...it is a universal practice for later editors or translators to make updated substitutions which are quite necessary to make certain items clear to later readers without elaborate circumlocutions. It would be quite captious to place these deliberate substitutions in the same incriminating heading as erroneous anachronisms."
- (118) Bright, 81, following Albright, *Archaeology*, 206-207. So also De Vaux, 224-225.
- (119) van Seters, 17.
- (120) van Seters, 17
- (121) Davis, 144-145.
- (122) Davis, 145.
- (123) "Camel," *NIDBA*, 115-116.
- (124) A.E. Day & R.K. Harrison, "Camel," *ISBE*, Vol. 1, 1979, 84.
- (125) Wiseman, "Archaeology," 316.
- (126) Harrison, *OT Intro.*, 311.
- (127) Kitchen, *Orient*, 79-80.
- (128) Yamauchi, 37.
- (129) Day & Harrison, 584; Thompson, 23.
- (130) Wenham, 289.
- (131) Millard, 50.
- (132) E. Ball, "Horse," *ISBE*, Vol. 2, 759.
- (133) Millard, 50.
- (134) Ball, 759.
- (135) Millard, 50.

(136) Crete and the Aegean Isles, Kitchen, *Orient*, 80.

(137) K.A. Kitchen, "The Philistines," D.J. Wiseman, ed. *Peoples Of Old Testament Times*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 56; Robert R. Steiglitz, "Philistines In The Patriarchal Age," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Vol. 8, No. 4, (1982): 28.

(138) Unconscious in the sense that the author did not realise that it was an anachronism, Millard, 49. So Bright, 82; *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 25; S.H. Hooke, "Genesis," *Peake's Commentary On The Bible*. (Wottingham: Van Nostrand Reinhold (UK) Co. Ltd., 1986), 194: "...the allusion to Philistines in Canaan at this period must undoubtedly remain an anachronism."; De Vaux, 503. Van Seters argues that the term refers to the exilic period after the break-up of the Pentapolis by the Babylonians (54), a theory that is only valid if he is correct about a 1st millennium context for Abraham. See further discussion below.

(139) Kitchen, *Peoples*, 56; W.S. Lasor, "Philistines," *ISBE*, Vol. 3, 842.

(140) Lasor, "Philistines," 846: "note the interchange of 'Philistines' and 'Canaanites' in Josh.13:2-4 & Judg. 3:3. Note also the expression "the Canaanites who dwell in the plain" Josh.17:16, almost certainly a reference to the Philistines, since they had chariots of iron."

(141) Kitchen, *Peoples*, 56; Lasor, "Philistines," 846.

(142) E.g. Barker, *Tribute*, 133-134; Kidner, 142; Millard, 50.

(143) Lasor, "Philistines," 846.

(144) Lasor, "Philistines," 39-64.

(145) Lasor, "Philistines," 65-103.

(146) Lasor, "Philistines," 310.

(147) Lasor, "Philistines," 121.

(148) van Seters, 10.

(149) van Seters, 67.

(150) Hamilton, 64.

(151) van Seters, 75.

(152) He rightly rejects parallels drawn from Nuzi which have been used to claim the a special class of marriage existed amongst Hurrian aristocracy, in which the husband actually adopted his wife. Van Seters, 71-75; cf. Hamilton, 381-382; Wenham, 288.

(153) van Seters, 68.

(154) Selman, 115.

(155) Hamilton, 382.

(156) R.K. Harrison, "Esau," *ISBE*, Vol. 2, 129; Wright, 43.

(157) van Seters, 93.

- (158) Selman, 116.
- (159) van Seters, 69-70.
- (160) Hamilton, 445.
- (161) van Seters, 70; Selman, 117.
- (162) Harrison, *OT Intro.*, 109.
- (163) Hamilton, 445; Selman, 117-18.
- (164) Selman, 121.
- (165) Hamilton, 64-65
- (166) Selman, 119.
- (167) Selman, 120-121.

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