Biblical Archaeology: The Hydra of Palestine's History

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Abstract: Both Israel Finkelstein and William Dever have allegedly distanced themselves from the kind of "biblical archaeology" of William F. Albright. Their own efforts, however, to relate Palestinian archaeology and biblical narrative not only reflect Albright's earlier methods, they create a politically oriented incoherence. In three recent works, since the turn of the millennia, Finkelstein uses archaeologically based arguments primarily to resolve problems of biblical interpretation. Dever, who also has published three biblical-archaeological studies since 2001, concentrates, rather, on archaeological issues, while using biblical narrative for his underlying historical context. A discussion of the figures of Solomon and Josiah on the one hand and a discussion of "landscape archaeology" and site classification, on the other hand, illustrate the shortcomings of their methodology.

Keywords: Biblical archaeology – history of Palestine – Canaanite – Israelite – Solomon – Josiah.

Albrightean "Biblical Archaeology"

In a presentation of "expert opinions" in the article "Biblical Archaeology" in *Wikipedia*,[1] both William Dever and Israel Finkelstein are cited – along with Ze'ev Herzog – as clearly distancing themselves from Albrightean "biblical archaeology"– a theologically apologetic discourse on the use of Palestinian archaeology in support of the historicity of biblical narrative, which, until the mid-1970s, had dominated Old Testament studies.[2] At least, Dever and Finkelstein are

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1. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_archaeology, (accessed Feb 10, 2015).
2. William F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianaity: Monotheism and the Historical Process*, 2nd edn (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins 1946); *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra* (New York: Harper & Row 1963); *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan, a Historical Analysis of Two Contradictory Faiths* (London: The Athlone Press 1968), cf. Thomas L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham* (Berlin: De Gruyter 1974); John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1975; J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes (eds.), *Israelite and Judean History* (Philadelphia: Westminster 1977).

represented as distancing themselves from "biblical archaeology", in-sofar as it relates to the stories of the patriarchs, of an exodus from Egypt, a conquest under Joshua and, in the case of Finkelstein and Herzog, a "united monarchy" and a "temple of Solomon".[3] In spite of such alleged distance, however, and in contrast to Herzog and David Ussishkin,[4] both Dever and Finkelstein have written extensively over the past fifteen years, within the genre of biblical archaeology and have grounded their presentations on a wide variety of "convergen-cies" and "conjunctures" between archaeology and the Bible, which they believe can be established.[5] In fact, they show little hesitation in interpreting the Bible with the help of archaeology or, indeed, archaeology in terms of their understanding of "biblical Israel".[6] Whatever the progress archaeology has made since Albright publis-hed his first contributions some ninety years ago[7], a methodological distancing of Finkelstein and Dever's perspectives from the "biblical archaeology" that Albright's work gave expression to, is hardly ap-parent. Albright, in fact, points to just such "correspondences" and "conjunctures" as Dever and Finkelstein use, when he defends the thesis that Abraham was a *Hapiru* caravaneer of the early second mil-lennium.[8] Rather than directly identifying Abraham's activities in the evidence we have of caravan trade, Albright pointed to biblical texts that speak of Abraham as a Hebrew, such as in Genesis 14. On

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3. E.g., William G. Dever, *Recent Archaeological Discoveries and Biblical Research* (Seattle: University of Washington Press 1989; Israel Finkelstein, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Jerusalem: IES 1988); Ze'ev Herzog, "Beersheba Valley Archaeology and its Implications for the Biblical Record" in André Lemaire (ed.), *Congress Volume Leiden 2004* (Leiden: Brill 2006), 81-102.
4. David Ussishkin, "The Temple Mount in Jerusalem during the First Temple Period: An Archaeologist's View", in J. David Schloen (ed.), *Exploring the Longue Durée* (Winona: Eisenbrauns 2009), 473-483.
5. William G. Dever, *What Did the Israelites Know and When Did They Know It? What Archaeologists Can Tell Us About the Realities of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2001); *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2003); *The Lives of Ordinary People in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2012); Israel Finkelstein and Neil A. Silberman, *The Bi-ble Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of its Sacred Texts* (New York: The Free Press 2001); *David and Solomon: In Search of the Bible's Sacred Kings and the Roots of the Western Tradition* (New York: The Free Press 2006); Israel Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom: The Archaeology and History of Northern Israel* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature 2013).
6. For this concept, see Philip R. Davies, *In Search of Ancient Israel* (Sheffield: Shef-field Academic Press 1992), passim.
7. William F. Albright, "Contributions to Biblical Archaeology and Philology", *JBL 43* (1924), 363-393.
8. William F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (New York: Doubleday 1968).

the basis of such biblical texts, he argued that Abraham was in fact a caravaneer, that caravaneers in the second millennium were generally *Hapiru* and that *Hapiru* caravan trade was carried out in the period in which Albright understood the Old Testament to have set Abraham. Finally, his argument was considered confirmed because such caravaneers visited the places Abraham visits in the Bible and performed the type of actions performed by Abraham (Albright 1968; Thompson 1974, 53).

Albright ever spoke of an "essential historicity" and allowed for inaccuracies, discrepencies and anachronisms, as well as the existence of variable traditions. His eventual history was ever recognised as probable and in "harmony" with the Bible and archaeology, precisely as Dever and Finkelstein have understood "convergence" and "conjuncture". Also like Albright, Dever and Finkelstein severely reduce the role of biblical criticism to that of defining an "historical reality" which they see as implied in biblical narrative. So, for example, we find Albright arguing that "if the patriarchs are to be seen as leaders of large tribal groups, then to show that tribal migrations of related linguistic peoples took place in a way reminiscent of the patriarchal movements demonstrates the historicity of these narratives and establishes for us the date of the patriarchal period" (Albright 1963, 5; 1968, 56; cf. Thompson 1974, 53). Like Dever and Finkelstein, Albright also used archaeology to correct the biblical narrative in constructing his history: most notoriously, in his adjustment of the "exodus and conquest" period to the Late Bronze/ Iron Age transition.[9] In the closing summary of my evaluation of Albright's methods for writing the history of the second millennium (Thompson 1974, 316-321), I drew the following principle:

Because of the limitations of our primary data, particular care must be taken in the isolation of our material and in its independent evaluation. Before general conclusions can be drawn encompassing all available materials, we must be careful that the relationships we trace between distinct bodies of evidence are themselves concretely supported by evidence (Thompson 1974, 320).

In my review of the 2001 publications of Dever and Finkelstein and Silberman, I pointed out that Dever's arguments, supporting the "reality" of the Bible's view of ancient Israel (Dever 2001, 239) suffered from a failure to understand the complexity of both biblical compo-

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9. William F. Albright, "The Israelite Conquest of Canaan in the Light of Archaeology", *BASOR 74* (1939), 11-23; John J. Bimson, *Redating the Exodus and Conquest,* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 5 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1981); Thompson (1974), 52-57.

sition and ethnicity.[10] It is, therefore with gratitude that I view Dever's return to the question of the convergence of his archaeological research regarding the 8th century and alleged biblical associations. It is wholly on the basis of such associations that his continued use of an Albrightean "biblical archaeology" seeks legitimacy. I agree with his statement "that the information from archaeological and material sources is now our primary source for writing history – not the biblical texts" (Dever 2003, 71). I also agree with him that "Joshua-Kings cannot be read uncritically as a satisfactory history, but neither can they be discarded as lacking any credible historical information" (Dever 2003, 226). What I do find missing, however – and here Dever stands in contrast to Finkelstein – is the lack of critical respect for the integrity of a reading of texts on their terms, whether they are biblical or ancient Near Eastern.[11]

Dever and Finkelstein's continued efforts to take the middle ground in the "minimalist-maximalist" debate echo Roland de Vaux's earlier effort to find a balance in the mid-twentieth century debate between American and German versions of "biblical archaeology".[12] The debate engaged Albright on the one hand, along with John Bright and George Ernest Wright, who used their archaeological research as a means of historicizing the biblical narrative,[13] and, on the other hand, most European scholars and, especially, Albrecht Alt and Martin Noth.[14] De Vaux's historical constructions chose the center between the German and American sides of the debate, typically focusing on

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10. Thomas L. Thompson, "Methods and Results: A Review of Two Recent Publications", *SJOT 15* (2001), 306-325 (309).

11. Thompson (1974), 57; "A Testimony of the Good King: Reading the Mesha Stele", *Ahab Agonistes: The Rise and Fall of the Omri Dynasty*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe (London: T&T Clark 2007), 236-292; *Biblical Narrative and Palestine's History: Changing Perspectives* 2 (Sheffield: Equinox 2013).

12. Roland de Vaux, "Method in the Study of Early Hebrew History", *The Bible and Modern Scholarship*, ed. James Phillip Hyatt (New York: Abingdon 1966), 15-29; "On Right and Wrong Uses of Archaeology", *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century in Honor of Nelson Glueck*, ed. James A. Sanders (New York: Doubleday 1970), 64-80.

13. William F. Albright, *The Biblical Period From Abraham to Ezra* (New York: Harper 1963); John Bright, *Early Israel in Recent History Writing* (London: SCM Press 1956); George Ernest Wright, *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital,* Studies in Biblical Theology 8 (London: SCM Press 1952).

14. Albrecht Alt, "Erwägungen über die Landnahme der Israeliten in Palästina", *Palästina-Jahrbuch 35* (1939), 126-175; Martin Noth, *Das System der Zwölf Stämme Israels* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 1930); *Geschichte Israels* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht 1950); Thomas L. Thompson, "Martin Noth and the History of Israel", *The History of Israel's Traditions: The Heritage of Martin Noth* , ed. Steven L. McKenzie and M. Patrick Graham (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1994), 1-90.

a limited, but "essential historicity" of theologically defined "events", not least the Exodus and the Davidic covenant.[15]

Central to understanding Dever and Finkelstein's need to find a biblical component in their historical interpretation has been the challenge to the project of "biblical archaeology" by three books in 1991 and 1992, which launched the "minimalist-maximalist" debate and came to dominate the field through the following decade.

The first work was a short monograph on the Canaanites by Niels Peter Lemche.[16] Although the first published and the more immediately relevant of the three to the current discussion, it was less noticed even as it clearly underlined the political dynamic in the misuse of biblical names as historical. The name "Canaanite" personifies an ancient geographical term, but, in the Bible, evokes a people: the bearers of values, identity and heritage. Biblical "Israelite" and "Canaanite" present a dichotomous pair with an effective literary function, essential to the inauthoctonous trope which defines the "promised land" as *Eretz Israel*. Israelites stand opposed to the indigenous people of the land, whose ancestor, Canaan, is marked by Noah's curse. As Canaan becomes *Eretz Israel*, Canaanites epitomize the dispossessed. The politics of Israeli archaeology's early decision to use "Canaanite" and "Israelite" as period markers did not only identify the heritage of an Iron Age *Eretz Israel* as Israeli. It offered Palestinians the heritage of the Bronze Age and marked them as a people without a heritage in the land: the heirs of a literary, divinely blessed, genocide and historiographic disaster! If the "Canaanites", however, in fact, were neither a nation nor a people, but simply any who lived in the land, once called Cana'an, Israelites, too, would be, historically, no more than those who lived in the central highlands. The origin of this region's settlements were not related to either the settlement of Judah or its future Jews. So simple was the "minimalist-maximalist" debate.

My own monograph, on the possible historical context for the concept of an Israelite people,[17] drew four conclusions, expanding Lemche's argument: 1) The biblical narratives about Israel – from the Patriarchs of Genesis to the destruction of Jerusalem by Nabuchadnezzar – were not historical accounts of the past, but literary and

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15. Roland de Vaux, "Les Patriarches Hébreux et l'Histoire", *RB 72* (1965), 5-28; also Bruce Vawter, *A Path Through Genesis* (New York: Sheed and War 1965) and Wright 1952; cf. Magne Sæbø, *Hebrew Bible Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation III/2 The Twentieth Century: From Modernism to Post-Modernism* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2015), 420-421.
16. Niels Peter Lemche, *The Canaanites and Their Land: The Tradition of the Canaanites* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1991).
17. Thomas L. Thompson, *The Early History of the Israelite People From the Written and Archaeological Sources* (Brill: Leiden 1992).

theological fictions. 2) The origins of Israel were related to the new Iron I settlements of the central highlands, which, in the ninth century, BCE, developed a small highland patronate bearing the name Bit Humri/Israel. 3) The formation of this polity in the central highlands, following a recovery from the climate-driven desedentarization of the highlands in the Late Bronze Age, was both much earlier and without any direct relationship to the comparable but later recovery and return to sedentary settlement in the southern highlands in the course of the tenth and ninth centuries, BCE. This region and the Transjordan highlands of Edom also developed the small patronage kingdoms of Judah and Edom, closely associated to the Assyrian development of the overland trade network. 4) The biblical understanding of Israel as an ethnicity was to be dated to the Persian Period at the earliest and should be understood as an utopian trope of biblical literature.

Closely related to my monograph was Philip Davies' very important essay,[18] which distinguished three different functions of the name "Israel": 1) "Israel" of biblical narrative: the figure of the patriarch and father of 12 sons, themselves the fathers of twelve tribes, who were brought from Egypt by Moses and whose sons conquered the "promised land". This was the Israel led by Joshua and the Judges and which formed the legendary kingdoms of Saul, David and Solomon: an Israel which Yahweh had destined for disaster at the hands of the Assyrians and Babylonians. 2) The second Israel is "ancient Israel": a construct of scholars. This Israel is hypothetical and theoretical: a modern understanding, a narrative, ideally based on evidence. 3) His third "Israel" is often confused with the other Israels. It is the Israel of the real past, one that no longer exists.

This exposure of the fictive foundations of Israeli heritage politics, so central to "biblical archaeology", fed the heated polemics of scholarly discourse. The late 1980s and early 1990s also witnessed the closure of the fifteen years discourse over the historicity of biblical origin stories.[19] Both Israeli and European scholars came to understand Israel's historical origins in the Iron I settlements of the central

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18. Philip R. Davies, *In Search of Ancient Israel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1992).

19. John Van Seters, *The Hyksos: A New Investigation* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1966); *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1975); Niels Peter Lemche, *Israel i Dommertiden* (Copenhagen: Gad 1972); *Early Israel: Anthropological and Historical Studies on the Israelite Society Before the Monarchy,* VTS 37 (Leiden: Brill 1985); Thompson 1974; John H. Hayes & J. Maxwell Miller, *Israelite and Judean History* (Philadelphia: Westminster 1977).

highlands and as culturally rooted in the Bronze Age.[20] The related acceptance of the legendary character of biblical narrative by many archaeologists in Tel Aviv still fuels the intense debate between the archaeological faculties from Tel Aviv and Jerusalem over the dating of early Iron Age pottery, which might be related to events of the tenth century, BCE and is, therefore, central to any argument in favor of the historicity of the United Monarchy. The use of the chronology of the Hebrew Bible, however, given its roots in the allegorical chronology of the medieval Masoretes, exposes an incoherence in the ideology of much Israeli archaeology.

Although the old arguments of "biblical archaeology" had fully collapsed, since the turn of the millennia, two competitive efforts have sought to salvage the remnants of its "ancient Israel". In a concerted effort to maintain some form of "biblical archaeology", Dever and Finkelstein have each published three books, adding six new heads to our scholarly Hydra at great cost in methodological transparency (Dever 2001; 2003; 2012; Finkelstein & Silbermann 2001; 2006: Finkelstein 2013).

While Finkelstein uses archaeology in an effort to solve problems of *biblical interpretati*on, Dever centers his historical contributions primarily in archaeological issues, but ever in support of a history of *biblical Israel*. While one is never in doubt of the technical progress of this old-new "biblical archaeology" since Albright had dominated the field for a period of fifty years,[21] one may doubt this new wave of a biblical, ethnocentric archaeology is any more critical.

An Old-New Biblical Archaeology: Israel Finkelstein

Finkelstein's perspective of "biblical archaeology" owes much to Roland de Vaux's ethnocentric exaggeration of Israel's role.[22] With de

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20. Moshe Kochavi, *Judea, Samaria and the Golan: Archaeological Survey, 1967-1968* (Jerusalem: IES 1972); Thomas L. Thompson, *The Settlement of Palestine in the Bronze Age,* BTAVO 34 (Wiesbaden: Dr. Reichert Verlag 1979); "Palestinian Pastoralism and Israel's Origins", *SJOT 6* (1992), 1-13; *The Early History of the Israelite People: From the Written and Archaeological Sources* (Brill: Leiden 1992); Israel Finkelstein, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Jerusalem: IES 1988); "Further Observations on the Socio-Demographic Structure of the Intermediate Bronze Age", *Levant 21* (1989), 129-140.
21. William F. Albright, "Historical and Mythical Elements in the Joseph Story", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 37 (1918), 111-143; Albright (1968).
22. Roland De Vaux (1965; 1966; 1970); *L'Histoire ancienne d'Israel I: Des Origines à l'installation en Canaan* (Paris: Gabalda 1971), cf. Finkelstein 2012.

Vaux, Finkelstein largely neglects a sustained construction of non-
Israelite Iron Age Palestine, even while acknowledging, e.g., the Pho-
enician orientation of coastal Palestine from Acco to Tantura, the
Aramean cultural links of the eastern Galilee and northern Jordan
rift, including Beth Shan, Tel Kinneret, Dan and much of northern
Transjordan. Finkelstein also draws on the Mesha stele to view 9th
century Moab in competition with Bit Humri/ Israel and the Ara-
means of Damascus for Megiddo, Ta'anek and the control of the
Jezreel. They are disputed territories, but hardly Israel.[23] Yet, in une-
quivocal terms, Finkelstein alleges an unparalleled greatness for Israel
(Finkelstein 2012, *passim*), however much one must doubt that its
borders would differ much from the limited region of the highlands,
which are defined by known "Israelite" forts (Dever 2012, 89-97);
that is, the highland region north of Ramat Rahel and al-Khirbe and
South of Tel Jezreel.

  Also echoing de Vaux, Finkelstein's three volumes deal primarily
with defending the historical quality of the Bible's legendary figures
and narratives, an orientation, which creates an absurd, politically
oriented history. Archaeology is used not to write history or show that
the biblical narratives were accurate history, but to show that such
legends might reflect historical events and contexts, which might yet
be reconstructed with archaeology's help (Finkelstein & Silberman
2006; Finkelstein 2013). Archaeology, for Finkelstein, also offers a
key to understanding unhistorical biblical legends, as, for example,
in his arguments that the greatness of Samaria and Bit Humri be
understood as the historical reality which lay behind a Judean writer's
competitive effort to create a narrative of David and Solomon, within
Jerusalem's legend of a "United Monarchy". Similarly, the biblical
narrative about David and his band of outlaws finds its historical, lit-
erary context in the eighth century, BCE; much as the story of Saul's
reign discloses Israel's historical political origins, before Samaria was
built (Finkelstein 2013, esp. chapters 2-3)!

  Central to Finkelstein's project is the assumption that the core of
the "Deuteronomistic History" had been written within that narra-
tive's historicized story of a Josianic religious reform (Finkelstein &
Silberman 2001, 14). This circular argument claims that the story
of Josiah's centralizing reform is evidence for itself (cf. Thompson

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23. See also Thomas L. Thompson, "Ethnicity and A Regional History of Pales-
tine", *History, Archaeology and the Bible Forty Years after Historicity, Changing Per-
spectives 6, CIS*, ed. Ingrid Hjelm & Thomas L. Thompson (London: Routledge,
forthcoming).

2001, 317)![24] Finkelstein, otherwise, identifies a narrative implying a supersessionist ideology, viewing Jerusalem as the cultic center of biblical Israel, but offers neither evidence nor argument for its historicity or his dating of the story (Finkelstein 2007; 2012). Given its primary orientation in form criticism,[25] this discourse hardly deals adequately with the literary complexity of such heroic chain-narratives, among which Samuel-Kings finds its home.[26]

Alternative interpretations are readily available among biblical scholars: not least the recent study of Louis Jonker.[27] Alternatively, one could consider Gary Knopper's theory of an implicit claim of ideological priority in Samaria's earlier temple, from at least the 5th century, BCE.[28] Unlike Finkelstein's Josiah story, the priority of the Samaritan temple has the merit of supporting archaeological evidence. Finkelstein claims that Jerusalem's expansion to its western hill sometime in the 7th century is explained by the evocation of a mass exodus of refugees from the siege and fall of Samaria in the fourth quarter of the eighth century. As a biblical scholar, I always wonder – when I consider Finkelstein's tireless pressing of this biblically oriented claim – why such refugees would have sought or found security among the most treacherous of their enemies!

One can hardly miss the deeply ironic contrast, which Finkelstein and Silberman sketch between the limited archaeological-historical evidence for a Judean monarchy before the eighth century and the biblical story of the united kingdom of David and Solomon. One

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24. Thomas L. Thompson, "Archaeology and the Bible Revisited: A Review Article", *SJOT 20* (2006), 286-313.
25. Following, variously, Nadav Na'aman, "The Kingdom of Judah under Josiah", *Tel Aviv* 18 (1991), 3-71; "Population Changes in Palestine Following Assyrian Deportations", *Tel Aviv* 20 (1993), 104-124; "The Debated Historicity of Hezekiah's Reform in the Light of Historical and Archaeological Research", *ZAW 107* (1995), 179-195; "The Contribution of the Amarna Letters to the Debate on Jerusalem's Political Position in the Tenth Century, BCE", *BASOR 304* (1996), 17-27; Steven L. McKenzie, *The Trouble with Kings: The Composition of the Book of Kings in the 7*[th] *-6*[th] *centuries BCE* (Leiden: Brill 1991); Baruch Halpern, *The First Historians: The Hebrew Bible and History* (San Francisco: Harper & Row 1988); Baruch Halpern & David S. Vanderhooft, "The Edition of Kings in the Seventh-Sixth Centuries, BCE", *Hebrew Union College Annual* 62 (1991), 179-244.
26. Ingrid Hjelm, *Jerusalem's Rise to Sovereignty: Zion and Gerizim in Competition, CIS* 14 (London: T&T Clark 2004), 195-210; Thomas L. Thompson, *The Messiah Myth: The Near Eastern Roots of Jesus and David* (London: Jonathan Cape 2005), 223-321.
27. Louis Jonker (ed.), *Texts, Contexts and Readings in Postexilic Literature*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 2. Reihe (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2011), 74-86.
28. Gary N. Knoppers, *Jews and Samaritans: The Origins and History of Their Early Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013), 102-134.

must, however, point out that the narrative of Kings, which is launched by the tragic story of Solomon's hubris, lays its primary plotline within the theme of unity vs. division. The theme of greatness is not so much engaged in David's story as in the tragic story of Solomon's rise and fall. The David story follows far more the plotline and themes of the king's rise to power, particularly the motif of "past suffering" as stereotypically found in the "testimony of the good king" (Thompson 2007, 260-262). The discrepancy with which Finkelstein is most preoccupied is that which is apparent in comparing the limited evidence of settlement in the Judean highlands during the 10th and early 9th centuries, BCE, with the hundreds of highland settlements, which supported the early patronage kingdom of Bit Humri (Especially Finkelstein 1988, 47-53 and 89-91; cf. Thompson 1992, 288-292 and 221-239, respectively). Given such a contrast in our historical record, how can one but entertain an ironic reversal of the Bible's supersessionism?

The Way with Kings

I have previously argued that the biblical narrative of the Books of Samuel and Kings is not an historiography (Thompson 1992, 372-382), nor relating an understanding of any real past, which archaeologists might find useful for their historical reconstructions.[29] Here, I wish only to take up the issue of a single motif of that great biblical chain-narrative; namely, the motif of greatness. It is not a motif, which relates to an actually historical, past greatness of any king or polity, whether of Samaria or Jerusalem. This greatness has rather a literary and narrative function, within the tragedy, which is at the heart of this chain narrative. Finkelstein's efforts to see this striking motif as a reflection of Israel's alleged, historic greatness, in an imagined past of the Omride dynasty, is without the slightest foundation within a narrative world where this greatness functions as a measure of failure. The theme of Solomon's greatness is far from the world of Bit Humri or, indeed, any historical world other than intellectual history. It is a greatness which supports a narrative theme with its trajectory aimed towards the story's closure in the story of Jerusalem's destruction in 2 Kings. Finkeslstein's failure to examine the literary functions of the greatness of David and Solomon and their United Monarchy,

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29. Thomas L. Thompson, *The Bible in History: How Writers Create a Past* (London: Jonathan Cape 1999).

seriously undermines his proposal of a biblical archaeological convergence of evidence. Solomon's greatness and wisdom becomes dominant already in the subtle, ironic tale, opening his story in 1 Kings 3, and it is a greatness which prepares for an even greater fall from grace. Yahweh, pleased with Solomon's love for him, which reciprocates the love Yahweh had expressed for Solomon at his birth (1 Kings 3:3; cf. 2 Sam 12:24-25), appears to the king in a dream. A classic folktale is opened by the divine offer of a gift, limited only by the limitations of its recipient: "Ask what(ever); it will be given you" (1 Kings 3:5)! Such a story hardly ever ends well. Here, it follows the stereotypical pattern of initial success and reward, uncontrolled hubris and fall from grace. In response to Yahweh's fate-determining question, an answer of brilliant wisdom opens the door to greatness. With humility, Solomon acknowledges that Yahweh has already given him his role as David's heir over a great and numberless people. He, therefore, asks for "an understanding heart to govern Yahweh's people, one discerning between good and evil" (1 Kings 3:6-9). Yahweh grants the wish, as he had promised. Solomon's wise and discerning heart is marked by a three-fold leitmotif of the greater story, as Solomon, like Hezekiah and Josiah, takes on the role of the good king of legend (Thompson 1997): "as none has been before or any after will be" (1 Kings 3:12; cf. 2 Kings 18:5; 23:25). With his wish granted, however, the real test of the story, even of his wisdom and discernment, is immediately opened: "I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, that no other king will compare with you.…" A brief illustrating tale of Solomon's wisdom follows as his judgment of the two harlots, with but a single child, living, brings all Israel to "wonder at the divine wisdom that was in him to render justice" (1 Kings 3:16-28).

However, even such a demonstration of Solomon's greatness is set under severe stress by the narrative's greater ploy. Already at the end of Samuel's rule as judge over Israel in 1 Samuel 8, the people had asked for a king, that they might be "like all the nations". Although this request implicitly rejects Yahweh as their true king, Yahweh grants the request and orders Samuel to "show them the ways of the king": a stereotyped description of the arbitrary and unjust rule of royal patrons, which also informs many of the stories of 1-2 Kings. This warning to the people is already foreshadowed by Deuteronomy 17:14-20, the so-called "law of the king", so essential to understanding Solomon's narrative. For our purposes, the following excerpt should suffice: "He must not return to Egypt to multiply horses for himself . . . not multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor greatly multiply for himself silver and gold". Fulfillment comes in 1 Kings 10-11. The whole world sought the good king's presence

and brought gifts. The women Solomon collected from foreign na-
tions, "who turned his heart away" numbered 700. Silver became as
common as Jerusalem's stones and, in a single year, he acquired a fate-
ful 666 talents of gold! Solomon brought horses from Egypt: 1400
chariot and 12,000 horse: fabulous numbers for any ancient army.
Surely, too, we must add, it is from this exuberant story line and
from the equally fabulous Assyrian references to 2,000 chariots and
10,000 soldiers, so legendarily sent by Ahab to the battle of Qarqar
in 853 BCE, that Finkelstein and Silberman owe their belief in Bit
Humri's allegedly historical greatness![30]

But, apart from the tragedy of kingship's failure and the division
of his kingdom at his death, what of the specific test of Solomon's
wisdom and discernment in 1 Kings 3 and the trajectory his story
sets for the greater story? His wisdom and discernment seems, in fact,
confirmed in Solomon's second prayer, in spite of its evocation of the
coming exile. In fact, Solomon sees this as inescapable "*because all
men sin*" and, therefore, in the coming crisis of Yahweh's justice, are
fit for destruction. However, exactly "because all men sin", it is left to
Yahweh, once again, to take on the task of changing! Following the
plot of Isaiah, the punishment cannot belong to the sinner, who can-
not bear it. Rather, the solution must lie with Yahweh to learn com-
passion and forgiveness of his people and their sin (1 K 8:46-53). This
story of Solomon in Kings, which anchors the plotline for the greater
story, hardly implies the existence of a Judean supersessionism as Fin-
kelstein assumes. Nor, indeed, is there any historical evidence for a
Judean competition with Samaria's past, any more than there is his-
torical evidence for a context for the composition of 2 Kings within
any historical religious revivals attributed to Hezekiah or Josiah, any
more than of other, similar reforms attributed to Asah (1 Kings 15:9-
24) and Jehoash (2 Kings 12:1-21). Judea does not supersede Samaria
in any way, in Kings' narrative, but rather shares Samaria's rejection
by Yahweh and follows Samaria into exile.

The lost tribe of Judah

Both Finkelstein and Dever follow 2 Kings 17 and close ancient Israel
and Samaria's history with Bit Humri's transformation into the As-
syrian province of Samerina. The people of Samaria, however, in fact,

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30. Thomas L. Thompson, *The Bible in History: How Writers Create A Past* (Lon-
don: Jonathan Cape 1999), 65-66; Thompson 2005, 268-271.

continued in the land. They watered their plants, picked their olives, pressed their grapes and worshipped their god. When we consider the disaster that overfell Samaria, I believe we need to think again about the most effective of propaganda: histories hidden and ignored. Certainly, the silencing of the non-Jewish history of the central highlands is a most serious distortion of a biblically based history.[31] Just as important is the distortion supported by the failure to consider the seriousness of the great demographic disaster, which befell Judah at the hands of Sennacherib, two decades after Samaria's fall![32] Judah hardly recovered and itself might be appropriately marked with the figure of a "lost tribe".[33]

For Finkelstein, who presents his historical construction in a continuous narrative, the silencing of Samaria's future allows him to shift his focus to what he asserts is the context of his history. Finkelstein shifts from an archaeologically driven historical mode to biblical theology, where he had addressed the question of the authenticity of a Jewish narrative. His domain question had been how 2 Kings understands Judah's common ground or unity with Israel, given the separate and distinctive origin histories, which Finkelstein has constructed? While the introductory function of Genesis might have helped him answer this as a literary question, with reference to the stories, which present Judah as the son of Jacob-Israel, the issue for Finkelstein was to understand the legendary narrative of a United Monarchy, in support of the role of Judaism as *Israel's surviving remnant*. Within that ideology, there is in Israel today, no political room for a post 722 BCE Israel (Hjelm forthcoming). Finkelstein has fallen victim to his own strategy of ethnocentricity; for he has created his historical narrative as a theological justification for modern, secular Israel's archaeological project!

I believe, moreover, that both Finkelstein and Dever have great trouble in continuing their historical narratives about the central hills after 722 BCE. Their commitment to a biblical resonance for their archaeology also commits them to a biblical strategy in their history

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31. Ingrid Hjelm, "Lost and Found? A Non-Jewish Israel from the Merneptah Stele to the Byzantine Period", *History, Archaeology and the Bible Forty Years after Historicity, Changing Perspectives 6, CIS*, Hjelm & Thompson, forthcoming.

32. Lester L. Grabbe, *Like A Bird in A Cage: The Invasion of Sennacherib in 701, BCE* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 2003).

33. See further Thomas L. Thompson, "Memories of Esau and Narrative Reiteration", *SJOT 25* (2011), 174-200; "What We Do and Do Not Know about Pre-Hellenistic al-Quds", *The Politics of Israel's Past: The Bible, Archaeology and Nation-Building*, ed. Emanuel Pfoh & Keith W. Whitelam (Sheffield: Phoenix Press 2013), 49-60; "The Faithful Remnant and Religious Identity: The Literary Trope of Return – a Reply to Firas Sawah", Pfoh & Whitelam (2013), 77-88.

and a transference of Israel's destiny from a no-longer existent biblical Samaria to Jerusalem. Finkelstein's compelling need to draw on refugees from the "northern kingdom" to explain Jerusalem's expansion in the first half of the seventh century veils this theological assumption more than it unveils a past. There is no *historical need* for making this decision! There already exists, ready at hand and fully attested by both archaeology and Assyrian texts and monumental art, an even greater, massive, refugee-creating, demographic disaster to fuel Jerusalem's expansion; namely, the catastrophic destruction which befell Lachish and Judah in 701 BCE at the hands of Sennacherib (Grabbe 2003; Thompson 2013, 77-88). The villages and towns of Jerusalem's hinterland were lost and their patronage was transferred to loyal Assyrian clients on the coastal plain, or destroyed and their inhabitants deported.

Although Lachish was rebuilt by the mid-seventh century and there was considerable demographic recovery, especially in the South, Jerusalem, even with its estimated growth to some 10,000, hardly became a "great city". It was never more than a large provincial town on the fringe of empire. The campaigns of Nabuchadnezzar in the sixth century brought disaster once again, destroying Jerusalem and decimating most of Judah. Once more, much of the population was deported and towns and villages of the region were left in ruins. Though Jerusalem, with much of the Persian province of Yahud, was destined to lay in ruins for some centuries, the destruction of the Edomite capital of Bosrah at the hands of Nabonidus, the last of the Babylonian kings, did bring the heartland of Judah, together with Edom and the Negev, into a coherent cultural whole (Thompson 2011; 2013A; 2013B). In the Persian period, most of this region – the province of Idumea – was centered in Lachish, whose recovery positioned it as the dominant power of the southern hills until late in the 2nd century, BCE.

An Old-New Biblical Archaeology: William Dever

In contrast to Finkelstein, Dever has little interest in interpreting the Bible in using archaeology to understand the literary or fictive qualities of biblical narrative. Rather and much like his teacher George Ernest Wright, Dever is interested in understanding archaeological remains and in constructing a history based in archaeology. In his own words, he is a "minimalist" in his approach to writing the history of Palestine. Yet, with regard to the Bible's perspective of the past,

which hardly converges with the archaeological and historical record, Dever often maintains an openness to what he sees as the biblical perspective of the past. This is most notable in his understanding of the inautochtonous settlement of the land and the historicity of the United Monarchy. In this respect, he can maintain the "biblical archaeological" contrast between a "Canaanite" Bronze Age and an "Israelite" Iron Age and, holding his option for a biblical perspective, he allows for the historicity of the so-called united monarchy.[34] His interests are not specifically in problems of biblical interpretation and he is primarily preoccupied, especially during the past decade, with archaeological interests, especially small finds, reflecting Palestine's subaltern heritage.[35] In this respect, he returns to a long neglected but important aspect of archaeological research, which had flourished apart from the biblically oriented histories of Israel. This tradition of scholarship can be epitomized by Kurt Galling's *Biblisches Reallexikon*,[36] the fully revised second edition by his students, edited by Helga Weippert,[37] and her more thoroughly representative *Handbuch der Archäologie*.[38]

Landscape Archaeology

While Dever supports his discussion with reference to some more modern perspectives, used widely in archaeology today, he is not always convincing. His understanding, for example, of the rich variety of ecological contexts in Palestine's many small regions, is limited to references to his personal experiences in the village of Deir Samit, near Hebron. This has led him, unfortunately, to speak of Palestine's agriculture comprehensively as a "subsistence economy" (Dever 2012, 237-239). One might, however, doubt that even Deir Samit's agricultural economy of the early 1970s is to be properly described as a "subsistence economy", though the region is arid and its agri-

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34. Dever (2001), 271-298; Dever (2012): 30-34; Cf. Thomas L. Thompson, "Text, Context and Referent in Israelite Historiography", *The Fabric of History: Text, Artifact and Israel's past*, ed. Diana Edelman (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1991), 65-92.

35. For the "time of the divided monarchy", see Dever (2001), 159-244; and for the "eighth century" Dever (2012), 142-206.

36. Kurt Galling, *Biblisches Reallexikon* (Tübingen: Mohr 1937).

37. Helga Weippert (ed.), Kurt Galling, *Biblisches Reallexikon* (Tübingen: Mohr 1977).

38. Helga Weippert, *Palästina in vorhellenistischer Zeit, Handbuch der Archäologie* (München: Beck 1988).

culture relatively poor. Landscape studies are useful, in fact, because different regions reflect different economies and we can certainly not assume that Palestinian agriculture is represented as a whole by Deir Samit's! Regional economies vary in Palestine quite specifically because the landscape changes. Consider, for example the differences in the agriculture of Deir Samit to what we find in the Northern Negev, the southern Shephelah, the highlands of the Western Galilee, the northern Jordan Rift, the coastal plain or some 20 other regions with considerably different landscapes, each with their distinct economies and, therefore, different histories.[39] The landscape of Deir Samit reflects but one of Palestine's many ecologically variable forms of a *Mediterranean economy*. These different regions are rooted variously in sheep and goat herding, fruits and olives, grain and field crops. Palestine's is not a subsistence economy, but a trade-oriented, agricultural and herding economy (Thompson 1992, 141-146). Leaving Deir Samit, Dever also argues that some regions of the lowland valleys and coastal plains were not open to agriculture in much of the Iron Age because of malaria-infested swamps (Dever 2012, 38-46). However, the technology used in agriculture varies not only according to Palestine's different regional landscapes, but also according to its different periods. Archaeological surveys have shown that already in the Early Bronze Age irrigation farming through relatively simple irrigation and drainage systems was widespread in the lowlands of the North and had opened large areas to settlement, which, without such systems, could easily be subject to swamp formation and malarial infestation. This was most notable in the densely populated and stable Beth Shan and Northern Jordan valleys (Thompson 1979, 25-29).

Cities and Nation States?

Dever's classification and typology for eighth century sites is also problematic. His distinction between capital cities, first tier administrative centers, district capitals and tier 2 cities and urban centers, suffers from two problems. His designation of a "city" (Dever 2012, 106-141) is used for sites with an estimated population of as few as 300 (Tall as-Saba') to perhaps 5000 (Tall al-Qadi), with no other "city" larger than 3000. Apart from Tall al Qadi, Dever's "cities" average a population of little more than 1500. He acknowledges, howe-

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39. Thomas L. Thompson & Francolino J. Goncalvez, *Toponomie Palestinienne: Plaine de St. Jean D'Acre de Jerusalem* (Louvaine La Neuve: L'Institute Orientaliste de Louvaine 1988).

ver, that field archaeology of ancient Near Eastern sites otherwise has used an estimated population of 20,000 before speaking of a "city"! The second difficulty is rooted in his identification of Samaria and Jerusalem (for which he gives no 8th century population estimate) as "capital cities" and *all other sites* as "subordinate cities". The classification is entirely biblical and rooted in a biblical perception of eighth century Palestine! Gaza, Ashqalon, Lachish, Shechem, Megiddo, Tell al-Qadi, Gezer, Ekron, Bosra and yet other sites, have histories as regionally dominant patronates from at least as early as the Execration Texts and there is no archaeological evidence that this pattern of Palestinian polity was significantly different in Dever's eighth century!

It becomes clear that Dever's analysis hinges on his understanding of Israel as a divided *nation state governing the whole of Eretz Israel*. Why does he understand that Tall al-Qadi is a city subordinate to Samaria, when in the 9th century it appears – at least if the Aramaic *byydwd* inscription is both genuine and to be read as Dever does – that this town, along with Tel Kinnereth, was a client of Aram's patronage? Why does he see Megiddo as subordinate to Samaria? It, along with Tell el Qadi, is beyond the "border" established by the "Israelite" fort at Tel Jezreel and both sites fall to the Assyrians when Damascus falls. Is Tell Gezer a subordinate administrative or regional center of a national state? Is it, in its own right, a regionally dominant patronate, controlling the northern Shephelah, which may have been a client of first Samaria in the eighth century and, then – as Samaria quarreled with the Assyrians – have transferred its patronage to Jerusalem? If Dever is correct about Gezer's becoming a Judean city after 722 BCE, such a shift reflects a governing polity of patronage rather than that of a national state. Apart from the biblical narratives, Palestine's Bronze Age polity – structured according to small, regionally dominant towns – has a continuous history through the Iron Age and survives at least into the Hellenistic period. If we consider all of Palestine in our description of the Iron Age, the structures of patronage, we see so clearly in the Amarna letters, are fully appropriate to the Iron Age.

Dever's interpretation of archaeological remains, echoing Albright's "biblical archaeology" as it does, interprets historical *realia* through an ethnocentric, biblical perspective. For example, he understands the song about "Israel" in the final stanza of the Merneptah stele's victory song over Lybia, as confirmation of a biblical origin story by marking the transition from a Canaanite Bronze Age to an Israelite Iron Age (Dever 2001, 118-120). Interpreting the Merneptah inscription's description of four towns ("… plundered is Gaza … carried off

is Ashkelon, bound is Gezer, Yenoam is as one not existing…")[40] as implying that the town of Gezer had been captured in an Egyptian military campaign under Merneptah, Dever dates this destruction with the destruction of Gezer Stratum XV (1210 BCE), unfortunately depending entirely on an uncertain biblical and archaeological convergence. That is, his interpretation of the reference to Gezer in Merneptah's poem is merged with his understanding of Gezer's stratum XV and then used to support the date for the transition from the Bronze to the Iron Age.

In the poetic representation of the Merneptah stela, however, the four Palestinian towns mentioned refer to towns under Egyptian control, which reflect the peace which the Lybian victory has created. Gezer, as one of the children of Khurru, plays the role of Israel's lost seed (allegorically representing the fertility of the land), but is understood by Dever to represent the dying Late Bronze, "Canaanite" society. The figure of "Israel" bears the allegorical role of the former husband (patron) of Khurru (the land). The name of Israel bears, perhaps, the appropriate pun reflected in this name: "Israel"/Jezreel, which, however, Dever insists refers – not to the father of such "Canaanite" towns, but to the proto-Israelites of the early Iron I period highlands, casting an historical trajectory forward, towards the biblical legends of Omri, Israel's future patron. Dever's interpretation involves a tendentious misreading of the closure of an ancient Egyptian victory song: a victory not over Palestine, but over Libya. This allegorical closure celebrates Egypt's peace and patronage, a characteristic that radically effects its meaning (Thompson 2007, 274-276).

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40. Ingrid Hjelm & Thomas L. Thompson, "The Victory Song of Merneptah, Israel and the People of Palestine", *JSOT 27* (2002), 3-18 (10-11).