

2 Re-Constructing Biblical Archaeology

Toward an Integration of Archaeology and the Bible

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Abstract

For over a century, the archaeology of the Land of Israel went hand in hand with the Bible. Biblical Archaeology, the outcome of this interaction, has been normally conceived as the handmaiden of the biblical texts, authenticating and illustrating them. Whether motivated by theological or secular agenda, the main tenet of Biblical Archaeology was political history. In spite of recent claims for the emancipation of archaeology from the tyranny of the biblical texts, the archaeological agenda is still biblical, pursuing questions related to biblical historiography. Paradoxically, however, due to its problematic nature, the use of the Bible in archaeological discourse is considered today almost illegitimate.

We envision a different integration between archaeology and the Bible. On the one hand, an archaeological agenda, independent of the biblical text, will open a much wider range of social and cultural questions. On the other, using the Bible as a cultural document to answer these questions will restore its central place in the archaeological discourse of the biblical period. Conceiving of both biblical texts and ancient material artifacts as cultural documents, we believe that their inspection will be fruitful and enlightening. Words and artifacts can give us access to the mindset of the people of the biblical period. Encapsulated in both are the worldviews, cosmology, perceptions of landscape, ideology, symbolism, etc. of the people who produced them. The insights gained by this approach will eventually result in a better understanding of biblical political history.

Introduction

Biblical Archaeology is currently under crisis. On the one hand, some of its practitioners are seeking to emancipate the archaeology of the Land of Israel from the tyranny of the biblical text that has dictated the discipline's agenda for many years. In their opinion, archaeology must take the leading role in the historical and historiographical study of the biblical period (especially Finkelstein 1996a, 1998; Finkelstein and Silberman 2001, 2006; Herzog 1999, 2001; see also Ussishkin 2003). On the other hand, in spite of the new vistas of research opened to archaeology by its great theoretical progress, the issues considered worth pursuing by these scholars are hardly different from those that interested Biblical Archaeology since its early days, namely, the deeds of kings, military campaigns,

major destructions, etc. Furthermore, though the Bible is all but eliminated from most of the current archaeological discourse due to the dark shadow cast over its historicity (below), the agenda of current Biblical Archaeology is paradoxically still driven by biblical historiography (cf. Finkelstein and Silberman 2001, 2006).

In this essay, we suggest to renew the dialogue between archaeology and the Bible but in a completely different manner. First and foremost, we argue for a new archaeological agenda not dictated by the biblical texts—an agenda that will focus on the wide array of social and cultural questions stemming from the plethora of material finds of the biblical period (mainly from the Iron Age, 12th–6th centuries BCE). Yet, the agenda must integrate the Bible in addressing these questions, since it is a cultural document encapsulating invaluable information about the social and ideological world of the society that has produced this material culture. The new integration will infuse fresh air into Biblical Archaeology’s sails, and will restore the Bible to its central position in the archaeological discourse of the biblical period.

Archaeology and Bible: Ambivalent Relations

Since its inception in the 19th century, the archaeology of the Land of Israel has gone hand in hand with the Bible (for comprehensive summaries, see, e.g., Moorey 1991; Bunimovitz 1995, 2000; Silberman 1982, 1995; Davis 2004; see also Levy, this volume). ‘Biblical Archaeology’—the fruit of this unique combination—was initially conceived as the handmaiden of biblical studies whose task was to illustrate the biblical world and shed light on its historical and cultural background (e.g. Davis 2004: 3-20). Later, it was used to prove the authenticity of the biblical text. The curriculum of Biblical Archaeology and its attitude to the Bible were shaped especially during its ‘Golden Age’ between the two world wars, and reflected the intellectual and ideological background of the ‘Founding Fathers’ of the discipline (Dever 1985; Moorey 1991: 25-78). The spiritual world of William F. Albright and his students, most notably G. Ernest Wright, was anchored in the religious life of the United States in the late 19th and early 20th century (For Albright see: Running and Freedman 1975; Van Beek 1989; Long 1997; Levy and Freedman 2008; and the critical articles by Jack M. Sasson, Neil A. Silberman, William G. Dever and Burke O. Long in *Biblical Archaeologist* 56 [1993]; also *NEA* 65 [2002]. For Wright see: Dever 1980; King 1987; and the articles in *Biblical Archaeologist* 50 [1987]: 5-21.) They attempted to establish the historicity of the biblical narratives in face of the ‘threat’ posed by German biblical criticism. Biblical Archaeology developed, therefore, as a sub-discipline of biblical studies, a vehicle for supplying external and objective evidence that would refute the theoretical assumptions of ‘high criticism’. Its goals were to identify the ‘period of the Patriarchs’, to prove the historicity of the Israelite conquest of Canaan, and to place Israelite monotheism in its appropriate position within the ideological history of the ancient Near East. Improvements in archaeological methodology, the establishment of ancient Near Eastern chronology and construction of the region’s cultural history—all important achievements of Albright school—were not intentional goals of themselves. Apparently they were but tools helping to create an historical interpretative framework through integration of archaeological finds, biblical text, and external textual sources (see, e.g., Dessel 2002).

Paradoxically, though the ‘Israeli school’ of Biblical Archaeology that developed mainly after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 was secular, its scope and interest paralleled those of the Albright school. For the first generation of Israeli archaeologists, the Bible served as a founding document of the nation’s history. Archaeology played an important role in affirming the links of the newly founded state with its ancient past and its ancestral land (Bar-Yosef and Mazar 1982; Yadin 1985; Stern 1987; Dever 1989a; Silberman 1989; Geva 1992). No wonder, then, that the lion’s share of the archaeological enterprise was related to the Bible—a tendency dubbed by W.G. Dever (1989b: 49*; 1993: 710) ‘secular fundamentalism’. Although the interpretative framework of the

Israeli school reflected ethnic and national sentiments more than religious interests, it focused on the same historical aspects that were at the core of the Albright school, namely the Israelite conquest of Canaan, the monumental building activities of the kings of Israel and Judah, military campaigns, mass destructions, etc. The two branches of Biblical Archaeology—the American and the Israeli—were busy, therefore, in a search for evidence for ‘big’ historical and political events and for royal enterprises, thus viewing the Bible as a primary historical source, both relying on it and affirming it. In this ‘monumental’ archaeology, no place was found for the study of social and cultural process, nor for close acquaintance with the daily life of the ‘silent majority’.

Several important developments, however, shook Biblical Archaeology during the 1970s and 1980s. In the American side, the influence of the ‘new archaeology’, although not always direct and explicit, was felt (Dever 1981, 1992; see also Levy, this volume). New archaeology’s a-historical, and even anti-historical attitude was probably partially responsible for the growing will to sever the connection between archaeology and the Bible and to ‘liberate’ the former from the ‘yoke’ of the latter. Dever (1985) even called for secularization of the discipline, under the banner of ‘Syro-Palestinian Archaeology’ (replacing now the old fashioned ‘Biblical Archaeology’). This movement was accompanied by the adoption of scientific and technological advances and their incorporation in archaeological excavations—also resulting from the influence of the ‘new archaeology’ of the time (Dever 1981; see, however, Dever 1993: 707). In the Israeli side, too, major shifts took place as a consequence of the large archaeological surveys in the highlands following the Six-Day War of June 1967 (see mainly: Kochavi 1972; Zertal 1992–2005; Finkelstein, Lederman and Bunimovitz 1997; Finkelstein and Magen 1993; Ofer 1994, 1998; see also Frankel *et al.* 2001; Gal 1992). These surveys brought with them fresh conceptual innovations to Biblical Archaeology, but at the same time, ironically, eroded its connection with the Bible.

First and foremost, the surveys brought into the forefront the ‘people without history’—the rural population that was the backbone of past societies but had been ignored by both ancient elite’s historical writing and by the modern ‘urban biased’ and ‘tell minded’ archaeologists (Ahlström 1982: 25; London 1989; a conspicuous outcome of this change, along with the indirect influence of the ‘new archaeology’, is the plethora of settlement patterns and demographic studies that followed the surveys, e.g. Broshi and Gophna 1984, 1986; Finkelstein 1988: 324-35; Broshi and Finkelstein 1992; Finkelstein and Gophna 1993, and many others).

Second, the reconstruction of settlement and demographic history of the Land of Israel introduced a long-term perspective (*longue durée*) in which ancient Israel was brought into normal, ‘secular’ cultural evolution, in contrast to its unique, almost ‘super-historical’ position in the eyes of some biblical archaeologists of previous generations (Finkelstein 1988, 1994, 1995, 1996b; Bunimovitz 1994). Third, environmental and ecological factors, previously ignored, became the basis for explaining not only the structure of daily life and sociopolitical organization in ancient Canaan and Israel, but also culture change (Finkelstein 1989, 1993; Stager 1985, 1988). As an outcome of the above new directions, short episodic historical events lost their popularity as adequate explanation for culture change and were substituted by slow, long-term changes that are deep-structured within the geographical-ecological setting of the historical scene.

The distancing of settlement archaeology from the history of ‘events’ signaled the growing chasm between cultural interpretation of the archaeological record and the biblical text. If the Israelite settlement in Canaan can be explained by ethnographic analogies for the settling of pastoral nomads groups, the ecology of the highlands, and long-term cyclical settlement processes (Finkelstein 1988, 1992, 1994), then the biblical text becomes redundant.¹

1. In perspective, the broadening of the research program in the archaeology of the Land of Israel, which took place in the 1980s and early 1990s (see its culmination in Levy 1995), reflected a break with the biblical agenda, though not necessarily with the Bible. However, as we shall see below, this widening of

A similar process of disengagement from the text can be seen also in the traditional archaeological study of the central *tells*, which has always relied on historical events documented in the Bible. Even here, there has been a growing discontent with the ‘secular fundamentalism’ that simplistically viewed the biblical narratives as history, and a call to ‘liberate’ the archaeology of the Iron Age from the ‘tyranny’ of the Bible was loudly voiced. The historicity of large parts of the biblical text has been questioned vis-à-vis the archaeological reality; the well-known narratives were deprived of any historicity and were attributed to the ideological and theological world of late monarchic Judah (reflecting the new disciplinary discourse influenced by the ‘minimalist’ school, see below; Herzog 1999, 2001; Finkelstein and Silberman 2001). An apt expression of this process is the drastic revision of the Iron Age chronology, which empties the biblical description of the glorious United Monarchy, and delays the formation of the state in Israel and Judah (Finkelstein 1996a, 1999).

In tandem with the above changes, an even more dramatic process of completely undermining the credibility of the biblical text took place during the 1990s. A group of biblical scholars had totally negated the validity of the Bible as an historical source for early Israel and even the monarchic period. These scholars, sometimes dubbed ‘minimalists’ or ‘nihilists’, claimed that the Bible was composed only in the Persian, the Hellenistic, or even the Roman period, and therefore had no relevance for the study of the Iron Age (e.g. Davies 1992; Thompson 1992, 1999, 2000; Lemche 1994, 1998; Whitelam 1996). Though this small group of scholars have not convinced mainstream biblical and historical scholarship (see, e.g., various works in Day 2004) and was severely criticized (e.g. Rainey 1994; Halpern 1995; Dever 1998, 2001; Pasto 1998; Rendsburg 1999; Barr 2000), it had an immense impact on the scholarly discourse, including archaeology. Thus, many scholars, including those that are not necessarily inscribed to the ‘minimalist’ school, completely refrain nowadays from referring and relying on the biblical text. Using the Bible (in whatever capacity) is seen today as problematic and in many instances is simply avoided.

Despite the above, and notwithstanding the vociferous plea to ‘liberate’ archaeology from the burden of the biblical text, the agenda of Iron Age archaeology in the Land of Israel is currently still dictated by the Bible (most notably, Finkelstein and Silberman 2001, 2006; even the great scientific progress achieved in the utilization of ^{14}C in the archaeology of the Iron Age in Israel [e.g. Levy and Higham 2005a] is, to a large extent, an outcome of the debate over the historicity of David and Solomon). The anthropologically oriented research program that developed in the 1980s was abandoned, and once again the central themes include the United Monarchy, the emergence of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the status of Jerusalem as a capital, etc.—all issues stemming from biblical historiography. Surprisingly, even radical critics of the historicity of the biblical narratives did not turn to alternative research themes abundant in modern archaeology (e.g. economic structures, core-periphery relations, social organization, socioeconomic stratification, power relations, symbolism, gender, and more). Rather, they remained within the domain of biblical historiography, and devoted lengthy studies to prove their arguments regarding, for example, the non-existence of the United Monarchy (e.g. Wightman 1990; Finkelstein 1996a, 1999, 2003; Niemann 2000; note that opposing views were also ‘dragged’ into extensive discussion of those issues, e.g., Stager 2003; Mazar 2004, and many others; see also the vast literature on the United Monarchy and Iron Age chronology). Even though archaeology is the vehicle for their arguments, at the end of the day the discussion revolves around biblically driven issues. Apparently, the questions asked at the forefront of current archaeological research of the biblical period are similar to the ones dealt with by Albright and his students generations ago, even if the answers to these questions are diametrically different (cf. Finkelstein and Silberman 2001).

research horizons was short lived, and from the mid-1990s one can identify an unfortunate retreat to the more limited research agenda of previous generations of Biblical Archaeology.

We thus face today a paradoxical situation that leads Biblical Archaeology into a cul-de-sac: while its scientific agenda is still dictated predominantly by biblical historiography, the Bible itself, due to its problematic nature as an historical source, has been cast out of the archaeological discourse and its use has become almost illegitimate.

‘New Biblical Archaeology’: The Archaeological Record and the Biblical Text as Cultural Products

The developments in the 1970s and 1980s and the indirect influence of the new archaeology, as discussed above, led to a growing chasm between the Bible and archaeology. This divide, however, led to some dissatisfaction. W.G. Dever, probably the most vocal advocate for a ‘secular’ Syro-Palestinian archaeology during in the 1980s, called in the early 1990s for a ‘New Biblical Archaeology’ (1993). Dever realized that the total split between the two fields was more than he bargained for. The texts, problematic as they might be, are still important in the attempt to study the Iron Age. He therefore called for a new cooperation between archaeologists and biblical scholars and envisioned an ideal, synthetic history of ancient Israel comprised both of ‘sacred history’ (based largely upon biblical texts) and of ‘secular history’ (based on Iron Age archaeology in Israel and the ancient Near East). In the meantime, however, he was ready to compromise for the two histories running parallel to each other (1993: 711). Disappointingly, Dever’s plea to rebuild Biblical Archaeology along new lines of construction was, generally speaking, unheeded.²

Embracing the idea of a ‘New Biblical Archaeology’, we suggest a re-construction of Biblical Archaeology founded on a different integration between archaeology and the Bible. On the one hand, we call for an archaeological agenda not dictated by the biblical text, which will place cultural and social issues at the center of the discussion, hence expanding our research questions. On the other hand, integrating the Bible as a cultural document in the quest for the answers to these questions will restore the biblical text to its central place within the archaeological discourse.

The archaeology of the Land of Israel in general, and that of the biblical period in particular, has produced a rich and detailed database, originating from a wealth of institutionalized and salvage excavations, as well as from extensive surveys conducted all over the country. This wealth of information, unparalleled in other countries, has not been fully used yet, especially in regard to social and cultural questions. As emphasized above, archaeological studies of the Iron Age period concentrated mainly on questions of political history, chronology, typology, etc. Progress in world archaeology in the last decades has enriched the discipline with a plethora of theoretical and practical approaches and immensely enlarged the range of issues dealt with by archaeologists as well as advancing the ways to tackle them. These issues include, for example, social organization, political

2. Recently, Levy and Higham (2005b: 5-6) defined ‘New Biblical Archaeology’ as Biblical Archaeology embracing ‘science-based methodologies to control time (chronometric methods) and space (e.g. Geographic Information Systems [GIS] and other digital processing technologies)’ (see also Levy, this volume). While applauding this suggestion, which calls for a better-controlled Biblical Archaeology, we find it too narrow as a platform for a ‘New Biblical Archaeology’. It does not directly address the need for a more sophisticated integration between the biblical texts and the archaeological finds, nor do new methodologies necessarily transform an old agenda (cf. Clarke 1973: 11). For example, the extensive and sophisticated use of ¹⁴C in the debate over the chronology of the 10th century (see the various papers in Levy and Higham 2005a; see also Bruins, Van der Plicht, and Mazar 2003; Finkelstein and Piasezky 2006; and Sharon *et al.* 2007, and many others) does not change the fact that the debate is still over Great Kings and Great Deeds. Numerous additional scientific methods and procedures, currently applied in the field, also fall short of solving the problems we are facing. While producing new data, it still requires explanation and interpretation. In our view, these should be created within an anthropological framework.

structures, spatial analysis, gender, social stratification, ideology, etc. (see, e.g., Renfrew and Bahn 1996; Johnson 1999; Hodder 2001). A thorough restudy of the rich Iron Age archaeological database at our hands, in light of the new disciplinary insights, will undoubtedly bring into relief various behavioral patterns of the period's society that demand explanation. It should be emphasized that no such patterns could have been discerned in the past, since the research perceptions and questions were different (for the linkage between the two, see, e.g., Trigger 1980; 1989: 1-26; Hodder 1986: 14-17; Shanks and Hodder 1995; Bunimovitz and Greenberg 2006).

The method to explain the newly revealed patterns includes comprehensive reference to the cultural context in which they were embedded. Despite the problems involved in using the Bible as an historical source, there is no doubt that it is a cultural document that incorporates contemporary, Iron Age 'layers' and can provide valuable information about Iron Age society. The incidental information contained in the Bible, just like the language of the people, provides insights into the social and spiritual world in which they created their material culture. As Murray (1998: xxxi) wrote: 'It does not matter whether the stories...are true... And even a forgery is an important piece of evidence for the period that perpetrated it... This principle of unconscious revelation through representation...is one of the most powerful tools in the modern historian's study of mentalities'. And in King and Stager's (2001: 7) words: '[F]or our purposes, then, it matters little whether the biblical accounts are "true" in the positivistic sense of some historians and biblical scholars... The stories must have passed some test of verisimilitude, that is, having the appearance of being true or real. In this sense, the biblical accounts and many other ancient accounts, however self-serving and tendentious, become grist for the cultural historian's mill'.

Both the biblical text and the period's material culture are cultural products of the very same society. Both words and artifacts open a door into the cognitive world of the people who created them: they represent worldviews, cosmology, spatial perception, ideology, symbolism, etc. The present approach 'places texts and maps in the same role as anthropological descriptions or natural scientific laws... Unlike these sources, as products of the society under study, they enable us to give *interpretation from within* that society. That is, they may enable us to give the same interpretation to archaeological material as people from within that society would have given' (Dark 1995: 57, emphasis in the original).

A few studies conducted by us recently demonstrate the new approach presented here, and its potential (see also Faust 2005).

1) The phenomenon of directing Iron Age buildings and settlements in ancient Israel to the east, and avoiding the west, went unnoticed by previous scholarship (Faust 2001). Because this tendency is not explicitly mentioned in the text it was not looked for in the past, and was revealed only by a scrutiny of the archaeological data.

The tendency to direct doorways of structures to the east and avoid the west influenced not only dwellings but also city gates. Moreover, it appears that it even had an impact on Iron Age urban planning (Faust 2001, 2002). An examination of various climatic and functional considerations does not explain the phenomenon. Many ethnographic studies, however, have demonstrated the strong influence that cosmological principles can have on the planning of buildings and settlements (e.g. Wheatley 1971; Oliver 1987; Waterson 1997), and that in many cases the east is preferred (e.g. Parker Pearson and Richards 1994: 15; Har-El 1984; Frazer 1968: 47). In the case of the ancient Israelites, however, we have additional information. The common Biblical Hebrew word for east is *qedma* (forward), while the west is *ahora* (backward) (e.g. Drinkard 1992a, 1992b). As Malamat (1989: 67) phrased it: 'The early Israelite ego faced east'. Moreover, additional words for those directions indicate that the east had a good connotation while the west had a bad one. The common word for west in Biblical Hebrew is *yam*, literary 'Sea', which is the most conspicuous element in this direction. But the word *yam*, beside designating a large body of water and westerly orientation,

had some other meanings as well, and in many cases it represents the forces of chaos, sometimes personified in the *Leviathan* or other legendary creatures (Lewis 1993: 335; see also Ahlström 1986: 49; Stoltz 1995: 1397-98; Keel 1978: 23, 35, 49, 50, 55, 73-75).

The matching of the archaeological pattern, human tendency to prefer the east, and the evidence that the Israelites not only oriented themselves to the east but had even attributed positive and negative meaning to the various directions, seem to be sufficient to conclude that the Israelites viewed the east as a hospitable place (and the west as an inhospitable one), and this is the reason for the eastward orientation of structures and settlements. Still, it appears that the available evidence allow us to go one step further. Ezekiel 40–48 describes the temple in Jerusalem. It is clear that the description is not historical, and, at best, contains some historical elements, but this is irrelevant for the present discussion. According to this description, the Temple courts had three gates each, the main one in the east, and two others in the south and north. It is striking that no entrance is described in the west. Perhaps more important is the description of the eastern gates. This is the main gate through which Ezekiel enters the temple (40:4ff.). Later, however, the eastern gate is described as being closed, since this is the gate through which God is entering the Temple (44:2; see also 43:1-4 and ch. 46). The matching of the description with the archaeological data—where east is preferred and west is avoided—is therefore complete.

Thus, an archaeological pattern, along with language and texts (which are used as a substitute for human informants), seem to give an important insight into some of the cosmological principles of the ancient Israelites. This is because both the texts and the archaeological finds are cultural products reflecting the perception and beliefs of the society that produced them. Notably, the entire discussion, including the biblical one, stemmed from an archaeological agenda.

2) Another example is the well-known four-room house. This house is the dominant type of domestic building in Ancient Israel from the beginning of the Iron Age until the Babylonian Exile. As such, numerous studies were devoted to its origins and the ethnic identity of its inhabitants (e.g., Shiloh 1970, 1973; Netzer 1992; Holladay 1992, 1997; Ji 1997). The popularity of the four-room house was explained as either expressing its close relation with the Israelites (without elaborating the reasons for this relation) and/or its functional suitability to the needs of the Iron Age peasants, regardless of their ethnicity. Neither of these explanations, however, seem to account for the synchronic and diachronic dominance of the four-room house as a preferable architectural type in all levels of Iron Age settlement (from cities to hamlets and farmsteads), all over the country (both in highlands and lowlands), for almost 600 years(!). Moreover, the plan served as a template not only for dwelling, but also for public buildings, and even for the late Iron Age Judahite tombs (e.g. Barkay 1999). The fact that the house disappeared in the 6th century seems also to refute any 'functional' explanation, as no changes in peasant life and no architectural or agricultural inventions took place at the time. We have therefore suggested that an adequate explanation for the unique phenomenon of the four-room house must relate to the ideological/cognitive realm (Bunimovitz and Faust 2002, 2003; Faust and Bunimovitz 2003). Formed in the Iron Age I to fulfil the functional needs of the hill-zone settlers, the four-room house took shape during the process of ethnic negotiation and boundary construction that accompanied the Israelite ethnogenesis. Some of its architectural characteristics (few of them revealed by Access Analysis) reflect Israelite values and ethnic behavior: e.g. egalitarian ethos, purity, privacy, and cosmology. These are reflected in the spatial syntax of the house, as well as in the biblical text. Moreover, because the Israelites were preoccupied with Order (Douglas 1966), once this kind of house became typical, it eventually became the appropriate and 'right' one. It is thus the dialectic between function, process, and mind that created the 'Israelite House' which once crystallized long-lived for hundreds of years and disappeared following the destruction of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, when its creators and maintainers lost coherence and were dispersed.

Whether all the explanations raised by us for the specific plan of the four-room house and its popularity will prove to be correct is irrelevant at the moment. We should stress that the entire discussion and all lines of reasoning stemmed from an archaeological agenda. Even the discussion of purity laws and their relevance to the Israelite household had been developed in an attempt to explain an archaeological pattern.

Summary

The archaeology of the Land of Israel has been shadowed from its inception by texts. Over the years it has become apparent that the biblical text is a problematic source for comprehensive historical reconstructions. This understanding, among other developments and influences, led to its marginalization within the archaeological discourse. Still occupied today by ‘big questions’ about biblical history, Iron Age archaeology has pushed aside the Bible itself, placing Biblical Archaeology at a dead-end.

We propose to *reverse* the usual scientific procedure in Biblical Archaeology. The research agenda should be archaeological/anthropological, relying on patterns identified in the archaeological record. Explanation of these patterns, however, should include *all* lines of evidence, with an important place reserved for the biblical texts. From a cultural perspective, the Bible as an ‘unconscious revelation’ is invaluable.

The new procedure will not only expand our research questions and restore the importance of the texts in the archaeological discourse, but may also be of importance for historical-political reconstructions—the main substance of ‘traditional’ Biblical Archaeology. Political aspects are, after all, part of a larger cultural environment (cf. Bunimovitz and Faust 2001). Thus, a better understanding of the political facets of a society demands acquaintance with its cultural facets—an aspect usually overlooked by the archaeology of Iron Age Israel.

While ‘liberating’ the research agenda from the ‘shackles’ of the Bible, it is rather the new approach to Biblical Archaeology suggested here that reinstates the Bible at the heart of the archaeological discourse of the Iron Age.

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