

---

**The Archaeologist's Spade and  
the Apologist's Stacked Deck:  
The Near East through Conservative Christian Bibliolatry**

*Daniel Martin Varisco*

*I want to suggest to you, in the first place, that you should be very suspicious of all archaeologists who tell you that they have proved conclusively the truth in Holy Scripture. (Rev. A. C. Headlam 1931:123).*

*The hermeneutics are so variable, and the prejudices so strong that, in these archaeological controversies, all the fallacies known to logicians have flourished luxuriantly. (Cobern 1891:312)*

In 1956 a popular book of essays was published by the noted Sumerologist, Samuel Noah Kramer; it was called *History Begins at Sumer*. About that time I was introduced to Sunday School in a local Baptist Church in northern Ohio, where it was definitely taught that history was begotten with a literal Adam and Eve around 4004 B.C., give or take a divine day. That church no longer exists. I went on to major in "Biblical Archaeology" at the conservative evangelical Wheaton College in Illinois and then further afield for a degree in anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania, the institution where Kramer spent most of his life deciphering Sumerian tablets. A

---

Daniel Martin Varisco, Associate Professor of Anthropology  
Department of Anthropology & Sociology  
*Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York, USA*

---

quarter of a century ago I wrote an M.A. thesis entitled *Archaeology as Apologetic: Towards an Understanding of the Fundamentalist Paradigm*. I never published the thesis, in part because I went off in different directions as a Middle East anthropologist and Arabist. In preparing this talk, I realized I am still trying to understand that “fundamentalist” paradigm.

This will not be an objective essay – not exactly a novel admission given the postmodern build up to the currently new millennium – but it does have several objects in view. The first I wish to stress is the last word in my title: bibliolatry. As a youthful victim to this narrow view of reality that still pervades a large minority of our population, the meaning for me goes beyond any concise dictionary rendering. Being passionate about things biblical leads many, given the post-Darwin spin of modernity, to a need – perhaps more likely a craving – to defend the grand old book. And God gave believers “apologetics” that they might smite the hosts of critics who saw myth where once the order of all things was written in stone. Partisan by design, the apologetic defense of Holy Writ stacked the decks so that ordinary people would not doubt that God still rolls the dice. The stones, for apologists who saw science and modern biblical criticism eroding the very foundation of their faith, began coming to light in Darwin’s time after centuries of buried neglect. The archaeologists’ newly tooled spades were nowhere more “telling”, pun intended, than in the Near East, the “Fertile Crescent,” the “Biblical World.”

My focus is on two particular questions of interest to me both as someone who grew up in and out of such bibliolatry and as a scholar of Middle Eastern culture and history. The first is how archaeological finds were used as an apologetic tactic to defend the faith and – bizarre as it might seem to some of you – to convert others to a losing literalist

interpretation. There are many sites and many finds, so I will deal only a few prominent examples in which textual truth is validated through the dirty business of archaeological fact-finding. The second question is more germane to the theme of this volume. Why was there such a focus on the Near East as the “apologetic Armageddon” in the last-ditch effort to save the bibliolatric literalism of conservative, mainly Protestant, Christianity? Going beyond the obvious, how did the perception of this Biblical World – both the treasures underground and the customs of those humble folk still making a meager living from the ground – merge with the discursive styles of “Orientalism” and Christian apologetics as the ideological glue of Western colonialism in the region?

#### **Bibliolaters of the Word Unite**

*If such errors are to be found in them [Scriptures], if the writers betray such ignorance of the relative situation of the places they mention, they would incur the suspicion of having recorded not facts but inventions of their own, or mythic traditions in which they could no longer distinguish the true and the false from each other. If convicted of mistakes here, who could resist the impression that they may be fallible also as religious teachers, and thus forfeit the character from which they claim they authority over the faith and consciences of men. (Hackett 1855:172).*

For a text that is written in several languages, some long dead, that took over a millennium to coalesce into a sacralized unity, that was edited and redacted across the political spectrum and that has been at the center of more martyrdom and

---

torture than any other single book in history, the Bible – all 66 “books” in the authorized canon and some 773,692 words in the King James Version of 1611 – begs to be understood. That attitude to the Bible as a “divinely-inspired” whole without error may properly be called “bibliolatry,” an idolizing of the book no less fervent than reverence for the idea of God “himself.” Most Christian theologians across a wide spectrum of sects have recognized the inherent danger of a literalist interpretation, especially one based on translations, by individuals totally divorced from the cultural context that produced and reproduced the texts.<sup>1</sup> In 19th century America and England, however, it was generally considered indiscreet, and largely unnecessary, to doubt the veracity of Holy Writ. Today the literalists are on the conservative end of Protestantism; outsiders commonly deride them as “fundamentalists,” although most self-style themselves as “born-again” or simply “Bible-believers.”<sup>2</sup> While the influence of a literalist view has waned to the point of extinction in academic contexts, the popular, usually skin-deep, mantra of “the Bible is true” pervades American culture. You and I may think, or hope, that such fundamentalists are on the margins, but what a large margin it is. If you want a reality check: a national Gallup Poll in June, 1999, shows that 68% of the American public think “creationism” should be taught alongside “evolution” as biology in the public schools, while only 28% said “evolution” should be required in science classes. As late as 1997 almost half of Americans thought God created Adam and Eve in one act less than 10,000 years ago.

Bibliolatry, as epitomized in Hackett’s mid-19th century quote above, bears a “domino theory” of Biblical exegesis. If the Bible, consistently seen only as a whole, has mistakes on matters of everyday knowledge and historical fact, what if its statements on central tenets of the faith are equally subject to

doubt? The dominoes were carefully arranged long before Darwin's Voyage on the *Beagle* in a paradigmatic passage by John Witty (1705, preface):

*If Moses's History of the Creation is not to be literally interpreted, then neither is that of the Fall; and if the Fall is a piece of mythology, then so is the Redemption; and if the Redemption is a Fable, then welcome Deism, and farewell reveal'd Religion.*

This downfallen fear has been echoed in an increasingly beleaguered conservative apologetic up through the present. A group of Anglican clergy, scandalized by Mr. Darwin's naturalistic theory of origins, based their "Oxford Declaration" in 1864 on the dogma that if one part of scripture was doubted, the whole would fall. In 1867 some 700 English "gentlemen" signed a "Declaration of Students of the Natural and Physical Sciences" in which they predicted that it was only a matter of time before "true science" and the Bible would agree. The magnitude of the earlier debate is well articulated in the founding principles of the Victoria Institute, set forth in 1865:

*As no rational being who thinks can believe in contradictions, there can be no doubt whatever, that when the Scriptures and science are at issue, one of them must be at fault; and, in that case, it must be of the greatest consequence to mankind at large, to be able to discover which*  
(Anonymous 1867:6).<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, it was only a matter of time before science and history dealt a crucial rational blow to the dogma of the Bible as divinely inerrant. This, of course, did not stop conservatives and bible-believers from blatantly ignoring the mounting evidence against Biblical accuracy. The reason for this is not hard to decipher. A challenge to the scientific or historical accuracy

---

of any part of the Bible makes it less likely that someone would accept the essential miracle at the center of Christianity. As radio evangelist Martin De Haan (1962:6) put it to Middle America:

*Prove that Moses did NOT write the books of the Pentateuch and you PROVE that Jesus was totally mistaken, and not the infallible Son of God He claimed to be.*

Out of context this statement seems totally absurd: what has the authorship of Moses to do with the divinity or moral ethos of Jesus? It may very well be absurd even in context, but the underlying assumption is clear. We should readily take born-again Christians at their word and recognize the zero-sum of their apologetics. Consider the question posed by Henry Morris (1966:108), founder of The Institute for Creation Science, a bizarre “scientific” institute with an associated bible college promoting the idea that science disproves evolution and supports creation by divine fiat. Morris, like most other born-again, believes in a literal hell for all who are not “born again,” a spiritual code word that usually requires taking the Bible literally. He asks, “How can an inquirer be led to saving faith in the divine Word if the context in which that Word is found is filled with errors?” Not only must one believe the Bible is true; it must be vigorously defended against its Satanic detractors in order to save souls.

In historical hindsight we must distinguish several forms of bibliolatry. It is one thing to think that a scripture is sacred when there is not a mass of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Assuming in mid-19th century England that the Bible must have been right follows from a Victorian world view, now seen as excessively narrow, that an avowed Christian morality is what made men civilized. At that time defending Adam and Eve, or even the authorship of Moses, was also

about defending a moral view of life when few “others” – including Bedouins and Turks – were seen as civilized. By the 20th century, however, with the total collapse of an intellectual base for literalist exegesis, defense of the Bible became perverse, a willful attempt to ignore rational inquiry in order to salvage a severely blinded dogma.<sup>4</sup> At the start of the 21st century the dogma trudges on mainly in America under the cloak of a general conservatism. Some blindly assert that no finding of science or history refutes biblical authority; others quietly hope that is and will continue to be the case.

Let us begin with the 19th century variety of bibliolatry. In the first three quarters of the 19th century an estimated 2,000 individual travel accounts were published in America and Europe on the Holy Land (Ben-Aireh 1972:83). Horatio Hackett (1855:iii), was one who played the pilgrim-cleric role in an 1852 trip to Palestine. He wrote down his observations “for the purpose of promoting a more earnest and intelligent study of the Sacred Volume.” Although writing before Darwin’s *Origin of Species* or widespread access in America or Europe to critical Biblical scholarship, Hackett (1855:172) was keen to show that the geographical accuracy of Biblical passages could be a powerful weapon against those who rejected Christianity and for those who needed their confidence strengthened. This apologetic thrust is encountered in many of the travelogues and religious books spawned by such visits. H. B. Tristram (1866:viii), in a large volume published by the Society Promoting Christian Knowledge, informed the faithful that “even the minor details of the topography and the natural character and features of the land have tended to corroborate the minute accuracy of the Inspired Record.” Much of the early commentary on Holy Land geography viewed it as an ally of a literalist and historicist approach to Biblical history. This is understandable,

---

given some of the pioneering topographic findings of American scholars like Edward Robinson. It was not until almost the end of the 19th century, with George Adam Smith's (1894) *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, that a more balanced approach to the findings took hold.

Biblical history was more than the accuracy of place names. Even before archaeological excavation became widespread, the living people of the Near East were seen as a comparative window for illuminating biblical customs. The massive volume of Henry Van-Lennep (1875:6), for example, approached the observable customs of contemporary Bedouins and peasants as "the only key that can unlock the sense of many a valuable text of Scripture and bring in to view." For Thomson (1859:xv), whose widely circulated *The Land and the Book* sent through several editions, Palestine was "one vast tablet whereupon God's messages to men have been drawn, and graven deep in living characters by the Great Publisher of glad tidings, to be seen and read of all to the end of time."<sup>5</sup> The romanticized image of Bedouins cut from the mold of patriarchal Abraham, even though more often encountered as marauders, convinced many conservative Christians that little had changed since biblical times.

### The Stones Cry Out?

*Persons of the Jewish and Christian faiths find themselves between a rock and a hard place. The Bible speaks of a God who is active in the history of certain supposedly actual persons, places, and events. The archaeologist, then, ought to be able to find evidence not that God was at work in these times and places but that supports the reality of these events. However, archaeology finds*



*no trace of many biblical events and finds evidence that clearly contradicts others. If the persons, places, and events are not real, then how can God be active in them? How trustworthy is the biblical claim that God is present in this history when the narrated events are not factually accurate, or appear not to have taken place, or have left no trace and therefore cannot be determined to have been events at all? The believer is caught between the rock of the biblical claim and the hard place of the archaeological contradiction (Willis 1992:77).*

Before examining the role of “biblical archaeology” in assisting the interpretation of history and as an apologetic tool, it is expedient to start with a conclusion that is now so obvious and unassailable that it may seem redundant to highlight it at all. What we call the canonized Bible is only an imagined unity; it is rife with myth and the flavor of sociopolitical ideologies current during its continual creation; it is no different in its obvious differences than any other text. To those of us who long ago abandoned any guilt at not believing in a God who plays capriciously and narcissistically with “his” creation, interpretation of the Bible is an academic issue, engagingly relevant as it still must be in 21st century American society. If I seem to be beating a dead horse, it is mainly because I know far too many people who still suffer from a religious “if I were a horse” delusion.<sup>6</sup> I hasten to add that both presidential candidates in the recent election claimed to be “born again” Christians (as did Presidents Carter, Reagan and Clinton), and that George W. Bush, following Reagan, has been quoted as saying the jury is still out on evolution.

---

Defending the textual Rock of Ages is indeed a hard task. As Willis notes above, the individual who believes in Christianity as a historically-based and supernaturally-charged revelation is caught between the rock dogmatism of a claim for inerrancy and the hard reality of well over a century of scientific, including archaeological, research. Or, to mix metaphors, how can believers have their pie-in-the-sky and eat it, pun intended, too? In a rational world they cannot, any more than sensible people can accept a flat earth, the revolution of the sun around the earth, or spontaneous generation of maggots in rotten meat. In the real world, people think as they please and seem capable of having meaningful and productive lives even while holding the most absurd and illogical beliefs I can imagine. My aim is not to deconstruct bible-believing Christianity, but to isolate the factors that made archaeology, the proverbial “spade” in fundamentalist and evangelical rhetoric, an admired apologetic tool. What is the “archaeology,” in that much overused Foucaultian sense, of apologetic archaeology?

Contextualizing the lure of the Holy Land is made all the more difficult by the fact that three world faiths view it, encapsulated in the holy city of Jerusalem, as sacred space. To the extent that adherents of any of the three prominent monotheisms validate claims to the Holy Land as a God-given right, it is not hard to see why there has been a long and unendingly disturbing history of bloodshed and conflict over the actual physical space. Exploration of the antiquities, primarily rock-hewn structures too large to be dismantled for the everyday needs of succeeding generations, proceeded piecemeal for centuries. In the “modern” sense, one can start the “scientific” exploration with Napoleon on the eve of the 19th century; this is also a compelling starting point for consideration of the direct European colonial hegemony that emerged

soon after. Those who prefer a more “American” reading can take heart from the influential explorations of William Robinson at about the same time de Tocqueville was discussing what being “American” meant. The British, no doubt, find in Austin Henry Layard, discoverer and first digger of ancient Nineveh’s tell-tale remains, the archetype of the traveling Victorian dilettante unearthing the biblical past. British interest in Palestine, which fueled the Palestine Exploration Fund in 1865,<sup>7</sup> was later to be followed by the German Deutsche Palaestina Vereins in 1878 and the French-inspired École Biblique in 1890.

The earliest role of archaeology, more topographic, art-historical and textual than actual digging, was summed up nicely by John Jahn (1839) more than two decades before Darwin forever changed the terms of the debate. In a tantalizingly un-positivistic vein, Jahn remarks:

*Archaeology ... considered subjectively or in reference to the mind, is the knowledge of whatever in antiquity is worthy of remembrance, but objectively is that knowledge reduced to a system. In its widest sense, therefore, it embraces achievements of a historical nature, and everything else, important to be transmitted to subsequent ages; but in a limited sense, has special references to religious and civil institutions and ceremonies, to opinions, manners and customs, and the like.*

“Biblical Archaeology,” for Jahn “embraces everything in the Bible worthy of notice and remembrance, whether it be merely alluded to, or treated as something well known.” He then lists seven “genuine and undoubted sources” for the student of biblical archaeology. The first and apparently most weighty is the “Scriptures” as the “testimony of the people

---

themselves.” The second is the familiar ground of “Ancient Monuments” such as the arch of Titus, pyramids, tombs, engravings and the like. These remnants or ruins are for Jahn “in a manner living testimonies.” The other trusted sources are ancient coins, the well-known works of Philo and Josephus, various Greek and Latin authorities, the Mishna and “Certain ecclesiastical writers” like Jerome. Jahn is quick to point out that use of the last sources – which he in fact enlarges to Syriac and Arabian books – requires caution “lest we assign to antiquity what belongs to a more recent period.” More as an aside than a formal source, he then commends study of the customs of the “wandering” Arabs “who have retained with the most constancy and exactness their ancient habits.”

In Jahn’s preliminary remarks, he proceeds from his definition of biblical archaeology straight into “Its Importance to a Theologian” before delineating the sources mentioned above. While Christianity and the Bible had its critics in the 1830s, theologians like Jahn felt no special urgency to refute them. The primary importance of archaeology was its value in providing context and illustration for better understanding of the Bible. The theologian could “throw himself back more fully into the age of the country, and the situation of the sacred writers and their contemporaries...” A second value is allowing the theologian to be sure of “the precise import” of biblical passages. The third and sixth uses are overtly apologetic. Biblical archaeology gives the theologian a “new ability in answering the objections of the opposers of Revelation” and “enables him to enter into the nature and spirit of the arguments in favor of the authenticity of the sacred books.” But Jahn is no blind dogmatist, even though he had no reason in his mind to doubt his religion. He recognizes the need “to separate moral precept and religious truth from the drapery of figurative language” since language is in part a product of its

age. Reverence for the Bible and a willingness to defend it is a form of bibliolatry for Jahn,<sup>8</sup> but I could imagine that were he writing in 2001 his views would change.

Let us contrast this 1839 perspective with one from 1972 by my fellow Wheaton alumnus Josh McDowell. This is his *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, the verdict being clearly divined in the author's subtitle of "Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith." McDowell, unlike Jahn more than a century before, does not call himself a theologian but rather he is listed on the title page as "Traveling Representative for Campus Crusade for Christ International." The accolades on the cover suggest this is an important apologetic reference for born-again. A well-known evangelical theologian, Wilber M. Smith of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, called it "without doubt the best anthology of Christian apologetics that has appeared in this generation" (I assume Smith was either intentionally humble or considered his own classic, *Therefore Stand*, from a previous generation). Bill Glass, who headed his own evangelistic association, went a step further in suggesting it "is probably the finest reference book in the field of apologetics that has ever been written."

You may object to my choosing a single reference, which not only serves up a straw argument but with its outrageously absurd and non-supportable claims becomes a virtual haystack. It is, I readily admit, an extreme example but one I would also argue resonated well in the mainstream of born-again and is claimed to have been a stimulus to conversion, a la Billy Graham, to the evangelical flavor of American protestantism. The point is not that McDowell was qualified to write a serious work in apologetics; his work amply disputes that. The issue is that his perspective reached millions of impressionable people. The book cover claims that in the five years prior to 1972 Josh McDowell spoke to more than two

---

million students and faculty at more than 400 universities in 42 countries. The success of the first book inspired McDowell to come out with *More Evidence that Demands a Verdict* in 1975. Neither is a monograph in the normal academic sense, but rather an outline of what McDowell often calls “lecture notes” with hundreds of quotes taken, as the spirit moved him no doubt, wholly out of context.

McDowell’s second book devotes an entire chapter to “Archaeology and Criticism.” Like Jahn, McDowell (1975:17) begins with a definition of archaeology. For McDowell archeology is literally “the study of antiquity” or “a science devoted to the recovery of ancient civilizations with a view to reconstructing the story ... progress and fall.” No sources are cited for these definitions, which are little more than standard dictionary renderings. McDowell proceeds directly to four factors about the role of archaeology in biblical studies. He, in fact, quotes verbatim from a 1968 article by the well-known archeologist William F. Albright in *Christianity Today*. None of these factors specifically deals with the apologetic role, but the next section is a compilation of quotes about the basic contributions of archeology to biblical criticism. The first point is a clever rhetorical set-up arguing that “archaeology enhances the ‘scientific study’ of the text.” Of course it does, but only if the material scientifically derived is also scientifically interpreted – a point not made by the author. The second seems, at first glance, a reasonable point: “archaeology acts as a check in the area of critical studies (both radical and conservative).” The seven quotes supporting this point all emphasize the role archaeology has played in supporting the historicity of various biblical passages. The “check” provided in these quotes is only in one direction. The third contribution is the obvious point recognized by everyone that “archeology helps to illustrate and explain various biblical passages.” How could excavation in

the Biblical world not help better understand a text that claims to speak about the history of that world? Here we see McDowell the student term-paper king at his best in quoting (with attribution) one archaeologist's comments for more than a page of print. The fourth point that "archaeology helps to supplement areas not dealt with in the Bible" gets short shrift from McDowell – one brief sentence and no quotes.

Now we arrive at McDowell's (1975:20) real point, which he labels "a word of precaution." His argument is worth quoting in full in order to see the kind of bibliolatry still at play today.

*All too often we hear the phrase "Archaeology proves the Bible." There needs to be a word of caution. Archaeology cannot "prove" the Bible, if by that you mean "prove it to be inspired and revealed by God." If by prove, one means "show - ing some biblical event or passage to be histori - cal," then it would be correct usage. I believe archaeology contributes to biblical criticism, not in the area of inspiration or revelation, but in historical accuracy and trustworthiness about the events that are recorded. Let's say the rocks on which the Ten Commandments were written are found. Archaeology could confirm that they were rocks, the Ten Commandments were written on them and that they came from the period of Moses; it could not prove that God had written them.*

McDowell, as he himself notes, is using "prove" in more than one sense. Archaeology, as a science, can not be used to prove religious beliefs like Jesus is the son of God, the Bible is divinely inspired and other statements that are not reducible to testable hypotheses a scientist could propose. Scientific

---

proof, unlike theological dictate, is not dogmatic, at least it should not be, but neither is it comforting for those who must go to extraordinary and absurd lengths to explain why evidence so often contradicts a literalist view of biblical statements. It is the second sense of “proof” in which McDowell exposes his prejudice and basic weakness. If, as McDowell argues, it is possible with archaeology or some other scientific method to “prove” a certain event or passage is historical, must it not also be possible – in scientific terms – to prove the opposite. For example, there is no credible scientific proof that a worldwide cataclysmic flood occurred in recorded human history, but McDowell (1975:139-141) ignores this major contradiction to the historicity of early Genesis and only addresses the issue of whether or not the Bible contains two different flood accounts. The flawed approach here is that any scientific evidence that proves a biblical assertion must be scientifically correct, but evidence for contradiction or that suggests mythic elements can be challenged or simply ignored. McDowell’s exegesis of jots and tittles is of a piece with the recent Florida recount of chads and dimples: being objective is not the object.

If McDowell is out to win a court case in public opinion, he is only willing to give the jury one side – in this case defense of bibliolatry. If he is out to win a debate, he is only willing to sum up what he thinks the opposing argument is. But there is more to his approach than outright contempt for rational inquiry and basic fairness. “The proper motivation behind the use of these lecture notes is to glorify and magnify Christ – not to win an argument,” says McDowell. “Apologetics is not for proving the Word of God but simply for providing a basis for faith.” While I must admit that it dazzles my mind how presenting a one-sided and inaccurate collection of uncontextualized quotes could glorify the Son of God, I am also pleased



that the underlying motive is in full view. The bibliolatry of McDowell, who keeps saying how important science is, boils down to a very simple and immutable precept. The present-day born-againer believes the Bible is true on the basis of faith, “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1, KJV). The proof is not in the pudding.

### When is a Spade not Called a Spade?

*We want, in fact, to take our critic out of his study, and to set him on a camel in the wilderness, to surround him with human beings in all their primitive conditions of society and of thought, to humanize and to Orientalize the student, and to show him what men think and do in lands where they still swear by the “Living God” and still say in their daily life “It is from the Lord.” (Conder 1887:389).*

*It is because Captain Conder’s recent utterances are mischievous as well as futile, that I have resolved to show, by a very few examples out of many which I have noted, that when he discourses about Biblical criticism he is not to be listened to or argued with, but simply passed by as a man who is speaking of things he does not understand. (Smith 1887:562)*

Let me apologize for taking so long to address the issue of apologetics that I have yet to dig into any of the actual findings of biblical archaeology. There are quite a few accounts about the development of this field. Certainly no understanding of the intellectual history could be undertaken without

---

examining the raucous debate over “biblical criticism.”<sup>9</sup> There is also a vast literature, referenced in my M.A. thesis (Varisco 1975), of those who all along have used biblical archaeology to “prove” or at least offer as counter-proof for a particular interpretation of the Bible as a special kind of Revelation. It is also important to remember that interest in the argument over “Bible History” sells, especially in America. Perhaps the most prominent example of this is journalist Werner Keller’s hopelessly flawed *The Bible as History*, first published in 1956 and ever since then a mainstay of mass-media paperbacks for the Barnes-and-Noble crowd. Of all the potential sites for tracing the contours of this spirited debate over archaeology and the Bible, I will focus on a gentlemanly disagreement in the late Victorian era between two archetypal gentlemen.

The first is Captain Claude R. Conder, the conservative English officer and engineer who was largely responsible for the systematic survey of Western Palestine between 1872-1878 under the auspices of the Palestine Exploration Fund.<sup>10</sup> The chief concern of the survey was obtaining an accurate map of a territory Britain had vital interest in. Indeed, the later partition of Palestine at the end of World War I had the British-defined borders already drafted. Ironically, this was little different from the motivation of Captain Fitzroy’s admiralty voyage to map the coast of South America, although young Darwin shook up the religious establishment in a way most Palestine Exploration Fund members would never sanction. The Palestine survey was ambitious, though only embryonically scientific, in collecting information on weather, geology, botany, zoology, topographic names, some folklore and even very limited excavation. From the start it was a grand adventure of a piece with contemporary Victorian travelers such as Richard Burton and Charles Doughty. In his popular account

of the first survey years, Conder (1874:133) records the plight of his survey camp when “Jericho fever” struck:

*A full day's journey (and it was by special Providence that we were not more) from a doctor, or from any source of supply, in a malarious climate, a desert, and surrounded by wild and hostile tribes, with most of the servants incapable, and the rest only kept from deserting us by the certainty of being shot down, the anxiety of the position was as trying as can well be imagined.*

This survey was no picnic, although I can imagine certain English aristocrats viewing a day's outing away from the manor house in similar graphic terms, and later it had to be temporarily suspended after an “unprovoked attack” in which some Safed tribesmen wounded Conder (Kitchener 1875:195).

The second gentleman, if his Scottish credentials entitle him to such claim at the time,<sup>11</sup> is the more renowned, at least in hindsight, biblical scholar and pioneering “anthropologist” William Robertson Smith. Smith, the credible critic, expert linguist and precursor of an emerging social scientific approach to the Bible and Islamic texts, became Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at the Free Church College in Aberdeen in 1870. By 1881, however, his non-traditional views on biblical criticism resulted in a “heresy” case and the loss of his chair at Aberdeen. Although offered a post at Harvard – imagine the impact that would have had on biblical scholarship in late 19th century America – Smith ended up at Cambridge. Ironically this was as a reader in Arabic, replacing E. H. Palmer, a Palestine explorer recently killed in Sinai. Robertson Smith had also been chosen to edit the prestigious *Encyclopedia Britannica*, a task he was increasingly able to devote time to while at Cambridge.

---

A spirited exchange took place between camel-riding Conder and text-rendering Robertson Smith in the *British Contemporary Review* in 1887. Conder (1887:376) summed up the ongoing controversies as a choice between “ancient monuments” and “modern critics.” His opening salvo speaks of “Truth” with a capital T:

*In seeking Truth we ought to be ready to give up every cherished illusion and every dead tradition, if so be that we may thereby see her better. But before we accept the new light it is quite as important that we should feel certain that it is better than the old, for the new is not true because it is new, but only when it is found to rest more firmly on fact.*

The concern of Conder is with the “truth” claims of a host of “continental” critics, specifically the German Julius Wellhausen, who earlier had been cited by Professor Robertson Smith as reviving interest in the “scientific study of the old Testament literature.” The gist of Conder’s prose is that Wellhausen has nothing new to say, is a bad scholar and is ignorant of the mounting evidence of archaeology.

There is a telling metaphor near the start of Conder’s (1878:377) diatribe:

*In other words, the critic cannot hunt with the hounds and run with the hare, for, if he discredits the authority of the Old Testament writers, he must rest on some other authority, and this cannot be allowed to be his own. It must be the authority of documents or monuments which cannot be discredited.*

In attempting to outfox his opponents, Conder uses Wellhausen as a case in point of a critic who pursues a “purely literary study” but fails to learn from “results of the study of

monuments and manners in the East.” For example, Wellhausen is said to reduce “Jehovah” to being the name of a tribal god only known in Palestine. Conder passes over the biblical statements to the contrary and then challenges Wellhausen to look at a recent discovery by a certain Mr. Pinches of the “Holy Name” in cuneiform inscriptions from 900 B.C. or its appearance on royal names before the captivity of Israel or its appearance on objects from Phoenicia, Syria, Cyprus and even Malta! He (1887:378) concludes:

*The testimony of the monuments accords with the words of Malachi and shows us that almost as early as the days of Solomon the name of Jehovah was adored by Semitic peoples from Nineveh to Sidon, and from Pethor to Jerusalem. Surely it is difficult to believe that the tribal God of a small Israelite family could so rapidly have become sacred to the various races of Western Asia, and it is easier now to reconcile what is now a proved archeological fact with the words of Genesis (iv. 26), which accords a high antiquity to the Holy Name.*

In his response to this point, Smith (1878:566) chides Conder for claiming evidence without giving credible support. On the issue of Jehovah (Yahweh) appearing on a Phoenician gem, Smith documents the source of Conder’s claim to a coin in the British Museum and then notes that it is considered to be of Greek origin from Gaza.

Conder’s (1878:384) aim is to “show that many of the results at which Wellhausen arrives by his exegesis are not supported by the discoveries due to modern research.” His own authority for criticizing the critics is validated by his presence, his “being there” among the “monuments.” This is the sentiment which informs the rhetorical challenge that a critic like

---

Wellhausen should be set on a camel in the wilderness and see for himself rather than speculate over words in his comfortable study. It is, of course, only the critic who is seen as biased and arbitrary. Thus, argues Conder (1887:389):

*In addition to this, there is throughout an attribution of tendency and motives to the ancient writers, which is very foreign to the real spirit of early human literature. We are asked to start with the assumption that these writings are not honest or genuine expressions of their author's beliefs, but crafty representations of facts due to religious or political motives. Those who know the simplicity and the piety of Eastern thought will always find it hard to believe that the vivid and graphic narratives of the Bible are to be regarded as cunningly political essays.*

That such dated rhetoric should ring so untrue today unmasks the bibliolatry inherent in Conder's argument. Conder was convinced that the historical study of the monuments would leave biblical criticism in its dust, so to speak.

Before the dust had settled, William Robertson Smith responded in the same journal with an apt rewording of the protagonists; for Smith it was Captain Conder, not ancient monuments, vs. the critics. Smith (1887:561) praises Conder for his contributions in the survey of Palestine but questions how Conder can claim knowledge of biblical exegesis and criticism simply by "going up and down the country with a theodolite." In the interest of truth, Smith (1887:561-62) feels it necessary to respond:

*When a half-informed person comes forward with pretensions to authority, when he claims to judge and condemn those who really know, and to do so from a standpoint of superior intelligence*

*and information, it is not amiss to point out his mistakes, and if he has got the ear of the public it is sometimes a duty to do so. It is because Captain Conder's recent utterances are mischievous as well as futile, that I have resolved to show, by a very few examples out of many which I have noted, that when he discourses about Biblical criticism he is not to be listened to or argued with, but simply passed by as a man who is speaking about things which he does not understand.*

Ridiculing the specter of a critic on a camel in the field, Smith wonders how that would give any individual scholar the skills he needs as a linguist, epigrapher and historian. After noting that Wellhausen is a scholar whose knowledge of Arab sources and customs was widely respected, Smith (1887:562) suggests in derision that he fails “to see that the German critic in his study is at a disadvantage as compared with the English amateur.”

Smith's article lays bare the amateur nature and blatant bibliolatric bias of Conder's continual assertion that modern archaeology refuted all criticism of the biblical narratives. Not unlike a modern biologist asked to respond to someone defending Adam and Eve, the editor of the *Encyclopedia Britannic* does not spare his disdain of ignorant popularizers like the conservative captain. The sting is especially evident at the conclusion of Smith's (1887:569) response:

*Captain Conder may, if he pleases, shut his eyes to all historical evidence, and fall back on the old position of unquestioning faith in ecclesiastical tradition; but truth and honesty forbid him to ignore the historical evidence that lies next to his hand and take refuge in an appeal to obscure and remote analogies, derived from literatures of*

---

*whose history the best scholars know very little,  
and of which he himself cannot read a line in the  
original.*

It is tempting to look back at the Conder-Smith exchange and claim Smith the clear victor; after all his positions have largely been affirmed. But it would be a mistake to see this “Scopes Trial” over the apologetic use of archaeology as decisive in the public eye. There was no dearth of popular religious literature asserting that critical theories “have been put to rout by the spade and pick” (Taylor 1891:127) or that the “father of pickaxes” was avenging the quarrel of the “father of history” (Tomkins 1897:2). “Thanks to our trusty friend, the spade...” writes William Wright (1892:144) about the discovery of the Hittites, “those who believe not Moses and the prophets must be confounded by bricks and stones.” It was tempting for some literalists to see the discoveries of archaeology as “brought to light by Providence just in time to confront these godless speculations” (Gregory 1891:211).

The cry of the day was let’s call a spade a spade, but oh what a dirty pickaxe there was to grind. In a review of Conder’s work and other publications on the English survey of Palestine, Albert Socin (1885:248), a German critic, noted that this research “by its apologetic tendency, runs the risk of failing to secure recognition as a complete international science.” Conder (1886:326), in direct response, is oblivious to his own bias:

*I am not aware that the permanent publications  
of the Palestine Exploration Fund can justly be  
said to have an “apologetic tendency.” Survey and  
the description of ruins have no tendency at all;  
they represent the collection of facts on which the  
reader may put any construction he pleases.*



Trained engineer that he is, Conder compartmentalizes “facts” as things that speak for themselves, an overtly mechanical approach that would treat study of narrative or myth the same way one builds a bridge or surveys a valley for a railroad. I note that the primary proponent of so-called “scientific creationism,” Henry M. Morris, was trained as a hydraulic engineer. This explains, only in part, his theory that the universal flood of Noah is responsible for geological phenomena like the Grand Canyon or marine fossils on mountaintops. I further note that a certain NASA engineer, Josef Blumrich (1973), published a “Chariots of the Gods” mass market clone in which he describes the fiery chariots in the Prophet Ezekiel’s dreams as credible spaceships. And if I may be forgiven for another anecdotal spin, I vividly remember going to a new faculty orientation seminar at my university in which I met a newly hired engineer who insisted that Adam and Eve was as scientific as evolutionary theory! As I would not want to cross a bridge built by an exegete, neither would I trust an engineer to analyze religious language.

Conder the amateur was easily ridiculed by knowledgeable biblical scholars like Smith and Socin. In 1890 two events happened that changed the landscape of the critics vs. monuments debate. First, the later-to-be-knighted Flinders Petrie, a founding father of modern excavation methods in the Middle East, began excavating Tell el-Hesi in Palestine. Second, Archibald Henry Sayce founded the Chair of Assyriology at Oxford. Here was a man, like Smith, who was an acknowledged linguist. Petrie was a serious archaeologist who did not engage in the apologetic fray, but Sayce gave hope to the literalists. In a book commissioned by a conservative religious society, Sayce (1894:6) derided the main arguments of the “higher criticism” of the Old Testament, labeling its proponents as “popes” who proclaim a “doctrine of their infallibility.” By

---

ignoring the results of archaeology these critics are likened to those who adopted an “anti-scientific attitude” that condemned Galileo. Yet, ironically, Sayce (1894:21) is just as hard on the apologist “who presumed to apologise for the apparent imperfections and inconsistencies of Scripture.” He dismisses both critic and apologist as verbal hair-splitters. Yet Sayce’s rhetoric was immediately grasped by apologists as further proof that the Bible was historically accurate.<sup>12</sup>

What fueled Sayce’s reactionary rejection of critical biblical scholarship was not just the notion that the facts were on his side. Here the man was very much a product of his time. If these foreign critics were right and the Bible was indeed myth rather than Revelation from a historically interfering God, what would happen to the civilization – his victoriously Victorian world – that was so dependent on Christian morality? A clear presentation of his fear, with undisguised emotional import, comes through in the following passage (Sayce 1895:484):

*on the one hand ... a body of doctrine, which has been the support in life and the refuge in death of millions of men of all nationalities and grades of mind, which has been witnessed to by saints and martyrs, which has conquered first the Roman Empire and then the barbarians who destroyed it, and which has brought a message of peace and goodwill to suffering humanity. On the other side there is a handful of critics, with their lists of words and polychromatic Bibles. And yet the “higher criticism” has never saved any souls or healed any bodies.*

This fear, echoed in succeeding fundamentalist and born-again rhetoric through the present day, is the primary stimulus to the surviving apologetic thrust of biblical archaeology.

The purpose is not to discover historical truth, but to protect a very privileged view of an ideology sustaining “The Truth.”

Sayce, too, had his critics. The noted biblical scholar S. R. Driver (1894:425) concurs that the “verdict of the monuments” – a reference to the title of Sayce’s magnum opus – is in: “Along the whole it either leaves intact, or actually supports, the critical position.” The warning against “hypercriticism” is acknowledged but dismissed by Driver as of little consequence. A biting critique was also laid out by A. A. Bevan (1895) who accuses Sayce of glaring inconsistencies and advocating positions rejected by the vast majority of archaeologists and linguists. For Bevan (1895:806) the verdict is not that of archaeology but of Sayce himself. Far too many archaeologists, argues Bevan, “emphatically repudiate” the conclusions Sayce “wishes to thrust upon the public” in the name of archaeology. Other critics of Sayce, including A. Macalister (1894) and Prof. T. K. Cheyne (1894: 368) muse with a note of glee that Sayce had been called by apologists, like the biblical Balaam, to curse the critics “but that in spite of himself he virtually blesses a strictly moderate criticism over and over again.”<sup>13</sup>

To assess the role of Christian apologetics in the use and abuse of the archaeological discoveries coming to light in the latter half of the 19th century, we need turn no further than a perceptive analysis given by Francis Brown in the midst of the controversy. Speaking to Bible students at Presbyterian Theological Seminary in New York, Brown (1885:5-6) remarks on the impact of archeological discoveries in Assyriology:

*It was therefore not strange, that, to the eager students of philology and history who hailed the new*

---

*discoveries, and plunged with energy into the work of their elucidation, were added numbers of those to whom Apologetics seemed the most important field of human learning, and who, with a more or less hasty equipment for the task, began at once to make Assyriology serviceable in defending the Scriptures. The consequence was the appropriation of valuable matter, often effective employment of it, great and infectious enthusiasm, but a sad lack of cool judgment and scholarly patience.*

The author is no rabid agnostic critic, nor does he fear the results of archaeological research on his own spirituality as a Christian. He appreciates the use of the “positive benefits” of archaeology in biblical study, but he is also keenly aware of the abuses. The first abuse is what Brown (1885:7-8) sees as “an ill-directed and excessive Apologetics”:

*But it may be questioned, whether the Apologetic temper, always on the defensive, always looking for assaults, and prepared, at the first blow, to strike vigorously back – is a healthy frame of mind for a Christian thinker. It accustoms him to a timorous view of truth. It is likely to issue in a narrow zeal, which will oppose every new thing, through fear that it may, in some way, imperil the old. It tends to prevent the taking up of new and genuine elements into the sum of truth, the modifying of statements to make them harmonize with advancing knowledge... An Apologetics of this sort runs the risk of crippling itself, by insisting upon the use of old methods and weapons against modern and well-equipped opponents.*

In specific terms Brown (1885:13) notes how apologists have rushed to judgment with preliminary translations so that “the simplest rules of critical inquiry have been forgotten.” The famed discoverer of the Babylonian flood story, George Smith, claimed in a 1875 letter to the *Daily Telegraph* and a subsequent book that he had found a cuneiform tablet recounting the temptation and fall of Adam and Eve. Although shown to be a misreading by the noted Assyriologist Friedrich Delitzsch, the claim reappeared in book after book in the apologetic frame. A further abuse was a tendency to refuse the clear facts of archaeological finds, including those that contradict biblical statements. Similarly, Brown chides Bible students who ignore the new problems that archaeological research uncovers in biblical interpretation.<sup>14</sup>

### A Flood of Proofs

*And the flood was forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it was lifted up above the earth. And the waters prevailed, and were increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark went upon the face of the waters. And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered. Genesis 7:17-19 (KJV).*

*There is no escaping the conclusion that, if the Bible is true and if the Lord Jesus Christ possessed divine omniscience, the Deluge was the most significant event, geologically speaking, that has ever occurred on the earth since its creation. Whitcomb and Morris (1961:216).*

---

*Here, too, there is such a difference of opinions, and such a confusion, that you have no chance of deciding as to the correctness of the matter, and do not even feel inclined to investigate thoroughly its historical truth. Al-Biruni (1879:27)*

Of all the apologetic claims for “scientific” confirmation of an early biblical story, none has had more lasting power than the delusion of a worldwide deluge in which Noah, his immediate family and a two-by-two assortment of land creatures survived a cataclysmic flood in a pitched, wooden ark. What makes this single case a suitable paradigm is that it combines arguments from geology, archaeology and ancient texts in order to support a biblical claim that rational minds, including the quote above from the 11th century Islamic scholar al-Biruni, usually view as myth. The documentation of the biblical flood case is quite expansive, although there is less analysis of the twists and turns the conservative rhetoric has taken in the last quarter of the 20th century.<sup>15</sup>

The role of the spade came into play in two ways. First, the excavations of Layard from 1850-54 at ancient Nineveh uncovered texts from the Assyrian Empire. One of these texts, later studied at the British Museum, turned out to be an Assyrian account of the flood. The discovery was announced in 1872 by George Smith,<sup>16</sup> but important fragments were missing from the tablets. As a result, *The Daily Telegraph*, in a media coup funded an exhibition to return to Nineveh, where missing fragments were indeed found. It is not hard to imagine why conservatives saw in this archaeology work the hand of God directing a defense of biblical historicity. Indeed, in the following decade of the 1880s, major confirmation for events in the later history of Israel came to light with the Siloam

inscription (Sayce et al. 1881:141), the Amarna Tablets (Sayce 1889) and the resurrection of the Hittites (Wright 1884).<sup>17</sup>

Both critics and apologists recognized the importance of having a similar flood story from outside the biblical sources, but each took opposite approaches to the obvious fact that there were substantial differences in the two stories. As other versions of a flood story were discovered, it was clear that the myth of a flood was widespread in ancient Mesopotamia, but that hardly qualified it as evidence that it reflected an actual deluge of the proportions seemingly indicated in Genesis. The standard apologetic response, well articulated by Dallas Theological Seminary's Merrill Unger, is that the Hebrew and "Babylonian" accounts go back to a common source of fact, the actual flood. Moses, asserts Unger (1954:71) was enabled by divine inspiration "to record them [facts about the flood] accurately, purged of all their crude polytheistic incrustations and to adapt them to the elevated framework of truth and pure monotheism." As literary evidence for historicity, the innumerable flood accounts worldwide are ambiguous at best.

A more grounded argument exploded in the media on March 16, 1929, when *The Times* of London reported that physical evidence for the flood had been found by archaeologist Leonard Woolley in Ur, legendary birthplace of Abraham. Two days later it was announced that another archaeologist had found similar evidence of a flood deposit at nearby Kish. Public interest in this new evidence, coming not long after the specter of the Scopes Trial in Tennessee, was high. In the *National Geographic Magazine*, Max Mallowan (1930:118) wrote about "New Light on Ancient Ur" that "there was every reason to believe that it [the flood layer at Ur] was something very much more than this: *that it was the great Biblical Flood related in the Book of Genesis*, a flood that afterward came to be regarded not as a local but as a world flood." Mallowan,

---

hardly an apologist, still feeds the apologetic cause by asserting that the “extraordinary importance of this discovery cannot be overestimated” and how important it was “to point out the salient features to those skeptics who will wish to disbelieve.” Further archaeological investigation, including a careful reading of the excavation results at Ur and elsewhere, shows unambiguously that these few flood layers could not possibly have been a worldwide flood, although such finds do lend credence to the biblical myth deriving from local flooding of the Tigris and Euphrates.<sup>18</sup>

Despite disclaimers by archaeologists, the popular perception that flood layers uncovered by the spade proved the biblical account of Noah’s flood continued. Most widespread is the insidiously unrevised by perpetually reprinted *The Bible as History* by German journalist Werner Keller. Published originally in English in 1956, after which it has been a standard “Book of the Month Club” selection and still gets recycled in most bookstores, more than 7 1/2 million copies were in print by 1974!<sup>19</sup> Subtitled “A Confirmation of the Book of Books,” Keller glosses over criticism by archaeologists and churns out case after case where archaeology is said to “prove” biblical history. Woolley’s flood layer data, hopelessly garbled in Keller’s indiscriminate prose, is cited as a discovery which “shattered even the experts” (Keller 1974:34). “A vast catastrophic inundation,” says Keller, “resembling the Biblical Flood, which had regularly been described by skeptics as either a fairy tale or a legend, not only had taken place but was, moreover, an event within the compass of history.” Keller, biased as he is, did not write in a vacuum. Woolley (1929:52) can be faulted for the vacuous claim in a public lecture that no single archaeological discovery ever refuted a biblical statement, since he clearly knew better. Even Al-Biruni, almost a millennium earlier, knew better.



Bible believers who were desperate for “scientific” backing to their theological argument that the Bible must contain accurate science and history rather than “myth” were suitably impressed by the discovery, even as it became increasingly clear that such a flood could not possibly have been the universal deluge the Bible appeared to indicate. The flood layers were picked up on immediately by Henry H. Halley, whose *Bible Handbook* began in 1924 and has been revised every year or few years to the present.<sup>20</sup> This widely distributed resource among fundamentalist and evangelical Christians provides archaeological notes on the “Actual layer of Mud” found at Ur, Fara, Kish and Nineveh as “evidently deposited by the Flood” (Halley 1959:81). Southern Baptist J. McKee Adams (1946:145) informed the faithful that “the story of the Deluge finds specific confirmation in the eight feet of clay deposit at Ur of the Chaldees.” Those who advocated a universal flood were forced to reject the flood layers as a local event unrelated to the “universal Noahic deluge” (Unger 1966:19). Most Bible believers would agree with Free (1962:43) that the flood was after all a “miracle” and God “could cause the earth to be covered to any depth which He chose.” Other conservatives cited the archaeological flood layers as a good reason to accept the biblical account as referring to a local flood (Ramm 1954:163).

Other elements of the flood story go off the deep end. One unending theme is the alleged discovery of Noah’s ark in the Ararat mountains of Turkey. Such claims, stretching back to antiquity, are legion. I remember, as a child, seeing a picture in *Ripley’s Believe It or Not* of a giant anchor from Noah’s Ark resting touristically in an orthodox monastery. A lengthy, and largely sympathetic, review of many of these “sightings” is provided by John Warwick Montgomery (1975), who in 1970 participated in a group called SEARCH (Scientific

---

Exploration and Archaeological Research), ascending a mountain in Turkey. The expedition returned with four samples of “plank-like” wood, found at the edge of a glacier some 13,000 feet above sea level (Anonymous 1970:1094). These were subjected to carbon-14 dating, even though creationists routinely criticize such dating methods as unreliable.<sup>21</sup> Were the wooden pieces really from a ship, argue the discoverers, “a host of biblical, historical, and geological problems will have to be reassessed and answered” (Anonymous 1970:1094).<sup>22</sup> Such a reassessment, needless to say, has not been needed, though there continue to be hundreds of applications by individuals and groups wanting to search Turkish mountains. At that time Montgomery touted satellite imaging as a bright prospect for identifying the remains of the ark. Later, a former NASA astronaut lent his credibility to one of the myriad ground searches for the ark. Several popular, and deceptively unscientific, films have been aired on television about this “arkeology.” In a book accompanying *In Search of Noah’s Ark*, we are informed that of the more than 200 flood accounts, “the Biblical record is the only one that can really be accepted as an authentic eyewitness account” (Balsiger and Seller 1976:34). For some the biblical story is the “log-book” which “the commander of the ark had made from time to time of the leading incidents of his memorable voyage” (Bishop 1906:511). This perhaps explains, in part, why there are so many alleged “eyewitness” accounts of finding bits and pieces of the ark.

The depth of flood mania belongs not to the archaeologist’s spade but to the geologist’s catastrophic imagination. As outlined by Charles Gillispie (1951), among others, the nemesis of modern geology was a form of catastrophism at times referred to as Neptunism. Mercifully put to rest among scientists before Darwin by Charles Lyell’s articulation of a “uniformitarian” nature to geological processes, the appeal to geo-

logical events not observable today has nevertheless been maintained by creationists. “Flood geology,” as the 20th century survival of early catastrophism has been dubbed, was most noticeably advanced among bible believers by Seventh-Day Adventist George McCready Price (1935) and the equally fervent Baptist Henry M. Morris.<sup>23</sup> Morris, a hydraulic engineer by training, combined with conservative theologian John Whitcomb to write *The Genesis Flood*, the virtual “bible” of contemporary flood geology.<sup>24</sup> Also known for his efforts to introduce “scientific creationism” into the science curriculum of public schools, Morris pieces together a brilliantly idiosyncratic scenario for a worldwide flood that explains all the geological and biological phenomena that scientists recognize as part of our evolutionary history. A universal flood in recent geological history becomes the *diluvium ex machina* that can somehow account for the Grand Canyon and dinosaur tracks in the New World. Morris and his kind cite what they call “scientific” evidence, but ultimately they see their work as defending God against the constant attacks of a world thoroughly ensnared by a literal hell-bound Devil. Ironically, flood geology is presented not only as a counter to evolutionary perspectives but as an apologetic tool to win souls to their fundamentalist world view.

In looking back over the plethora of claims, it is easy to forget that the idea of a literal flood was so entrenched in Western intellectual history. Our continuing usage of “Semitic” in relation to a host of people from the “Biblical world” may seem innocuous enough today, but it stems from a literal view that after Noah, in the post-diluvian world, Noah’s son Shem fathered the Semites from whom Israel and Jesus were to descend. What is interesting about Noah’s flood is how the public perception, fueled by apologists and journalists for different but collateral reasons, easily buys into the

---

role of the spade – even at geological depths – as proving biblical history. The evidence, across the spectrum in this case, causes far more problems for a literal rendering of Genesis than any momentary attention to myth that might have an iota of history somewhere mixed in. What Schliemann did for Homer, romantic as that is now known to be, archaeologists could not do for Moses; Troy was not Eden.

### The Orient as Apocalyptic Armageddon

*As a matter of fact, however, it may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or in exact detail historical statements in the Bible. And, by the same token, proper evaluation of Biblical descriptions has often led to amazing discoveries. They form tesserae in the vast mosaic of the Bible's almost incredibly correct historical memory. (Glueck 1959:31).*

*For what the Orientalist does is to confirm the Orient in his readers' eyes; he neither tries nor wants to unsettle already firm convictions. (Said 1979:65)*

While we can readily decry the manipulation of “facts” by religious apologists, it is also the case that scholars themselves have abetted the process with incautious statements. Is it any wonder that literalist apologists like Morris (1956, quoted in McDowell 1972:72) feel free to assert that there is “not one unquestionable find of archaeology that proves the Bible to be

in error at any point.”<sup>25</sup> One of the quotable quotes most cited by conservative apologists is the seemingly airtight statement, indicated above, by the noted Jewish archaeologist, Nelson Glueck.<sup>26</sup> Glueck was not a Christian apologist, although he was routinely lauded by Bible believers as an archaeologist who found his sites “with Bible in Hand” (Boyd 1969:51). What Bible believers fail to add is Glueck’s (1964:12) acknowledgment that archaeology could “definitely contradict a biblical statement which previously has been accepted as being indubitably correct historically.” Ironically, a pertinent example of such a change is the reversal of Glueck’s initial claims for a gap in occupation in the Negev and Transjordan from 1900-1300 B.C.E. (Mattingly 1983). In fact, Glueck rejected fundamentalist attempts to prove the Bible, arguing instead that the spiritual truths of the text were not dependent on a literal reading of myth as history (Bamberger 1970, Wright 1959). As fellow archaeologist, albeit Catholic, Roland de Vaux (1970:65) observed, Glueck was “a man for whom the Bible is not only a subject of study but an inspiration for life.”

Unfortunately, as can be seen for a number of eminent scholars in the 19th and 20th centuries, the general respect for biblical history relating to ancient Israel could blind them to archaeological data that controverted numerous biblical assertions and at the same time provided apologists with seeming support from reputable sources. This is especially true with one of the most famous biblical archaeologists of the 20th century, William F. Albright. Albright’s contributions to the archaeology of Palestine are well known, but his negative view of what he saw as “excesses” of earlier textual critics led him to a strange bedfellow bargain with apologists. In one of his earlier publications, Albright teamed with adamant conservative apologist Melvin Kyle to argue that the geological evidence for

---

the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was in “exact agreement with the Biblical record” (Kyle and Albright 1924:290).<sup>27</sup> From time to time he either wrote in the forums of bible believers, such as *Christianity Today* (Albright 1968), or introductions to questionable scholarly works (Albright in Kelso 1966). Some Bible believers believed Albright was in their camp (Wilson 1972:11), while others (Allis 1959) recognized that Albright’s conviction of biblical historicity did not extend to the supernatural events given in Genesis. Like Glueck, however, Albright was widely quoted by apologists as supporting the claim that archaeology was constantly proving the Bible right.

Apologists and archaeologists, textual critics and historians – the unearthing of biblical history and unmasking of biblical myth proceeded at a time when Western colonial expansion allowed such activities. The debates about the infallibility of the Bible reflected not only the rumblings after the scientific revolution that removed the Bible as a viable source for origins, but also the ramblings of Orientalists who staked out the region as their intellectual field of play. Had it not been for Napoleon or British occupation of Egypt and Palestine, and later Iraq, when would the archeological discoveries discussed above have been made? As Said (1978) and a host of others have well represented, the Biblical World, Near East or Middle East – label it what you will – was appropriated through a discourse called “Orientalism.” Said’s articulation of this discourse favors a political interpretation in which the will to control is paramount. Archaeological exploration, no less than Victorian Travelers and French novelists, fits neatly into the scenario of such an imagined, but hardly imaginary, Orient. But, I would suggest, that the history of apologetic archaeology is less about the Orient as political space than it is about the increasing irrelevance of sacred space as

academically sound and the perceived marginalization of literalist Bible believing Christians.

Bible believers are plagued – I can think of few better metaphors – by a presupposition that the Bible as they know and interpret it cannot contain errors. This domino theory of divine inspiration, once defensible in an intellectual climate of general Christian reverence, has long ceased to be viable by any rational criterion of objective truth and scientific method. Individuals and sects have gradually retreated from the intellectual defense of an inerrant Bible, so that literalist apologists of all shades basically have the field to themselves. That the American public is still swayed by the vocal few who continue to clamor for a literal Adam and Eve and keep climbing Ararat for wooden relics is disconcerting, to say the least, less a tribute to the brilliance of literalist rhetoric than to the ongoing anti-science-but-pro-technology ethos of our media-mediated pop culture.

Most literalists not only read myth as history and science but also view ancient biblical prophecy as inevitable prediction. I suggest that the rhetoric of apologetic archaeology, once a serious issue for academic debate, took on an apocalyptic aura in the hands of mid to late 20th century Bible believers. Indeed, if I read contemporary Bible believers and born againers correctly, we are now more than ever on the brink of what literalists expect to be a decisive Apocalyptic Armageddon. Armageddon, of course, is on the prophetic horizon as a culminating battle between the forces of good and evil in which a long suffering yet jealous God via his literal flesh appearance as Jesus will finally overcome the Devil and all things unborn again. The great battle of Armageddon, foreshadowed in Revelation 16:16, will literally take place in modern Israel. The same literalists who argue for inerrancy in biblical history are directly concerned about the future history

---

of the Middle East. As Dallas Theological Seminary theologian John F. Walvoord (1990:183) sums it up: “The armies of the world will be used as Satan’s pawns for this final hour of victory. The revolt against the world dictator will assemble the nations in the Middle East. The crescendo of wars and destruction will increase until the entire world is on the brink of ruin.” These armies are said to include the Russians, Red Chinese and new Muslim hordes. No more insidious scenario for domination of the “Orient” was ever proposed by an Orientalist scholar or colonial administrator.

The archaeologist’s spade, once seen as a powerful ally, is only a hand tool in a game that the apologist has no sense of losing since God is on his side. In this case the “spade” rather than the ploughshare is fashioned into a sword. Stacking the deck, if done for the glory of God, raises few ethical qualms for the Bible believer. In a world where all have sinned, divine ends justify human means. The game will end not with a reasoned winner but with the same kind of divine fiat that started it off in the first place. The God who could fashion humans from clay and raise Noah and his family above the highest mountain can certainly silence unborn-again critics.

### **Concluding Remarks**

As the days of the Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days that were before the Flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the Flood came and took them all away, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. Matthew 24:37-39 (KJV)



*If the knowledge of archaeology can do all this for the Christian, it behooves him to study it assiduously in order that it may become a more effective weapon in his hand – for dealing with personal opposition and in invading the strongholds of Satan for the purpose of leading men unto repentance. (Vos 1956:125).*

At the start of this paper I posed two questions to frame the discussion and reign in an inevitable tendency to explore beyond the borders of points already made. The first, which dominates the paper, is how apologists have used archaeology to defend a literalist view of the Bible as history devoid of myth. The second delved into the focus on the “Biblical World” dimension of the Orient as part of the overall ideological glue of Western colonialism in the region. Hints, like shards, dot the surface of my remarks, but it remains to tell the argument in a concise – hopefully not too condensed – form.

As an anthropologist, I continually find myself returning to Darwin’s 1859 *Origin of Species* as a watershed for how human history – as well as origins – is understood today. It took at least a decade for the natural beauty of Darwin’s natural alternative to take hold as the fundamental paradigm informing modern scientific method. At that time doubts about the scientific and historical validity of the Christian Bible were already firmly entrenched in European philosophy and theology. The Deists dealt the knockdown punch to literalism long before atheists gained a public forum. So it is hardly “news” today to assert that a century and a half of archaeological and textual research has established beyond any reasonable doubt that what Christians once revered as an inviolable “word of God” must be approached on an equal exegetical playing field with any other religious text. Regardless of

---

how Christians today regard the moral or spiritual “truth” of their foundation text, it is not and should not be construed as unmitigated history minus myth and legend. The few kernels of historical reality buried in the redactions can hardly sustain a credible claim that the *Biblia* must per divine force be free of error.

As made clear from the start, I feel no need to refute apologists, archaeological datum by archaeological datum. Such a task is unnecessary for serious students and scholars and inevitably unavailing for diehard Bible believers. It is important to examine the rhetoric and probe the motivations underlying the history of apologetic archaeology. The core principle, what I label here as a domino theory of divine inspiration, was set in stone long before geographers packed their theodolites and archaeologists picked their mounds. For the unflinching literalists this principle will be firmly entrenched long after academic support has dissipated. The rhetoric varies, but either variation of “the bible is proved by archaeology” or “the bible is not necessarily disproved by archaeology” leads to the same end: acceptance of a totalizing world view in which a historically interfering God creates, controls and eventually crushes all opposition.

The apologist’s deck is stacked because so much is at stake. It is necessary for those of us who study their rhetoric to recognize that the real issue can not be about truth claims for the simple reason that literalists do not follow the standard objective and scientific approaches we try to.<sup>28</sup> How can anyone argue rationally with Henry Morris’ (Whitcomb and Morris 1961:345) claim that God created the universe with the appearance of age? If such a God must exist and can cavalierly contradict what we naturally see as natural law, my essential criterion – and I imagine your’s – for reality is not shared. The default line of conservative Christian apologists is that doubts

about history and science in the bible will lead souls away from their narrow view of Christianity. A literalist who speaks of “The Truth” means “their” truth and only “their” truth.

Confirmation of the absurdity of arguing with such apologists is amply illustrated by those who take the challenges to inerrant biblical history and science as a means of winning souls to their view of life, rebirth and death. The scenario informing such a bizarre conversion tactic is outlined in the preface to an apologetic defense of Noah’s Flood by conservative theologian Alfred Rehwinkel (1951:xvii):

*The shock received by the inexperienced young student is therefore overwhelming when he enters the classroom of such teachers and suddenly discovers to his great bewilderment that these men and women of acclaimed learning do not believe the views taught him in his early childhood days; and since the student sits at their feet day after day, it usually does not require a great deal of time until the foundation of his faith begins to crumble as stone upon stone is being removed from it by these unbelieving teachers. Only too often the results are disastrous. The young Christian becomes disturbed, confused and bewildered. Social pressure and the weight of authority add to his difficulties. First he begins to doubt the infallibility of the Bible in matters of geology, but he will not stop there. Other difficulties arise, and before long skepticism and unbelief have taken the place of childhood faith, and the saddest of all tragedies has happened. Once more a pious Christian youth has gained a glittering world of pseudo learning but has lost his own immortal soul.*

---

An exegesis of this apologist rhetoric can help us better understand a perspective that is so intellectually narcissistic that even the most damning challenges are recast absurdly as support. The main concern of Rehwinkel, apparent throughout his text, is keeping the faithful in the fold. It is assumed that the educational system in the classroom, exemplified by the acceptance of an evolutionary perspective in the sciences, was at odds with the religious teachings a child would be exposed to in home and church. This battle for the mind, which transforms into a battle for the soul, is seen literally as a battle. Although Rehwinkel uses the metaphor of a rock-solid foundation of faith, it seems one easily removed – stone by stone – in the overpowering presence of “unbelieving teachers,” a code word for agents of the Devil. Here Rehwinkel confuses the ideal of indoctrination with the less rigorous reality of how education works. The assumption that students would automatically accept statements doubting the Bible due to the “authority” of their unbelieving teachers exposes the “tabula rasa” that being born again demands intellectually. In all of this the student is not to blame given the Satanic forces out to confuse and bewilder him or her. Knowledge, administered outside the indoctrinating clutch of the church or home, is viewed not as liberating but more as a form of virus or a weed that damages what is most important – the soul. The domino effect is clearly at work here, so that doubts about the biblical authority in geology send the student down a path of pseudo learning that ultimately results in loss of an “immortal soul.”<sup>29</sup> The implication is that a “pious Christian youth” is like an innocent lamb being led to slaughter in the outside world of unbelief. Hence the urgent need for apologetics.

Rehwinkel’s (1951:xix) solution is to encourage young Christians not to abandon their faith, ridiculous as its supernatural baggage may seem in the world’s eyes, but to

remember famous scientists of the past (invariably a distant past) who believed the Bible. The bottom line is that “great men of science” recognize the limitations of science and it is only the unbeliever who is arrogant, intolerant and dogmatic. This zero-sum, black-and-white world view, situated as a battle of cosmic dimensions, is not really about when Noah lived or how high the flood rose but about salvation. In citing his reasons for studying the “Flood,” Rehwinkel (1951:xix) concludes that the final reason “is to remind the Christian reader that the Flood is a prototype of the Final judgment, which will make a sudden and fearful end of the second world.” If the Flood was a myth, then how could any reasonable person continue to believe in this event as a sign of the impending end of the world?

Ironically, the dogmatism of Bible believing apologists leads them to treat the weakness of their position as a strength. As Josh McDowell (1972:3) admits in his compendium on apologetics, “the best defense is a good offense.” In practical terms, this means laying out the claim that Jesus died for our sins. The goal is to quote scripture in the belief that the “mana” of God’s words will convict sinners and win them from the Devil’s grasp (cf. Hebrews 4:12). Thus, the specific arguments made in rational defense of biblical statements about history and science function to soften up the targeted soul. It should come as no surprise that the very first words of Morris’ (1956:3) classic *The Bible and Modern Science* are: “The purpose of this book, very frankly and without apology, is to win people to a genuine faith in Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of God and the Bible as the Word of God, and to help strengthen the faith of those who already believe.” Indeed, in October 2000 the Institute for Creation Research, founded by Morris, celebrated thirty years of “creation evangelism and education” resulting in “many testimonies of people won to

---

Christ” (J. D. Morris 2000:2). According to their own reckoning, during this period over 100 books and 50 videos were produced, some 300 formal debates were held on college campuses, seminars have been conducted in every state and over 40 countries, creation science programs are broadcast over 1500 radio outlets worldwide and courses are even offered online. All of this has one goal in mind: defending a literalist view of creation by challenging any world view not in compliance with their own fundamentalist ethos.

Contemporary literalist apologetics, unlike its ancestral varieties in a pre-Darwinian world where the Bible still had respect as an authority on history and science, appeals to proof not to convince those scholars in a position to know but rather to bolster claims for legitimacy among the ill-informed public. A common feature in the rhetoric of Bible believers is a not very discreet disdain of intellectuals and expertise. As McDowell (1972:3) remarks about his own qualifications, “an Arkansas farm boy sharing the gospel would be more effective in the long run than a Harvard scholar with his intellectual arguments.” This image of a righteous David for the cause of God against the Goliaths of human knowledge has broad appeal with the American public, who eagerly buy – perhaps more in a physical than figurative sense – all manner of cult archaeology claims about sunken island civilizations and ancient planetary astronauts. As fundamentalist Howard Vos (1956:125) concludes in his discussion of the apologetic value of archaeology, the skeptic and liberal theologian will hardly be swayed to accept the supernatural claims of the Bible. So an “archaeological apologetic” is most suitable for the “non-Christian” (i.e., those not yet born again) close to salvation but needing to overcome intellectual hurdles and to the believer who needs to withstand “skeptical barbs” at every point.

We are now ready to sum up the second question: how does the apologetic use of biblical archaeology fit into Orientalist discourse? Orientalism, conceived as a discursive conspiracy by the West to dominate the East, encompasses apologetic archaeologists up to a point. The colonial presence allowed the spade to be used in the first place. Colonial governments encouraged archaeological exploration for pragmatic motives more political than academic. Many of the prized biblical artifacts went straight from tell to European and American museums and university storehouses. Whether Arabist or literalist, Christianity was prejudiced over Islam and Judaism. In short, the same factors that allowed and at times impelled political and economic exploitation of the Orient also served the rhetorical ends of Bible believers intent on preserving their literalist agenda and garnering souls for the hereafter.

There is more at stake here than the ideology of hegemony and domination. The biblical “Orient” of the apologists evolved as more a matter of Real Apocalyptik than Real Politik. Not all “imperialist” explorers were overtly out to achieve crass political ends. The English Captain Conder, who surveyed Palestine on leave from his military unit, did not see his own role as advanced guard for an impending political takeover. Ironically, he shows a clear sympathy for the local population, when he argues:

*Those who advocated the colonisation of Palestine by Englishmen, Germans, or Jews, seem to forget that a native Moslem population still exists, or to consider them only fit for the fate of the Red Indian and the Australian, as savages who must disappear before the advance of a superior race. (Conder 1878:386).*

---

While the work of the Fund certainly served the interests of Empire, it was more as defense of an explicitly “English” conservative worldview than a quest for direct domination.

Archaeological finds were believed to prove the Bible as historically accurate so that souls could be saved and the whole damned world warned of an impending and decisive final judgment. The consequences of the Bible believer’s apocalyptic are staggering, if taken seriously. Fundamentalists have long supported the state of Israel and some actively support attempts to rebuild the temple (in the spot where Muslim shrines now sit) because this fits into their view of how the world will end (Haddad and Wagner 1986). Most born agains conveniently believe they will escape the coming horrors, but they claim Jews will suffer a holocaust worse than any in history and that unspeakable human suffering will take place everywhere. The battle to defend the Bible as history ends, in their view, with the whole world realizing their “Truth” only when it hurts. This is not just an attack on the “Orient,” which admittedly bears the brunt of the destruction, but on basically every principle of rational and scientific progress. Such is the epitaph of an unrestrained bibliolatry. That it should be written in apocalyptic style for an archaeological site (i.e., Har Megiddo) Holy Land tourists by the bus loads currently walk over is an irony I take little pleasure in pointing out.

### **Bibliography:**

- Adams, J. McKee, 1946. *Ancient Records and the Bible*. Nashville: Broadman Press.
- Albright, William F. 1968 “Archaeological Discovery and the Scriptures,” *Christianity Today* 12:19:915-17.



- Allis, Oswald T., 1959. "Albright's Thrust for the Bible View," *Christianity Today* 3/17:7-9, 3/18:12-14.
- Anonymous, 1867. Scientia scientiarum. *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* 1:5-29.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1970. "Wood on Mount Ararat Intrigues Explorers." *Christianity Today* 13/24:1094
- Armstrong, Harold L., 1971. "An Attempt to Correct for the Effects of the Flood in Determining Dates by Radioactive Carbon," In W. E. Lammerts, editor, *Scientific Studies in Special Creation*, pp. 98-102. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishers.
- Bailey, Lloyd R., 1989. *Noah: The Person and the Story in History and Tradition*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.
- Balsiger, Dave and C. E. Seller, Jr., 1976. *In Search of Noah's Ark*. LA: Sun Classic Books.
- Bamberger, Fritz, 1970. "The Mind of Nelson Glueck," In J. A. Sanders, editor, *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century*, pp xvii-xxiv. Garden City: Doubleday.
- Barton, John, 1998. "Historical-critical Approaches," In *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, edited by John Barton, pp. 9-20. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Beidelman, Thomas O., 1974. *W. Robertson Smith and the Sociological Study of Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ben-Arieh, Yehoshua, 1972. "The Geographical Exploration of the Holy Land," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, pp. 81-92.
- Benson, Clarence, 1929. *The Earth, The Theater of the Universe*. Chicago: The Bible Institute Colportage Association.

- 
- Bevan, A. A., 1895. "Professor Sayce versus the Archaeologists," *Contemporary Review* 68:805-814.
- al-Biruni, Abu al-Rayhan Muhammad, 1879. *The Chronology of Ancient Nations (al-Athar al-baqiyya)*. Translated by C. E. Sachau. London: W. H. Allen.
- Bishop, S. E., 1906. "Have We Noah's Log-book?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 63:510-17.
- Blenkinsopp, Joseph, 1998. "The Pentateuch," In *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, edited by John Barton, pp. 181-97. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Blumrich, Josef, 1973. *The Spaceships of Ezekiel*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Boyd, Robert T., 1969. *Tells, Tombs and Treasures: A Pictorial Guide to Biblical Archaeology*. N.Y.:Bonanza Books.
- Bright, John, 1942. "Has Archaeology Found Evidence of the Flood?" *Biblical Archaeologist* 5/4:55-62.
- Brown, Francis, 1885. *Assyriology: Its Use and Abuse in Old Testament Study*. New York: Scribner's Sons.
- Cheyne, T. K., 1893. *Founders of Old Testament Criticism*. London: Methuen and Company.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1894. "The 'Higher Criticism' and the Verdict of the Monuments," *New World* 3:365-69. [review]
- Cobern, Camden M., 1891. "Bibliolatry and Monumentimania," *Homiletic Review* 21:311-18.
- Coder, S. M., 1967. "Can You Trust Your Bible?" *Moody Monthly* 67/5:5, 56-59.
- Conder, Claude R., 1878. *Tent Work in Palestine*. 2 vols. London: Richard Bentley.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1886. "The English Explorations in Palestine: A Reply to Professor Socin," *Expositor*, Ser. 3, 3:321-35.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1887. "The Old Testament: Ancient Monuments and Modern Critics," *Contemporary Review* 51:376-93.

- De Haan, Martin, 1962. *Science and the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Radio Bible Class.
- Dever, William G., 1974. *Archaeology and Biblical Studies: Retrospects and Prospects*. Evanston: Seabury-Western Theological Seminary.
- Driver, Samuel R., 1889. "Hebrew Authority" in D. G. Hogarth, editor, *Authority and Archaeology Sacred and Profane: Essays on the Relation of Monuments to Biblical and Classical Literature*, 3-152. London: John Murray.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1894. "Archaeology and the Old Testament," *Contemporary Review* 65:408-26.
- Elder, John, 1960. *Archaeology and the Bible: Scientific Proof of Bible History*. London: Robert Hale.
- Free, Joseph P., 1962. *Archaeology and Bible History*. Wheaton: Scripture Press. Second Edition.
- Frei, Hans, 1986. "The 'Literal Reading' of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does it Stretch or Will it Break?" In Frank McConnell, editor, *The Bible and the Narrative Tradition*, pp. 36-77. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gillispie, Charles C., 1951. *Genesis and Geology: The Impact of Scientific Discoveries upon Religious Beliefs in the Decades before Darwin*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Glueck, Nelson, 1959. *Rivers in the Desert*. N.Y.: Farrar, Strauss & Cudahy.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1964. "The Bible and Archaeology," In M. Mansoor, editor, *The Book and the Spade*, pp. 7-20. Madison: Office of the Book and the Spade Exhibition.
- Gould, Stephen Jay, 1984. "Creationism: Genesis vs. Geology," In A. Montagu, editor, *Science and Creationism*, pp. 126-135. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- 
- Gregory, D. S., 1891. "The Divine Authority of the Scripture versus Rationalistic Criticism," *Homiletic Review* 21:203-13.
- Hackett, Horatio B.  
\_\_\_\_\_, 1855. *Illustrations of Scripture Suggested by a Tour through the Holy Land*. Boston: Heath & Graves.
- Haddad, Hassan and Donald Wagner, 1986. *All in the Name of the Bible*. Brattleboro: Amana Books.
- Halley, Henry H., 1959. *Bible Handbook*. Chicago: Henry H. Halley. (22nd edition)
- Headlam, Rev. A. C., 1931. "Chairman's Address: Archaeology and the Bible," *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly*, 122-36.
- Jahn, John, 1839. *Jahn's Biblical Archaeology*. Andover: Gould, Newman and Saxton. [original, 1823]
- Jellie, W. H.,  
1904. "The Apologist's Last Line of Defense," *Homiletic Review* 48:343-45.
- Kelso, James, 1966. *Archaeology and Our Old Testament Contemporaries*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Kramer, Samuel Noah, 1956. *History Begins at Sumer*. Falcon Wing's Press.
- Kyle, Melvin G., 1899. "The Value of the Spade in Biblical Criticism," *Biblia* 11/10:293-301.
- Kyle, Melvin G. and W. F. Albright, 1924. "Results of the Archaeological Survey of the Ghor in Search of the Cities of the Plain," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 81:276-91.
- La Sor, William S., 1959. "Archaeological Finds," *Christianity Today* 3/12:37-38 [review of Glueck 1959]
- Little, Paul E., 1967. *Know Why You Believe*. Wheaton: Scripture Press.

- Macalister, R. A. F., 1894. "The Higher Criticism and the Verdict of the Monuments," *Expositor* Ser. 4, 9:401-16. [review]
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1907. *Bible Sidelights from the Mound of Gezer*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Mallowan, M. E. L., 1930. "New Light on Ancient Ur," *The National Geographic Magazine* 57/1:95-130.
- Marsden, George, 1984. "Understanding Fundamentalist Views of Science," In In A. Montagu, editor, *Science and Creationism*, pp. 95-116. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mattingly, Gerald L., 1983. "The Exodus-Conquest and the Archaeology of Trans-Jordan: New Light on an Old Problem," *Grace Theological Journal* 4:245-62.
- McDowell, Josh, 1972. *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*. San Bernadino: Campus Crusade for Christ.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1975. *More Evidence that Demands a Verdict*. San Bernadino: Campus Crusade for Christ.
- Montagu, Ashley, 1984. "Introduction," In A. Montagu, editor, *Science and Creationism*, pp. 3-17. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Montgomery, John Warwick, 1975. *The Quest for Noah's Ark*. N.Y.: Pyramid Books.
- Morris, John D., 2000. "Thirty Yearts of Creation Evangelism and Education," *Acts & Facts* 29/10:1-3.
- Morris, Henry M., 1956. *The Bible and Modern Science*. Chicago: Moody Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1966. *Studies in the Bible and Science*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1984. *History of Modern Creationism*. San Diego: Master Book Publishers.
- Morris, Robert *et al.*, 1874. *Bible Witnesses from Bible Lands*. Jerusalem.

- 
- Price, George McCready, 1935. *The Modern Flood Theory of Geology*. N.Y.: Revell.
- Ramm, Bernard, 1954. *The Christian View of Science and Scripture*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Rehwinkel, Alfred M., 1951. *The Flood in the Light of Bible, Geology, and Archaeology*. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.
- Ruby, Robert, 1995. *Jericho: Dreams, Ruins, Phantoms*. N.Y.: Henry Holt and Company.
- Said, Edward, 1979. *Orientalism*. N.Y.: Pantheon.
- Sayce, Archibald Henry  
\_\_\_\_\_, 1889. "The Cuneiform Inscriptions of Tel El-Amarna," *Journal of Transactions of the Victoria Institute* 24:12-31.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1894. *The "Higher Criticism" and the Verdict of the Monuments*. London: Society Promoting Christian Knowledge.
- Sayce, A. H. *et al.*, 1881. "The Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions Discovered at the Pool of Siloam in Jerusalem," *PEFQS*, pp. 141-57.
- Silberman, Neil Asher, 1982. *Digging for God and Country: Exploration, Archaeology, and the Secret Struggle for the Holy Land, 1799-1917*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Smith, George, 1876. *The Chaldean Account of Genesis*. New York: Scribner, Armstrong & Son.
- Smith, George Adam, 1894. *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Smith, William Robertson, 1887. "Captain Conder and the Critics," *Contemporary Review* 51:561-69.
- Socin, Albert, 1885. "The Survey of Western Palestine," *Expositor*, Ser. 3, 2:241-62.

- Stearns, Charles C., 1892. "The Monuments and Inscriptions Called Hittite," *The Hartford Seminary Record* 2:125-45, 165-86.
- Taylor, F. W., 1891. "The Higher Criticism and Archaeology," *Biblia* 4:5:126-27.
- Tenney, M. C., 1975 "Contributions of Archaeology to New Testament Christianity," *Wheaton Alumni Magazine* 42/2:3-6.
- Thomson, W. R.  
\_\_\_\_\_, 1859. *The Land and the Book*. NY: Harper & Brothers.
- Tomkins, Henry G., 1897. *Abraham and His Age*. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode.
- Tristram, H. B., 1866, *The Land of Israel*. London: Society Promoting Christian Knowledge.
- Unger, Merrill F., 1954. *Archaeology and the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.  
\_\_\_\_\_, 1966. *Unger's Bible Handbook*. Chicago: Moody Press.
- Van-Lennep, Henry J., 1875. *Bible Lands: Their Modern Customs and Manners Illustrative of Scripture*. N.Y.: Harper & Brothers.
- Varisco, Daniel Martin, 1975. *Archaeology as Apologetic: Towards an Understanding of the Fundamentalist Paradigm*. M.A. Thesis, Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania.
- de Vaux, Roland  
\_\_\_\_\_, 1970. "On Right and Wrong Uses of Archaeology," In J. A. Sanders, editor, *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century*, pp 64-80. Garden City: Doubleday.
- Walvoord, John F., 1990. *Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crisis*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Wellhausen, Julius, 1878. *History of Israel*. Edinburgh: Black.

- 
- Whitcomb, John C. and Henry M. Morris, 1961. *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and its Scientific Implications*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company.
- White, Andrew Dickson, 1896. *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*. N.Y.: D. Appleton and Company.
- Willis, W. Waite Jr., 1992. "The Archaeology of Palestine and the Archaeology of Faith: Between a Rock and a Hard Place." In J. H. Charlesworth and W. P. Weaver, editors, *What Has Archaeology to Do with Faith?*, pp. 75-111. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International.
- Wilson, Clifford, 1972. *Crash Go the Chariots: An Alternative to Chariots of the Gods?* N.Y.: Lancer Books.
- Witty, John, 1705. *An Essay Toward a Vindication of the Vulgar Exposition of the Mosaic History of the Creation of the World*. London: John Wyat.
- Woolley, C. Leonard, 1929. *The Excavations at Ur and the Hebrew Records*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Wright, G. Ernest, 1959. "Is Glueck's Aim to prove that the Bible is True?" *Biblical Archaeologist* 4:101-08.
- Wright, G. Ernest and D. N. Freedman, editors, 1961. *The Biblical Archaeologist Reader*. Garden City: Anchor Books.
- Wright, William, 1884. *The Empire of the Hittites*. London: James Nisbet.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1892. "The Hittites," In *The City and the Land*, pp. 138-82. London: MacMillan & Co.
- Young, Davis A., 1990, "The Discovery of Terrestrial History," In H. J. Van Till, editor, *Portraits of Creation*, pp. 26-81. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.



## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> In this paper I use the term “literalist” primarily for those who deny the possibility of any kind of factual error or myth in the canonized Bible. For a broader view of “literal” readings of scripture in Christian hermeneutics, see Frei (1986).

<sup>2</sup> For example, Joseph P. Free (1962:viii) prefers to call himself a “Bible believer” rather than “evangelical” or “conservative.” See Free (1962:341-56) for an interesting discussion of labels used for “conservative” approaches to archaeology. The work of George Marsden (e.g., 1984) is helpful in situating the conservative protestant views towards science. In general the term “fundamentalist” has been abandoned by many Bible believers due to its pejorative use, while “evangelical” and “neo-evangelical” are preferred by those who accept a modified literalist view, arguing that the findings of science and archaeology do not necessarily rule out the supernatural.

<sup>3</sup> This credo so appealed to later conservative Bible believers that it is even quoted at length (e.g., Rehwinkel 1951:xviii-xix).

<sup>4</sup> Examples of such bias are prolific in the conservative literature. Consider Jellie’s (1904:345) rallying cry for the apologist’s “last line of defense”: “When we are told that criticism and science have rendered our position untenable, we can meet the assertion with a smile of pity. We know that our apologists are well able to hold their own, and meantime we stand invulnerable behind the impregnable ramparts of a spiritual experience which transforms our belief in God into an absolutely unwavering certitude.”

<sup>5</sup> Testimonials to Thomson’s book are legion; e.g. “Dr. William H. Thomson, in his ‘Land and the Book,’ has demonstrated to the joy of millions of readers, how thoroughly the *Country* of God’s people illustrates the *Narrative* of God’s dealings. God has joined “this twain’ together in an indissoluble bond” (Morris *et al.* 1974:5).

<sup>6</sup> It is worth noting a comment more than 25 years ago by William Dever (1974:17) regarding criticism of a fundamentalist bias in archaeology as beating a dead horse: “Well, everywhere I go in America that horse still kicks pretty vigorously.”

---

<sup>7</sup> The Palestine Exploration Fund was founded on three basic principles: “That the work undertaken must be conducted on strictly scientific principles; That the Society should as a body abstain from controversy; That the Society was not to be a specifically religious Society” (charter quoted in MacCalister 1907:203-204). By and large, however, the members accepted the historicity of the Bible and were highly critical of the Bible’s “higher criticism.” As MaCalister (1907:2) remarks, “the Society and its officers are by no means blind to the immediate claims of the Bible student.” For example, in 1870, six of the individuals authorized to give lectures on behalf of the fund were reverends.

<sup>8</sup> In Gillispie’s (1951:224) masterful intellectual history of catastrophist geology in Victorian England, he notes that geologists of the day assumed God spoke equally in Nature and in the Bible. “Like other pious people, devout geologists and naturalists felt a real reverence for the Bible, but bibliolatry, though it may have complicated the difficulties arising from the interpretation of the geological record, was not the root of them.”

<sup>9</sup> A good starting point for understanding the critical approaches of the 19th century is Barton (1998) and Blenkinsopp (1998).

<sup>10</sup> For an account of Conder’s work with the survey, see Ruby (1995) and Silberman (1982:117-22). His own popular version of the work is Conder (1878).

<sup>11</sup> I say this only in part facetiously. Beidelman (1974:11) comments that “Smith’s speaking voice, with its thick Scottish burr and sharp, shrill quality, detracted somewhat from his potential as a preacher and lecturer...” The potential for ethnic prejudice in the ensuing exchange is certainly not to be ruled out.

<sup>12</sup> Cheyne (1893:233) argues that Sayce made so many concessions to Biblical orthodoxy that he had essentially become an “orthodox apologist” despite his denials. Sayce’s own biography was used to illustrate the hand of God in providing archaeological proof of the Bible. In discussion following a lecture by Sayce at the Victoria Institute, one man observed that Sayce’s life “has been preserved to us by what I may call a miracle. He landed one morning from his boat on the Nile, and went ashore and was bitten by a deadly asp; he hurried into his boat, and with his own hand burnt the bitten part down to the bone, he then turned to

the table, wrote out his will, and prepared for the worst..." (Sayce 1899:29).

<sup>13</sup> The effect of Sayce's grudging confirmation of textual criticism is discussed by White (1896:483-484).

<sup>14</sup> My discussion here is confined to the 19th century. For a preliminary assessment of the evolution of apologetic archaeology in the 20th century, see Varisco (1975). For a recent and cautious "evangelical" perspective on the issue, see the text by my archaeology professor at Wheaton, Alfred Hoerth (1998:16-22).

<sup>15</sup> For a basic introduction to the various claims made about Noah's flood, see Bailey (1989). For a recent and cautious "evangelical" review of the issue, see Hoerth (1998:189-96).

<sup>16</sup> George Smith (1876) provided the first translation, although this has been superseded. The nascent nature of this early translation effort can be illustrated by Smith's rendering of the hero Gilgamesh as "Izdubar" or "Gisdubar."

<sup>17</sup> Conservatives were particularly excited by the discovery of the Hittites, since some critics had doubted their existence as a people. In a commentary on Wright's book on the Hittites, Stearns (1892) argues: "It is the best work of an earnest, faithful, Christian apologist." Wright was in fact a missionary in Damascus.

<sup>18</sup> One of the earlier assessments making this point is that of Bright (1942), later reprinted in Wright and Freedman (1961:32-40).

<sup>19</sup> A second revised edition, containing no retractions of the innumerable factual errors, was published in 1983 and is still widely available.

<sup>20</sup> For an evangelical critique of the damage done by Halley's archaeological "facts", see Hoerth (1998:20). A casual search of fundamentalist websites (e.g., [www.bible-truth.org](http://www.bible-truth.org)) shows that out-of-date claims made in Halley's *Bible Handbook* still circulate without correction.

<sup>21</sup> One of the common arguments for doubting radiocarbon dating is the assertion that there was no radiocarbon in the pre-Flood atmosphere. As an example of lunatic Fundamentalist science, consider the assertion of Harold L. Armstrong (1971) that radiocarbon dates be recalibrated

---

according to the biblical ages for the antediluvian patriarchs. Assuming a date of 2444 B.C. for Noah's worldwide flood, any radiocarbon date greater than 15,000 B.C. (sic) would actually refer to the time of the Flood.

<sup>22</sup> Not all literalists find comfort in the reported ark sightings. Joseph P. Free (1962:42, note 14) cautions: "There is so much established evidence for the validity of the Old Testament that we do not need to depend on such items as these unconfirmed rumors of the finding of the ark."

<sup>23</sup> For a sympathetic treatment of the development of flood geology, see Morris (1984). For an evangelical treatment of flood geology, see Ramm (1954:157-178) and Young (1990). It is interesting to note that evangelical Josh McDowell (1972, 1975) avoids any mention of flood geology or creationism in his apologetic notes.

<sup>24</sup> Critiques of flood geology are not hard to find, although most scientists are bemused rather than stressed by the absurd claims laid before the public. A good place to start is Gould (1984).

<sup>25</sup> Biblical archaeologists who are commonly quoted by apologists include such notables as W. F. Albright and Nelson Glueck.

<sup>26</sup> The Glueck quote, or a part of it, can be found in Coder (1967:59), Elder (1960:178), La Sor (1959:31), Little (1967:102), McDowell (1972:68), and Tenney (1975:6).

<sup>27</sup> See Kyle (1899) for an example of his apologetic approach to biblical archaeology, which for Kyle is "history risen from the dead."

<sup>28</sup> As Montagu (1984:3) observes, debating literalists, especially those who advocate a "scientific" creationism, is a no-win situation. Their influence on the public is not to be ignored; their views should not be given credence in an academic forum.

<sup>29</sup> Fundamentalist Clarence Benson (1929:90) is more blunt: "If we deny the Deluge, we must repudiate the integrity of Scripture and the testimony of Jesus Christ. There is no neutral ground. If the Deluge goes, the Bible goes. If the Flood is a myth, Christ is untrustworthy."