

The Old Testament and Archaeology With a Personal Top Ten of Discoveries

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KEYWORDS: *scepticism, historical value, proof, evidence, narrative analysis, poetics, literary criticism, Jericho, exodus, materials, bias, Minimalists, dating, historicity, discoveries, illustrations, parallels, fraud, Sennacherib, black obelisk, Hezekiah, Samaria, Megiddo, David*

This essay originated as the counterpart to one about the New Testament and archaeology which Ben Witherington III published in *Christianity Today* and in which he lists the ten top discoveries relating to the New Testament.¹ I will be focusing on the relationship between the Old Testament and archaeological research, including the study of objects like inscriptions. My aim is to show how archaeology enriches our understanding of the Old Testament, but I am taking the detour of first showing some of the problems in the relationship between the two.

I will argue that Evangelical students of Bible and religion have no reason for scepticism and for ignoring the results of the archaeology of Israel. At the same time we need to be realistic and to realize that accidental historical events and persons are always very hard to verify.

Fifty years ago the book *The Bible as History: Archaeology confirms the Book of Books* by Werner Keller was published.² The German title of this book, *Und die Bibel hat doch recht*, translates as *The Bible is right after all*.³ A title like this one is not very fashionable nowadays. Today the answer to the question of whether the Old Testament is historically reliable is even more a bone of contention than fifty years ago. Biblical scholars and archaeologists are no longer natural allies. It would seem that many Evangelical scholars now take more guarded positions regarding the historical value of the Hebrew Bible than the previous generation used to do. There is a clear reluctance to say that proof or evidence has been found of something the Bible tells us about. In the USA the attitude of the current generation of evangelical scholars differs from that at the time of the biblical archaeology movement, the period of the great archaeologists, William F. Albright (1891-1971) and G. Ernest Wright (1909 – 1974). Nowadays only a minority of the archaeologists of the Near East would admit that the Bible has a major role to play in their motivation, their methods and their results. Significantly, the journal founded by Wright in 1938 under the title *Biblical Archaeologist* is now called *Near Eastern Archaeology*. Many archaeologists study ancient Israel without much overt interest in the historicity of the Jewish Scriptures. This is even true of Israeli archaeologists. Many biblical scholars, on the other hand, have turned to the literary analysis of the Scriptures, to narrative analysis and poetics. Whether or not the events described in these texts actually happened would seem to be a less relevant issue.

¹ 'Top Ten New Testament Archaeological Finds of the Past 150 Years', *Christianity Today* (22 September 2003; online at www.christianitytoday.com/ct/main/archives.html).

² Werner Keller, *The Bible as History: Archaeology confirms the Book of Books* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1956). The German original dates from 1955.

³ In German the book went through 34 editions and was still being updated and reprinted in 2001 although its author died in 1980.

The onset of literary criticism in the nineteenth century led to the rise of a critical orthodoxy which dates much of the Old Testament in the exilic or even post-exilic period. This meant that a large gap opened between the records and the events described in them. The historical reliability of the texts was questioned although all parties realized that proximity to source and reliability are not intrinsically connected, either positively or negatively. However, in their dealings with the hypotheses of literary criticism, orthodox scholars were hoping to receive help from archaeology which was seen as a more factual discipline. For a while this indeed seemed to be what happened. In more recent times, however, we are seeing a split between archaeologists and biblical scholars which would seem to be the result of two developments: on the side of the biblical scholars the absence of spectacular and convincing archaeological discoveries has led to some embarrassment about the lack of positive results, whereas on the side of the archaeologists the interpretation of results now takes place from a more sceptical viewpoint than in the generation of the biblical archaeology movement. We will deal with both these developments in order.

WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?

In fewer cases than was thought the Old Testament can actually be shown to be correct, and in other cases it does seem

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as if it is incorrect. A well-known example is Jericho, where the work of John Garstang in the nineteen-thirties seemed to confirm the veracity of the biblical story but where Kathleen M. Kenyon in the fifties did not find evidence for destruction by Joshua and the invading Israelite tribes.⁴

In the same way many things have not been found which orthodox Christians were expecting would surface as the result of much hard work. Archaeology may have supplied us with much background information but evidence for the existence of biblical characters such as Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Samuel and Solomon simply has not surfaced. In a way this is not surprising for, as I said in the introduction, accidental historical events and persons are hard to verify anyway, but there was hope that texts would be found. However, the land of Israel yields very few texts, and the Old Testament is still the only major text about the history of the Jewish people before Alexander the Great.⁵

Another specific example of absence of evidence is the story of the exodus from Egypt, the journey through the wilderness and the settlement in Canaan. Over recent years scholars such as James K. Hoffmeier have been collecting much material about the historical backgrounds to Israel's stay in Egypt, the exodus and the desert period.⁶ In doing so they have increased the probability that the biblical stories are based on historical events – but there is as yet no direct evidence that this part of the Old Testament is historically reliable.⁷ As a result biblical

⁴ Kathleen M. Kenyon, *Digging up Jericho* (London: Benn, 1959).

⁵ There is, of course, the Jewish historian Josephus but he is not an independent witness, being dependent upon the Scriptures.

⁶ James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt. The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (New York: OUP, 1997); James K. Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai. the Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Traditions* (Oxford: OUP, 2005).

⁷ The evidence in Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) is also largely implicit; see the review in *Themelios* 30/3.

historians, if they believe in an exodus at all, remain divided between those who situate the exodus in the fifteenth century and those who opt for the thirteenth, and the pharaoh of the exodus remains elusive.

PAUCITY

Not only do we have few texts in comparison to many surrounding nations,⁸ we also have relatively few objects from Israel in Old Testament times. Several factors will have contributed to this relative dearth of materials.

- 1 The material culture of Israel was poorer than that of neighbours such as Egypt and Mesopotamia. Places and strongholds will have been lesser in size and poorer in quality. The population was less numerous.
- 2 The other peoples often left us reports about victories won, images and statutes of deities and objects relating to life after death (Egypt). Such objects were less important for the religion of Israel; some were even condemned altogether in the Old Testament. This is not to deny that images of idols existed: we know that worship of idols took place on a rather large scale. But it is to say that these idols did not easily survive because every now and again the statues would be smashed up by kings such as Hezekiah and Josiah.
- 3 The conquest in 587 BC and subsequent exile led to the destruction and disappearance of many objects. For the temple in Jerusalem at least, 2 Kings 25 describes a very thorough destruction and looting, and the fact that the site then lay bare for some 50 years gave the erosive elements free rein. Similar depopulation and exposure to erosion probably destroyed many other sites in Judea as well.
- 4 When longer documents were written, the normal writing material in Israel was the perishable papyrus rather than clay, leather or parchment.
- 5 The worship of the God of Israel was supposed to be without visible aids outside the temple of Jerusalem, without glorification of the king, and without costly preparations for life after death. Once the temple was destroyed such worship would hardly leave behind many interesting objects for later scholars or treasure hunters.
- 6 The site of the temple is currently occupied by Muslim sanctuaries and can't be investigated.⁹

All in all it is not really a surprise that ancient Israel had left us more meagre remains of material culture than major cultures such as Egypt and Assyria.

On the other hand the Hebrew Bible is unique in size and as a historical document, but the critical orthodoxy firmly and pervasively distrusts this source. This prejudice has now travelled from the theologians to the archaeologists, as we shall see in a moment, but that

⁸ From countries like Ammon, Edom and Moab we have even fewer.

⁹ Over the last few years the Palestinians have illegally excavated under the temple mount in order to create an underground mosque. The thousands of tons of debris were taken to the Kidron Valley. Scholars such as Prof. Gabriel Barkay are currently sifting through it. Their findings so far largely relate to NT times and later rather than to the Old Testament period.

should not make it any more credible in the eyes of Evangelical scholarship. It is of course correct that the Bible is not a product of unbiased historiography, but is it therefore less reliable if read in an informed way? The verdict of bias applies just as much to every other 'historical' text from the ancient Near East. For example, the famous prism of King Sennacherib of Assyria (number 1 below) proudly tells us that he 'shut up [King Hezekiah] like a bird in a cage', but it never continues to admit that the great king subsequently failed to capture the hapless little town of Jerusalem and had to retreat unsuccessfully. That Sennacherib was indeed defeated, however, is not only revealed in the Scriptures but can be deduced from the fact that he has not left us a record of victory!

CONTEMPORARY POSITIONS

We now move to the shifting presuppositions of the archaeologists. As in all scholarly disciplines, what one person regards as an established fact is merely a wrong interpretation in the eyes of somebody else. Old Testament archaeology is no exception to this general rule. The biblical archaeology movement has been succeeded by a new generation, many of whom are openly sceptical about the usefulness of the Old Testament for their discipline. Two contemporary examples of sceptical approaches to the available evidence spring to mind.

- 1 A rather vocal group, the so-called Minimalists, is convinced that the Old Testament does not contain any historically reliable information about the period before the Babylonian exile in the sixth century BC. So they argue not only that the Old Testament documents date from after the exile – whereas many scholars would date the final versions of many texts during the exile – but they also conclude that the amount of historical information contained in them is negligible. Because two of these Minimalists are connected to the University of Copenhagen, the group is sometimes also called the Copenhagen school.¹⁰
- 2 The leading archaeologist, Professor Israel Finkelstein, dates important discoveries made in cities such as Hazor and Megiddo a century later than was conventionally done, i.e. in the ninth rather than in the tenth century B.C.

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His basis for doing so is a new way of dating the pottery found in the relevant layers. As a result, the massive buildings in these cities can no longer be attributed to King Solomon but have to stem from the period after his death.¹¹ The new dating of the pottery, however, is by no means generally accepted. Finkelstein's next step is the denial of the historicity of David and Solomon on the argument that absence of evidence for their large kingdom is evidence of absence – which is a weak argument in any scholarly discipline but most certainly in archaeology. Small wonder that some of his opponents accuse him of bringing up the whole issue of the redating of the pottery specifically in order to eradicate the evidence for David and Solomon! However that may be, Finkelstein's explicit presupposition, like that of the Minimalists, is that the Old Testament is historically

¹⁰ The Copenhagen Minimalists are Thomas L. Thompson and Niels P. Lemche. Another leading figure is Philip R. Davies from Sheffield. See Herschel Shanks, 'Face to Face: Biblical Minimalists Meet Their Challengers', *Biblical Archaeology Review* (July/August 1997).

¹¹ See also item 8 in the top ten below.

unreliable in what it says about anything prior to the period of King Josiah.¹² An increasing number of Israeli archaeologists, especially those related to Tel Aviv University, agree with him.

SOME RECENT DISCOVERIES

Despite the scepticism new discoveries are still being made. Two examples will do, a small and a large one.

- 1 The transition from Bronze Age to Iron Age in Israel coincides with the rise of the monarchy (Saul. David). So when Deuteronomy 3:11 tells us that king Og of Basan, who belongs to the period of the settlement, had an iron bed, it opens itself up to the criticism that it is a late composition which is ignorant of the material culture of previous eras. But is that criticism justified? The leading archaeologist Alan Millard has shown that it is not. First, the bed is clearly mentioned as a rarity so the author doesn't generalise about the materials used at the time. In the second place, Millard shows that a bed strengthened with iron is meant, not a wholly iron bed. Third and probably most importantly, the first iron objects already appeared in the Late Bronze Age.¹³ Rather than an embarrassment, the text in Deuteronomy is remarkably accurate.
- 2 One recent discovery could potentially be extremely important although it is still too early to call. In 2005 Eilat Mazar, one of the minority of Israeli archaeologists who is actively trying to connect Scriptures and archaeology, set out to find evidence for the existence of King David and within a few weeks she claimed that she had in fact found David's palace at one of the highest spots of Jerusalem, near the so-called Stepping-stone structure.¹⁴ If this is true it would be a great breakthrough because so far nothing in Jerusalem could be positively connected with the period of David and Solomon. In 2005 Mazar could expose only some 10 percent of a rather large stone structure and her work will continue for a while. Yet, as some people have said, even if this is not David's palace but a fortress, someone else's palace or a temple, it is the first discovery of a large construction from the early Israelite period anywhere in Jerusalem. As such this building alone may suffice to overturn the idea of Finkelstein and many others that at the time of David Jerusalem was just a small village.

In all this it is ironic to note that it is considered problematic that Mazar takes her Scriptures seriously and that she is funded by a wealthy American. (Historically most digs have been funded by people who expected results.) These two facts a priori disqualify her and her work in the eyes of the Palestinians, the Minimalists and many others. Israel Finkelstein has shown his hand by calling Mazar's work 'Messianic eruptions in biblical archaeology'.

As this is work in progress I have not included this discovery in the top 10 below. Yet if it is really David's palace, it deserves the number one spot!

¹² See Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Free Press, 2001).

¹³ Alan R. Millard, 'King Og's Iron Bed: Fact or Fancy?' *Bible Review* 6.2 (April 1990), 20.

¹⁴ E. Mazar, 'Did I find King David's palace?', *Biblical Archaeology Review* (January/February 2006).

USEFULNESS

We now turn to the positive use and the results which have been achieved by Old Testament archaeology. The archaeology of the Holy Land functions as a scholarly discipline which brings to light evidence for the world of the Bible and which helps us study its historical aspects. There are basically three closely related ways in which archaeology supports the reading and study of the Jewish Scriptures.

(1) Archaeology can provide illustrations and illuminations of the Bible and its world. Since the early nineteenth century, large amounts of material have been discovered which shed light on the Old Testament. Most of it is from outside Israel and much stems from Mesopotamia, the present day Iraq. Beautifully illustrated books are published which shed light on the ancient texts.¹⁵ For example, we have come to know a great deal about the ancient city of Ur from which Abraham came. Centuries before Abraham's time the city already had a remarkable civilisation and wealth. Texts from another city, Nuzi, tell us that married couples who remained childless let a female slave bear them a child; the fact that Abraham and Sarah did the same was therefore quite normal. The palaces of the Assyrian kings in Nineveh and Nimrod have rendered countless treasures, among which are chronicles of the Assyrian kings which helped reconstruct the chronology of the kings of Israel.¹⁶ We now know what the potter's pot looked like (Jeremiah 18) and painters such as Rembrandt and Rubens would have to change the robes of their biblical characters considerably. The reference to golden cups at the Persian court in Esther 1 is illuminated by the discovery of large quantities of gold in Persia. It would be easy to multiply the illustrations of what daily life and worship looked like in ancient Israel.

PARALLELS

(2) Some of the above examples have already taken us to the second use of archaeology. Ever since the systematic discoveries of the ancient Near East began in the nineteenth century, archaeology has rendered many parallels with the nations and cultures which surrounded Israel. We now know that Israel's neighbours had creation stories, tales about great floods, myths, temples and altars. They also had their deities and statues. In many respects Israel is not as unique as it had always – rather naively – been assumed to be. Many biblical data have become more understandable and more verisimilar, but also more 'of this world'.¹⁷ Comparison has

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helped us understand the similarities as well as the differences between Israel and its neighbours.¹⁸ The discovery of the laws of the Babylonian king Hammurabi, which predate

¹⁵ See e.g. Rhys Carpenter *et al.*, *Everyday Life in Ancient Times* (Washington, D.C: National Geographic, 1958) and Alan R. Millard, *Treasures from Bible Times* (Tying: Lion, 1985).

¹⁶ E.A. Wallis Budge and L.W. King, *Annals of the Kings of Assyria* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1902); D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of the Babylonian Kings (626-556) in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1956).

¹⁷ For a theological reflection on what this implies, see Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation. Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

¹⁸ For collected texts see James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts: Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955); now succeeded by William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, *The Context of Scripture Vols. 1-3* (Leiden: Brill, 1996-2002).

those given to Israel by Moses, supports an early date for (the writing of) the Pentateuch and enables us to compare the two law codes.¹⁹

(3) The third use of archaeology is that which looks at the facts from an apologetic perspective and with Werner Keller tries to say that 'the Bible is right after all'. It is this apologetic use which is currently more problematic than it used to be. We must always remember that by definition it is not easy to prove the truth of unique and unrepeatable historical events without the help of written sources. For example, the name of Baruch, Jeremiah's secretary, has been found on clay seals; this would suggest that the stories about him in the Book of Jeremiah are accurate but it does not amount to proof.

PERCEIVED AND REAL FAKES

At the moment the reputation of biblical archaeology is at stake because there are suspicions of fraud and forgery. In 2002 an ossuary (a kind of burial box) came to light which according to its inscription was used for 'James son of Joseph brother of Jesus'. If authentic, it would be a most remarkable piece of evidence not only for James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem and one of the brothers of Jesus, but also for Jesus himself. It would indeed be the oldest surviving evidence because James was killed in AD 62. For several reasons – some of which might not be merely scholarly – many argue that this ossuary is too good to be true and its authenticity is heavily disputed.²⁰ The person who had it in his antiques shop in Jerusalem was accused of forgery and falsification by the Israeli authorities and a court case was started against him. To me personally the fact that the trial is dragging on slowly indicates that it is at least hard to prove the ossuary's inscription a fake.

In its stride the ossuary has also caused other famous discoveries to become disputed, such as an ivory pomegranate alleged to stem from Solomon's temple with the inscription, 'Sacred donation for the priests of the house of [Yhw]h', which has been exhibited in the Israel Museum since 1998, and a more recently discovered inscription which mentions the temple.

In all these cases we have to do with objects of which the provenance is uncertain, that is to say whose place and date of discovery is unknown and which just appeared on the antiques market. It is alleged by the authorities that original but simple antiquities were taken and inscriptions or ornamentation were added in order to increase their relevance and ... their value. Whatever the outcome of the trial, objects of unknown provenance will remain problematic. However, the large majority of archaeology discoveries stem from known places and were made by members of teams so that their authenticity can't be disputed. To these we now return.

A PERSONAL TOP 10 FOR THE OLD TESTAMENT

Here follows a list of the ten most important discoveries relating to the Old Testament. Drawing up a list like this cannot but be subjective. To compensate for the subjectivity, the items are not listed in order of priority but in the order in which they were discovered. It is

¹⁹ M.E.J. Richardson, *Hammurabi's Laws: Text, Translation and Glossary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

²⁰ It is ignored on the 700plus pages of James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Jesus and Archaeology* (Grand Rapids & Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006).

remarkable that most were found either before 1900 or recently. This last fact can keep us full of expectation and on the alert. Also note that the first three and the fifth objects are all in the British Museum.²¹

- 1 The cylinder of the Assyrian king Sennacherib which is known as the Taylor Prism after the person who brought it to England. The hexagonal clay cylinder, less than 40 cm high, contains long descriptions of eight campaigns of the king in minute cuneiform script. At one point Sennacherib tells that he wanted to punish king Hezekiah for not submitting to his power and that he locked him up in Jerusalem 'like a bird in a cage'. That was in the year 701 BC. The cylinder's text sheds much light on an important period in the history of Judah (cf. Isaiah 36-37 = 2 Kings 18-19). Found at Nineveh in 1830.
- 2 The black obelisk of the Assyrian king Shalmanesser III, a statue erected to glorify the deeds of the mighty king. On one of the panels on the two metre high stone obelisk some Israelites are shown prostrate and bringing tribute. Among them is either king Jehu in person or a high ranking servant of his. Remarkably Jehu is referred to as 'son of Omri', showing that from the point of view of the Assyrians Omri had been a key person in the history of Israel. Other persons mentioned on the obelisk are the kings Ben-Hadad and Hazael of Aram (Syria) whose names we know from 2 Kings. Found in Nimrud in 1846.
- 3 The cylinder of the Persian king Nabonidus (555-539 BC) which refers to his son Belshazzar (Dan. 5). For a long time it was the only piece of evidence outside the Bible for the existence of this prince-regent, and it also explains the designation of Daniel himself as the third in the kingdom (Dan. 5:29), viz. after the real but absent king Nabonidus and the prince-regent. Four identical copies were found at the four corners of the *ziggurat* (temple tower) at Ur in 1854.
- 4 The tunnels which together formed the underground water supply of the city of Jerusalem, with the inscription in the tunnel of Siloam which was built under king Hezekiah. The first parts of this system were discovered in 1867 by Charles Warren but even recently Professor Ronny Reich has found more elements. The Gihon spring is the only natural source in Jerusalem which was however situated outside the old city walls. Reich found the foundations of a large, pre-Israelite tower with walls four metres thick which must have been built over the vulnerable spring. It was already known that King Hezekiah had a nearly horizontal tunnel dug so that water could flow from the spring into the city. It has recently become clear that the so-called Warren's shaft, a natural vertical shaft, cannot have been part of the water supply.
- 5 The Cyrus cylinder, the document in which the great king of Persia (559-530 BC) tells us that he conquered Babylon and captured king Nabonidus. He then sets out

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his policy of religious tolerance. Not only did he allow many exiles to return to their native countries, he also encouraged them to rebuild the temples of their respective deities. This small clay object illuminates the book of Ezra. Found in 1879.

²¹ They are discussed in Terence C. Mitchell, *The Bible in the British Museum* (London: British Museum Press, 1988; 2nd ed. 2004).

- 6 The Merneptah stele, also known as Israel stele, from the Egyptian town of Thebes. This granite monument of Pharaoh Merneptah or Merenptah, son of Rameses II, dates from about 1200 BC and it contains the oldest reference to the name Israel. It thus testifies that a people named Israel lived in the country of Canaan about that time. The stele was discovered in 1896.
- 7 The royal palace in the city of Samaria, from which over the centuries most but not all ivories have been taken by robbers. According to 1 Kings 22:39, king Ahab built a palace which contained much ivory, and the prophet Amos heavily criticised the acquisition and display of this type of wealth at the expense of the poor (Amos 3:15; 6:4). The finds testify to the level of prosperity achieved in the kingdom of Israel. Discovered 1931-35.
- 8 In the fifties of the last century the general-turned archaeologist, Yigael Yadin, excavated at Hazor and compared the buildings he found there with previous discoveries at Megiddo and Gezer. The gates and walls of the three cities were not only of high quality, they also turned out to be from the same period, while the groundwork of the gates is nearly identical. As the buildings and the pottery found all stem from the tenth century BC, Yadin attributed them to the activities of king Solomon and regarded them as confirmation of 1 Kings 9:15. To be sure, no texts were found in any of these cities; any interpretation has to be based on the objects themselves.²²
- 9 In a man-made cave at Ketef Hinnom two tiny silver amulets were discovered in 1979. On the back of one of them it says 'property of Isaiah'. They contain words from the book of Numbers (6:24-26) and one of them also contains Deuteronomy 7:9. Although most scholars date them to around 600 BC and others even later, on the basis of the type of letters used, Erik Waaler now argues that they date rather from around 700 BC. Waaler compares the importance of these tiny pieces of silver to that of the famous Rylands papyrus of the Gospel of John which overnight brought down the latest possible date for the Gospel by about a century. Recently, advanced research methods such as progress in photography have enabled scholars to read yet more letters than before on the badly worn surfaces. Waaler also points to the combination of the two books of Numbers and Deuteronomy which are often attributed to different sources, arguing that the pieces of silver may testify to the existence of the Pentateuch around 700 BC.²³ A cautious response might be that the existence of fragments of text doesn't automatically prove the existence of the entire book.
- 10 Until recently the name of David had not been found once by archaeology so that doubts about his very existence could easily be voiced. However, since the nineties of the last century we have no fewer than three records containing his name! This is truly a dramatic turn round. The first reference to David was the now famous inscription from Tel Dan, found in three pieces in 1993-94, which contains a text written by a Syrian king who refers to king Ahaziah from the House of David.²⁴ Several years later David's name was also

²² Note that Finkelstein dates all these buildings a century later, as we discussed above.

²³ Erik Waaler, 'A Revised Date for Pentateuch Texts? Evidence from Ketef Hinnom', *Tyndale Bulletin* 53 (2002), 29-55 [http://98.131.162.170//tynbul/library/TynBull_2002_53_1_02_Waaler_KetefHinnomText.pdf].

²⁴ Although not everybody accepts the text as a reference to a historical King David; see the discussions in K. A. Kitchen, 'A Possible Mention of David in the late tenth Century BCE, and the Deity *Dod as Dead as the Dodo?', *JSOT* 76 (1997), 29-44; A. Lemaire, 'The Tel Dan Stela as a Piece of Royal Historiography', *JSOT* 81 (1998), 3-14; Kitchen, *Reliability*, 36-37, 90-92; and the minimalist George Athas, *The Tel Dan Inscription: A Reappraisal and a New Interpretation* (New York & London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003).

discovered in a list at the great temple of Amon in Karnak, Egypt, written on behalf of Pharaoh Seshonk, i.e. no longer than half a century after David's lifetime.²⁵ The third occurrence is on the Mesha stone or Moabite stone which was hewn in 830 BC.²⁶ Although this stone, an inscribed piece of black basalt, was found as long ago as 1868, the name of David has only recently been found on it. In fact it may be there twice, the first reference seen by Andre Lemaire and the second by A.F. Rainey.²⁷ The stone is very interesting for other reasons as well, being the only such monument from the countries on the river Jordan. It confirms information from both the Bible (2 Kings 3) and Assyrian sources about the activities of king Mesha.

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Prepared for the Web in September 2009 by Robert I. Bradshaw.

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²⁵ Kenneth A. Kitchen, in *Biblical Archaeology Review* (January/February 1999).

²⁶ On all three see Kitchen, *Reliability*, 92-93.

²⁷ A.F. Rainey, 'Syntax, Hermeneutics and History', *Israel Exploration Journal* 48.3-4 (1998), 244-251.