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ARCHAEOLOGY
OF THE
LAND OF THE BIBLE
10,000–586 B.C.E.

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CENTER FOR JUDAIC-CHRISTIAN STUDIES



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REGIONAL STUDIES

Only a wide regional approach can provide a comprehensive picture of settlement and cultural change in a certain area. Several projects in Israel and Jordan are based on this outlook. The best example is perhaps the study of the Arad–Beer-sheba region initiated by Y. Aharoni nearly thirty years ago. It started with sporadic surveys and culminated in the excavation of six sites, achieving a complete archaeological picture of the entire region. Other such projects are being carried out in the Negev highlands (by R. Cohen and staff from the Israel Survey); in the Shephelah (integration of the work of surveys and of separate expeditions at Lachish, Ekron, Tel Batash, Gezer, and Yarmuth); in the Yarkon Basin; in the mountains of Samaria (by A. Zertal); in the land of Ephraim (by I. Finkelstein); in the western valley of Jezreel (by A. Ben-Tor); in the northwestern Negev and northern Sinai (by E. D. Oren); in the Golan Heights (by M. Kochavi and P. Beck); in the Baq'ah Valley of Transjordan (by P. McGovern); and elsewhere. This comprehensive regional view has become dominant in the archaeology of Palestine.

CHRONOLOGY

Relative chronology is ascertained by typological sequences of objects, particularly of pottery, established by comparative studies of stratified assemblages from various sites in a certain region. Comparison of assemblages within the regions enables us to define a relative sequence in each area, and to establish a chronological order for the entire country.

Once the relative sequences have been obtained, absolute chronology can be established. For the earlier periods, carbon 14 tests are the basis for dating. There are, however, serious problems in utilizing these tests. Such problems mainly concern the validity of C 14 calibration based on dendrochronology; calibrated dates in the fourth and third millennia B.C.E. appear to be too early when compared to dates ascertained through Egyptian chronology.¹³ From ca. 3000 B.C.E. the absolute chronology of Palestine is based to a large extent on that of Egypt. Egyptian objects found in Palestine—including royal inscriptions, scarab seals, and others—and artifacts

exported from Palestine to Egypt and found in dated contexts provide the basis for a chronological framework. The dependence on Egyptian chronology is so strong that any change in the latter necessitates a parallel shift concerning Palestine. The Egyptian finds may, however, be misleading, as scarabs, statues, and other Egyptian artifacts were considered precious or sacred objects and may have been kept as heirlooms for generations.

While the correlation with Egypt is based on direct export and import of objects, Mesopotamian chronology is less important, since in most periods the relations with Mesopotamia were indirect through the mediation of Syria. Imported pottery and other artifacts from Cyprus and Greece also play a significant role in chronological studies, but sometimes one forgets that absolute dates in these countries are based to a large extent on those in Egypt and the Levant, making the danger of circular argumentation great. For the period of the Israelite monarchy, correlations between archaeological phenomena and historical data known from the Bible and from Assyrian and Babylonian documents are of particular importance for dating, but such correlations must be carried out with care, as several serious mistakes have been made in this realm in the past.

TERMINOLOGY AND PERIODIZATION

Terminology for the early periods in Palestine is based upon worldwide periodization maintained since the 1819 work of the Danish archaeologist Ch. J. Thomsen. This is the Three Age System, which divides the early periods into three major units: the Stone Age, the Bronze Age, and the Iron Age. For Palestine, this terminology was accepted, but it underwent several changes and adaptations. Thus, it has been recognized that between the Stone and the Bronze ages there is an additional "Copper Age," denoted "Chalcolithic." Some Israeli archaeologists tend to use terms with ethnic connotations—"Canaanite period" and "Israelite period"—instead of the terms "Bronze Age" and "Iron Age."¹⁴ In this book, however, we will maintain the widely accepted Three Age division.

Another terminological problem relates to two transitional periods: that between the Chalcolithic period and the Early