

OBJECTIVITY AND SALVAGE EXCAVATION POLICY IN MANDATE PALESTINE AND THE STATE OF ISRAEL : AN APPRAISAL OF ITS EFFECTS ON UNDERSTANDING THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD

by

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ABSTRACT

Archaeological research in the Holy Land grew out of the discipline of Biblical Archaeology, an approach which has, to date, directed the lion's share of field activity towards sites related to Biblical History. This selective approach has been responsible for the creation of a large and important, but extremely subjective primary archaeological data base; one which is inherently biased away from non-Biblical periods. The result has strongly influenced all understanding of the archaeological record, often detrimentally. However, since the time of the British Mandate for Palestine until the present, the implementation of a determined, objective policy of salvage archaeology in the territory of the State of Israel has acted as a curb on this tendency by adding a healthy, non-biased increment to this data base. It is a policy which makes no distinctions between Biblical related and non related sites and it has been responsible for major discoveries which have, in certain instances, radically altered scholarly comprehension of the archaeological record.

When first approached to express my views on objectivity in salvage archaeology at the annual meeting of Israel Anthropological Association conference my immediate reaction was that most archaeological activity and especially salvage work has a primary motivation which is intrinsically subjective. It is initiated by a conscious desire to elucidate obscure, buried aspects of the past; an approach which takes for granted that such an activity is worthwhile, even desirable. The alternative would be to limit archaeological inquiry to those ruins and artifacts which we literally and figuratively trip over.

To dig or not to dig is never a question of human survival and archaeological excavation is one exercise from which society will rarely reap material benefits. Indeed most excavation is an

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activity requiring considerable expenditure of time, effort and expense in search of the obscure. Yet for all this, archaeological exploration is accepted practice and even prescribed by law in many parts of the world. What then does objectivity have to do with salvage archaeology ?

Before addressing this question it is perhaps best to briefly explain what is meant by the term "salvage" and how it differs from "rescue" work. The latter is understood to be excavation with the end result the preservation, *in situ*, of at least the major remains of a site. Salvage archaeology is the recording of archaeological data through excavation prior to a site's destruction with the consequent loss of all data not recorded.

The question of objectivity in "salvage" archaeology is one which I would like to explore briefly in the pages below. It can involve a multiplicity of answers on different levels in what Gallay [1989:29] has described as a "hierarchy of explanations".

In Gallay's scheme archaeological research is understood as having a structure, the base of which is data that is descriptive of material remains. Using these data as a foundation the archaeologist, by means of analyses and syntheses, offers explanations [*i.e.* interpretations] which progress in complexity in a hierarchical system in which each level is based upon the explanations established in the step below, until finally the "meaning" of the research is set forth. This paper is concerned with one aspect of the lowest level in this hierarchy, a primary element in the construction of a data base, the choice of sites for excavation.

The selectivity of "directed" approaches to field work has, traditionally, introduced strong biases in the basic data available, especially in favor of the excavation of large tells associated or identified with Biblical history. In Israel this tendency continues till the present as may be witnessed by a list of excavations in Israel in the summer of 1990 [Menahem 1990]. The sites include : Ashkelon, Tel Miqne [Biblical Ekron of the Philistines], Tel Jezreel, Caesaria maritima, Tiberias, Beth Shean, Tel Hazor, Tel Bet Saida and Biblical Geshur [The Golan Heights].

Salvage archaeology in Israel, on the other hand, is uniquely free of preferences inherent in "directed" strategies [*i.e.* biases which confine their contributions to highly selected portions of the archaeological record]. Obviously this has important bearing on the very nature of the primary data base, here understood to be the sum total of archaeological information acquired from excavation, duly recorded for posterity.

Salvage archaeology is derived from a venerable tradition of archaeological practice. An understanding of its history is instructive as to how, as the result of a subjective, benevolent attitude towards all antiquities, a modicum of objectivity has been infiltrated into the ground floor of the discipline where otherwise it would be absent. The discussion below focuses on the objective nature of the decision as to which sites will be excavated and some of the more outstanding fruits yielded by this approach.

The practice of salvage archaeology in Israel today is an indirect result of the inception, in the 19th century, of the discipline of Biblical Archaeology. The idea of systematic excavation in the Middle East in general and in Turkish Palestine in particular, in search of physical remains associated with Biblical events, was one which aroused a great deal of interest in European circles of the last century and which continues to the present. Nowhere was there more

enthusiasm than in Britain and with the granting of the mandate of Palestine by the League of Nations, His Majesty's government became the legal custodian of the Holy Land and the keeper of all its antiquities.

To the everlasting credit of the colonial administration this was understood as a sacred trust, one which called for the institutionalization of archaeological activities and which made no distinction between antiquities related to the Bible and those lacking such significance. This judgement, which gave a positive value to archaeological activity, was to create a law and a climate which, at least in theory, gave blanket protection to all antiquities.

By 1920 the first Antiquities ordinance was promulgated, creating a Director, the custodian of this trust, in charge of a department for implementing the law. Thus all legal excavation was regulated and what was more important, all antiquities, especially archaeological sites, published in an official list, came under its protection. The destruction of sites was permitted only with permission of the director and then usually only after excavation. The Department, by virtue of its trusteeship of buried sites, then became the executor and sponsor of salvage excavation when such was deemed necessary. Just how seriously this trust was taken may be noted by the subsequent behavior of the British authorities. The archaeological treasures of Palestine were never removed to Britain to enhance the collections of the British Museum. Instead a local authority became the repository of the major finds. Eventually the imposing edifice of the Palestine Archaeological ["Rockefeller"] Museum was constructed to house it.

The policy of salvage excavation, inherited from the British Mandate administration, was continued from the time when the State of Israel gained its independence, by The Department of Antiquities and Museums of the Ministry of Education and Culture. It remains in effect to the present in the government regulated Israel Antiquities Authority which, in August 1989, replaced the Department as the institution responsible for the implementation of the Antiquities Law.

The original Antiquities Ordinance of the British Mandate government in 1920 [A. O. 1920], later additions of 1929 [A. O. 1929] and its two restructurings in 1960 [A. O. 1960] and in the Law of 1978 [A.L. of 1978], by the State of Israel are, amongst other things, clear statements of an "objective" approach towards archaeology within the subjective framework referred to above. The statutes provide for the protection of all antiquities sites with no regard to religious, sentimental or other considerations.

Antiquities sites are defined as areas which contain antiquities and appear in "Reshumot" [A.L. 1978, Ch. 7 : 28] or schedules which originated in the mandate period. Additions to these schedules are published by the government from time to time at the instigation of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Sites not officially recognized in "Reshumot" can, by decree of the Director of the Antiquities Authority, be declared as such [A.L. 1978, ch. 7 : 28, a] and consequently may come under the protection of the law.

The definition of an "antiquity" in Israel's 1978 law [A.L. 1978, paragraph 1], still in effect, is of interest in this context :

1. any object, whether detached or fixed which was made by man before the year 1700 of the general era, and includes anything subsequently added thereto which forms an integral part thereof;
2. any object referred to in paragraph [1] which was made by man in or after the year 1700 of the general era, which is of historical value and which the Minister has declared to be an antiquity;
3. zoological or botanical remains from before the year 1300 of the general era.

This definition, derived from the original British concept, is remarkably free from bias and it has introduced a modicum of objectivity into the general data base, since 1920, by the demand for excavation of upwards of 2000 sites or portions thereof, in danger of destruction. This does not mean that every single site which has been obliterated has been excavated in its entirety in this period; merely that major efforts have been made to glean the most amount of information from the majority of sites to be destroyed. Decisions as to which sites deserved the most attention seem to be relatively free of some of the more obvious forms of political and religious bias.

Certainly a degree of bias exists even in this system but I suggest that it is by far the most objective approach to archaeological excavation shown by any institution involved in the archaeology of Israel. A list of salvage projects sponsored by the Department in its 70 year history would be indicative of this objective policy. It would include virtually every type of site from every period in the archaeological record. I myself, in 14 years of having been engaged almost exclusively in salvage work, have excavated sites related to virtually all major periods from late prehistoric to almost modern times; some of them attributed to the major ethnic and religious groups still inhabiting the country.

The decision-making process of "to dig or not to dig" is one related to the projected degree of loss [of a site and the data base which can be derived from it] measured against resources and outside pressures. To ensure against hasty decisions, when the size and state of a site are completely unknown, surveys and sondages are methods most frequently employed. They have been standard practice, for the period in which I have been involved in salvage work, and the instruments by which momentous discoveries have been made and major errors in decision making have been avoided.

This policy of salvage excavation has been responsible for the creation of an enormous body of knowledge, an addition to the primary data base which otherwise would have passed out of human cognizance. Some of this material is published, much of it remains in raw form in the Department's archives. Despite all the severe limitations of the quality of this data it remains a completely random sample of those sites, known to have ceased to be part of the archaeological record, in those regions of the country which have undergone modern development.

This "system of sampling" is not, however, without its own negative bias. The size of the data base available for any one region is dependent upon and in direct proportion to the scale of modern development. Thus those portions of the country which did not undergo major development are not represented faithfully in the primary data base.

This was especially true of the Negev until recent years when major re-deployment of the Israel Defense Forces prompted intensive archaeological surveying with upwards of 11,000 sites discovered and an enormous spurt in salvage excavations [R. Cohen, chairman Archaeological

Survey of Israel; personal communication]. Of these, hundreds were "salvaged" and many more were « rescued ».

Additional subjectivity in the primary data base has been imposed by research designs which choose sites by methods other than random encounters. No criticism of problem-oriented research is intended here, merely an admonition to scholars to be aware of the bias it introduces into the primary archaeological data base. This bias was, and still is, a serious impediment to research because it is intensified in the literature; relatively few salvage excavations have been published and access to the archives mentioned above is either restricted or denied to many researchers.

Indeed, were research to rely exclusively on published excavation reports, the distinct impression gained would be that the Biblical periods were the most populous, in antiquity and, necessarily, the most prominent, archaeologically; a circumstance which is open to question.

Major efforts are, however, now being made by the Israel Antiquities Authority to rectify this situation. The publication of long overdue excavation reports is greatly contributing to the primary data base as is the recent policy of enforcing minimal reportage of excavations in the periodical, *Hadashot Archaeologiyot* [News in Archaeology] to the Authority. The institution of systematic surveying [an increasingly significant aspect of field archaeology] and gazetteer works such as that by F. J. de Cree [1990] are, more and more, making available to researchers primary information on the number and general nature of sites. Similarly growing interests in prehistoric and post Biblical periods also have contributed to correcting the imbalances created by the selected retrieval and perception of data. Still biases exist and I suspect they will always be a factor to be considered in archaeological research.

When the data base derived from only salvage operations is compared with that originating in research oriented excavations which are directed at one or, at most, only several specific aspects of the archaeological record, one can begin to appreciate the significance of the fruit of 70 years of this policy of salvage work. Following are several examples of bias, briefly reviewed, which exist in the perception of the archaeological record in Israel; a condition which, to some extent, can be or has been corrected by the contribution of salvage work.

A significant bias in our perception of the archaeological record is associated with the Chalcolithic culture. The major occupation sites of this period presently known are in the Golan Heights [Epstein 1978], the Southern Jordan Valley [Hennessy 1969; Porath 1985] and the Negev [Perrot 1984]. There is little hard evidence for sedentary settlement in the coastal plain in this period; what is known is mainly from surveys and soundings of limited size [Gophna 1974]. Few also are the permanent occupations known in the hilly part of the country or in its north. Indeed the little substantive information that is available on Chalcolithic settlement in these regions comes from fortuitous discoveries in salvage operations.

This dearth of information on Chalcolithic settlement in the well watered heartland of the modern State of Israel and the West Bank territories is virtually impossible to understand. The "lack" of large permanent settlements in these regions is quite clearly a function of an insufficient [i. e. biased] data base. It is manifest in a recent synthetic work on the Chalcolithic period in The Levant [Gilead 1988 : 412-413] in which there is an inordinate reliance on sites of the "Southern

Levant" [*i.e.* The Negev]. The researcher is obviously aware of extensive references in the literature to Chalcolithic deposits in central and northern Israel (e.g. Zori 1977; Gophna 1974; Raban 1982, VII), many of them probably representing permanent settlements, but is forced to virtually ignore this region because most sites remain either unexcavated or have not been exposed to any appreciable degree.

This is neither the result of a conspiracy nor an attempt to mislead. It is, on the one hand, merely the consequence of non-development or inadequate inspection in certain regions of the country where these sites are located and, on the other, the fruit of years of excavations almost exclusively "directed" towards other regions, principally the Northern Negev, where sites are eminently visible and easily unearthed. The resultant bias in the primary data base is of major proportions.

Salvage archaeology has done only some small service in correcting this obviously distorted data base. Recent excavation at the site of Tel Teo [Eisenberg 1989] has shown evidence of a portion of a sedentary, well organized Chalcolithic community in the Huleh Valley in the far north of Israel. Another Chalcolithic settlement, of unknown proportions, has been noted at Sataf near Jerusalem [Gibson 1988] on a steep hillside overlooking the Vale of Sorek. Buried beneath later terracing, this early occupation was encountered during a rescue operation in a region where it was little suspected. Numerous other sites of this same horizon have been noted in formal and even casual surface surveying. Undoubtedly continued development of the central and northern regions of Israel will radically alter current theories of settlement patterns for the Chalcolithic period.

A more positive example of salvage archaeology's considerable contribution towards the rectification of a particular bias which seriously impaired scholars' understanding of the archaeological record is that concerning the EB I period. As recently as 1978 the late Kathleen Kenyon [1979, Chapter IV], in her interpretation of the primary data base, declared that the period saw several groups of invading tribesmen entering the country, undergoing a process of gradual sedentarization and development which led, eventually, to the floruit of an urban [Early Bronze II] culture; hence her term for this formative period : Proto-urban [= EB I].

Such a characterization as this was, with some reservations, still possible at the time of her writing. Relatively few settlements of the EB I were then known and fewer had been excavated. Of the latter group of sites, most were exposed only on a small scale and published only minimally. Indeed they were explored mainly because of their presence in the basal deposits of tells of interest to Biblical students rather than for the interest they generated of themselves. The literature on the subject was disproportionately biased in favor of tombs rather than settlements; a state of affairs clearly reflected in Kenyon's [1979] chapter on the Proto-Urban period. Indeed her use of the term Proto-Urban seems to have been based more on intuition than on hard evidence.

At the same time that Kenyon was developing her synthetic treatment of EB I society she could draw on a far greater and more representative fund of knowledge concerning the following, EB II culture, enabling her to characterize it with greater accuracy. There was then a positive bias for this period; one derived from much published, accurate and quite detailed information on numerous sites of the EB II. This was not the result of any special design but

merely a set of fortuitous circumstances. These urban centers happened to have been located on sites later occupied by towns of Biblical fame which first drew the attention of archaeologists. Continued interest in these urban centers can be understood from the impressive nature of their remains.

The implications were, for Kenyon, obvious. She perceived, somewhat understandably, in her synthetic study [Kenyon 1979] a far greater gap between the levels of development of the societies represented at EB I and EB II sites than was actually warranted by the evidence [Braun 1989 b, 1]. Today with major increments in our knowledge [the contribution of salvage archaeology] it is abundantly clear archaeological research has only just begun to comprehend the intensity, diversity and importance of the EB I [Kenyon's Proto-Urban] period; one distinguished by many and sizable sedentary communities displaying evidence of a long and complicated history of settlement and development [Braun 1985a, 73-76; 1989a; 1989].

With the notable exceptions of Hartuv [Mazar & de Miroschedji 1989], Jawa [Helms 1981] and sites of Biblical significance [e.g. Megiddo, Beth Shean and Jericho], the bulk of our information on the EB I period is derived from salvage projects : Meser [Dothan 1957; 1959], En Shadud [Braun 1985a], Yiftahel II [Braun 1984; 1985b], Beth Yerah [Amiran & Cohen 1977; Yoyev 1985, 14], Tel Shalem [Eisenberg 1987], Tel Kittan [Hadashot 1976], Tel Teo [Eisenberg 1989], Kabri [Scheftelowitz 1990], "Small" Tel Malhata [Negev] [Hadashot 1979] and Palmahim Quarry [Braun 1990]. What indeed would be the state of knowledge of the EB I without the information derived from these last sites ?

Biases of this sort undoubtedly remain in the primary data base and will probably continue, with only some modifications, to plague researchers for a long time to come. Similar biases can, no doubt, be cited for other periods equally neglected in field work. Gaps will remain in our knowledge of the archaeological record and there will continue to be "lesser known periods" despite the relative importance, in the entire buried archaeological record, of sites of those time spans.

Only the fortuitous unearthing of archaeological sites of all descriptions, combined with a systematic, continued implementation of an objective policy of salvage work is likely to persist in correcting for biases of this sort. The reliability of the primary data base, as a true reflection of the archaeological record, can then be expected to increase in direct proportion to the scope of salvage excavations, creating an ever more sound basis for the discipline.

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