



Books

Grounded in Facts

The Dead Sea Scrolls, writes Broshi, had no impact on the development of Judaism after the Second Temple's destruction – but had a crucial influence on Christian doctrine



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This book offers a selection of articles (not all of which can be considered here) by archaeologist Magen Broshi, curator of the Israel Museum's Shrine of the Book for 30 years. The articles focus on three subjects: the history of biblical archaeology, the central aspects of the material culture of the Holy Land, and research on the Dead Sea Scrolls. There are also studies that focus on Josephus Flavius' credibility.

Generally speaking, reverberations in the media and in the public are generated by those essays proposing theories that completely deny the credibility of the biblical tradition or theories that run counter to the commonly held views on the origin of the scrolls discovered at Qumran (that

is, that they were written by members of the Essene sect or were part of the sect's "library"). Broshi is a prominent representative of the "commonly held view" or the mainstream in scholarly research on these two subjects. It should be noted that this view has sometimes come under fire for its conservatism and conformity – yet this does not mean that such a view is any further from the truth than are radical or speculative theories. In fact, in many cases, the opposite is true.

In the opening essay, Broshi briefly surveys, on the one hand, the history of Christian biblical archaeology, especially Protestant biblical archaeology, which was driven by a desire to "corroborate the Bible," and, on the other, the origins of so-called Hebrew archaeology, which were driven by a similar desire, although under very different circumstances. The many critics of "biblical archaeology" consider it a form of dogmatic scholarship, a tendentious, "engaged" product of "colonialist Zionist nationalism." (The many books expressing this critical view that have been published in recent years are a clear manifestation of polemical, manipulative – and even, at times, crude – historical writing.)

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Broshi recognizes the fact that, in its initial stages, the primary driving forces behind biblical archaeology were theology and ideology; however, in his opinion, biblical archaeology wisely underwent a process that he defines as a "scientific immunological mechanism." He is referring to the readiness of scholars to admit errors of both fact and interpretation, as well as to alter



themselves from "extra-scholarly" tendencies. He does not give an opinion on whether this was a scholarly, "autonomous" process or whether the change in paradigm was linked to changes in the scholars' society and culture.

It is hard to accept his opinion (in an article written in 1987) that the preponderance of secular Jews among Israeli archaeologists stems from the fact that "everything that religious Jews need is in the Bible, not in the ground." This argument is refuted by the archaeological "bug" that has bitten at least a portion of Israel's national-religious Jews over the past three decades. Similarly, it should be pointed out that the prevailing view on the "formative status" enjoyed by biblical archaeology in molding the national self-awareness and identity of the new Jewish community in the Holy Land (Broshi as well writes that "in Israel, ideology played a more central role than in other countries") is somewhat exaggerated.

Harnessing the past

In any event, Jewish nationalism, as some argue, is certainly not the only modern example of the utilization of archaeological findings (which are not only monuments, but also literary and historical documents) to harness the past in order to serve the "needs of the present - and the future."

Nevertheless, it is correct that the question as to whether Abraham and Moses were actual historical figures ' totally different value from the



archaeology is a unique link between, on the one hand, the reconstruction of the ancient past with the help of archaeological findings and, on the other, religious beliefs and nationalist ideologies. It is thus no wonder that biblical archaeology is at the center of a controversy that has a wider scope than the debate in which other "archaeologies" find themselves.

Broshi rejects the approach that seeks to prove that the biblical narrative is always, in every case and on every subject, a reliable historical depiction from the factual standpoint. At the same time, however, he is also far from supporting the revisionist, or "nihilistic" position, according to which every historical tradition in the Bible is nothing more than a late "invention." Thus, for example, he does not deny the factual core of the tradition concerning the settlement of the Land of Canaan by the Tribes of Israel around the year 1200 B.C.E., although he does believe that the historical account in the Bible concerning the tribes' settlement (based, in his view, on oral traditions) is essentially fictional: He favors the view that the settlement was the product of a prolonged process rather than the result of a military conquest.

I find it hard to accept Broshi's statements regarding Julius Wellhausen who, in the last quarter of the 19th century, turned "documentary hypothesis" into the dominant dogma of biblical scholarship. Views are mixed on the question of whether Wellhausen was an anti-Semite. Nonetheless, the fact that comments expressing a primitive anti-Semitism can be found in his writings does not mean that his theories are untrustworthy - as argued by Broshi, who certainly does not totally reject their validity. Perhaps, Broshi is writing in a humoristic tone, although some readers might think he is dead serious.

First of all, if we accept this rule at face value, we will have to reject a considerable number of theories - and not just in the field of biblical criticism. Second, Broshi himself proves that it is not always correct to adopt theories held by fundamentalists simply because they have been formulated to prove the Bible's credibility.



The book's main section deals primarily with the Holy Land's demographic history and material civilization. Here Broshi transports his readers to the reality in which the biblical narrative unfolds; to the environmental conditions in which the Israelite entity crystallized, that enabled demographic development as well as the development of the Israelite tribes' settlement of the Holy Land; and to the basic diet of the population. Thus, for example, he considers the "invention" of terrace agriculture - which he terms an "initiative from below" and which opened the door to agriculture on mountainous terrain and to increased food production - as important as the pyramids that were constructed by the regime in Egypt during the rule of the pharaohs.

Broshi accepts the view that demographic pressure gave rise to the technological innovations that enabled the continued growth of the Holy Land's population in the five centuries that preceded the Assyrian invasion (in 734 B.C.E.). Of course, this demographic increase had far-reaching political and social consequences. Most readers will be surprised to learn that, according to a rough estimate, the Holy Land had approximately 150,000 residents in the year 1000 B.C.E. and some 400,000 residents in 734 B.C.E. (about 222,000 in the Kingdom of Israel and about 110,000 in the Kingdom of Judah), and that Jerusalem had approximately 25,000 inhabitants during the reign of King Solomon, approximately 4,500 during the Return to Zion under Ezra and Nehemiah, between 30,000 and 35,000 during the Hasmonean era, and about 80,000 in the period immediately preceding the destruction of the Second Temple.

The peak period for the population of the Holy Land was the era of Byzantine rule, when it reached about one million. This figure alone, it would seem, dramatically demonstrates the immense scope of the demographic revolution that has taken place in the Holy Land over the past century.

Chapters 16 to 23 are devoted to the research that has been conducted on the Dead Sea Scrolls. This research (some 15,000 essays have been written about them during the last 50 years!) has generated not only alternative theories



and conspiracies behind the scenes. As noted above, Broshi represents the predominant position and rules out, one by one (at times with razor-sharp, crude sarcasm) the validity of the various proposed alternative theories, according to which Qumran was, for example, a farm, a fortress or a commercial outpost.

In his opinion, the residents of Qumran constituted a small group of Essenes (numbering about 150 to 200 persons) who lived there for a period of approximately 150 years, while the Dead Sea Scrolls are their religious-literary product (or the product of members and supporters of the sect who did not reside in Qumran), or the product of works reflecting an outlook that was close to theirs. According to Broshi, the members of the sect were not the only ones familiar with Qumran's theology, and this familiarity continued for many generations after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. (It is unclear, he argues, whether this "underground" influence was the result of accessibility to many copies of at least some of the scrolls or to oral knowledge of the Qumran tradition.)

Powerful impact

Evidence of such knowledge of Qumran theology can be seen in the Talmud's ongoing argument with various outlooks, all of which can be traced to the Essenes, and in the impact of Qumran literature on Karaism. For example, basing himself on several analogies between the views expressed in the New Testament and those expressed in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Brosh posits that some of Christianity's fundamental beliefs, such as predestination, can be traced to the writings of Qumran.

He therefore concludes that the Dead Sea Scrolls, which, in his opinion, had no impact whatsoever on the development of Judaism after the Second Temple's destruction, exerted a crucial influence on the development of Christian doctrine (and Christian fanaticism) and on Western culture. According to Broshi, a small sect that had little influence on its immediate cultural setting, which dwelt on the fringe of the desert and which saw itself as a chosen segment of the nation had a far-reaching impact on human



civilization - an impact that was many times more powerful than that of the literature of the majority society.

Here, a well-known fact must once more be noted: Whereas there is a wealth of scholarly essays on the Dead Sea Scrolls in various European languages, there are few such essays in Hebrew. This phenomenon deserves a research study in itself. Only recently have there been signs that this situation is changing.

This collection of essays ends with a wonderful literary reconstruction (that first appeared in the journal *Alpayim* in 1996) of the way of life that was led by the Essenes in Qumran.

Some of the essays in this volume were initially published in Hebrew, while others have appeared only in English. All of them reflect a wide range of subjects, interests and areas of specialization. Readers will find here not only useful information and intelligent interpretation of certain chapters in and aspects of the history of both the Jewish people and the Holy Land during the biblical and Second Temple periods, but also an important discussion of the link between "facts," on the one hand, and theory and interpretation, on the other. The publication of this collection of essays (and additional articles) in Hebrew will definitely be a welcome and much needed event.

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