

Don C. Benjamin, *Stones and Stories: An Introduction to Archaeology and the Bible*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010, 386 pp, ISBN 9780800623579, USD 39.00.

Reviewed by Christopher J. Davey

The title of this book by Don Benjamin, who teaches Bible and Near Eastern Studies at Arizona State University, is *Archaeology and ...* indicating that the book is organised around archaeology and not the Bible. After an introduction there are five parts, Popular Archaeology, Cultural History, Annales Archaeology, Processual Archaeology and Post-Processual Archaeology. The archaeological material discussed is almost exclusively derived from modern Israel with the exceptions being the Uluburun and Cape Gelidonya shipwrecks.

The arrangement is applied in an interesting fashion. Popular Archaeology begins by discussing pilgrims from the time of Eusebius and then geographers such as Edward Robinson. The archaeology of emperors discusses Napoleon and the beginnings of Egyptology and Assyriology. The archaeology of travellers deals with Edward Lane, David Roberts, Gertrude Bell, Edward Chiera and Donny George with a discussion of Nineveh and a comment about Orientalism.

The next chapter on antiquities dealers critically discusses Belzoni, Dayan and the ethics of collecting antiquities. Strangely this section begins with Burckhardt, one of the most significant nineteenth century travellers and geographers, who would fit well into any of the three preceding chapters, however it is good to address matters of ethics early in the book. The archaeology of missionaries starts with Klein's discovery of the Mesha Stone and then discusses Israelite religion and Atrahasis. One is left feeling that with the appropriate inclusion of Burckhardt, John Gardner Wilkinson and William McClure Thomson, amongst many others, this part could have been more focussed and set the scene of international interest and activity more suitably.

Part Two begins by demonstrating how cultural historians use written texts such as the Bible and ancient annals to interpret material remains found by archaeologists. Biblical Archaeology, a branch of cultural history, is discussed with respect to Albright, Wright, Bright and Kitchen before moving to the origins of ancient Israel as proposed by Alt, Noth and Mendenhall.

At no stage does the book consider Israel Finkelstein's archaeological work and it does not include his most significant study, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1988), in the bibliography. However, Benjamin does follow Faust *Israel's Ethnogenesis* (London: Equinox 2007) arguing that nomadic herders migrated into cities of Syria-Palestine and after the disruption at the end of the Late Bronze Age they settled in the hill country now known as the Occupied Ter-

ritories. He seems to believe that the people who came to be known politically as Israelites descended from earlier generations of Bedouin or Bedouin-like people.

The next chapter describes the Wheeler-Kenyon archaeological excavation technique and its development. Petrie, Reisner, Badè, Moorey and the Lahav project are also discussed. Arad and Qumran are then used as case studies to show how archaeological sites can be interpreted.

The part on Annales Archaeology discusses its origins with Bloch, Febvre and Braudel and the development of a focus on a broad cultural understanding of the past, rather than specific events. This leads to chapters on agriculture, pottery and architecture. The agricultural chapter deals with grain found at the Syrian site of Abu Hureyra (said to be in Iraq), hunting practices of the Natufians, art at Çatal Hüyük and then Iron Age Palestine farming. The pottery chapter barely mentions pots and has a long discussion about ancient concepts of body and soul. The architecture discussed is almost entirely domestic Iron Age Palestinian and leads into a discussion about Biblical concepts of household.

The development of processual archaeology is described in conjunction with General Systems Theory and in contrast to cultural history. As Benjamin explains, cultural historians aim to derive a story from the stones whereas processualism aims to reconstruct processes. The title of the book is suitably ambiguous in this regard, although Benjamin is certainly more sympathetic to cultural history than most modern archaeologists. Binford's ethno-archaeology is then discussed and Gezer, Tel Mique and nautical archaeology are used as case studies for processual archaeology. However these chapters do not apply processualism. There is very little scientific analysis of artefacts referred to and the site descriptions apply the biblical story uncritically as a non-processual untrained archaeologist might. There is, for example, a long section on the biblical story of Samson in the Tel Mique chapter.

The introduction to post-processual archaeology begins with a section on Dever and his arguments with Albright about the use of the biblical text. However, as Dever was a champion of the so called New Archaeology, that is processualism, it is a little confusing to raise that debate in this context. Benjamin describes post-processualism as seeking the evolving worldview of the people who were associated with the excavated artefacts. As a postmodern discipline post-processual archaeology allows a diversity of explanations for cultural change, but is more site-specific distrusting regional generalisations or *meta-stories*. There follows a chapter on household archaeology that includes a discussion of gender studies.

The final chapter in the book considers Biblical Archaeology today. It raises issues of cooperation with funding bodies such as National Geographic, the use of the web, and museum display. It acknowledges the work of people such as Albright and current research. The issue of faith

is raised briefly, but political motivation and bias is not commented upon.

The book concludes with descriptions of the main university-based archaeology programs in North America, a glossary, a comprehensive annotated bibliography and an index.

Albright is seen as the first biblical archaeologist, although it is conceded that 'the first American to excavate in Syria-Palestine was William Matthew Flinders Petrie.' (97). Bliss, who carried on from Petrie in Palestine, was American. The fact is that the book is very American in its outlook, selection of people and material.

It is also focussed on modern and ancient Israel; archaeology and archaeologists working elsewhere in the Eastern Mediterranean, Western Asia and Egypt are barely mentioned. This restricted focus severely limited the available archaeological scholarship and examples to suitably illustrate archaeological theories. Benjamin does not appear to be political and in fact begins with the statement that:

Archaeology is not the plunder of the treasures of ancient cultures, nor proving that the Bible's descriptions of people and events are historically accurate, nor a legal remedy for determining which people today have a legal right to the land (1).

Benjamin discusses the background to the book on *The Bible and Interpretation* website:

I wrote Stones & Stories for at least three reasons. First, I wanted readers to realize how productive the last one hundred years of fieldwork in the world of the Bible has been. Second, I wanted to encourage archaeologists working in the world of the Bible to put at least as much effort into thinking about what they were doing in the field – theory, as they have put into how they are doing fieldwork – practice. Third, I wanted to encourage archaeologists working in the world of the Bible to make a more concerted effort to collaborate more often with archaeologists working in other parts of the world. (http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/benjamin_35790927.shtml accessed 10 October 2009)

The focus on Old Testament material from modern Israel limits the achievement of the first objective and gives no basis for accomplishing the third. Roger Moorey's *A Century of Biblical Archaeology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox 1991) is much more successful in achieving these two objectives. The second objective is partly realised by Benjamin, who also states on *The Bible and Interpretation* website:

Stones & Stories is a guide to understanding how archaeologists romance the stones – the artifacts which make up the material heritage of now extinct cultures – in order to get them to tell their stories – to talk about their maker cultures. The book describes the schools or theories of archaeology used by popular and professional archaeologists to persuade the stones in the world of the Bible to talk to us. (http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/benjamin_35790927.shtml accessed 10 October 2009)

This is partly true. Anyone reading this book will have a basic introduction to some current archaeological thought. However they are not likely to understand the different approaches to archaeological interpretation very well as the case studies do not illustrate them clearly. This is probably not entirely Benjamin's fault. There are very few examples of the application modern approaches to archaeology in the area that Benjamin focuses upon. If he had expanded his horizons east of the Jordan River and north of Damascus he would have found many appropriate examples.

The stated intentions are admirable and the introductions to each part are useful. The book is organised for teaching with conclusions, summaries and study questions at the end of each chapter.

The book is commendable because there is nothing else like it available. Benjamin set himself a daunting task and the fact that much of it does not come off is an indication of the difficulty facing any individual dealing with the large number of disciplines now involved in the archaeological endeavour and the vast amount of excavated and poorly published material. It is also an indication that in the region from which case studies are drawn, there are very few significant examples of the application of modern method and theory.