



**Eric H. Cline, 2020 *Digging Up Armageddon: The Search for the Lost City of Solomon*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, ISBN 978-0691166322, pp 424 US\$50.**

Reviewed by Christopher J. Davey

Professor Eric Cline was a member of the most recent archaeological team that excavated the site of Megiddo from 1994 to 2014. There were two previous major excavations of the site, the first by the German Oriental Society led by Gottlieb Schumacher 1903–1905 and the second, and subject of this book, by the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (OIC) 1925–1939. The title of the book reflects the lure of the site, the biblical references to the last great apocalyptic battle and to the site's connection with King Solomon, which were factors in securing funding for the OIC excavations from John D. Rockefeller Jr.

The publications of the OIC excavation, *Megiddo I* and *Megiddo II*, have been cornerstones of the study of Levantine archaeology since the 1940s and have become the subject of increasing discussion. While alluding to some of these controversies and the current dating of the strata (Ch. X), Cline's interest is elsewhere and focuses the history of the excavations themselves and the people involved. Using records, letters, telegrams, reports, newspaper reports and contemporary writings, many held by the Oriental Institute itself, he meticulously describes the relationships and experiences of the OIC excavation team members.

Cline's narrative is fully documented and includes year-by-year team lists and bibliographies. There is a list of people involved, that would have benefitted from the inclusion of information about their subsequent lives. Laid bare are the 'intrigues, infighting, romance, and dogged perseverance' (p xxiii) of the dig staff, and situations still all too familiar to field archaeologists. He also describes the recurring physical ailments, especially malaria, political uncertainties, and infrastructure shortcomings that are less severe today. Identified are many problems associated with the Megiddo expedition: competing

management agendas, difficulties preparing publications, legal action by staff, workers' strikes, illegal antiquities handling, and political developments, most of which are described dispassionately. This was the period of the British Mandate when there was increasing Jewish immigration and rising Palestinian opposition.

However, Cline does present a perspective on one situation involving antiquities smuggling. When leaving Megiddo in June 1934 to take up a position in Old Testament at Oberlin Graduate School of Theology, Dr Herbert May signed a customs declaration when boarding a ship at Haifa stating that he did not possess antiquities (pp 174–186). When his luggage was opened this was found to be untrue. The claim that the many sherds, flints, and small number of pots he had were 'worthless' and should therefore not be deemed 'antiquities', is treated sympathetically by Cline. People later associated with the Australian Institute Archaeology were also leaving Middle Eastern countries, including Palestine, at that time with similar object collections and the Institute Archive still holds the export licences then issued for them. The movement of antiquities was governed by permits issued by national authorities, in this case the British Mandate, and it was not left to frontline customs officials to rule on such matters. Cline seems to have expected the English-trained Megiddo Director and ex-Chief Inspector of Antiquities for Palestine, P.L.O. Guy, to be a party to May's illegal behaviour.

Such matters aside, I wish that I had read this book prior to studying Levantine archaeology. Excavation reports are often sterile documents that present plans, describe objects, and sometimes offer interpretations. Researchers today regularly consult archived field notes and any other material from which the excavation reports were derived. It is not that the reports are false, but rather they often lack context. The reasons for excavating and the circumstances of the work are important factors when assessing archaeological data. Reading personal correspondence and hand-written field notes is a laborious task, but in this case for Megiddo, Cline has done us the service of reading the personal documents and shaping them into a coherent story. This context will help students and researchers to form a more reasoned appreciation of the archaeological evidence from Megiddo.

There are references to other excavations in Palestine at the time: Garrod at the Carmel Caves, Crowfoot at Samaria, Rowe at Beth Shan. At least one visiting archaeologist described the OIC excavation at Megiddo to have been 'conducted when money is no object' (p 154). During its fourteen years, the expedition had four to twelve full-time salaried staff present, a substantial dig house with servants, accommodation, workrooms, and storerooms, and over 200 workers when excavating. Yet they did not produce publications noticeably superior to other excavations that were operating on a shoestring. The reasons for this may perhaps be ascertained by reading between the lines of Cline's fascinating narrative.