



Portrait by Julian Gordon Mitchell (nephew) Photo: courtesy of Laura Amalir

TERENCE CROFT MITCHELL (1929-2019)

A quiet, genial Assistant Keeper would often greet inquirers coming to the Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities at the British Museum with a friendly smile. Serious questions were answered thoughtfully and positively; the cranky received kindly advice. Terence Mitchell worked at the Museum from 1959 to 1989, becoming Acting Keeper of the Department in 1983 and Keeper from 1985 to 1989. A major task given to him in his earlier years there was to edit three large volumes of typescript reports about excavations at Ur which

Sir Leonard Woolley had left unpublished. Terence found they needed much attention, the third demanding correlation with the excavation records kept in the Museum and considerable expansion and annotation. They are *Ur Excavations IX: The Neo-Babylonian and Persian Periods* (1962), *Ur Excavations VIII: The Kassite Period and the Period of the Assyrian Kings* (1965) and *Ur Excavations VII: The Old Babylonian Period* (1976). His care and perseverance in this major task have put all concerned with the ancient city of Ur in his debt. Those



Figure 2: A portrait of Terence as a schoolboy by his father, Arthur Croft Mitchell.
Photo: courtesy of Laura Amilir.

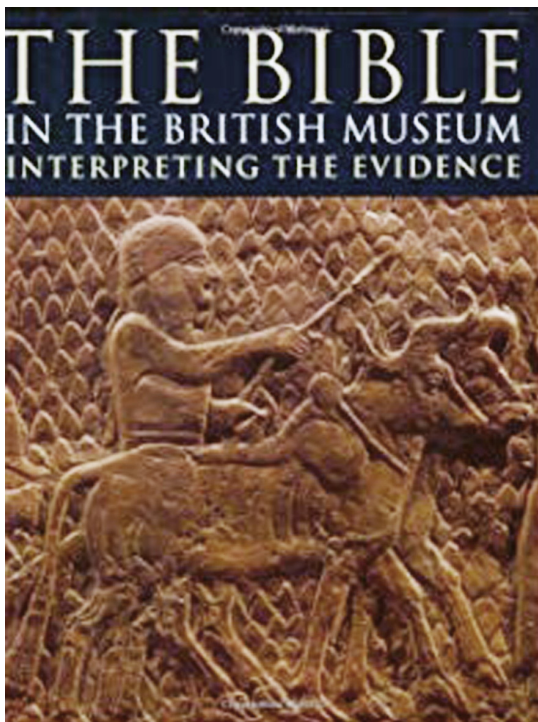


Figure 3: Cover of *The Bible in the British Museum*.

characteristics are evident in all his writings, notably the five chapters on the history of Israel and Judah he contributed to the *Cambridge Ancient History* and his entries in *The New Bible Dictionary* (1962, 3rd ed. 1996; e.g. Arabia, Flood, Nations – Table of). After retirement he was allowed a desk in the Department where he continued his research, completing his *Catalogue of the Western Asiatic Seals in the British Museum: Stamp Seals III, Impressions of Stamp Seals on Cuneiform Tablets, Clay Bullae and Jar Handles* (2008), for which Ann Searight made drawings, and writing other papers, some of them



Figure 4: Terence on his first archaeological trip.
Photo: courtesy of Laura Amilir.

still to be published. The greatly enlarged lecture on ‘Biblical Archaeology in the Persian Period,’ which he gave in 2005, demonstrates the range of his knowledge. It has become part of the volume honouring him (see below). Beside technical studies, he wrote a booklet *Sumerian Art Illustrated by Objects from Ur and Al-Ubaid* (1969) to inform interested members of the public about the Museum’s collection. Many visitors have benefitted from his guidebook, *The Bible in the British Museum* (1988) which has been revised and reprinted several times, the photographs eventually in colour (2016). It demonstrates Terence’s concern to make the material intelligible and clarify its relevance to understanding the Bible, without sacrificing academic rigour.



Figure 5: The Colossal lion marble sculpture from Knidos displayed in the British Museum's Great Court, London. It is believed to commemorate the naval Battle of Cnidus in 394 BC when Conon defeated the Lacedaemonians. Terence liked to meet his visitors at this statue, which he would explain was originally placed atop a hilltop monument where it would have been seen by all passing seafarers, one such being the Apostle Paul (Acts 27: 7).

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Terence Croft Mitchell was born on 17th June, 1929, his father being Arthur Croft Mitchell, an artist whose paintings are in several public galleries, and his mother Evelyn Violet née Ware. He died on Easter Sunday, 21st April, 2019.

During the Second World War he was evacuated to the United States for schooling. He returned to Bradfield College for his secondary education and studied Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge for his degree, taking his M.A. in 1956. He spent most of 1956-58 in research at Tyndale House, Cambridge, a period that resulted in his first papers including 'Archaeology and Genesis I-XI', *Faith and Thought* 91.1 (1959) 28-49 and 'The Old Testament Usage of *n'sāma*,' *Vetus Testamentum* 11 (1961) 177-87, in which he argued that the word for 'breath' in Genesis 2:7 is used only of human beings and so may be the biblical distinction between them and animals. After undertaking a project for some months for Walter Beasley, founder of the Australian Institute of Archaeology, he was appointed to the British Museum post.

Terence was a convinced evangelical Christian for whom the Bible was most important, hence his articles just

mentioned. He regularly attended churches in London and gave his time unselfishly to supporting Christian organizations, serving as Chairman of Faith and Thought (formerly the Victoria Institute) 1986-2009 and as Lay Chairman of the Chelsea Deanery Synod (1981-84), as well as being a long-standing member of the Gideons. As a student he came to the attention of the Christian Assyriologist Donald Wiseman, then at the British Museum, who was always eager to guide young scholars to work in biblical archaeology and ancient languages. That led Terence to join the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical Research which held annual groups to study different approaches to the Bible. He attended the Biblical Archaeology and Old Testament Groups as often as he could, building lifelong friendships with the Egyptologist Kenneth Kitchen and the writer. He would diffidently offer to read a paper and graciously accept comments, eventually producing a published text.

Terence was a modest man, a stalwart, reliable scholar whose works display his concern for fact and common sense in dealing with the ancient world. He was well-liked by colleagues world-wide who appreciated his geniality and his generosity in sharing information to help their research whenever he could. He was a life-long bachelor,

never finding the perfect partner he would have liked, and continuing to live in the large house in Chelsea which he and his younger brother inherited. For many years he bravely cycled through London traffic from his home to the Museum.

Terence's friends had planned to present a collection of essays to him to mark his 90th birthday. He died one month before that was possible and instead *Studies in Ancient Persia and the Achaemenid Period* James Clarke, Cambridge, 2020 (edited by John Curtis, his successor at the Museum) stands as a memorial to him.

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Selected Publications

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