

# BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY REVIEW

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**BAR** 36:03, May/June 2010

The Devil Is Not So Black as He Is Painted

**BAR** interviews Israel Finkelstein

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Israel Finkelstein is professor of archaeology at Tel Aviv University and has codirected the excavations at Megiddo since 1994. Recently, he was the recipient of an award that provides a fund in excess of \$4 million for a scientific study of the history of ancient Israel. Editor Hershel Shanks and Professor Finkelstein discuss, among other things, whether or not there was an Exodus from Egypt.

**Hershel Shanks:** Israel, I know that you are not a Biblical minimalist, and you're not a Biblical maximalist either. You regard yourself as a centrist. But many people refer to you as a Biblical minimalist. How do you account for that?

**Israel Finkelstein:** To tell you the truth, I don't know. I believe that I'm indeed in the center. I never take a sweeping view on Biblical history. You'll never catch me saying, "Everything is not historical" or "Everything is historical." For me, there's never a black-and-white situation.

Most of us agree that the actual compilation [of the Biblical text] is relatively late. So the question is whether everything earlier is *not* historical and everything from the time of the writing of the text *is* historical. My answer is no. There are indications that earlier material contains germs of historical memories from the formative days of early Israel. On the other hand, when the text is soaked with ideology and with the theology of the later writers, even for events close to the time of the writing, not everything is completely historical.

Why people don't understand this is beyond me. Not only do they tend to stick labels on what I am doing—you know, the minimalists say that I am a maximalist and the maximalists say that I am minimalist. They also stick [modern] political labels on what I am doing. This is absolutely incorrect to do.

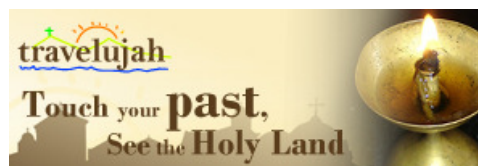


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For instance, I once gave a lecture in a prominent place in America—I'm not going to give names. And there was a prominent archaeologist who came to the podium afterward and said something like, "It is a well-known fact that Israel Finkelstein is a post-Zionist." I was really furious. I came to the podium and said to him, "What do you know about me? I don't recall you standing next to me when I cast my vote in the last elections in Israel. I don't recall you sitting between me and my wife at home when we speak about current affairs. What do you know about me? We have never spoken about politics. How do you know whether I'm on the left or I'm on the right?"

Why people do this I don't know. Hershel, I don't usually get pissed off very quickly, but this is something which really pisses me off. If they say that I am a Biblical minimalist, okay, fine. What can I do? But when people start sticking political labels to me, this is absolutely unacceptable.

#### **Have you changed your views over the years?**

I'm always changing. As Moshe Dayan once said, "Only a donkey does not change his mind." Archaeology is a variable and active discipline. Every summer there's new information. And when there's new information, of course I change my mind. Let me give you two examples.

#### **Concerning minimalism and maximalism?**

Concerning the history of ancient Israel. I'll give you one example for minimalism and one example for maximalism. Early on, I wrote an article strongly arguing that Judah became a meaningful territorial entity only in the late eighth century [B.C.E.]. Later, I reexamined the evidence, looking at new data from Jerusalem and Beth Shemesh, and reanalyzing data from Lachish, and I came to the conclusion that there is evidence for the first early steps to statehood [of Judah] as early as the ninth century B.C.E. So I changed my mind. If you read my book (with Neil Silberman) on David and Solomon carefully, you'll see that I do believe that the David story contains historical germs.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, on other items I have become more critical of the Biblical text, for instance, looking at the archaeology of Jerusalem and Judah, I now think that the reality behind the Book of Nehemiah is later than generally accepted. I won't call it minimalist, but more critical. For me, it all comes from my understanding of archaeology. I could be right; I could be wrong. I have no ideology invested in this. I am looking at the archaeological data.

#### **But your work also requires some interpretation of the Bible. Are you a Biblical scholar?**

I'm not a Biblical scholar in the sense that I cannot take a chapter of the Bible and analyze it and identify its redactions, its editing. I cannot do this. I don't have the background to do this. I am a Biblical historian. Biblical history can be reconstructed according to archaeology—Biblical texts and extrabiblical, that is, ancient Near Eastern texts. There are very few Biblical scholars who understand enough archaeology to do this and there are very few archaeologists who understand enough Biblical scholarship to do this. This is the only thing that I can say about myself regarding Biblical history: I am not ignorant. I read a lot of Biblical scholarship. I know what's going on.

#### **You know enough Biblical scholarship so that you can take a text of the Bible and say that this was written at a certain time and try to mine it to see what was historical from an earlier period and what was politically adjusted a little bit to meet the needs of a later period?**

Right.

#### **You feel that you can do that?**

Yes. I think that I can do that—not in every case. Take Hosea. You want to know what is original, what is later and so forth, I cannot do this. It's very difficult. But for the "historical" books, I can do this because I have a very strong tool in my hands. That strong tool is archaeology.

I sometimes have arguments with archaeology friends who think that an archaeologist is a technician who hands over his finds to clever historians who then reconstruct history. I don't agree. If you ask me, "What is your profession, Israel Finkelstein?" I will tell you I am a historian practicing archaeology. I do not believe in the archaeology of "cooking pots." I do not believe in archaeology as only walls. I don't minimize the importance of anthropological archaeology. Don't misunderstand me. My own interest, however, is in a different layer of archaeology. I am interested in the line between archaeology and the texts. I see myself as a historian practicing archaeology, which means my aim is to reconstruct history, not to reconstruct the history of the rim of a cooking pot.

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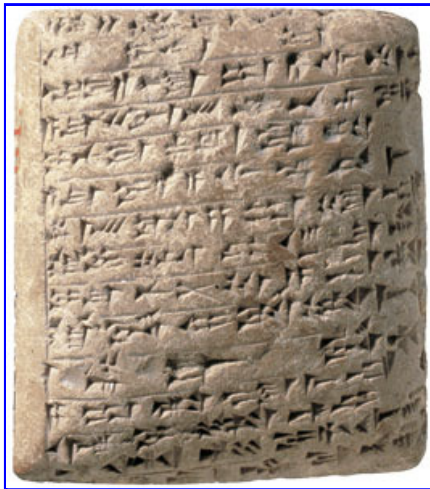
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**You threw up your hands as to why you sometimes have this reputation of being a Biblical minimalist. Perhaps it's because you reach a negative conclusion when the only thing you can really say about whether the Biblical text is historical is "I don't know." Let me give you an example: Was there an Exodus from Egypt?**

You should start with a different example, because the Exodus is really a difficult case. I have to really concentrate now because there are many aspects to it. You put a trap. I know you, Hershel, you put a trap here. So I have to be very careful. We know each other, Hershel, 35 years or so. This is an ambush ... But I'm not going to run away. There are many answers to this question. The easiest answer is, "I don't know." But I think that one can offer a better answer. But the answer is again not black and white. It's nuanced. If you are speaking about an Exodus the way it is described in the Biblical text—a very large group of people marching through the desert for 40 years—the answer is "no."

**Of course; everyone accepts the fact that two million people did not cross the Sinai desert. We don't need to argue about that.**

Fine. So this is my first answer: The story is nuanced. If you look at the archaeological evidence from the Sinai and from Israel and at the text, there is not a clue for a major migration of people from Egypt into Canaan at the end of the Late Bronze Age [c. 1200 B.C.E.]. This is the second answer. I am speaking positive archaeology here, plus extrabiblical texts: What we know about the strength of the Egyptian control over the Sinai and Canaan from archaeology—fortresses and the like—does not let us read Exodus in a simplistic way. To give you an example, the el-Amarna cuneiform tablets, which describe the situation in Canaan in the 14th century B.C.E., mention that 50 or 100 Egyptian soldiers were enough to pacify a revolt in Canaan. So there is no way for a large group of wanderers to enter Canaan from the desert without provoking a swift Egyptian reaction.

The third answer is that much of the Exodus account in the Biblical text does not come from the Late Bronze Age. The text does not have memories from the Late Bronze Age. It moreso depicts geographical realities and historical concerns closer to the period of the compilation of the text, which means the background of the story, in my opinion, is closer, let's say, to the seventh century B.C.E., and maybe even a bit later. That's the third answer.

The fourth answer would be that all this does not mean that there was no group of people coming from Egypt. To follow Egyptologist Donald Redford, perhaps the expulsion of Canaanites [the Hyksos] from Egypt in the 16th century [B.C.E.] could have left a memory and that memory became some sort of a myth that later found its way into the Biblical text in a process that we cannot fully reconcile. And even this is a somewhat simplistic answer.

So your Exodus question was a nice attempt to trap me, Hershel, because it's really easy to say "No, there is no history there." But I cannot say that. What I am saying is that there is no 13th-century B.C.E. history in the text. There is no 13th-century B.C.E. major migration of people—Asiatics, Canaanites, Hebrews, whatever you want—from Egypt and the Sinai to Canaan. The larger scene makes it [an Exodus] impossible, [considering] what we know about Canaan, what we know about Egypt, etc.

Some scholars suggest that there was a group of people who came from Egypt with egalitarian ideas different from the local belief or faith in Canaan, and that they were the nucleus for the people in the Canaanite highlands who became Israel. I cannot detect

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this archaeologically.

But you know archaeology is not about individuals. Archaeology is not about ten people crossing in the desert. Archaeology is not even about a hundred people crossing the desert. This is beyond the resolution of archaeology. Do you agree with me?

**Yes. I appreciate what you're trying to say, but you're coming down in a very negative way, when there is really room for a lot that's positive. For example, we know that there was a people Israel in the late 13th century B.C.E.**

Right.



**And that people was so important that the Pharaoh bragged about defeating them. Whether he did or did not defeat them, he bragged about it. He thought he was a big shot because he destroyed them [as related in the Merneptah Stele].**

**The tenor of the Exodus account in the Bible is accurate for that time. Someone in the seventh century in Jerusalem wouldn't have known that the construction in Egypt was mudbrick construction, instead of the stone construction that the Israelites were using in the eighth century or the seventh century B.C.E. So much of the ambiance of the Bible account, the details, are confirmed by Egyptian archaeology—the slaves, the straw for the mudbricks, the people escaping into the desert and being caught. Let's not talk about 600,000 men escaping [as the Bible says], but there were a group of people who escaped who considered themselves Israelites. There is such a strong memory of this in the Bible.**

Of course there is a strong memory.

**And the memory is of a degrading condition. No other people in the history of the world has ever invented a history of themselves as slaves. This is not archaeological evidence. Is it proof? No. But it is a cautionary note. It cautions us not to reach a negative conclusion. More: It is likely that some group of people who considered themselves Israelites escaped from Egypt and this became their "national" story.**

Hershel, let me give you my take on what you have just said. Some of the things that you have said may be acceptable; many of them are not acceptable to me. First of all, we all know the Merneptah Stele [containing the late-13th-century B.C.E. reference to "Israel"] is very important. But it's not more important than what we know about the dealings of the Egyptians at the time, and what we know from archaeology about the emergence of Israelite identity. The Merneptah Stele is indeed proof that there was a group of people named Israel in the late 13th century B.C.E. There is no way to argue about this. I mean, I agree with you, but what does it say about the Exodus? Or the rise of Israel in Canaan? Or the size and location of that group of people?



Where did these Israelites come from?



Well, you know my take on this. There were local groups in Canaan in the Late Bronze Age. I don't want to go beyond what archaeology can tell us. The majority of Israelites came from this local Bedouin-like stock, from the people of Canaan in the second millennium B.C.E.

Most of what you say about Egypt, the straw and the mudbricks—Hershel, you know I like you a lot, I don't want to be harsh with you. But I tell you, straw and mudbricks and so on—*bubbe-meisehs* [“grandmothers’ tales” in Yiddish]. You have to stick to the hard-core information—fortresses, settlement patterns, foodways, etc.

Saying that no other people invented slavery as their roots means nothing to me. It's not an argument. It's a cute thing to say, not more than that. I can counter it with many other arguments. My arguments and your arguments—where do they lead us? Nowhere. I am coming from archaeology.

**How and why did this group of people in the highlands of Canaan in the late 13th century B.C.E. invent this Egyptian past?**

I don't think they invented it in the late 13th century. This is the difference between us.

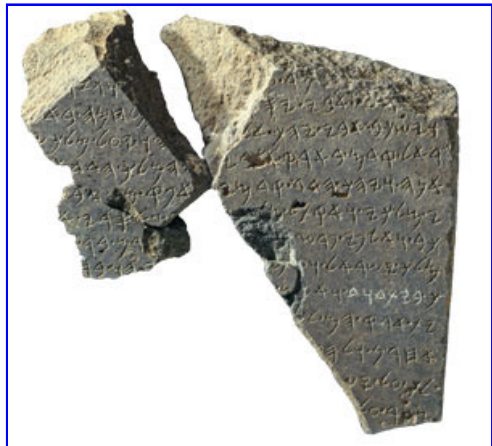
**You mean they invented it later?**

No. You have to look at it in a nuanced way. You see, Hershel, I think that there could have been this memory of Canaanites [the Hyksos] being thrown out of Egypt, via the desert and into Canaan in the 16th century B.C.E.

But I should start in a different way. And this is where I differ from you. You look at the reality of the story and you say, “Hey, this is the Late Bronze Age.” And I am telling you, in this story there are two realities. There is the internal reality of what is going on in the eastern desert, the border with Sinai, people coming, people going and so on. This has always been the situation in the eastern Delta of the Nile in antiquity—in the Middle Bronze, in the Late Bronze, in the Iron Age. When you narrow the focus and look at some of the details, they are from a later period. For me, this is the most important thing. I don't think people from the [Canaanite] highlands sat together around a campfire and either invented or wrote down the story in the 13th century B.C.E. It's a slow process of a memory that becomes a myth that has been transmitted from father to son that absorbs more and more layers. Finally there comes a moment that the story is put in writing.

Eighth-century [B.C.E.] prophetic works mention the Exodus and the story in Egypt, so the story is definitely earlier than this moment, when it was written down.

What I am saying is, that this is a long process. Archaeology is stratified—and the story is also stratified.



**It seems to me that you could conclude one of two things: (1) that there was an Exodus of a kind that we can't fully capture; it developed into a story over the generations, even after it's put in writing. Being in writing doesn't mean it's fixed. It continues to develop; it continues to add details and take away.**

Sure, sure.

**So you can reach two conclusions. (1) There was no Exodus, or (2) there was some kind of an Exodus, we don't know the details, we don't know the numbers, we don't know how. I suggest you don't leave enough room for doubt; you come down negatively. You depend very much on the absence of evidence. We have seen time and again in archaeology, where there is no evidence, and all of a sudden it's there. Nobody ever found any archaeological evidence of the name David. In all of history, we cannot find an ancient mention of David, of anyone named David, not just the king. Then suddenly, out of nowhere, comes a great inscription mentioning**

**“David,” “House of David.”<sup>a</sup>**

Hershel, you are a great performer. First of all, I don't buy this “Let's wait and see”

theory. I'll tell you why. "Let's wait and see" is not only in archaeology. "Let's wait and see" is in every science, in every field of research. There are fields of research that provide new data all the time. Luckily archaeology is one of them. We are an empirical science. This is good. I like it this way. In empirical scientific research, you can always expect new revelations. You never know what will happen tomorrow morning. What I'm giving you is an analysis of what I know today. Tomorrow morning, if there is a new piece of information, I will take it into consideration.

Hershel, your mistake, in my opinion, is that you use the word "Exodus." Now, I am not against the word "Exodus," because "Exodus" is part of my identity, part of my heritage. But when you look at research and you use the word "Exodus," you imply immediately the Biblical story is fully historical. Let me just tell you that I am ready to accommodate that: In the background there was a movement of people inside and outside of Egypt in the Late Bronze Age and in the Iron Age, and a memory was developed about a possible ancient event, and this memory later picked up importance, and was transmitted orally for many generations and finally became the Exodus story in writing. I am not saying that there is no historical germ whatsoever in it. You'll never catch me saying that. But I don't see it as fully historical either.

**Nobody says it's fully historical.**

So we are arguing about how much history there is in it.

**You don't like the word "Exodus."**

I like this word "Exodus" very much. But I like it in a cultural context.

**But not in a historic context?**

Not in a research context. Because in a research context, it biases me.

**How about in a historic context? Can I use "Exodus" in a historic context?**

Not as a historical event; yes, as a cultural tradition.

**I'm talking about history.**

What I said to you before is what I'm going to say again. I'm going to repeat it for you, Hershel: There is no evidence for a movement of large groups of people. There is no possibility, on the background of Egyptian domination of Canaan in the 13th century B.C.E., of people marching into the land, and so on and so forth. Most of the Israelites came from the local [Canaanite] background of the second millennium B.C.E. The Exodus story in the Bible depicts eternal realities on the one hand and specific realities of the [later] Iron Age, on the other hand. It's possible that there is some sort of a memory behind the story. Voila, this is my answer.

**But there's much that isn't archaeology. That's where your problem lies.**

Look, I'm coming from archaeology, Hershel. Archaeology provides you with real-time evidence. Archaeology enables you to look at Canaan in the 13th century B.C.E. in detail. Archaeology lets you look at the Sinai. Archaeology lets you look at the eastern Delta. Archaeology lets you look at specific places that are mentioned in the Biblical text. For instance, Etzion Geber, Kadesh Barnea, places that are mentioned specifically, that are pivotal to the story of the wandering in the desert and that were not inhabited in the Late Bronze Age. This is the picture that I am taking with me when I'm reconstructing the history behind the text.

I acknowledge that there is a vacant space after archaeology. I acknowledge it. This is the reason why I'm saying that I'm leaving open the possibility for a memory of something that did happen in the past. That's okay. This is my point of view. If you want to call it minimalism, what can I do? I don't think it's minimalism.

**You do believe that Solomon's Temple is historical. How do you distinguish your reasoning with respect to the Exodus from your reasoning with respect to Solomon's Temple?**

Every description in the Biblical text should be judged on its own account according to archaeology and ancient Near Eastern studies.



**How do you know that there was a Temple, a Temple Mount built by Solomon?**

I don't know. But when I put together all the pieces of evidence, I think that is the logical conclusion. I'll tell you why. First of all, I look at what I know from both

archaeology and texts about kingdoms in the ancient Near East. Even [small] city-states in the ancient Near East in the second millennium and the first millennium B.C.E. always had a compound in the capital with a palace and a temple.

**Do you have a tenth-century temple anywhere [at the time of Solomon]?**

Yes, for instance at Megiddo, the last phase of the Migdal Temple (see photo), and perhaps in other places.

In the Late Bronze Age and in the later Iron Age, when you have a dynasty ruling in the capital of a territorial entity, you always have a palace and a royal shrine near the palace. So the question is whether you can go back to David and Solomon as the founders of the dynasty. If they are the founders of the dynasty, they must have had some sort of a temple and a palace in the capital. Since I see David and Solomon as historical and I see them as the founders of the Davidic dynasty in Jerusalem, I see no reason to exclude Jerusalem and make it the only case on the face of the earth where there is no temple and palace in the time of the founders of a dynasty.

**What about a palace?**

Why are you asking about the palace? [Smiling] What's your interest in Jerusalem palaces? It's a theoretical interest?

**No. [Smiling]**

It's not a theoretical interest?

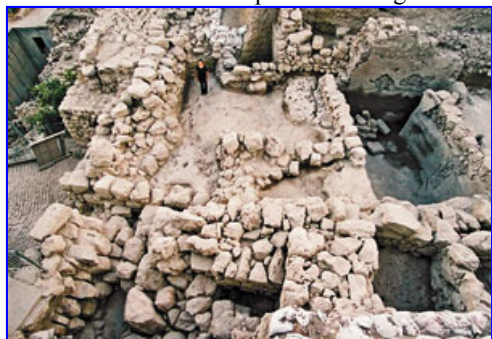
**No.**

Why is that? If I were a clever Washington lawyer, I would grill you on this.

**What do you think of the theory that Eilat Mazar has found walls in Jerusalem**

**from the tenth century [B.C.E.] that might have been part of David's palace?<sup>b</sup>**

I think that her excavations are important. They provide us with important information about Jerusalem in the Iron Age and later. But I see no connection whatsoever between the excavations and the palace of King David.



**Do you think there are any tenth-century walls that she has excavated?**

Yes, I think there are walls there that may be dated to the tenth century B.C.E. We wrote a long article about this.<sup>2</sup> We really think this is an important excavation. I'm not saying this only to be polite. Eilat Mazar is doing a great job there. I think that some of the walls may date to the Iron Age, but others may date later. It's not one coherent building. You can't date the building easily—if there was one single building. The most logical dating for the founding of a relatively monumental structure here should be somewhere in a phase we call Iron Age IIA. According to radiocarbon studies, this phase is in the ninth century B.C.E. [according to Finkelstein's controversial "low

chronology.” In the traditional chronology, Iron Age IIA begins in the tenth century B.C.E. David’s reign was in the early tenth century B.C.]

Eilat Mazar reads the Biblical text literally. The Bible says David “went down,” and David “went up,” and David went “to the left” and David went “to the right” and so on. I don’t think you can do that. There are many layers to the Biblical text. It’s not a guide to the topography of Jerusalem. Taking the Bible as a guide to the topography of Jerusalem in the tenth century B.C.E. is diminishing the text of the Bible in my opinion. This is the kind of Biblical archaeology that cannot be done anymore.

#### **Is there a discipline of Biblical archaeology?**

Tough question, Hershel. There is a discipline, I suppose. If you ask me whether I am a Biblical archaeologist, I will tell you: Yes. I am, in the sense that I’m an archaeologist who is interested in the Biblical text. I’m just coming from a conference in France where I had to write down my professional interests. I didn’t answer “Biblical archaeology.” I said my professional interests were the archaeology and history of the Levant in the Bronze and Iron Ages. It’s a safer definition of what I’m doing.

#### **Why is it safer?**

Because I also do Bronze Age archaeology. [The Iron Age is sometimes referred to as the Biblical period.]

#### **But safe implies some danger.**

It’s safer because it’s more accurate. Saying that I do Biblical archaeology puts me only in relation to the Biblical text. I think that I’m doing things more broadly than this.

Archaeology and reconstructing history are more complex than looking only in a black-and-white way, yes or no, whether archaeology verifies the text or not.

#### **Do you sense some embarrassment about being interested in the Bible?**

Not at all. I am not embarrassed. I am not ashamed. I am proud to deal with the Biblical text. I know the importance of the Biblical text. I’m proud of being able to work in a discipline that has the Bible at its center.

#### **How has the relationship of the Bible to archaeology changed over the past 35 years, since the founding of BAR?**

Well, I do think we are in a process of liberation from an antiquated reading of the Biblical text. We still have it [among some archaeologists]. I don’t want to mention names. You know better than I. They still interpret the Bible very literally. But, on the whole, if you take a step back and you take a broader look, we are in a process of being liberated, not from the Bible, but from an antiquated reading of the Bible. We tend to give it a more sophisticated reading.

This is not to say that the Bible has no history. It means that we need to look at the Biblical material more carefully, in a more sophisticated way.

#### **How has archaeology changed in the past 35 years?**

There are several lines of change. The first one, the most dramatic one is the inclusion of the exact sciences. The second change, as I already mentioned, is a more critical way of looking at the Biblical text. The third one is the turning from major tell archaeology to village archaeology, rural archaeology, settlement patterns, large-scale surveys. We see history as long-term processes, in the footsteps of what the French call the *longue durée*.

#### **What’s in your future, Israel?**

I have just started a big new project that will give us an opportunity to apply the exact sciences to archaeology. This has been done in the past of course, but now we will do it in a more powerful way. Steve Weiner of the Weizmann Institute [Rehoboth Israel] and I are the principal investigators. The title of the project is “Reconstructing Ancient Israel, The Exact Life Science Perspective.” We have five research tracks: the time of ancient Israel, the genesis of ancient Israel, the life of ancient Israel, the mind of ancient Israel and the identity of ancient Israel. We have a grant of 3 million Euros from the European Research Council of the European Union for this project. That’s more than 4 million dollars.

We have assembled a group of about 30 to 35 researchers. We are doing radiocarbon [dating], geoarchaeology and genetics. We will try to do DNA, palynology, petrography, metallurgy, ancient mathematics, residue analysis (looking in vessels for the residue of organic material)—and so forth. We are assembling many disciplines in order to try to answer the big questions that we posed in the proposal. Hopefully we’ll have more information on food ways, on trade, on manufacture of items, on chronology, on knowledge of the ancient people, what they had on their minds, on the manufacture of pottery. At the end of the day, all this will be assembled together and give us more information about the archaeology of the Iron Age and about reconstructing history, which also includes the Biblical text.

**This sounds like anthropological archaeology. Earlier you said you were interested**



**in historical archaeology.**


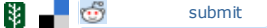

Here the two converge. Even when I do something on the side of anthropology or the exact and life sciences, it is not detached from what I'm doing in reconstructing the history of ancient Israel.

**Is there anything I should have asked you that I didn't, Israel?**

You should have told me that I'm right and you're wrong. You forgot that. [Both laugh]

**Thank you very much, Israel.**

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**\$4 Million for "Reconstructing Ancient Israel"**

[Sidebar to: The Devil Is Not So Black as He Is Painted](#)



With a grant of more than \$4 million, the project described at the end of Israel Finkelstein's interview will be a unique scientific effort to reconstruct the history of ancient Israel. Never before has a project of this complexity been undertaken with such substantial funding and such an array of scientific researchers.

The grant proposal notes that we have "very few real-time historical records" relating to the history of ancient Israel. Moreover, the proposal notes, "the biblical testimony [was] written a long time after the events described (if not mythical) took place." The proposal also recognizes "the strong theological agenda of both the original authors [of the Biblical text] and many modern scholars."

While Biblical archaeology has "provided critical evidence for the material culture of Ancient Israel ... until recently it has been dominated by a conservative interpretation of the biblical text and was not given a true independent role in constructing Ancient Israel's history," the grant proposal explains.

In contrast, "The exact and life sciences are not restricted by these preconceptions ... Archaeological science," the proposal asserts, "is the wave of the future."

The 15-page, single-spaced grant proposal describes this enormously complex project using scientific methodologies that most of us have never heard of, like morphometry, palynology and the examination of polished thin sections illuminated with polarizers. The project will apply "algorithms from the domain of artificial intelligence to the study of epigraphy." The project will study food deposits left in pottery, using "gas chromatography with either flame ionization or mass spectrometer detectors." The project will thus "deploy an arsenal of disciplines from the exact and life sciences."

The researchers will "concentrate on the micro-archaeology of Ancient Israel diachronically and synchronically."

It is not clear from the proposal to what extent purely Biblical scholars will be part of the project. They are not mentioned. Presumably they will be consulted at various junctures. Certainly this will be required when the project explores "a possible connection between the Hebrew Bible and Homeric literature," one of the subjects to be studied.

Unlike so many past efforts, this project, we are told, aims to provide a "bias-free history of Ancient Israel" that is expected to "revolutionize the study of Ancient Israel."

This prodigious project of course represents a marvelous opportunity. It is not without its dangers, however. A major question is whether the plan is simply too complex to be accomplished. Four million dollars sounds like a lot of money until you begin to apply it to the vastness of this project as envisioned in the proposal.

I do have one recommendation—the inclusion of an experienced, high-level management consultant with sufficient authority who will strictly supervise budgets and time schedules of each subproject and review their interconnections. He must have constant access to the principal investigators (Israel Finkelstein and Stephen Weiner)

and enjoy their confidence. Of one thing I am sure: Undreamt-of complexities and problems will tax the abilities of even the greatest scholars.—H.S.

 Talkback

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### **A question to Finkelstein**

Jonathan COHEN — Israel (5/16/2010 1:00:40 PM)

A second Try Eight years ago (Nov/Dec 2002) Hershel Shanks had an interview with Israel Finkelstein. In the wake of that interview I sent a letter to BAR which was published in the next issue (Three QUESTIONS). Finkelstein declined to answer. Since the last interview proves that his basic views did not change I am sending my main question again). In his interview Finkelstein kept saying in various formulations that the Tora's stories "are fully immersed into the realities of Late monarchi

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### **exodus as evacuation**

aris m hobeth — (5/16/2010 9:49:09 AM)

Looking for Moses in the Egyptian literature may provide more "historicity". Matching events described in the Moses saga with identical events (in proper sequence) in the Egyptian records may provide more "evidence" of the historicity of Moses as a famous Egyptian. Sincerely, Aris M. Hobeth (arismhobeth.com offers a possible but compelling reconstruction.)

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### **TEN PLAGUES = EXODUS ?**

Julian Mazur — Canada (5/15/2010 5:13:37 PM)

If the Ten Plagues of Egypt occurred, leading to the Exodus, the ambassadors to Egypt from Assyria, Hittities, Babylonia and Greece would have WRITTEN about the incredible goings on in Egypt, such as Nile turning red with blood,the three days of darkness, locusts and frogs etc. infesting their embassies. They would sent have their despatches ( not subject to Pharaoh's censors )to their countries.But to this day, not one single tablet that talks about these Ten Plagues have EVER been discovered.

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### **The Exodus**

Ben Plonie — Chutz L'Aretz (5/13/2010 1:46:03 AM)

The key to this interview is the phrase "Most of us agree". Not based on anything other than ideology. Certainly not based on hard exact sciences. Otherwise everyone would agree. There is more interpretation in archeology than in the Talmud. In the Riddle of the Exodus by James D. Long, a very close correspondence is found between the Biblical account and Egyptian people and events leading up to the demise of the first kingdom. Simply by looking where no one else is looking.

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### **Israel Finkelstein**

Julia Fridman — Israel (5/11/2010 6:40:30 PM)

I am very glad to finally read an article which finally sets the record straight about my professor Israel Finkelstein. If any of you had a chance to take a course with him you would understand what an exceptionally bright mind he has. If only everyone did

research the way he does! Everything he says has factual basis and if someone proves him wrong he welcomes it because he is actually in this for the KNOWLEDGE and not the fame. Oh and Chariot wheels? Really?!

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### **The Devil looks pretty black to me**

Daniel Buck — USA (5/8/2010 3:07:03 PM)

"I think her excavations are important. They provide us with important information about Jerusalem in the Iron Age and later. But I see no connection whatsoever between the excavations and the palace of King David." Well, I don't know if Eliat has found King David's palace, or not. But I have much more confidence in her findings than in Israel's who seems to have already decided that there is no Davidic palace to be found on Zion. Again & again he shows himself to be closed-minded. Not good.

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### **Hershel's discussion with Israel Finkelstein**

Patrick Levy — USA (5/5/2010 6:43:49 PM)

Thank you Hershel for this very interesting conversation with Israel Finkelstein. I understand Finkelstein's choice for sticking to scientific evidence but I have trouble buying his theory about a relationship between the exodus story and the Hyksos. How could a people that ruled Egypt for four centuries fabricate a past of slavery for themselves? Your remark regarding the lively details in the Exodus story is more convincing. I remain a loyal and passionate reader. Happy birthday BAR!

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### **Exodus at Equator**

C Broe — USA (5/3/2010 1:48:03 PM)

Forgive me Dr. Finkelstein, but you are looking in the wrong place for the Exodus. Scientists have found that the crossing was made at the equator c. 1451 BCE. After Santorini Island blew up the Egyptians went into crisis, perfect timing for an escape by the Jews (The evidence is in an Arab country). The Exodus may explain the founding of Israel late 13th c. BCE by 60,000 people with Egyptian building practices. Not all of the Bible is historically accurate, but the seed of truth is there.

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### **Hershel's interview with Israel**

Kenneth Hasekamp — USA (4/28/2010 2:49:16 PM)

This was a most interesting interview. There was what I felt was honest dialogue between peers that do not always agree, but have huge respect for each other. That is missing so often in today's world. It also raises my respect for BAR and the work Hershel has been doing over the last 35 years. It also keeps me coming back for more. By the way, I believe the Bible to be accurate and love each find that proves that, especially for King David. Keep it up, Hershel!!!!

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### **about Finkelstein**

Gilla — Israel (4/28/2010 2:08:46 PM)

Very interesting interview. Now you should do the same in depth interview with Steven Ortiz.

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### **Finkelstein and Cory**

Jag — Australia (4/27/2010 11:53:34 PM)

Cory... There are no chariot wheels in the gulf. And the argument about Moon dust has long been abandoned by fundamentalist biblical literalists. Finkelstein is a great scholar, and I am glad he helps us understand "biblical" history the way it really was. When it is said that nobody believes that the Exodus was fully historical it really means scholars - people who know what they are talking about.

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### **The Exodus**

Cory — USA (4/25/2010 4:11:02 PM)

"Nobody says it's fully historical." I guess you have never met me. Please explain the chariot wheels found in the gulf of Aqaba? I think that is a good indicator of what happened at that location. There is 3/4" of dust on the moon, which accounts for about 7,000 years of dust accumulation on the moon....this would indicate that the moon has only existed for about 7,000 years...since the Bible is accurate about the age of the earth, then i feel comfortable believing all of it.

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### **BAR Interview -Finkelstein & Shanks**

Robert Feather — England (4/23/2010 4:18:45 AM)

Hershel Shanks was far too soft with Israel Finkelstein, especially in relation to the Exodus.'IF' claims archaeology is paramount in the analysis, but completely ignores evidence for an influx of 60-70,000 outsiders to the hill country in the 12th century BCE, their house constructions and terracing mirroring those in Egypt, of the 13th century BCE. His suggestion that Egypt had too strong a control over Canaan ignores the textual evidence of a severe political upheaval in Egypt at the time.

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### **Biblical archaeology**

Philip Stern — United States (4/22/2010 8:44:03 AM)

Biblical archaeology is a real discipline. The Merneptah Israel stele is one example. But the example I always go back to is the Mesha Inscription. It can be dated to the ninth century BCE, has a theological agenda (for Kemosh) corresponding to the YHWH agenda of the Bible. It reads like a page from the Bible, only it takes a Moabite point of view. Then there is an inscription that tells a story about Balaam from a non-Yahwistic point of view. And there is plenty more epigraphic evidence!

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### **The Exodus and History of Israel**

John Byers — United States of America (4/17/2010 1:15:35 PM)

The conversation between Shenks and Finkelstein was most enlightening, and was much appreciated.

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### **Intelligent Faith**



A B Chrysler — USA (4/16/2010 11:13:58 PM)

Exact and life sciences like Morphometry, Palynology, Gas chromatography with flame ionization or mass spectrometer detectors are wonderful additions to our methods of confirming historical truths. Scientific methodologies should always be included in interpreting archaeological evidence and when possible a comparison with the Biblical text is often helpful. Consider that "All scripture is given by inspiration of God..." (II Timothy 3:16).

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