



Bible, Archaeology, and Historicity

September 13, 2006

- Announcements
- Community of Returned Exiles (from last time)
- Bible, Archaeology, and Historicity



Announcements

- Participation grade for section
 - As originally calculated, written assignments account for 95% of the grade
 - Balance is reserved for participation in lecture and (especially) in section
- Electronic Reserves:
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Community of Returnees in Judaea

- Returnees are under Persian sanction
 - Sheshbazzar (539) and Zerubbabel (520s), descend. of David
 - Ezra ca. 458, a priest and **scribe**. His charter (Ezra 7): to enforce the law of his God, written in a **Torah, a book** of law or instruction
 - Nehemiah (late 5th C) is a pious courtier of the Persian king.
- Clashes in Judaea
 - Between leaders in Jerusalem and other local leaders (e.g. Samaria) in a position similar to Ezra's or Nehemiah's
 - Between returned exiles and "peoples of the land," **possibly the descendants of the Judaeans left behind.**
 - In reality, relations more intimate: intermarriage with "peoples of the land" protested by some leaders, practiced by others
 - In this context: the formation of an association of returnees who vow to protect the Temple, provide for the priests and levites and **separate from the peoples of the land** (Nehemiah 10)

Bible, Archaeology, and Historicity

- In general: documents or evidence from outside the Bible do not **precisely** match the Bible. Differences may be telling
- Examples
 - Cyrus Cylinder (ca. 538 BCE) and Ezra 1
Royal policy and propaganda, vs. divine guidance of Israel's fate
 - Mesha Stele (ca. 830 BCE) and 2 Kings 3
Biblical text evades a theologically embarrassing loss
 - Palestinian archaeology and Joshua/Judges (ca 1200–1000)
Biblical text (e.g., Joshua) creates a tidy historical and religious narrative, where outside evidence suggests a messier history

Cyrus Cylinder and Ezra 1

- Bible: Cyrus' proclamation **fulfills prophecy** and **divine promise**
- Cyrus Cylinder reflects a **general policy** and in deference to another god!
- Is the biblical text a **made-up** or **heavily edited** proclamation?
- Even if not, as presented it serves Israelite (now "Jewish") interests, does not reflect **Cyrus'** motivations.

Mesha Stele

Currently at the Louvre, Paris

... Omri was the king of Israel, and he oppressed Moab for many days, for Kemosh was angry with his land. And his son reigned in his place; and he also said, "I will oppress Moab!" In my days he said so. But I [Mesha] looked down on him and on his house, and Israel has been defeated; it has been defeated forever! And Omri took possession of the whole land of Medeba, and he lived there in his days and half the days of his son: forty years. But Kemosh restored it in my days.... And the men of Gad lived in the land of Atarot from ancient times; and the king of Israel built Atarot for himself, and I fought against the city and captured it. And I killed all the people of the city as a sacrifice for Kemosh and for Moab....



2 Kings 3 and the Battle against Mesha

■ **Prophet Elisha b. Shaphan to Israelite kings:**

¹⁸This is a light thing in the sight of the LORD; he will also give the Moabites into your hand, ¹⁹and you shall conquer every fortified city, and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree, and stop up all springs of water, and ruin every good piece of land with stones

■ **The narrated unfolding of the events**

²⁵ And they [the Israelites] overthrew the cities (as in vv 18-19)

²⁶ When the King of Moab saw that the battle was going against him, ... ²⁷ Then he took **his eldest son who was to reign in his stead, and offered him** for a burnt offering upon the wall. And there came great wrath upon Israel; and they withdrew from him and returned to their own land.

Palestinian Archaeology and Joshua/Judges

- For discussion in section, and paper next week: Callaway, "Settlement in Canaan"
- Why **not** just rely on the Bible?
 - Because of internal contradictions, problems
 - Because of conflicts with archaeological data
- What to rely on instead?
 - Bible as one **group** of sources (with problems)
 - Archaeological and extrabiblical textual material
 - Frameworks of interpretation ("models")
