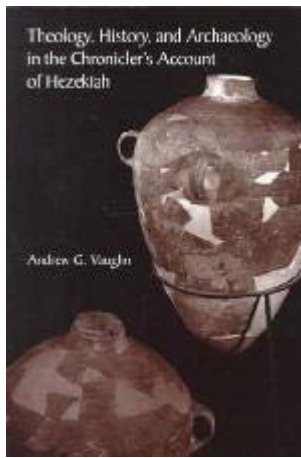


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Vaughn, Andrew G.

Theology, History, and Archaeology in the Chronicler's Account of Hezekiah

Archaeology and Biblical Studies 4

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This volume by Andrew Vaughn is a welcome contribution to what today is a somewhat limited body of studies of biblical texts whose focus is on evaluating texts and their historical contexts. It is a revision of the author's doctoral dissertation (Princeton Theological Seminary, Patrick D. Miller). The question which Vaughn attempts to answer is whether archaeology can provide evidence that the Chronicler used a reliable historical source for his account of the monarchy of Judah. As his test case, he evaluates the comments concerning King Hezekiah found in 2 Chr 32:27-30 (not found in the corresponding Kings material) which speak of the wealth and power of the king. Vaughn believes that the results of this study are relevant in the broader discussion of the historical reliability of the Chronicler.

Vaughn begins with reviews of previous scholarship concerning the dating of the reign of Hezekiah (he opts for a beginning date of Hezekiah's reign in 715/714 B.C.E. with a co-regency in the final ten years). He dates the book of Chronicles to the fourth century B.C.E. In these positions he is following previous discussions. In fact, the precise dating of the reign of Hezekiah and of the composition of Chronicles is not very significant for his thesis. He briefly discusses the dating of the Siloam Tunnel inscription, ruling it out on paleographic grounds as certain evidence for the reign of Hezekiah although he later concludes on historical grounds that it is likely to date from that time.

The main body of this volume is two chapters, the first of which is an archaeological assessment of the relative economic strength of Judah during the reigns of Hezekiah and

Josiah. His conclusion is that from an archaeological perspective the reign of Hezekiah was at least as prosperous and expansive as that of Josiah and probably more so. In his opinion, this would tend to support the claims of the Chronicler about the relative strength of the two kings (as opposed to the author of Kings who for theological reasons highlighted the accomplishments of Josiah). A second chapter brings new information and interpretive material to the phenomenon of the *lmlk* storage jar handles. Vaughn (and G. Barkay) have compiled new readings and a more complete list of extant *lmlk* handles. They have also provided new readings of related personal seal impressions (appendices of this volume help to locate materials related to the seals). This new information is analyzed to determine the extent and nature of the royal administration during the reign of Hezekiah. The correlation of the *lmlk* stamps with personal stamps expands the usefulness of the personal stamps for dating. This, in turn, allows there to be more precision in the assignment of dates to various archaeological levels which are relevant to the extent and nature of occupation. Vaughn concludes that 2 Chr 32:27-30 probably did develop from an accurate historical source or historical memory not recorded in the book of Kings.

The approach that Vaughn takes that attempts to bring the biblical text and the archaeological data into conversation with each other is one that is often missing in the study of the Hebrew Bible today. Even those who have in the past called for the divorce of "Bible" and "archaeology" are now admitting that such a conversation is necessary. Vaughn opens and sustains this conversation throughout his book. He deals with both text and artifact. In terms of the specific thesis which he is exploring, however, his work may be less than successful. In spite of Vaughn's concluding sentence, "Indeed, 2 Chr 32:27-30 probably developed from a historical source or historical memory of facts not recorded in Kings, and the Chronicler used this reference to Hezekiah's economic buildup and mighty acts to authenticate is ideological message" (p. 181), such a source has not been shown. A methodological problem arises from the last half of the sentence. Vaughn himself has shown that the language of these verses is ideologically freighted and intentionally mirrors language descriptive of the reign of Solomon. The implication is that, while the description may be accurate, there is no evidence that the Chronicler did not create the material himself. The main body of Vaughn's book dealt with the artifactual evidence. His analysis seems accurate when he says (p. 173) that these data "do not specifically necessitate the conclusion that these verses from Chronicles originate from a written source other than Kings." If neither an explanation of the artifacts nor the texts demand an outside source, it would seem that the thesis cannot be sustained—contrary to Vaughn's concluding statement.

A large part of the volume involves an attempt at comparison of the relative prosperity of Judah during the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah. Vaughn attempts to (loosely) quantify the situation by making use of survey data from the various regions of Judah. In this evaluation, it appears that he tends to minimize data which disagrees with his thesis (that the period of Hezekiah is as prosperous or more prosperous than the period of Josiah) and

to overstate the significance of data which agrees. A more fundamental question, however, deals with the methodology itself. His basic assumption (following G. E. Lenski) is that "an increase in population and settlement will be considered one component of an increase in the economic capacity and political power *in an agrarian society*" (p. 21, my emphasis). This assumption allows his use of survey data which may indicate an increase in the number of settlements (and maybe of population) within a given period or region. Can Judah in the late eighth and seventh century be defined simply as an agrarian society? The increasing importance of trade, at least from the period of the Assyrian domination of the area, would seem to call this into question. This comes into play specifically with an evaluation of the importance of increases in settlement in the Negev at the end of the seventh century. Vaughn dismisses these because they do not involve large populations or very significant numbers of settlements (pp. 57-58). But it may well be that these settlements are much more significant than they would appear in an agrarian system because they are not agrarian settlements but rather reflections of the (re)development of trade. They certainly may be very significant in judging "an increase in the economic capacity and political power" although they may not be large from an agrarian point of view. To suggest (p. 58) that they are the result of more consistent rainfall (a good agrarian category!) in the period with no corroborating evidence seems disingenuous at best.

While the volume makes a significant contribution to understanding the relationship between archaeological data and the biblical text, at times it also illustrates the danger of too close a relationship between them. This may be evident in Vaughn's comments about the nature of the Edomite remains in the Negev in the seventh century. Repeatedly he insinuates or states that the presence of Edomite remains at a site indicates that the site was under Edomite control and hence was not relevant to an economic build up during the time of Josiah. In fact, he argues that the Edomite presence "could point to weakness in the kingdom's defense system" (p. 50). This seems to reflect an understanding of the Judahite/Edomite relationship which sees it only (or primarily) as one of conflict and competition. This, in fact, is not reflected in the archaeological record but grows out of biblical texts expressing Judahite criticism of Edomites—primarily from the period of the Babylonian destruction of Judah. The archaeological remains could be read in quite a different way.

There are also numerous statements of fact and interpretation that could be questioned. Is it true that "...battering rams were located..." in the excavations at Lachish? While there was a mass burial at Lachish, how was it "associated with Level III" (p. 85)? How could anyone "utilize the remains of the Assyrian siege camp just north of the modern Damascus Gate... to make sense of all the known extrabiblical data" when no such remains have been found (p. 174). What was the period of use of the *lmlk*-stamped jars? At several points the implication is that they were not used in the seventh century (cf. p. 93), but later it is more correctly stated that there was not "widespread continued use of the *lmlk* jars into the 7th century." (pp. 94-5) If the find of a single *lmlk* stamped handle is

not significant in some cases (cf. pp. 101, 107, etc.), why is it significant in others (cf. pp. 55, 144-146, etc.)? And are *lmlk* handles really only significant when part of a restorable vessel (cf. pp. 101, 108)? If that same standard was used on all finds, his study would be much more limited in its scope.

There is no question that the greatest contribution that Vaughn makes relates to the corpus of *lmlk* stamped jar handles which he compiles. He also makes significant progress on the understanding of the use and nature of the jars that were stamped with these seals. It is very curious, however, that he does not comment at all on the four place names associated with these seals (Ziph, Hebron, Socoh and *mmšt*) although this has been the focus of considerable comment in the past and would seem to be pertinent to his discussion of the utilization of these jars. If it is indeed "probable that the jars would have been distributed from one site" (p. 161), what is the function of these associated place names?

These comments and questions should reinforce the overall evaluation of this volume. Vaughn has made a significant contribution to the conversation about the historical period of Hezekiah and also about the value of Chronicles as a historical source. The fact that one wants the conversation to continue should be the highest form of praise. Vaughn's volume is clearly in the conversation.