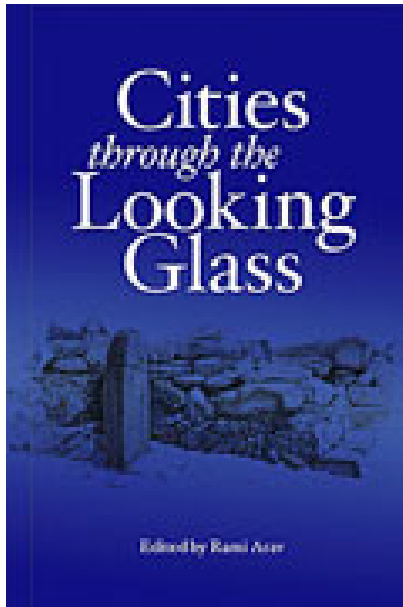


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Arav, Rami, ed.

Cities through the Looking Glass: Essays on the History and Archaeology of Biblical Urbanism

Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2008. Pp. x + 134.
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The volume under review is a collection of studies that deal with various topics relating to urbanism in the ancient Levant during the Iron Age through Roman periods (coined “Biblical Urbanism” by the editor). As written in the preface, the essays in the volume are based on papers that were presented at a conference on “Urbanism in the Biblical World” at University of Nebraska at Omaha in 2003.

In the first chapter, R. Arav (“Introduction,” 1–10) attempts to set the stage for the studies presented in the volume. Following a brief summary of the concept of urbanism and its applications and implications in archaeological research, he gives a very brief survey of aspects of urbanism in the ancient Levant. He then presents a brief overview of the various chapters that appear in the book. In the opinion of the present reviewer, the tone set in this introduction is unfortunate, since the lack of theoretical depth in the discussion of urbanism, which is glaringly evident in the introductory chapter, continues, for the most part, throughout the rest of the chapters as well. For a volume published in 2008 (even if based on research from four or five years earlier), the lack of reference to the wide and burgeoning theoretical research in archaeology on urbanism, including case studies on the ancient Levant, is unfortunate. Choice examples of this can be noted, such as: K. Branigan, *Urbanism in the Aegean Bronze Age* (Sheffield Studies in Aegean Archaeology

5; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 2000); M. Chesson and G. Philip, "Tales of the City? 'Urbanism' in the Early Bronze Age Levant from Mediterranean and Levantine Perspectives." *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 16 (2003): 3–16; G. Cowgill, "Origins and Development of Urbanism: Archaeological Perspectives." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004) : 525–49. While the author of the chapter refers (5 n. 3) the reader to Z. Herzog, *Archaeology of the City: Urban Planning in Ancient Israel and Its Social Implications* (Monograph Series 13; Tel Aviv: Emery and Claire Yass Publications in Archaeology, 1997) for further discussions on urbanism, this seems more than anything "lip-service." I have no doubt that a broader theoretical perspective would have benefited the entire volume.

In the second chapter, "Landscape of Shadows: The Image of the City in the Hebrew Bible" (11–21), N. Roddy attempts to survey the view of the city from the perspective of the biblical text. As would be assumed, he divides this into several distinct sections, in which various textual layers relate to the city and urbanism in different ways. As noted in the past, he discusses the overly negative view of the city in the prophetic literature and explains it as being part of the social and ritual criticism of the Israelite society of the prophets. He then notes that the view of the city in the "Deuteronomistic History" is varied, at times negative and at times positive, and argues that this is an indication that this source is not a uniform narrative. A negative image of the city is also seen in the "Primeval Narrative" in Genesis, which is likewise the case in the "Ancestral Narrative" on the urban landscape of pre-Israelite Canaan. All told, he believes that the various views of the city in the various portions are consistently negative.

In chapter 3, "Gospel Cities: Real, Imagined, and Avoided" (23–37), P. A. Williams presents a discussion of the role and relationship to cities in the New Testament. A very ambiguous, and changing, viewpoint is seen. If in the description of the life and actions of Jesus a largely negative view of the city is portrayed (most likely reflecting the largely nonurban origins of incipient Christianity), in the later parts of the New Testament a more positive view of the city is presented, most likely relating to the change in the focus, and location, of many of the activities and communities of the early Christians.

Leonard Greenspoon ("Text and the City," 39–52) discusses the urban, Alexandrian, origin of the Septuagint and stresses this through various examples of city-related texts in the Hebrew Bible and how they were translated through an urban-oriented lens in the Septuagint.

In "The City and the Philosopher in Ancient Greece" (53–64), L. W. Grams discusses the various views on the city in the schools of ancient Greek philosophy, from Socrates

through the Stoics. While differences can be seen in the respective approaches, the close relationship between the Greek philosophers and the city is apparent.

In the next chapter, “Urbanism in the Galilee: A Study of Kinneret, Hazor, Dan and Tzer in the Iron Age” (65-81), J. T. Greene presents an overview of the archaeological evidence from three urban sites in the Jordan Valley: Kinneret, Hazor, and Dan. Unfortunately, this overview is not up-to-date as to all recent excavations and publications (e.g., for Kinneret, summaries of the new excavations appeared already in 2005; see, e.g., J. Zangenberg, S. Münger, and J. Pakkala, “Excavations on the Sea of Galilee: The 2004 Season of the German-Finnish-Swiss Expedition to Tel Kinrot.” *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Evangelischen Instituts für Altertumswissenschaft des Heiligen Landes* 9/10 (2005): 77–91). The author then tries to integrate the finds from these two sites with the finds from the excavations at et-Tell/Bethsaida, which he refers to, throughout the chapter, as Tzer. While the identification of this site as Tzer has been suggested and may be possible, it has not been conclusively proven, and other, quite likely identifications do exist. I think it would be more prudent to refer to the site with a more widely accepted name.

Rami Arav, the editor of the volume, presents a very nice and useful summary of the archaeological evidence of the Iron Age fortified city at Bethsaida (“The Fortified City of Bethsaida: The Case of an Iron Age Capital City,” 83–115). Arav summarizes the various evidence for this Iron Age urban entity, first summarizing its surroundings and environment, then discussing various aspects, such as the fortifications and gate, cultic locations, a palace, evidence for the city’s economy, and so on. The author clearly prefers the traditional, higher chronology when dealing with and interpreting the archaeological remains on the site (such as the fortifications). The possible implications of the lower chronology in the interpretation of these remains should of at least have been mentioned, even if not accepted.

The final chapter, by D. Bahat, “Jerusalem between the Hasmoneans and Herod the Great” (117–28), is a general summary of the archaeological evidence of Jerusalem during the late Second Temple period, attempting to correlate the evidence with the relevant historical sources.

All told, this volume is a rather eclectic collection of studies that deal with various issues relating, to a greater or lesser extent, to urbanism in the Levant during the Bronze and Iron Ages, and other issues as well. While one could claim they all fall within the realm of “Biblical Urbanism,” one has the feeling that this term is a rather artificial construct. Likewise, several of the chapters did not choose to relate to all the most up-to-date theoretical perspectives and/or archaeological finds, something that detracts from the intrinsic value of this volume. Nevertheless, despite this, the volume does contain quite a

few very interesting studies that add to our knowledge on urbanism in the ancient Near East.