Moreland, Milton C., ed.

*Between Text and Artifact: Integrating Archaeology in Biblical Studies Teaching*

Society of Biblical Literature Archaeology and Biblical Studies 8


Buzz Brookman  
North Central University  
Minneapolis, MN 55404

The book consists of an introduction, eleven essays, and an annotated bibliography stemming from a 2000–2001 consultation series entitled “Integrating Archaeology and Biblical Studies,” which was held in Durham, North Carolina, and Eugene, Oregon. The stated goal of the volume is to present essays “designed to articulate the value of the historical reconstructions that draw from many media, to provide guidance for those who would like to do the same, and to offer case studies and models for readers to use as starting points” (6). In this way, the book addresses an existing discussion concerning the disconnect between the fields of biblical studies and archaeology. This cause is certainly merited, given that “it seems that to some extent, at least, graduate programs also reflect and even solidify a division between the two fields” (2). Thus, a particular objective of the book is to “facilitate the connection between the traditionally distant subdisciplines of biblical archaeology and literary studies of the Bible” (6).

The specific aim of the book seems to have been met in that the combination of articles is such that the reader does encounter a nice variety of ideas and an adequate range of discussion concerning approaches to bridging the gulf between the two fields. Yet, teachers of both biblical studies and archaeology may be led a bit astray by the subtitle, “Integrating Archaeology in Biblical Studies Teaching,” for one’s first impression may
be that the volume will be more pedagogically focused than is actually the case. Those looking for pedagogical reflections will likely be somewhat disappointed in that the quantity of attention focused directly that way is somewhat lacking. However, the qualitative content of the essays as a whole within the book should prove satisfying to most who teach in the field of biblical studies. The teacher who is looking for some fresh ideas for the conceptual construction of some new elements within a course can definitely find some grist for the mill, while those who had anticipated a volume geared more toward pedagogical insights will have to look elsewhere.

The individual essays within this volume offer a mix of very helpful suggestions and ideas even for those who have considerable teaching experience along with some information that is, perhaps, better geared for a relative beginner in biblical studies. For instance, Dessel’s article, “In Search of the Good Book: A Critical Survey of Handbooks on Biblical Archaeology,” seems much more suited for a student in biblical studies rather than for someone who has been teaching in the field for any measure of time. For someone totally uninitiated and unfamiliar with the sources discussed, this would be a terrific article. However, it might be ventured that anyone teaching in the area of Hebrew Bible would already have been introduced to these works and be familiar with their relative strengths and weaknesses.

Falk’s article examines the Dead Sea Scrolls and Qumran. It is, indeed, a nice overview of some of the archaeological background and considerations. However, the final section of the essay, entitled “Teaching Qumran,” does not offer a synthesis geared toward teaching to the extent one may have wished. Falk’s final paragraph offers four suggestions for integrating archaeology into teaching. His first “lesson” for teachers from the example of Qumran is, “beware of the vicious circle of hypothesis becoming data” (178). While this is certainly a valid concern as one attempts to understand and interpret archaeological data, it is, perhaps, not the stuff of primary concern as one attempts to bridge the disconnect between archaeology and biblical studies in the classroom. His final lesson is, likewise, of the type one might expect to be of real value to novice students rather than teachers. He cautions, “beware of using archaeology as a ‘proof text’ for questions raised on the basis of texts.” Again, this struck me as being a teaching point to students rather than advice to teachers on how best in the classroom to connect archaeology and biblical studies.

Naturally, this is not to say that the articles by Dessel and Falk are not of great value. They most definitely could be extremely useful in the hands of students. For a student just getting one’s feet wet in archaeology Dessel’s article would provide a very handy resource, indeed. The same is true for Falk’s article. It is a matter of audience, and these two articles impressed me as best directed toward students rather than teachers.
The same assessment might be made of Aubin’s, “Annotated Bibliography for Integrating Archaeology into Biblical Studies.” I found it to be something I would recommend to students in my archaeology class, but I did not find it particularly helpful to me as a teacher of Hebrew Bible who is interested in an interdisciplinary approach to biblical studies. It is composed of sources I would expect are already quite familiar to most teachers in biblical studies. It is billed as “strictly introductory,” and it is certainly that.

McCane’s article, “‘Here I am at Khirbet Cana’: Integrating Biblical Studies and Archaeology,” offers the sort of pedagogical perspective I had anticipated more of, given the subtitle of the book. Although he may well be preaching to the choir, his argument for the value of fieldwork by students as a means of integrating the fields is very compelling.