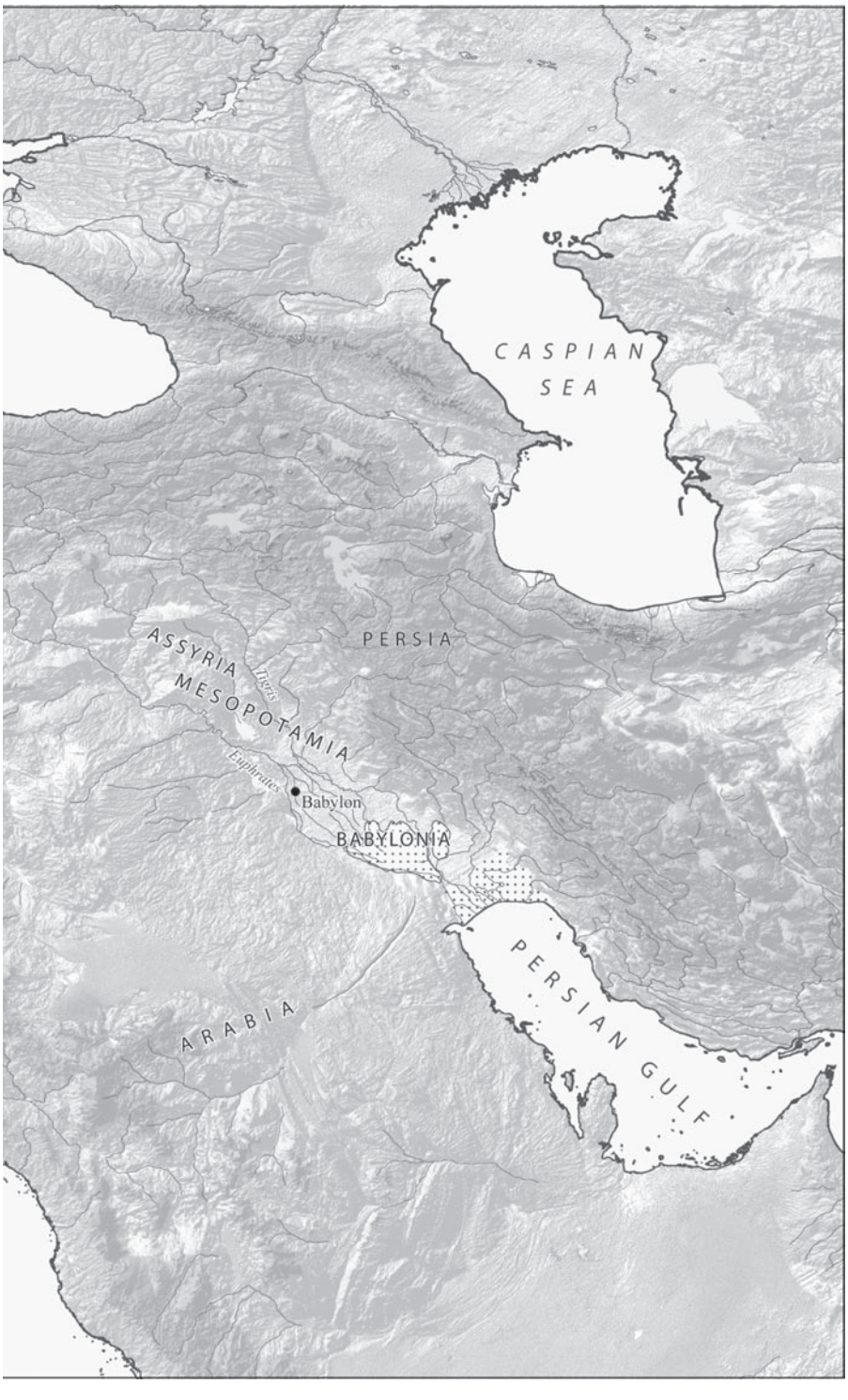
ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the heart of the ancient Near East (modern Middle East), at a crossroads between once-mighty powers such as **Assyria** to the east and Egypt to the south, is a tiny piece of land – roughly the size of New Jersey – that is as contested as it is sacred. One cannot even name this territory without sparking controversy. Originally called **Canaan** after its early inhabitants (the **Canaanites**), it has since been known by various names. To Jews this is *Eretz Israel* (the Land of Israel), the Promised Land described by the Hebrew Bible as flowing with milk and honey. To Christians it is the Holy Land where Jesus Christ – the messiah, or anointed one – was born, preached, and offered himself as the ultimate sacrifice. Under the Greeks and Romans, it was the province of **Judea**, a name that hearkened back to the biblical kingdom of **Judah**. After the **Bar-Kokhba Revolt** ended in 135 C.E., Hadrian renamed the province Syria-Palestina, reviving the memory of the long-vanished kingdom of Philistia. Under early Islamic rule the military district (*jund*) of Filastin was part of the province of Greater Syria (Arabic *Bilad al-Sham*). In this book, the term *Palestine* is used to denote the area encompassing the modern state of Israel, the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan, and the Palestinian territories.

This book introduces readers to this complex and fascinating land, the birthplace of Judaism and Christianity, drawing on archaeological evidence and literary (historical) information, including the Bible. Archaeological remains give voice to the narratives of forgotten peoples who contributed to its rich cultural tapestry: Phoenicians, **Edomites** and **Idumaeans**, **Moabites**, **Ammonites**, **Ituraeans**, **Nabataeans**, **Samaritans**, **Philistines**. Today, scholars generally use the term "biblical archaeology" to refer to the archaeology of Palestine in the Bronze Age (ca. 3000–1200 B.C.E.) and Iron Age (ca. 1200–586 B.C.E.) – that is, the Old Testament period, when the land was inhabited by Canaanites and

1.1 Map of the ancient Near East. Ancient World Mapping Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (www.unc.edu/awmc).



1.2 Map of the modern Middle East. Ancient World Mapping Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (www.unc.edu/awmc).

Israelites. In contrast, our focus is on the period from 586 B.C.E. to 640 C.E. – that is, from the fall of the kingdom of Judah and the destruction of **Solomon**'s temple (the end of the First Temple period) to the Muslim conquest of Palestine. In other words, this book covers the "post-biblical" periods (from a Jewish perspective) or the New Testament period (from a Christian perspective), including the Second Temple period (516 B.C.E.–70 C.E.).

Because this book is intended as an introductory text it is not footnoted, but a glossary of terms and timelines are included for reference purposes. For additional information, readers are encouraged to consult the recommended readings at the end of each chapter.

Chronological Framework

In the Mediterranean world and ancient Near East (the "Old World"), historical periods begin around 500 B.C.E. because this is when history writing began in the modern sense of the word, with Greek authors such as **Herodotus**. The prehistoric periods in the Old World are defined according to the most advanced material used at the time to manufacture tools: Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age. Each of these periods is further subdivided – for example, Old Stone Age (Paleolithic), Middle Stone Age (Mesolithic), New Stone Age (Neolithic); Early Bronze Age (EB), Middle Bronze Age (MB), Late Bronze Age (LB).

This system of periodization was developed in the nineteenth century, when scholars sought to impose order on the thousands of ancient artifacts that had been amassed in museums and private collections. It is not a coincidence that in the nineteenth century – at the height of the Industrial Revolution – scholars devised a chronological framework defined by the materials used to make tools. This reflects the view current at that time that civilizations using stone tools were less advanced (or more "primitive") than those using metal tools, especially iron tools. Of course, we now recognize the inherent bias of a system of periodization that ranks human progress according to materials used for tool making. Furthermore, there existed highly developed civilizations in Mesoamerica and other parts of the world that never emerged from the "Stone Age." Nevertheless, because this terminology is entrenched, it is still used by scholars working in the Mediterranean world and the ancient Near East. In other parts of the world, such as the Americas, where scholarly interest in archaeology developed later, other systems of periodization are employed.

Historical periods (after ca. 500 B.C.E.) are dated on the basis of events recorded in written sources. For example, in Palestine the early Hellenistic period begins with **Alexander the Great**'s conquest in 332 B.C.E. and ends with the Maccabean revolt in 167 B.C.E. In contrast, although the Stone Age–Bronze Age–Iron Age system of periodization helps organize artifacts in a relative sequence (meaning that, relatively speaking, the Stone Age is earliest and Iron

Age is the latest), it does not provide absolute dates for these periods. For the Iron Age (beginning ca. 1200 B.C.E.), some dates can be gleaned from written sources, such as the Hebrew Bible and Assyrian records. However, before the invention of radiocarbon dating in 1950 (discussed later), Egypt was the main chronological peg for prehistoric periods in the Mediterranean and ancient Near East, as it is the only country with a continuously dated calendar going back approximately 5,000 years (although scholars disagree about the precise dates of many events). Egyptian artifacts found at sites around the Mediterranean and ancient Near East provided absolute dates for associated remains and levels. The reliance on Egyptian chronology underlies the tripartite division of the Bronze Age around the Mediterranean, with the Early Bronze Age corresponding roughly with the Old Kingdom in Egypt, the Middle Bronze Age with the Middle Kingdom, and the Late Bronze Age with the New Kingdom.

What Is Archaeology?

Before embarking on our journey through the Holy Land, we must first understand the fundamental principles of archaeology. Archaeology is the study of the past as evidenced by human material culture – that is, built features and **artifacts** such as architecture, works of art, tools, and vessels that were manufactured and used by people. Only a small portion of human material culture has survived the ravages of time, most of it having been irretrievably destroyed by natural disasters or human agency, or – in the case of perishable materials – simply having disintegrated. Archaeology does not include the study of remains that predate humans (such as dinosaurs), the physical remains of humans (skeletons), or floral and faunal remains (animals and plants). These types of remains are studied by specialists in allied disciplines such as paleontology, physical or biological anthropology, zooarchaeology, paleobotany, and so on. Of course, archaeologists often include information from these disciplines when studying the remains of human material culture.

History is also the study of the past, but it is based on information provided by written documents or texts rather than material culture. In other words, although both archaeologists and historians study the past, they use different methods and sources to obtain the information. These sources of information often provide different (although not necessarily mutually exclusive or conflicting) pictures of the past. For example, because many texts were written by or for the ruling classes (elites) of ancient societies, they tend to reflect the concerns, interests, and viewpoints of those classes. In comparison, although archaeologists often uncover the palaces and citadels of the ruling classes, they also dig up houses and workshops that belonged to the poorer classes of ancient societies. Archaeological evidence can be used to complement or supplement the information provided by written records, and in cases in which there are

1.3 A tel (Beth Shean).

no written records (such as prehistoric societies), it may be our only source of information.

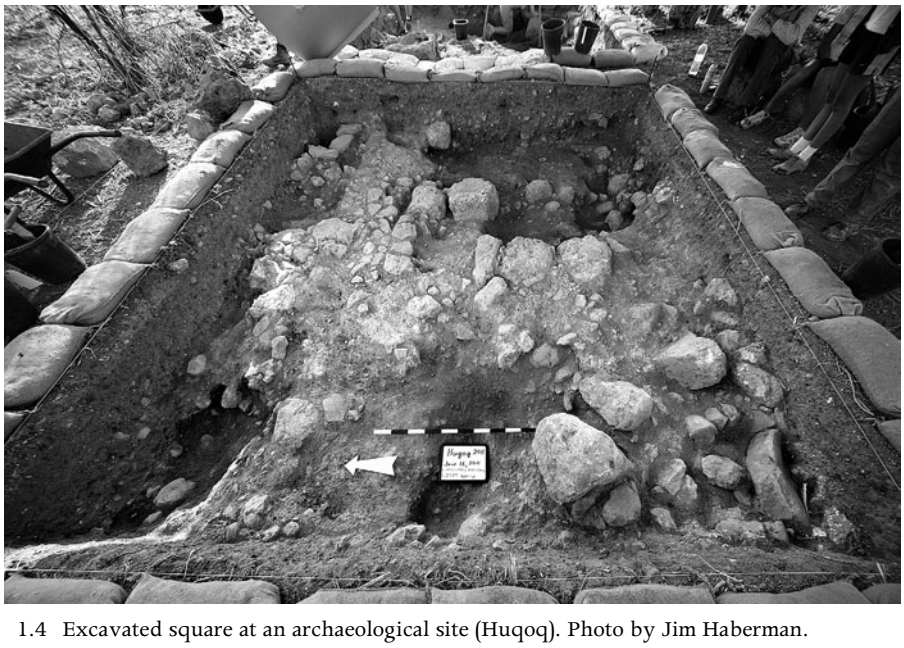
Principles of archaeology

Whereas some ancient sites were inhabited for only one brief period or phase, many sites in Palestine were occupied over longer periods. At such multiperiod sites, the buildings and debris from the successive phases of occupation accumulated, forming a series of levels one above the other, like a layer cake. At many biblical (Bronze Age and Iron Age) sites in Israel, there are twenty or more different occupation levels, forming an artificial mound called in Hebrew a ***tel*** (Arabic ***tell***). The famous tels of **Megiddo** and Hazor provided the models for James A. Michener's 1965 novel, *The Source*. Although many people think that successive layers of occupation at a site will always take the shape of a tel, this is not the case. In fact, tels derive their distinctive shape from a specific type of fortification system that was widespread in Middle Bronze Age Palestine and elsewhere in the ancient Near East. This type of system, called a **glacis** or **rampart**, was created by digging a deep ditch or dry moat around the outside of a town, piling up the dirt from the ditch in a huge embankment encircling the town, and plastering the embankment (the glacis or rampart) to make a steep, smooth slope. Fortification walls were erected at the top of the slope. This type of

defensive system must have developed in response to the introduction of a new type of offensive warfare – perhaps chariots or battering rams – or, perhaps, it was intended to prevent the mining of the fortification walls from below. By the post-biblical periods, new types of weapons and warfare had rendered the glacis and rampart system ineffective and obsolete. Therefore, sites established in these periods are not tels, even if they were occupied continuously for centuries, as, for example, Caesarea Maritima.

Archaeologists refer to occupation levels at sites as **strata** (singular, **stratum**), and to the sequence of levels as **stratigraphy**. Although it is helpful to visualize the strata of ancient sites as a layer cake, the reality is never that neat and simple. This is because the inhabitants frequently disturbed earlier levels when constructing the foundations of buildings or digging pits. In the course of such activities, they cut into or through earlier strata, churning up earlier material (potsherds, coins, etc.) with the dirt and stones. This means that at multiperiod sites, we always find earlier artifacts mixed in with later material. For this reason, we use the latest artifacts to date the stratum we are excavating and disregard the earlier material (at least for dating purposes).

Imagine that we are standing in a modern school building in Los Angeles that was built in 1972. When the school was built, a deep pit (trench) was dug into the ground for the foundations. At the time the floor was laid, it sealed the foundation trench and everything in it. If the floor is intact and we dig under it today, we should find nothing later dating than 1972 in the fill. However, we will almost certainly find objects that were manufactured before 1972, such as old Coke bottles, coins dating to the 1950s and 1960s, and so on, which were mixed with the dirt and deposited when the foundation trench was filled in. Now, let us suppose that the latest datable object we find under that floor is a penny minted in 1968. This coin will provide what archaeologists call a ***terminus post quem*** (Latin for "date after which") for the construction of the school. In other words, the coin will tell us that the school was constructed no earlier than 1968. Further, let us suppose that the school was destroyed by an earthquake in 1985, which caused the building to collapse, burying everything inside. The objects found on top of the floors will represent the items in use at the moment when the building collapsed. They will also provide us with a ***terminus ante quem*** (Latin for "date before which") for the construction of the school. In other words, if the latest datable objects found buried in the collapse were books printed in 1985, the school building must have been constructed on or before that date. One of the most famous ancient examples of such a catastrophic destruction is the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 C.E., which buried Pompeii and Herculaneum in volcanic ash and mud. Walking through the excavated streets of these towns today gives us a glimpse into what they looked like at the moment of their destruction.



1.4 Excavated square at an archaeological site (Huqoq). Photo by Jim Haberman.

Methods of Archaeology

During the course of excavation, archaeologists destroy the remains that are dug up. This is because once a shovel of dirt or a stone is removed from the ground it can never be put back the same way. For this reason, archaeologists record the excavation process using every means possible. If you have ever visited an excavation, you might have noticed that archaeologists dig in squares measuring 5 × 5 or 10 × 10 meters. The squares in the grid are separated from each other by banks of earth about 1 meter wide called **baulks** (or **balks**). This system enables archaeologists to measure and record the exact location of every excavated object and feature (by "feature," I mean something that is constructed, as opposed to an artifact, which is a portable, manufactured object). The recording is done by measuring levels (absolute heights or elevations within the excavated squares), keeping daily diaries, making drawings and taking photographs, and increasingly using computers and other technologies. Ideally, once a final excavation report is published, it should be possible for the reader to reconstruct the site as it looked before everything was dug up.

Archaeologists use various devices to keep track of the point of origin (**provenance** or **provenience**) of every excavated artifact and feature. One way to do this is to subdivide each square horizontally and vertically. One of the most common subdivisions used in excavations is a **locus** (plural **loci**). Locus means "spot" or "place" in Latin; archaeologists use this word to designate any excavated feature. For example, a locus can designate an oven, a pit, a room, or any