Introduction

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Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God (Psalm 87: 3)

At the turn of the twentieth century, Sir William Willcocks (1852–1932), one of Britain's leading engineers, proposed a scheme for the economic regeneration of the Near East. He aimed to export the urban growth of Victorian Britain to regions which he saw as key arenas in the imperial mission. Willcocks had recently designed the Aswan dam, which revolutionised agriculture in the Nile valley, when he published *The Restoration of the Ancient Irrigation Works on the Tigris: Or, the Recreation of Chaldea* (1903). He argued that the cities of the Old Testament had declined and disappeared because of geographical change, specifically alterations in the courses of the great rivers. By reversing this change, British industry could lead cities such as Ur, the birthplace of Abraham, to spring up again in all their ancient glory; the prosperity of the Bible lands could be restored. His biblical schemes for the rejuvenation of the rivers of the Old Testament world were raised in the House of Commons, presented at the solemn proceedings of the leading learned societies and discussed at length in the British and American press. Politicians professed their sympathy, but eventually baulked at the funds that would need to be raised to carry them out.[1] It was a quixotic campaign, proposed by a fervent Protestant who also wished to use the evidence of ancient waterways to locate the vanished Garden of Eden – his aim being not just to restore Ur, but paradise. Yet it encapsulates the theme of this book, which explores the presence of the biblical city in nineteenth-century British culture.[2] Its chapters show that it was in cities that archaeology, the study of the Bible and contemporary experiences of urbanisation intersected throughout the long nineteenth century.

[1] See, e.g., 'Egypt: The Storage of the Nile Waters – the Raian Basin', 2 August 1888, *Hansard*, 329, 1216–17; Colonel Ardagh and Conyers Surtees in *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, 9 (1887).

[2] 'The Garden of Eden and its Restoration: Discussion', *The Geographical Journal*, 40 (1912), 145–8; William Willcocks, *From the Garden of Eden to the Crossing of the Jordan* (Cairo, 1919); William Willcocks, *Sixty Years in the East* (London, 1935); Alessandro Scafi, *Mapping Paradise: A History of Heaven on Earth* (Chicago, 2006), pp. 348–50.

In the decades before Willcocks dreamed of Chaldea, Great Britain had become perhaps the most densely urbanised nation on earth. Urbanisation had been a distinctive feature of England's eighteenth-century economic development. In the half-century before 1800, England had accounted for 70 per cent of urban growth in Europe, despite possessing only 7.7 per cent of its population. A striking feature of this urbanisation was the rapid growth of provincial cities. The combined population of Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool and Leeds rose from around 30,000 inhabitants in 1700 to around 300,000 by 1800. This drift to towns became an unstoppable current in the nineteenth century. By mid-century, the majority of Britons lived in towns, while several cities had experienced staggering rates of growth. From 1750 to 1850 for instance, the population of Liverpool leapt from 22,000 to 376,000 people.[3] By the early twentieth century, over 75 per cent of the population of England and Wales lived in towns; half a million people lived in large provincial cities and over 6 million in greater London, which symbolised the new age of the metropolis.[4]

While urbanisation became a global, even universal, phenomenon in the century after 1850, Britain was unusual in having to confront its problems and seize its potential from an early date. Urbanisation in this period was not simply a function of industrialisation, nor reducible to quantitative measures of productive activity or population density: what made cities was the creation of distinctively urban experiences and ways of life.[5] When nineteenth-century Britons sought to comprehend, celebrate, lament or direct the urbanisation of their society, they reached for idealised models of city life drawn from history, mythology and religion. It is the starting point for this volume both that the Bible was a vital, perhaps even the principal, source of such models and that urbanisation made British scholars, and their publics, unusually interested in them.

Britons interested in biblical cities were well poised to make new use of an ancient category. Not only were the pages of the Bible scattered with hundreds of cities, but for centuries some of them had been abiding symbols of vice or spiritual possibility. While Jerusalem stood alone as *the* city of God, the object of Jewish yearning and lament and Christian meditation, other cities had come to encapsulate the perils and opportunities facing all

[3] E. A. Wrigley, *Energy and the English Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 60–7.
[4] Lynne Lees, 'Urban Networks', in Martin Daunton, ed., *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain: 1840–1950* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 68–9.
[5] Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt*: *Eine Geschichte des 19 Jahrhundert* (Munich, 2009), pp. 366, 380.

Christians: Babylon, Sodom and Gomorrah, Rome.[6] The premise of this book is that what was new in the study and depiction of biblical cities in nineteenth-century Britain was not just the scale of the social problems that needed explaining in the present, but also the quantity of information that travellers and archaeologists could amass about them. Histories of archaeology in the Mediterranean and Near East have recognised its intimate dependence on imperial power and commercial clout, but its biblical preoccupations have often been seen as a quirky tangent or an embarrassing obstacle to scientific progress. By embedding the discoverers of ancient cities in the world of Protestant thought from which many of them emerged and to which they all contributed, this book makes an interlinked contribution to the histories of archaeology and Victorian religious cultures – showing what the former did for the Bible, but also what the Bible did for them.

The variety of cities in the Bible is overwhelming, ranging as it does from Memphis (Noph in the Old Testament) to Petra (Edom) and from Corinth to Ur; from obscure settlements whose location or very existence was long disputed to centres of immemorial power and prestige, such as Damascus and Rome. Rather than covering all of these cities, this volume offers a series of nine overlapping portraits, which suggest the range and depth of the preoccupation with biblical cities in nineteenth-century Britain. It also ranges outside the pages of the Bible itself to cover Troy, where nineteenth-century excavations suggested connections between an ancient city and an authoritative text that had a direct impact on thinking about the Bible. While the strength of these chapters lies in their variety, they feature a recurrent set of preoccupations, which the remainder of this introduction outlines in some detail, providing a map of the religious and institutional terrain onto which the chapters can then be plotted.

The first theme is the connection between the ancient city and understandings of biblical authority. The change from understanding the world as comprehended within Scripture to understanding Scripture as comprehended within the ancient world in which it was produced was a tectonic shift in the making of modern culture.[7] Yet the speed and extent of that shift are still not yet fully understood. It is often identified with the growing prestige of the natural sciences and the rise, predominantly in German

[6] There are 1,171 uses of the words 'city' and 'cities' in the Authorized Version of the Bible.

[7] Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (London, 1974); Henning Graf von Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World* (London, 1985); David Katz, *God's Last Words: Reading the English Bible from the Reformation to Fundamentalism* (London, 2004).

universities, of higher criticism as a discipline, which in combination suggested that the Scriptures could not be an authoritative record of what had really happened in the past because miracles did not happen.[8] This book suggests a more complicated picture, arguing that archaeology helped British apologists to perpetuate the legacy of their scholarly predecessors, insisting that the Bible could pass the most stringent empirical and scientific tests of its accuracy in matters of fact. The anxiety to see in the Bible the unique measure of truth provided a cause around which a position on the relationship between the Bible and archaeology assumed a powerful if unstable unity. To term this a 'Protestant' position is not of course to suggest that Protestant churches, parties and sects agreed on the proper weight to accord Scripture, empirical inquiry and the testimony of tradition. The chapters that follow survey attitudes and people that range from Anglican high churchmen who looked tenderly on traditions associated with sites such as the Holy Sepulchre to Protestant dissenters, both Trinitarian and Unitarian, whose spiky independence and aversion to hierarchy and ritual made them sceptical of sacralising places without the express authorisation of Scripture. Nor is it to deny that British writers remained heavily dependent on the contributions of foreign scholars, both Catholic and Protestant, and on the collaboration of local informants. It is, though, to explore a literature that was cross-denominational in its appeal and a rhetoric of exploration and authentication whose nationalist emphases obscured the inconvenient truths that British travellers in the Mediterranean and Near East were often intellectually dependent on Continental allies and confronted on all sides by the material traces of a Catholic piety of place that they ostentatiously rejected.

The second, related theme of the book is the crucial contribution made by scientific travellers and then archaeologists to this apologetic discourse. The fault lines of biblical authority ran through the biblical city. On the one side were German higher critics and their British epigones, who wanted to decompose books of the Bible into oral and documentary traditions and then to reassemble them into secularised histories of religious thought. On the other was a shifting alliance of religious thinkers who wished to defend the Bible as a fairly transparent set of narratives about the world and who found in urban archaeology convincing proofs of its accuracy. This book stresses the institutional developments that made such archaeology possible and its privileged connection with the religious sphere – public, but not

[8] Frederick Gregory, *Nature Lost? Natural Science and the German Theological Traditions of the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), parts 1 and 2.

necessarily critical – in which debates about the authority of the Bible took place. It argues that archaeology not only belongs alongside geology, higher criticism and the comparative study of religion as a discipline of historical recovery that affected the reading of the Bible, but that it often worked to complicate and disrupt rather than to complement the impact of these other disciplines.

The final important theme, one which distinguishes this book from existing surveys of biblical archaeology, is its attention to the religious and urban context in which these debates took place. Not only did an ever growing number of British Protestants live in increasingly large towns and cities, but they were interested in turning cities to religious purposes. The churches, historians of Victorian religion now recognise, had not given up on the city.[9] When they thought about how to reform their own cities, Protestant ministers and laity turned to the cities of the Bible for encouragement and admonition. Archaeologists could rely on an appreciative hearing in a culture that increasingly defined Christianity as an urban religion. 'No other religion which has a Heaven ever had a Heaven like this,' wrote the fluent lay evangelist Henry Drummond (1851–97) about Saint John's dream of the New Jerusalem. 'Christianity is the religion of Cities.'[10] Duncan Bell has suggested that later Victorian thinkers were reluctant to concede that the histories of Greece and Rome offered patterns for the fate of their own imperial society and that they increasingly rejected parallels between their own imperial polity and Greco-Roman city states.[11] Yet Christian preoccupations bridged the widening gulf between ancient and modern. The chapters show that as new technologies brought nineteenth-century Protestants face to face with the ancient past – carrying them to the sites by railway and steamship, bringing photographs of them into their Bibles and homes – the effect could be estranging, with the imposing cities of their imagination fading to untenanted ruins or squalid hamlets. Yet at the same time they worked to rebuild their grandeur through colossal exhibitions, imagined reconstructions or even by rebuilding at the sites themselves. They recognised that city life was as much mental as material and worked to instantiate civic and religious ideals first worked out in biblical cities within their own culture.

[9] Simon Green, 'Church and City Revisited: New Evidence from the North of England, c.1815–1914', *Northern History*, 43 (2006), 345–60.
[10] Henry Drummond, *The City Without a Church* (London, 1893), p. 9.
[11] Duncan Bell, 'From Ancient to Modern in Victorian Imperial Thought', *Historical Journal*, 49 (2006), 735–59.

The foundations of the biblical city: text, exploration and belief

Christian interest in the cities of the Old and New Testament is almost as old as Christianity. Jerusalem and Rome had for instance been sites of pilgrimage from late antiquity onwards, when Christian devotion to the Holy Land and to the tombs of saints had created a new sacred topography which rivalled then supplanted that of the pagans: sacralising sites, amassing relics and erecting imposing shrines and churches on top of them and generating in due course a rich culture of antiquarianism, which would be both a resource and embarrassment to Protestant travellers.[12] The specific motive for nineteenth-century British interest in visiting, digging up and reconstructing these cities derived, though, from a transformation in the understanding of the Bible that had begun with early modern efforts to contextualise both the Old and New Testaments.[13] From the later sixteenth century, Protestant scholars had injected greater discipline into the study of Old Testament texts, insisting that before they were read typologically they must first be understood literally. This literal sense was a historical one, to be recovered through antiquarian and philological comparison of the language and customs of the Hebrews with those of neighbouring peoples. Prolonged strife between Protestants and Catholics over the origin and lineaments of the primitive church and the rebellion by pietists and latitudinarians against

[12] E. D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire AD 312–460* (Oxford, 1982); R. A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 139–57; Jas Elsner and Ian Rutherford, eds., *Pilgrimage in Greco-Roman and Early Christian Antiquity: Seeing the Gods* (Oxford, 2007).

[13] For the arguments in this paragraph see, from a huge literature, Peter Harrison, *'Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1990), chapters 4 and 5; François Laplanche, *La Bible en France: entre mythe et critique, 16ème – 19ème siècles* (Paris, 1994); B. W. Young, *Religion and the Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England: Theological Debate from Locke to Burke* (Oxford, 1994); Debora Shuger, *The Renaissance Bible: Scholarship, Sacrifice and Subjectivity* (London, 1998); Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton, NJ, 2005), chapter 4; David Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna* (Princeton, NJ, 2008); Suzanne Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (Cambridge, 2009); Scott Mandelbrote, 'Biblical Hermeneutics and the Sciences, 1700–1900: An Overview', in Jiste van der Meer and Scott Mandelbrote, eds., *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions: To 1700* (Leiden, 2009), pp. 1–37; J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion: Volume 5, Religion: The First Triumph* (Cambridge, 2011); Scott Mandelbrote, 'Early Modern Biblical Interpretation and the Emergence of Science', *Science and Christian Belief*, 23 (2011), 105–10. For a brilliant recent survey see Dmitri Levitin, 'From Sacred History to the History of Religion: Paganism, Judaism and Christianity in European Historiography from Reformation to "Enlightenment"', *Historical Journal*, 52 (2013).

Reformation scholasticism committed scholars with very different confessional allegiances to contextualising the actions and utterances of Christ and his apostles in the world of the ancient Mediterranean. Sacred history was therefore not so much secularised as hybridised, its story now supplemented and explained by insertion into and comparison with other civilisations. Insofar as this enterprise was an enlightened one, it formed part of a clerical or religious enlightenment centred on Britain and Protestant Germany. Aware that deists were making anti-clerical use of antiquarian researches to undermine faith in a written revelation, British and German scholars sought to show that the morals and learning of the Hebrews were appropriate to their time. They sought moreover to show that it was possible to treat large passages of Scripture as historical narratives or prophetic predictions, whose factual accuracy could be tested in minute detail. Alongside the internal evidences for the Bible's truth – correspondences between its different books or its agreement with the dictates of human conscience – they could adduce external coincidences between its narratives and the built, engraved and written remains of the world that it had described. Cities were storehouses of such evidence.

Not only was there ever greater reason to be interested in the cities of the Bible, but it was becoming easier to reach them. Most of them were located in an Ottoman Empire dwindling from a feared opponent of Christendom into a reluctant diplomatic and commercial partner that now had to accommodate European visitors. Chaplains and consuls in Smyrna from the later seventeenth century onwards were some of the first to seek out lost cities in Asia Minor, while the Society of Dilettanti sponsored investigations there and in the Aegean.[14] Such activities strengthened a reorientation of interest from the Grand Tour of Italy to new hunting grounds in the eastern Mediterranean. The wealth of publications on ruins that resulted brought a new lease of life to the venerable study of biblical antiquities. Scholars no longer had to rely on ancient authorities such as Josephus to supplement their Bibles but could draw on the direct testimony amassed by travellers. The potential use of travel literature was obvious to Johann David Michaelis (1717–91), a Göttingen professor who sponsored the expedition of Carsten Niebuhr (1733–1815) to the site of Babylon, as discussed in Michael Seymour's chapter below. Using Niebuhr's findings in the notes to his edition of the Bible, Michaelis developed a 'philology of things', which

[14] James Mather, *Pashas: Traders and Travellers in the Islamic World* (London, 2009); Richard Chandler, *Travels in Asia Minor and Greece: Or, An Account of a Tour Made at the Expense of the Society of Dilettanti* (London, 1776); Laplanche, *Bible*, p. 72; Bruce Redford, 'The Measure of Ruins: Dilettanti in the Levant, 1750–1770', *Harvard Library Bulletin*, 13 (2002), 5–36.

cross-referenced the text with an archive of extra-textual knowledge about people, cities and nature.[15] If his enterprise looks alluringly modern, then the discovery of cities also reinvigorated older methods of reading the Bible. Students of prophecy argued that travellers could test the warnings both of the Old Testament and the Book of Revelation against the evidence of things seen: cities menaced by God with destruction had been literally destroyed.[16]

The ties between text and city in British thought were disrupted, but finally much reinforced by the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. The attempt to read the Bible on its own terms rather than through the creeds of the established church became suspect to many Anglicans while the British were fighting a state and a nation that the *philosophes* had made. The evangelical revival, whose religion was at once experiential and doctrinal, revived allegorical and typological readings of the Scriptures that had never been wholly displaced by the pursuit of the literal sense.[17] War encouraged many Britons to see themselves or at least their particular sect as a covenanted nation, the antitype of Israel.[18] In Ashton-under-Lyne, the 'Christian Israelites' who followed John Wroe (1782–1863) not only adopted Jewish dietary practices, but attempted to build a New Jerusalem in the Pennines, complete with gatehouses.[19] Raised on a diet of triumphs and disasters, a generation of writers on prophecy urged that theirs was not the historical study of things past but the decipherment of calamities still to come. For many British Protestants, the prophetic enemy would still be the Roman Catholic Church, lending a confessional emphasis to many of the investigations pursued in the volume. For evangelicals in particular Rome was more than ever the Beast of Revelation rather than a site of pilgrimage or the hunting ground for Christian antiquities.

[15] Sheehan, *Bible*, chapter 8; Michael Carhart, *The Science of Culture in Enlightenment Germany* (Cambridge, MA, 2005); Michael Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (Oxford, 2010).

[16] Neil Hitchin, 'The Evidence of Things Seen: Georgian Churchmen and Biblical Prophecy', in Bertrand Taithe and Tim Thornton, eds., *Prophecy: The Power of Inspired Language in History 1300–2000* (Stroud, 1997), pp. 119–42.

[17] See Mandelbrote, 'Early Modern Biblical Interpretation' and Scott Mandelbrote, 'Early Modern Natural Theologies', in Russell Manning, ed., *Oxford Handbook to Natural Theology* (Oxford, 2013) for qualifications to the prioritisation of the literal reading by Protestant scholars.

[18] Nigel Aston, 'Horne and Heterodoxy: The Defence of Anglican Beliefs in Late Enlightenment', *English Historical Review*, 108 (1993), 895–919; John Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of the Enlightenment: Science, Religion and Politics from the Restoration to the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1986); John Gascoigne, 'Anglican Latitudinarianism, Rational Dissent and Political Radicalism in the Late Eighteenth Century', in Knud Haakonssen, ed., *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 219–40.

[19] Philip Lockley, 'Millenarians in the Pennines, 1800–1830: Building and Believing in Jerusalem', *Northern History*, 47 (2010), 297–317.

At the same time, the radicalisation of 'higher criticism' imperilled the project from a different direction. German critics recognised that the effort to ascertain the literal meaning of Scripture caused religious difficulties when it asserted things that either could not have happened (miracles), or should not have happened (God's approval of massacres carried out by the Israelites). The anxiety to retain the Bible as a religious resource pushed many critics to explain that the stories in which miracle narratives were embedded did not pretend to historical truth. Instead they expressed the mythopoeia common to all early literatures. God's apparent endorsement of cruelty or immorality could similarly be explained by a theory of accommodation in which divine revelation was always tailored to the limited understanding of a primitive people. Both forms of rationalism spread to New Testament criticism, helping to explain Jesus Christ to a culture reluctant to accept either his miracles or his claims to messianic and superhuman status. The writings of David Friedrich Strauss (1808–74) and Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860) were totemic examples of German historicism. Strauss had cast doubt on the possibility of sorting historical fact about the life of Jesus from myth and legend in the gospels while Baur recast most of the New Testament as the end product of struggles to shape the doctrine of the early church rather than an authentic portrait of Jesus and the apostles.[20]

Until the later nineteenth century, 'Germanism' occasioned splenetic reactions in both Britain and America. Yet as many of the chapters in this volume show, the dread of 'rationalism' and 'neology' strengthened commitment to finding concrete proofs of the veracity of biblical narrative. The religious world in Britain was hardly united in its reaction to German theology and biblical criticism and a fuller account than is possible here would trace a spectrum of reactions from panicked denial to calm acceptance. Yet until the later nineteenth century, a conviction that systematic collection and study of external evidences could help to ascertain and defend the literal meaning and the historical truth of Scripture was widespread among British Protestants. Evidential treatises by Nathaniel Lardner (1684–1768), William Paley (1743–1805), Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847) and others were never out of print and plenty of new ones were published.[21] Not the least attraction of the study of

[20] Among the many guides to this shift are Frei, *Eclipse*; Gregory, *Natural Science*, parts 1 and 2; Thomas Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism: W. M. L. de Wette, Jacob Burckhardt, and the Theological Origins of Nineteenth-Century Historical Consciousness* (Cambridge, 2000).

[21] See Michael Ledger-Lomas, 'Shipwrecked: James Smith and the Defence of Biblical Narrative in Victorian Britain', *Angermion*, 1 (2008), 83–110.

evidence was that it allowed one to demolish the flying buttresses of extra-scriptural traditions with which the Roman Catholic Church had supported the text.

British evangelicals felt that providence had appointed them to find such evidences. The informal empire that Britain established in and around the Mediterranean served a religious mission in which a defence of Christian civilisation was superimposed onto an older anti-Catholicism. During the Napoleonic Wars, the Royal Navy not only wrecked Napoleon's expedition to Egypt – itself a stimulus to the scholarly investigation of biblical lands – but established its lasting dominance in the Mediterranean. Its officers knew their classics and Bible and in the course of their duties amassed much new information about the location and present condition of ancient cities.[22] The struggle to find and expropriate prestigious classical antiquities had been a pursuit of war by other means and it outlasted the war itself; after the peace, the fragmentation of the Ottoman Empire encouraged piratical consuls and adventurers to get their hands on whatever they could and to ship it back to the British Museum. The result was a shift away from such leisured, even hedonistic, collectors as the Catholics Charles Townley (1737–1805) and Henry Blundell (1724–1810) who had drawn on private means to collect Roman antiquities in Italy.[23] The new breed of collectors were often enabled or even funded by the British state, whose interest in culture was no less real than that of France or Prussia, albeit less generous.[24] Scientific journeys often enjoyed a direct or semi-detached relationship with European state power. Thomas Spratt (1811–88) and Edward Forbes (1815–54) had for instance explored Asia Minor as part of the expedition to seize the Xanthus marbles for the British Museum; the French state commissioned investigations of Asia Minor by Charles Texier (1802–72) and Léon de Laborde (1807–69). The foundation of an Anglo-Prussian bishopric at Jerusalem as part of manoeuvres designed to contain the influence of France and its ally Mehmet Ali (1827–78) in the

[22] See, e.g., Francis Beaufort, *Karamania: Or, a Brief Description of the South Coast of Asia-Minor* (London, 1817); Charles Leonard Irby and James Mangles, *Travels in Egypt and Nubia, Syria, and Asia Minor, During the Years 1817 and 1818* (London, 1823).

[23] See, e.g., Edmund Southworth, 'The Ince Blundell Collection: Collecting Behaviour in the Eighteenth Century', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 3 (1991), 219–34; Viccy Coltman, *Classical Sculpture and the Culture of Collecting in Britain since 1760* (Oxford, 2009).

[24] Debbie Challis, *From the Harpy Tomb to the Wonders of Ephesus: British Archaeologists in the Ottoman Empire 1840–1880* (London, 2008); Holger Hoock, *Empires of the Imagination: Politics, War, and the Arts in the British World, 1750–1850* (London, 2010).