

Weigall and what drove his views, and also recognised what a good Egyptologist Weigall was. His continuing ill health forced Weigall to return to England in 1914.

Weigall's ill health exempted him from military service in the First World War, and it was in this period that a talent he had only previously lightly exercised came fully into play. He had written plays, but back in London he threw himself into successful play writing, theatre management, and set design. For the latter he was in much demand, putting on bright and beguiling designs that quite took war-weary London by storm. It is this later aspect of his life that has been hidden away for so long. Egyptologists always focus on his Egypt days, and his popular books on ancient Egypt. His theatre work and his popular novels have been overshadowed for many years and here they are brought into the limelight.

Weigall returned to Egypt in December 1922 at the request of the *Daily Mail* as their correspondent on the exciting new finds at Luxor. He fully expected to be present at the opening of the inner chamber of Tutankhamun's tomb, but rather than being welcomed as a fellow and knowledgeable Egyptologist, he found a cold wind blowing in his direction from his old colleague Carter. Lord Carnarvon had signed an exclusive agreement with *The Times* which then controlled all reports, releasing them later to the world, and even to the Egyptian press. Weigall was very much against this, and expressed himself forcibly. Many have attributed to him the 'pharaoh's curse' story that still resurfaces from time to time in the press.

The Weigall letters preserved in the family archive are truly remarkable for the light they throw on so many events and the characters concerned. This is particularly valuable in the Weigall/Carter relationship, and has much relevance to T.G.H. James's biography of the latter (Routledge, 1992). Weigall writes continuously to his wife Hortense, whom he sorely misses, in lively and delightfully informative letters that are extensively quoted and here set into their context. That such an extensive archive has survived is, in itself, amazing and it has been expertly mined by Julie Hankey to produce a fascinating biography of a beguiling man, one of the unsung heroes of the early and exciting days of Egyptology. Arthur Weigall was truly a pioneer and man of vision before his time in much that he advocated: his memory is well served in this delightful and informative biography.

Peter A. Clayton

The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts

Israel Finkelstein and
Neil Asher Silberman.

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385 pp. Hardback, £16.99 (\$26).

Over the last two decades there has been a growing trend in biblical scholarship to devalue the Old Testament as a source of historical information. Somewhat disconcertingly, this 'minimalist' approach is spearheaded by a small group of theologians (based in Scandinavia and England). Israel Finkelstein is not one of these axe-grinding theologians, but one of Israel's leading archaeologists. In *The Bible Unearthed* he comes a long way to agreeing with the minimalists, though drawing short of their most extreme conclusions.

Era by era Finkelstein states that there is no archaeological evidence for the great events of biblical times: the migrations of the Patriarchs, the Sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt, the Exodus, the Conquest of Canaan, and even the United Monarchy under Saul, David, and Solomon. Most of the new material offered concerns the 10th-century so-called 'Solomonic' strata (Iron Age IIA) in Israel. Their attribution to Solomon has always been something of a scandal, in that it rests on little more than faith, and it is gratifying to see Finkelstein, though a latecomer to the debate, now making some headway on this point (see *Minerva*, Jan/Feb 2002, p. 18).

In essence Finkelstein is returning to the model proposed by Kathleen Kenyon based on her work at Samaria, a model which, till very recently, was held to be discredited. Strata conventionally ascribed to the 10th century BC at Megiddo, Hazor, Gezer and other cities can be shown to date a century later. But what the model gives with one hand it takes with the other. King Solomon, lauded in the Bible as a great builder, is deprived of any evidence for building or having ruled an organised state. The 11th-century remains which Finkelstein lowers in date to Solomon's time are notoriously lacking in monumental architecture or other features we would expect from a 'golden age'.

Yet Finkelstein wisely shies away from denying that Solomon and his father David ever existed. A few years ago a 9th-century inscription was discovered at Tel Dan, northern Israel, referring to the ruler of Judah as the 'king of the House of David'. Finkelstein accepts the inevitable, allowing

the existence of David and Solomon but redefining them as local Judahite chiefs. There never was, in his opinion, a United Monarchy of Israel and Judah: Israel (in the north) crystallised as a state first during the 9th century while Judah (in the south) only became a 'fully-fledged state' in the late 8th century. In the following century Judahite scribes concocted the Bible as we know it, claiming falsely that their ancestral leaders David and Solomon had once ruled a powerful United Kingdom.

While Finkelstein stresses the fluidity of the chronology for early Israelite archaeology, his own analysis proceeds within an extremely narrow focus. It is not enough to adjust the chronology of one part of Israel's archaeology (the 10th-9th centuries) and then compare the results to the biblical record. A complete overhaul of ancient Near Eastern chronology is overdue. The dating comes from Egypt, but pharaonic dates for the 1st millennium BC themselves depend on a single synchronism with the Bible! In recent years Egyptological journals have carried numerous articles arguing that Egyptian chronology should be shortened at various points, the consequence of one of these shifts being that the Iron I period in Palestine could be shortened by a hundred years. Add to this the one-century reduction made by Finkelstein for Iron II and we are very close to the suggestion made by this writer and colleagues in 1991 (in *Centuries of Darkness*) that the real archaeological slot for Solomon lies not in Iron II but at the Late Bronze-Iron Age transition, presently dated to the early 12th century. A very different picture then emerges for Solomonic archaeology.

Finkelstein has removed one of the key pieces that holds up the house of cards known as 'biblical archaeology', unaware that when you do so the whole structure is in danger of collapsing. Only when the major problems of Egyptian and ancient Near Eastern chronology have been resolved can we make a final reckoning of the historicity of the Old Testament account.

Peter James