

Jordan: An Archaeological Reader

Edited by Russell B. Adams. Pp. xvii + 581, b&w figs. 165, tables 23. Equinox, London 2008. \$49.95. ISBN 978-1-84553-037-2 (paper).

Most publications dealing with ancient cultures of the southern Levant—generally understood as today’s Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority—have dealt with the western rather than the eastern parts of this area. Whereas numerous textbooks have been devoted to the archaeology of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, there is much less published on the equally rich and important cultural remains east of the Jordan River. The present textbook is therefore most welcome. The editor emphasizes the orientation of Israeli research toward the archaeology of ancient Israel, Judah, and Jewish history in general; archaeological research in Jordan has been less politicized. The latter statement may be explained by a certain lack of interest among the present population to link with the Nabataeans, Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites of the Iron Age. This has resulted in a more diverse orientation and a more liberal development of many branches of archaeological research in Jordan, free from ideological constraints.

The volume is basically a more up-to-date and reasonably priced version of *Archaeology of Jordan* (Sheffield, England 2001), in which the present editor also participated as coeditor, but which he himself criticizes as expensive and is, in any case, now out of print. The editor states that the primary purpose of this new textbook is to provide an introduction to the archaeology of Jordan for students and to serve as a companion volume for interested amateurs and tourists. It thus addresses a broad audience, which is quite an ambitious undertaking.

The volume has 17 chapters, starting with a well-balanced, condensed, historical review by the editor and continuing with the chapter “Evolving Landscape and Environment in Jordan” by Macumber. This chapter focuses on the diverging evolution of Jordan’s landscape,

hydrology, and climate. It is aimed at more specialized readers rather than at a broader audience. The next 15 chapters, which represent the archaeological core of the book, extend from the Paleolithic to the Ottoman period, though only a few can be discussed here in detail.

The chapter on the Paleolithic and Epipaleolithic periods by Olszewski is a well-written introduction to the longest “period” in the history and archaeology of Jordan. The finds of the famous lime-plaster human statuary with figures and busts from Ain Ghazal are included in the appealing chapter on the Neolithic period by Rollefson, which also describes the enormous and almost-unique settlements from near the middle of the 10th millennium B.C.E. In his chapter on the Chalcolithic period, Bourke points to a problem also affecting other periods, namely, that an overview is bedeviled by uneven coverage of much of the country (the Chalcolithic is best investigated in the Jordan Valley). This limits the value of generalizations about socioeconomic development, as these are based on single regions and thus skew debate. Bourke’s chapter includes nice sets of radiocarbon, faunal, and botanical data, as well as a case study on the cultic architecture of Tulaylat Ghassul, which produced the well-known processional wall paintings.

The Bronze Age is covered by Philip (Early Bronze [EB] I–III), Palumbo (EB IV), Falconer (Middle Bronze), and Strange (Late Bronze). Their four chapters represent different approaches to a period that spans approximately one-and-a-half millennia. Philip puts forward an interesting alternative to the traditional city-state model for EB I–III: prosperous village communities with well-developed agriculture had the resources to undertake major projects on a corporate basis. Philip points frankly to a weakness in his own chapter that also affects

several others—namely, the problem of presenting up-to-date knowledge, given the time constraints of the publishing process and the enormous amount of new data obtained since the late 1990s, when the previous version was being prepared. More recent literature should, for instance, have been included in the chapter on EB IV, which seems mainly to be based on the previous edition. The lack of references to recent research is especially evident in the chapter on the Middle Bronze Age. Falconer omits, for instance, the huge Canaanite temple from Middle Bronze (MB) III at Pella, one of the largest in the entire Levant, the excavation of which had already begun in the late 1990s. Also lacking are, in addition to more recent literature on the crucial Middle Bronze–Late Bronze Age transitional Chocolate-on-White Ware, references to the overviews of the Middle Bronze Age at Pella, the Middle Bronze Age of Tell Abu al-Kharaz (which he erroneously claims has no Middle Bronze Age at all), and the Middle Bronze Age of Tell Deir ‘Alla (all three in P.M. Fischer, ed., *The Chronology of the Jordan Valley During the Middle and Late Bronze Ages: Pella, Tell Abu al-Kharaz and Tell Deir ‘Alla* [Vienna 2006]). One could argue that this literature was published too late for inclusion, but it is all included in the next chapter on the Late Bronze Age. However, despite the listing of these references in the Late Bronze Age chapter, little new information is given in the text compared with the 2001 edition. In general, all the chapters on the Bronze Age would have benefited from more illustrations of attractive structures and objects, considering the targeted readership.

The transition between the Iron Age (Herr and Najjar) and Persian (Bienkowski) periods is blurred, and it seems that there was clear continuity from the former to the latter despite earlier claims. It would have been advantageous to finish the Iron Age chapter with a general synthesis. The chapters on the following periods, which are beyond the present research of the reviewer, comprise information on sites well known to the general public, such

as Petra, Gadara, and Gerasa. They include the Hellenistic period and the Nabataeans (Schmid), the Roman (Freeman), Byzantine (Watson), Ummayyad and Abbasid (Withcomb), Middle Islamic and Crusader (Walmsley), and Ottoman (McQuitty) periods. They are, in general, well balanced with a massive bulk of worthwhile information. One might only have wished for a more comprehensive overview of the Early Islamic periods and more illustrations in the chapter on the Roman period.

Generally, the editor has succeeded in producing a textbook of good quality (most of the illustrations included), with only minor editorial flaws (such as misspellings), at an affordable price. The majority of the audience should be students of archaeology in general and Levantine archaeology specifically. The target group could have been broadened to include interested laypersons if a glossary had been included, and this also would have helped the intended audience. The inclusion of more recently published research and unpublished knowledge is an absolute necessity in any future revised edition.

There is no doubt that the future of Jordanian archaeology is bright. The archaeological potential of Jordan is enormous and the generosity of the Department of Antiquities is renowned. This has attracted scholars from all over the world to participate in the exploration of the country’s past. In a not-so-distant future, an increasing number of graduates from thriving Jordanian universities, stimulated by textbooks such as this one, will certainly appear as authors of similar textbooks, which today are largely the work of foreign scholars.

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