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Great Britain, the U.S. and Paradigms of Modern Jordan's Ancient Identity

What follows represents a tiny fraction of a work in progress. The themes I discuss are part of a dissertation entitled, *Jordan First: Archaeology and Perceptions of National Identity in Jordan*, which seeks to frame archeological praxis and interpretation and the larger idea of Jordan's cultural heritage within an historical framework. While I am certainly dealing with Western, archaeologically-based notions of Jordan's identity, which are the focus of this paper, I am more interested in how late Ottoman and Western conceptions of Southeastern Bilād ash-Shām have been developed and fine-tuned over decades of Hashemite rule to serve as symbols of what Ernest Gellner called the "perennial" truth of the nation (Gellner 1983: 11). Ultimately my project addresses the degree to which the archaeological and cultural heritage has been a successful part of the cultivation of national identity in Jordan.

Trans-Atlantic Culture

There are three basic — and fairly obvious — contexts in which we can understand the meanings with which Jordan's cultural heritage has been imbued: the late Ottoman, the 19th and 20th century Western, and the Jordanian — including, of course, the interface between the regime and multiple levels of popular and intellectual understanding. This short paper touches upon only a few major themes regarding the Western context — notably the Anglo-American context. This is not to dismiss the scholarship of countless others of a variety of nationalities. But there are two reasons to focus on British and American archaeological endeavors. The first is simply political: Britain and America have historically been Jordan's two greatest foreign patrons. While this perspective naturally revolves around policy matters, British and American patronage has left indelible marks on the study, interpretation and preservation of Jordan's past, including antiquities legislation and the financing of cultural heritage projects.

The second reason to focus on the Anglo-American impact for the understanding of Jordan's past is due to British and American intellectual camaraderie, particularly in the formative years of archaeological exploration in Jordan and Palestine — dubbed the "biblical" or "Holy Land" — from the mid-19th century until the onset of the First World War. Studies addressing the confluence between Western archaeological research in the Holy Land and its multi-faceted impact on modern Middle Eastern states tend to view European and American involvement as separate, somewhat-related phenomena. They thus focus almost entirely on the connection between archaeological research and European empire or the connection between archaeology and American religiosity and missionary activity (Davis 2004; Silberman 1982). While these are important points of departure, our understanding of Holy Land archaeological exploration in its larger, trans-Atlantic, English-speaking social and intellectual context is incomplete. The indelible mark upon the study and interpretation of Jordan's past — and that of what we know today as the Middle East — was far more a result of collaborative intellectualism between English speakers across the Atlantic than European imperialism or American zealotry. British imperialism and American missionary endeavors were natural extensions of the much larger, overarching ethos of Protestantism in the liberal age.

Whether in overt religious expression or secular practice, Protestantism provided the framework for the ideal social order (Chadwick 1971). It was the basis of progressivism, industrialism, expansionism, prestige and anti-Catholicism — in whatever forms these took. It was part and parcel of philosophy and science. British and American men of science, philosophy and religion were often one and the same. They took a wide variety of positions in contemporary controversies, such as those resulting from Charles Darwin's publications of *Origin of Species* in 1859 and *Descent of Man* in 1871, or those wrought by the German scholar Julius Wellhausen's synthesis of biblical criticism, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*, in 1882. Scholars crisscrossed the Atlantic to speak, enjoyed wide notoriety and readership in both places and corresponded and debated regularly with one another. Learned, scientific societies had counterparts in both places, and many shared both British and American members (Moore 1979: 6-9; Silberman 1982: 115).

Science and scientific method provided the rigor with which systematic study of the biblical Middle East began at mid-century, with the survey of American Congregationalists Edward Robinson and Eli Smith, and the Dead Sea voyage of American naval commander William Francis Lynch, who hoped one day to broaden international trade horizons for Virginia cotton and tobacco (Rook 1998). Based on Robinson and Smith's and Lynch's work, the most famous of the scientific societies dedicated to Holy Land research, the British Palestine Exploration Fund — henceforth PEF — took its purpose and design for fieldwork. The most ambitious of its projects, and that with the most lasting impact, was the Survey of Western Palestine, carried out with Royal Engineers and materiel seconded and on loan from the War Office between 1871-1877 (Silberman 1982; Moscrop 2000). The most important consequence of the Survey has been long understood: the PEF's map was the War Office's conception of Palestine, later the Mandate conception of Palestine and the borders of the State of Israel (Abu el-Haj 2001: 28; Silberman 1982: 123).

Correspondence between the PEF and its recently founded American cousin, the American Palestine Exploration Society, resulted in the simultaneous proposal of a Survey of Eastern Palestine, the border between Western and Eastern Palestine being the Jordan River. The Americans were thought to be especially well-suited for this task, and both volunteered themselves and were volunteered for the undertaking (Silberman 1982; Moscrop 2000; Cobbing 2005). While figuring prominently in the biblical narrative, the lands east of the Jordan River did not encompass the kingdoms of the biblical Jews and were therefore not as important as those on the western side of the river. The Eastern Survey established a means of intellectual and military cooperation with the Americans but enabled the British to retain the most prestigious part of the survey. With the exception of the Jordan River Valley and adjacent northeastern territories, the country east of the river, unlike the country west of the river, lacked the number of ancient tell sites upon which biblical archaeological inquiry had become based. An American presence, furthermore, would not be so threatening in close proximity to the French presence in northern Syria and the increasing German presence, at the behest of Istanbul, in southeastern Bilād ash-Shām.

Assigned to West Point graduate Lieutenant Edgar Steever, the Eastern Survey failed to meet British standards. American Holy Land experience was severely curtailed by the Civil War and its military was, by the 1870's, far less experienced than the British in work of such nature. The Eastern side of the Jordan River also posed the logistical difficulty of remaining largely off the beaten path of explorers and archaeologists and only lately had witnessed the interest in infrastructure and security that had come to Palestine west of the Jordan (Cobbing 2005). By the late 1870's the American Palestine Exploration Society and its Eastern Survey were defunct. A survey of the east was taken up by Western Survey veteran Claude Conder for the PEF in 1881-1882, until he finally roused enough suspicion for Istanbul to revoke his *firman* (Jacobson and Cobbing 2005).

Paradigms Emerge

In addition to providing at least one border for several modern Middle Eastern states, the Surveys of Western and Eastern Palestine had serious implications for our understanding of the cultural heritage of those states, as pointedly in Jordan as anywhere. In undertaking the Survey, the PEF sought a rigorous understanding of the natural and man-made landscape of the Hebrew Bible, a biblical geography based on the texts of the ancient Jewish people in whom Christians identify their origins and for whom 19th century Protestants expressed such affinity. As such, all other biblical peoples were consigned to the category of "others" — and defined primarily in terms of their interactions with the ancient Jews as recorded in the Hebrew Bible — which were more often antagonistic or hostile than cordial. The lands in which those "others" lived likewise play supporting roles in the story of the Jews of the Old Testament, and were thus categorized in similar fashion as their peoples. Just as the Western Survey ultimately defined the borders of the State of Israel, the lands of nearly all of ancient Israel's non-Jewish neighbors are located today within the borders of modern Arab states.

While there is no reason to doubt that the non-Jewish peoples of the Hebrew bible also left texts behind, nothing thus far is known to exist on the scale of the Old Testament; there are only a handful of inscriptions and *ostraca*. Unlike our knowledge of the ancient Jewish scriptural writers, we lack the same historical narrative tradition of their non-Jewish neighbors. Our understanding of them is thus dependent on the archaeological record, which is often interpreted in light of what the writers of the Hebrew Bible had to say about them.

This situation becomes especially sticky for understanding the Iron Age in the Holy Land, particularly where Jordan, Occupied Palestine and the State of Israel are concerned. The Iron Age, defined roughly as 1200-550 BC, left behind the cultural heritage which has been most used and misused in making claims and counter-claims of the ancient past as a basis of national legitimacy. Because the largest and most comprehensive textual synthesis of this era is found in books comprising the Hebrew Bible, the Iron Age is most famously the era of David, the development of monotheism, Solomon's First Temple, the uniting of Israel and Judah, and subsequent splitting of that united Israelite monarchy on bad terms. By the end of the Iron Age, Jerusalem was lost and the Jewish people forced into exile in Babylon.

There were at least three Iron Age kingdoms in what is now the state of Jordan — Ammon, Moab and Edom — their borders and populations in flux with one another and with their neighbors in Israel and Judah. The geographical parameters of the PEF surveys were designed around Iron Age kingdoms described in the bible — Israel, Judah, Gilead, Ammon, Moab, Edom. Whether such toponyms existed before or during the Iron Age was irrelevant; the idea of the rise of kingdoms with definable geographic boundaries, linkable to an idea of ethnos, was something that 19th century Europeans and Americans could understand, given the world in which they lived. Visualizing the ancient ruins of the Holy Land in terms of their own contemporary realities gave Europeans and Americans "facts on the ground" that could be illuminated with the application of scientific method.

By this way, Palestine became divided into two distinct parts — *cisjordan* and *transjordan* — one was principally Jewish and the other was not. Christians worship the Israelite god Yahweh; not the Ammonite Milkom, the Moabite Kemosh or the Edomite Qawws. *Cisjordan* was thus important for understanding the roots of Western, Protestant civilization and *transjordan* was not. And despite decades of dedication of scholars of numerous nationalities working in Jordan, the Iron Age on the Western side of the river remains far better elucidated than that on the Eastern side.

The Western and Eastern Surveys of Palestine further more conceptualized Jordan in three distinctive parts — northern, central and southern — and its people into two categories — many desert and a few sown. And lacking the biblical significance of the western side of the river, important archaeological heritage of the eastern side naturally was understood to consist primarily of standing monumental sites, notably Jarash and Petra and some Crusader castles. These ideas have endured in popular conceptions of Jordan to this day. Jordanian Department of Statistics sources show that within Jordan's current borders, Petra and Jarash have consistently been Jordan's highest-grossing archaeological tourist attractions. This conceptualization of Jordan has, unfortunately, also endured in the minds of many scholars across disciplines, and whose interests lay within all epochs.

Mesha as Unsung Hero

The marginalization of Jordan's cultural heritage is certainly not the only reason why the Iron Age is sensitive. What is known of the Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites based on their own archaeological record and writing, demonstrates that the Iron Age peoples East and West of the Jordan River were linguistic and cultural brethren whose primary difference seems to be that each had its own deity and royal house. The cultural spheres of influence of these kingdoms obviously overlapped with one another. And whether we trust the Hebrew Bible's account of the relationship among the Iron Age kingdoms or question its motives, we don't have to suspend belief to trust scripture's assertion that these kingdoms sometimes conquered parts of each other's territory. The most extensive Moabite text, known as the Mesha Stela or Moabite Stone, discovered for the Western world by a German missionary in1868, tells us that Mesha, king of Moab, of the city of Dhībān, by will of his god Kemosh, defeated Israel forever, thus conquering the King of Israel who, with the help of his god Yahweh, had oppressed Moab for generations (Pritchard 1969: 320-321).

Whether or not it would be desirable — and it's my position that it never is — Mesha's stela and the site of his capital at Dhībān offer a clear instance in which Jordan could make overt nationalist claims based on its Iron Age archaeological heritage in a similar fashion as has Israel. To do so would open a terrible can of worms. As one Jordanian epigraphy and archaeology professor noted in an interview, first it would have to be decided once and for all that Mesha was an Arab. Bragging about Mesha conquering the King of Israel would thus be bragging about one Arab conquering another. The king of Israel conquered by Mesha, after all, was of Omri's dynasty, and textual evidence has long suggested that Omri was an Arab. We will likely never know for certain what terms like "Arab", "Israel" and "Moab" actually meant to the Iron Age peoples who used them.

Conclusions

To remain within the scope of a brief conference paper, I must conclude by jumping ahead chronologically, almost a century. Thus I must leave a discussion of what I believe marks the transition from the era of archaeology as a series of campaigns to archaeology as a real professional discipline in the Middle East — the years immediately following the First World War — for another time. While a major leap in professionalization occurred between approximately 1918-1921, a first comprehensive synthesis of Jordan's archaeological heritage was a long time coming. American Reform Rabbi Nelson Glueck, student of William Foxwell Albright, father of American biblical archaeology, spent the entire 1930's surveying Transjordan in a way never imagined by the proponents of the Eastern Survey. Using a broad definition of biblical archaeology — the prehistoric through the historical epochs of all the biblical lands — his focus on the east side of the Jordan River was revolutionary. While numerous aspects of his paradigm have been revised by Jordanian, North American and European scholars, he was the first person to put Jordan's Iron Age kingdoms on equal footing with their Israelite contemporaries.

But there was one way in which they were, and largely remain, distinctively inferior. In the introduction to his 1971 *fetshscrift*, Glueck is quoted as describing the Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites thus, "They spoke the same language as the Judeans, perhaps with a slightly different accent; they used the same kind of script; they built the same kind of buildings; they wore the same kind of clothes; and they fashioned the same kind of pottery. Yet", he emphasizes, "they *disappeared*, while the Jewish people, physical and spiritual descendants of their Judean contemporaries, lived on to transmit the perennial tradition of Jewish religion (Sanders 1970: xx)". In his popular book, *The Other Side of the Jordan,* published in 1940 and 1970, Glueck ponders the "disappearance" of the Transjordanian Iron Age peoples and the "genius" in the enduring Abrahamic monotheism of a small minority of their Cisjordanian contemporaries (Glueck 1970: 126-127). Was it the will of God or an accident of history? While he himself never sought to answer this question directly, it is easy for us to read between the lines.

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