

Holt, John Marshall, The Patriarchs of Israel (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press) 1964

- p. 21 There are still thoroughly competent and magnificently trained specialists in the archaeology of the Near East who construct elaborate houses of cards on the shaky foundation of slight, laboriously tenuous parallels between Biblical and archaeological data. It is perhaps better that the error continue to be on the side of boldness, lest the discipline grow complacent and intransigent. More serious is the attempt made by those who cannot brook even the shadow of literary criticism to discredit it as a whole by a tendentious use of archaeological data. One of the most recent instances of this abuse of archaeology is Free's Archaeology and Bible History, on whose first page the author writes that "two of the main functions of Bible archaeology are the illumination and the confirmation of the Bible."¹⁰ "Illumination" is well sought, but the set purpose of "confirmation" is one that asks too much and the wrong type of help from archaeology. One who wishes to show up the poverty of literary critical methods as final answers to Biblical questions can do so quite satisfactorily within the field of literary criticism itself and should not bend to his service a study that has proven its right to a respectably independent position. In a more gentle way | Cyrus H. Gordon's Introduction to Old Testament Times provides comfort for those who wish to do without literary criticism, but his work as a whole is on a much higher level.

The problem is more than merely trying to strike an average between too-eager use of archaeology, which would tie up every potsherd with a specific chapter and verse, and sullen resistance to literary criticism, which would consciously try to subvert critical study but, probably without intending to do so, would also tend to damage the proper exercise of archaeological science.

p. 22

p. 24 In agreement with all modern study of Genesis, the writer allows that not one word of any of the patriarchal legends was written down in literary form at any time contemporaneous with the people described in them. Late literary composition, however, is not itself invalidating, in view of the tenacity of oral tradition; so I will feel free to discuss any segment or detail of the patriarchal legends without immediate concern as to its literary source and transmission, except insofar as it may be worthwhile to show that critical analysis of the historical verisimilitude of such and such a passage is strikingly similar (or dissimilar!) to that reached by comparison with archaeological data.

In all that Biblical archaeology has brought to light in the past fifty years, not once is there to be found a direct identification of any one of the patriarchs known to us from the Genesis accounts, and we should hardly expect it, much as we might like to have it. It is indeed "impossible to relate the Biblical narratives with even approximate precision to the events of contemporary history," as John Bright has asserted.¹⁶ (16 A History of Israel, p. 61)

Camels
p. 116 The most intriguing aspect of this subject is the mention, in xxiv.¹⁰ and elsewhere, of the use of camels. To this Albright objects that there is no evidence of the domestication of camels in Palestine before 1100, and it would thus appear that their mention in the time of the patriarchs is patently anachronistic. Free counters with evidence from figurines, skeletons, carvings, and even a camel's hair rope that camels were known and domesticated in every Egyptian period from the predynastic on.⁵⁰ (Albright, The Archaeology of Palestine, pp. 206-207, and Joseph P. Free, "Abraham's Camels," JNES, III (1944), pp. 187-193.) De Vaux approaches the subject differently.⁵¹ (De Vaux, Revue Biblique, LVI (1949), p. 8f.) He acknowledges that camels are in general associated with full-fledged nomads, which the patriarchs were not. Furthermore, camels are represented in Mesopotamian drawings as early as the Obied Age and in Egyptian art as early as the first dynasty, but they then apparently fall into disuse until the end of the second