

Richard, Suzanne, ed. *Near Eastern Archaeology: A Reader*. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003. xviii + 486 pp. \$45.00 hardcover. ISBN 1-57506-083-3.

It would be difficult to find a category for this book. Richard, in her introduction, calls it “a companion reference textbook for college classes in archaeology, history, and biblical studies.” Other reviewers have tried (and rejected) other categories. It is not a dictionary, not an encyclopedia, not even technically a “reader” as the title claims, since it does not assemble articles previously written on a subject. It matters not. Here we have a collection of over sixty articles, ranging from three to about thirteen pages in length. They cover a wide variety of subjects, directly or (sometimes quite) indirectly related to the Bible or the archaeology of OT lands. Like a *Festschrift*, the book suffers from the danger that good material may get lost in the crowd.

There is little here that touches directly on translating the biblical text. Indeed the book has no index and no footnotes, so scripture references are to be found only in the body of articles. Very few of the articles, in fact, have any specific scripture reference, and most make no reference to the Bible at all.

What is more, some of the articles touching on the Bible seem to have been written more for the archaeologist who doesn't know the Bible well. In one article with the promising title “Text Sources for Levantine Archaeology: The Bible,” we find this: “The Torah (specifically the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) presents a composite account of Israel's origins that begins with creation and concludes with Moses' farewell address and death.” Or “In addition to the Tanakh/Old Testament, Christian Bibles include specifically Christian writings known collectively as the New Testament.”

Nevertheless, there is no lack of material that will be of interest to the average reader of *BT*. While it will usually not touch directly on translation, many articles include data or background information that will help us produce better notes for study editions. Take, for example, the cliché that the Philistines (and earlier the Hittites) held a monopoly on the production of iron, and that iron replaced bronze because it was harder and held a better edge for weapons and tools. In an article on “Metalworking and Mining in the Levant” we learn that these standard ideas are now being rejected. “There is no [archaeological] evidence for any ‘iron monopoly’ in the ancient world.” Iron, in fact, is softer than bronze and does not take or keep a good cutting edge. The real revolution came, not with the discovery of iron production but rather with the somewhat later discovery of how to make hardened steel, which is “far superior to the finest bronze.”

Here are a few articles that will be useful to many of us: “Bible and Archaeology,” “Writing and Scripts,” “Semitic Languages,” “Writing: The Archaeology of Writing,” “Chronology of the Southern Levant,” “Subsistence Pastoralism,” “Weapons and Warfare in Ancient Syria-Palestine,” “Religion and Cult in the Levant: The Archaeological Data,” “Canaanite Religion,” and “Goddesses.”

Each article includes a bibliography, some of them quite extensive.

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