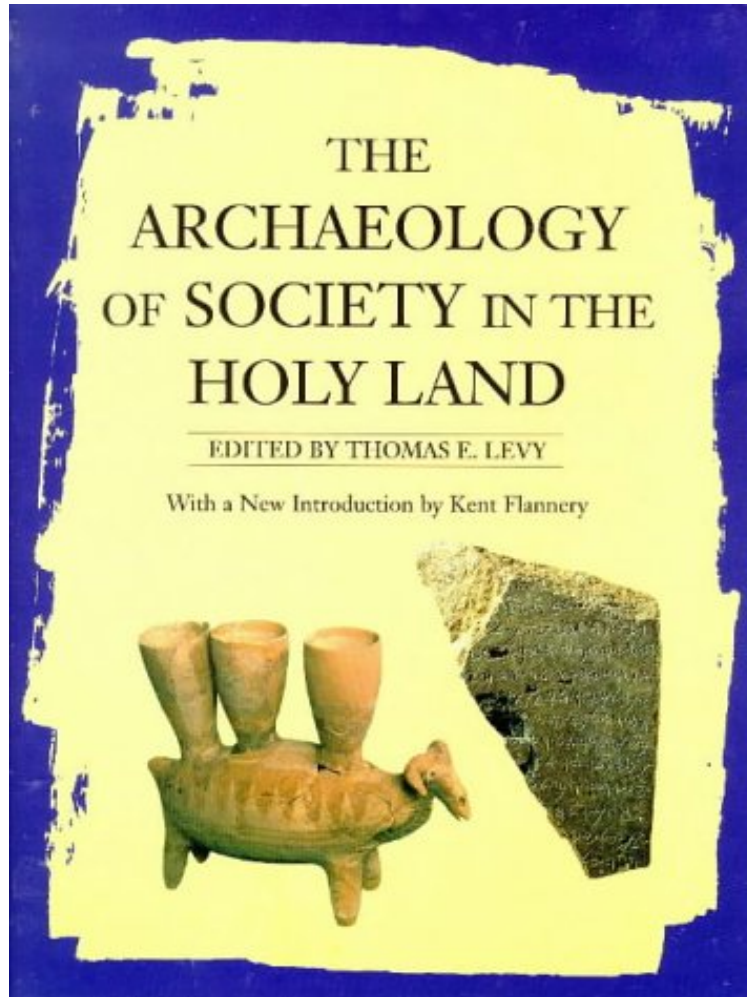


The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land

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From Brand: Cassell : The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land:

13 of 15 people found the following review helpful. A Survey of Archological Evidence Reaching Far in the PastBy G. W. ThielmanArchology constitutes a meticulous study of ancient artifacts and residues from periods in human history remote to the modern world. This field of anthropology is marked by differences in emphasis, depending on the region under excavation. In the southern Levant, such focus generally accentuates what has been termed "biblical archology", designed to augment historical understanding of the scriptures, both the Hebrew Canon and the New Testament. Aside from difficulties inherent in synthsizing descriptions written or edited centuries after the events narrated, often with religious revelations overriding historical "accuracy" (a concept whose importance has been presumed only relatively recently), archology--being predominantly a material discipline--can interpret only what is

physically observable in the present. Recent decades have witnessed profound changes in archaeology, expanding beyond the evidence of technological advancement--from Paleolithic hunter-gatherers to Neolithic agriculturists to the Bronze and Iron ages--as well as political demarcations--Canaanite city states, Israelite monarchies, hegemonies under Persian, Roman or Ottoman rule. Social archaeology--intended to examine the culture of the region in question--is the theme in *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land*, edited by Thomas E. Levy, professor of Judaic Studies at the University of California, San Diego. The articles cover a wide chronology from the early Paleolithic age to the modern era in terms of material culture, as well as flora, fauna, climate, economy, and manufacture. To preclude an overly narrow focus on Biblical periods, the thirty authors devote over a third of the book to the premetal times. Most of the dates are given in BCE and CE (which I do not appreciate, preferring the more traditional BC and AD), except the prehistoric periods which are rendered BP [before present]. The text is profusely illustrated, not only with photographs of pottery and plaques, but replete with detailed diagrams of excavated sites and shaded relief maps depicting these locations. This collective endeavor has been dedicated to the spirit of Fernand Braudel, the French historian who developed the theory of *longue duree* or long duration undercurrents which (allegedly) act independently of individual activities for any given span. Although this suggests a somewhat Tolstoyan conceit, the analysis presented renders support to people being influenced by the conditions in which they live. *The Archaeology of Society* begins with a preface describing its interdisciplinary approach weaving anthropology (the study of culture), history (textual criticism of ancient records), geoscience (including climatology and geology), archaeometry (artifacts dating, materials identification), and environmental archaeology (encompassing botany and zoology). The six parts that follow are further subdivided chronologically into 32 chapters. The climate in this constrained territory ranges from Mediterranean to arid. Many areas have limited or uncertain rainfall, and thus subsistence agriculture becomes precarious on such marginal land during drought without supplementing harvests by herding goats, sheep and/or cattle. On the eastern side of the Jordan River, Moab and Edom showed greater reliance on animal husbandry than the wetter regions further north. The variation in the land's topological environment is exhibited by the diversity of flora: 2682 plant species in 29,600 square kilometers as compared to a slightly lesser number on the California coastal region within more than double the area. Also, since the southern Levant stands at the crossroads between Egypt and Mesopotamia, the region serves as a convenient invasion route, with the inhabitants and political systems frequently becoming collateral casualties. These episodes serve to amalgamate societies with cultural cross-fertilization, in the aftermath of the initial destruction. While many archaeological publications on the holy land have concentrated on political and/or religious history of Israel, *The Archaeology of Society* discusses the culture and demographics of the inhabitants. One of the most notable observations in this volume is the catastrophic decline in material living conditions with corresponding population reductions and health deterioration (based on tooth wear and skeletal hypoplasia), particularly in the desert borders at the end of particular eras, either due to dramatic changes in climate or sociological factors such as military incursion. The impact of these conditions appears to be especially pronounced at the collapse of the Chalcolithic (~3500 BCE), the end of the middle Bronze Age (~1500 BCE), the beginning of the Iron Age (~1200 BCE), and the end of the Byzantine period (638 CE)--followed by very gradual and intermittent recovery. And while no explicit means of invasion for the Israelites has been discovered--unlike the Philistines who apparently came by sea and left pottery--the archaeological impression from these tribes is implied by a rapid decrease in the percentage of swine bones found in the highlands through the middle to late Bronze Ages. Many chapters report social stratification, for different societies are often characterizable by the different quality and type of items associated with various members in the community. Although such economic differentiation arose in the grave-goods monopoly of the middle Bronze Age elite (who were buried with ceremonial daggers and axes, in contrast to spears for the common man), the political dimension of this stratification developed later as a defensive measure from the need by a central state (such as the Davidic suzerainty) for professional armies and economic specialization. Despite this, tribalism continued in areas of marginal interest to the capitals. The excavated remains from the Iron Age suggest that the regimes had little direct impact on inhabitants outside the court, but probably received their principal revenue from maintaining protection against banditry for passage across the highways--a neglected function during the Roman occupation which contributed to the poverty and unrest during their administration. While the prophet Jeremiah condemned the extravagance of the wealthy, archaeology reveals less material distinction between households towards the end of Judah's autonomy than from subsequent periods of foreign oppression. Agrarian cultures, valuing continuity, frequently oppose incursion by disruptive economic influence from alien invaders. In the case of the Israelites, this resistance was brought against the Greeks during the Macedonian rule. Such attitudes can be exacerbated if natives are forced into the corvee by their masters as unwilling contributors to the new order, as with Herod's construction at Caesarea, or from the income-redistributionist taxation imposed by the Romans. Unlike other related books that cover ancient Israel, *The Archaeology of Society* eschews quoting the historical or prophetic books in the scriptures, even in chapters where the Israelite and Judaic kingdoms are discussed. This partially reflects a current perception that the scriptures represent a redacted account of the past interpreted in the light of ethical or religious precepts. The few exceptions which cite the Old Testament include references to Jeroboam's temple at Dan in 1 Kgs 12:29-30, Sheshak's invasion to identify the earliest verified biblical date of 925 BCE in 1 Kgs 14:25-26, Omri's purchase of Samaria in 1

Kn 16:24, and Mesha's raids commemorated by the Moab stele in 2 Kn 3:4-27. Josephus is cited more often, at least with regard to his accounts from the Roman pe-riod of the first century CE in which he wrote. While The Archology of Society is not intended for casual reading at the beach, the book is a valuable contribution to the historical and cultural background in the region where Judaism and Christianity were founded.

Taking an anthropological and socio-economic perspective, archaeologists working in Israel and Jordan present concise summaries of the archaeology of the region. Chronologically organized, each chapter outlines the major cultural transitions which occurred in a given period, and is accompanied by settlement-pattern maps and a plate highlighting the major artefacts which archaeologists use to identify the material culture of the period. In addition, windows are used to focus of major social issues and controversies such the agricultural revolution, the Israelite conquest of Canaan, and ancient metal-working and social change.

About the Author Thomas E. Levy is Professor of Anthropology at the University of California, San Diego. Levy took his Ph.D. degree at the University of Sheffield, U.K.