KINNERET AND NAFTALI

by

ERNST AXEL KNAUF

Bern

1. The Problem

Kinneret on the Sea of Galilee (Tell el-'Orême/Tel Kînroît; map reference 2008.2529), still under excavation, was a major city of 7–9 ha in the Early Iron Age.1 Recent archaeological insights call for a re-evaluation of the two biblical references mentioning the site: Jos xix 35 and I Kgs xv 20. What does archaeology help in the explanation of these two references, and what does the Bible contribute to our comprehension of the site’s history?—Texts are texts and pots are pots, the twain shall never meet? They meet on the ground of the theoretical construct of the “past real world” which, being a feeble construct, cannot thrive were it not nurtured by all the evidence we could possibly assemble. That pots relate, somehow, to the

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1 V. Fritz, Kinneret. Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen auf dem Tell el-'Orême am See Gennesaret 1982–1985 (Wiesbaden, 1990). The Interpretation and the dating of Iron Age Strata IV, V and VI have been modified by the results of the last campaigns (1994–1997), cf. V. Fritz – D. Viehweger, “Tel Kinrôt”, Excavations and Surveys in Israel 16 (1997), pp. 33–34; V. Fritz, “Das Deutsche Evangelische Institut für Altertumswissenschaft des Heiligen Landes in den Jahren 1995 und 1996”, ZDPV 113 (1997), pp. 153–156, esp. 153f. What had been presented in 1990 as an Israelite village of the Early Iron Age (Stratum VI), and a city founded by David (Stratum V) and modified by Solomon (Stratum IV) is now regarded as a Canaanite city (of 7 to 9 ha) of the Iron IB period (traditionally 11th century b.c.), once rebuilt as an urban site (Stratum V), but largely abandoned except for agricultural installations (including barns) at the turn of Iron IB to Iron IIA (Stratum IV, traditionally dated ca. 1000 b.c.).

past real world (however insufficient our perception of their significance may be), nobody denies; and nobody can deny that ancient texts, for their part, betray the impact of the “past real world” within which they were written by a number of features beyond the authors’ intention (like language, realia, religious beliefs and practices). Wherever texts make intentional statements about their present or their past, which is in any case our past, their statements are either true or wrong. They may relate fact (like II Kgs xv 29), fiction (like the story of Balaam’s talking ass, Num xxii 22–35) or a mixture of fact and fiction (like the story of Solomon in I Kgs i–xi). The perpetual task of the historian when dealing with texts is to sort fact from fiction, or tendential embellishments, or intentional misrepresentations; a task which cannot be executed with the clarity and decisiveness of immaculate logic. Nor is the archaeologist’s objective to make the pots speak based on epistemologically firmer ground. The difficulties encountered by the historian are no excuse not to deal with the texts, or the pots, or with both. Pots and people, texts and environmental conditions are there, and we simply have to stand up to their challenge. Most arguments concerning the “past real world” will have to be content to remain within the limits of reasonable speculation, or educated guesses. One can no longer do “History of ancient Israel” without archaeology; and the first thing that the neophyte encounters in archaeology: you get your hands dirty. Why should the historian fare any better?

of us is in firm possession of the truth, it is the truth that we are finally looking for. Whereas we cannot know whether any of our hypotheses is objectively true, we are able to know that some hypotheses are objectively wrong, being falsified by the evidence (like the proposition that the Torah were composed in the Hellenistic period—impossible on account of its language).

3 According to II Kgs xv 29, an Assyrian king called Tiglat-Pileser captured various cities in Galilee and “all the land of Naftali”. In his own inscriptions, Tiglat-Pileser III. confirms the report, cf. H. Tadmor, The Inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III, King of Assyria (Jerusalem, 1994), pp. 80–82 (Ann. 18, 10-7/24, i-11’); p. 202 (Summ. 13, 17’); archaeologically, the Assyrian conquest is attested by Dan II, Hazor V, Kinneret II (by then a “town of Naftali”, cf. infra, and for the Assyrian siege and conquest N. Rabe, “Perforierte Tonkugeln vom Tell el-‘Orôme”, ZDPV 112 [1996], pp. 100-121), Yoqneam XII and at other sites. None of the three “lists” of Galilean settlements destroyed in 733/732 B.C. completely agrees with any other (not all the sites excavated are mentioned in the extend texts, not all the sites mentioned in the texts are excavated); yet, they all attest to what actually happened in 733/732.