CHAPTER 5

A Changing ‘Archaeology of Palestine’ at the University of Leiden, 1959–2014

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1 Introduction

The activities of the professional Old Testament Society in the Netherlands and in Belgium (Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap) also included some archaeological elements during its 75 years of existence. These concerned the Near East in general and Palestine in particular. Some archaeology was dealt with by Old Testament scholars, but also a few full-time archaeologists were members of the society, because of their partial background in Old Testament studies. It should be noted that a separate society, specifically dealing with the archaeology of Palestine (PAW—Palestijns Archeologisch Werkgezelschap), was established in 1968—an initiative of Jan-Kees de Geus, Groningen University, and Henk Franken, Leiden University; it was discontinued in 2014. Its goal was also to connect archaeology with Biblical studies, but now with a focus on archaeology, updated in a scholarly way. This gave a key role to academic institutions such as departments of Old Testament or Biblical studies in Faculties of Theology or departments of Hebrew studies. In any case, the Dutch and Flemish Universities and Theological Colleges had only one separate department for the archaeology of Palestine (or Syria-Palestine) and this was at the University of Leiden.

The section on the Archaeology of Palestine started at Leiden University around 1959 as a unit within the department of Old Testament Studies of the Faculty of Theology. The Old Testament Professor Piet de Boer had attracted the theologian Henk Franken to teach Old Testament ‘realia’, i.e. material culture. Having been employed in Leiden since 1954, Franken trained for this (apart from his secondary background in cultural anthropology) by close study of excavation reports, by making field trips in Palestine, and by excavation training at Tell es-Sultan, Jericho, under Kathleen Kenyon in 1955–1958. As a

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student of the Historico-Critical approach to the Old Testament, Franken was interested in an archaeology that would provide a context to OT narratives, and concluded (1962) that ‘biblical archaeology should consist of capita selecta from the archaeology of Greater Syria, not chosen to throw light upon passages from the Bible, but chosen to get an image of the cultures from biblical times’. He tried to reach such an independent image and the possibility of chronologically correct association with written records in two ways, namely a solid stratigraphic approach in fieldwork for relative chronology and an independent type of pottery study to understand the changes and thus be able to justify a chronology based on type.

During his travels and excavations, Franken had gathered sherds from sites in Palestine for a basic study collection of pre-Hellenistic pottery. Thus he became prepared for the next stage of independent archaeological research, namely the excavation of Tell Deir Alla, focusing on the transitional period of Late Bronze Age to Iron Age in the mid-Jordan Valley. At Leiden University the facilities for the study of materials became available in the ‘Workrooms for Palestinian Archaeology’ (Werkkamers voor Palestijnse Oudheidkunde, fig. 5.1) that in reality was an archaeological research and teaching unit within the department of Old Testament studies. As a personal note, it should be mentioned that I experienced these ‘workrooms’ since 1964 and became more strongly involved from my first season at Deir Alla in 1967 onwards.

**Figure 5.1** Pottery and stones in the first ‘Workrooms for Palestinian Archaeology’, ca. 1965 (archive Deir Alla project).