

PART FIVE

INTRODUCTION TO ARCHAEOLOGY



The term *archaeology* is a compound word (from the Greek *archaios* and *logos*) meaning the “study of ancient things.” The early Greeks, Romans, and Jews used the term in their discussions of history. For example, Plato describes the Lacedaemonians as archaeologists since they were fond of people, genealogies, and foundations of ancient cities; Thucydides uses the term to summarize the early history of Greece; Dionysius of Halicarnassus employs the word to describe the history of Rome; and Flavius Josephus employs the term to describe the history (archaeology) of the Jews.¹ It appears that Bishop Hall of Norwich used *archaiologia* in English for the first time in 1607.



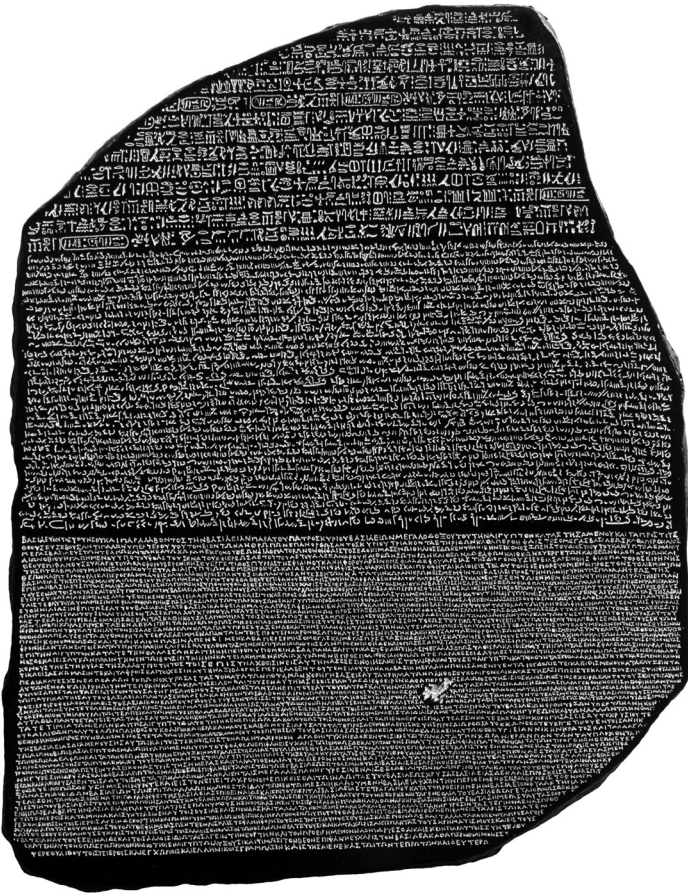
The mud brick gate system preserved at Tel Dan dates to the eighteenth century BC and is the only intact arched-gate complex in existence. The structure reaches the height of nearly 50 courses of mud brick and features three massive arches as the primary entrance into the city.

In modern times, when we speak of archaeology, in general we are referring to the discipline typically within the field of anthropology and history that draws upon an investigation of current material human remains in order to understand past customs, cultures, and civilizations. These remains include pottery, graves, buildings, coins, tools, weapons, clothing, jewelry, literature, inscriptions, and more. “Archaeology of the Bible” exists as a specific field of inquiry within this discipline; its primary goal is the excavation of areas

associated with the Bible and its societies and cultures, such as Jerusalem, Sodom, Jericho, Egypt, Israel, the Levant as a whole, and Mesopotamia. In this sense, archaeology is classified as “preclassical archaeology.”

Archaeology is also an art and science, meaning it is directed by certain fundamental scientific principles universally accepted by archaeologists; and its evaluations draw upon human interpretation, which usually improves with experience and knowledge.

Today, there are numerous academic and popular magazines, journals, and books dedicated to lengthy discussions about the meaning and implications of recent (and some prior) discoveries. This is primarily because many consider archaeology as the intersection between science and faith as well as the overlap between religion and history. The stories of Christianity, and some other religions, provide the background and in some cases the foundation from which one's doctrine emerges. Archaeology digs into those stories to provide illumination, clarification, and understanding, with a goal of discovering truth about the past.



The Rosetta Stone is displayed at the British Museum. Its trilingual text enabled Egyptologists to decipher hieroglyphics. (Photo by Zev Radovan.)

The Rise of Archaeology

For the past 250 years, archaeology has steadily grown into highly developed disciplines in major universities around the world. However, it wasn't always this way. Archaeology originally had its start in treasure-hunting and grave-robbing! This changed quickly after several excavations and discoveries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For instance, in 1751 after the many finds gathered through the excavations in Italy at the Bay of Naples (1738) and Pompeii (1748), the Society of Antiquaries was formed in London. Archaeology began gaining prominence as a legitimate discipline. Soon after the society was established, their journal was published, with discussions of various archaeological issues and artifacts.

In 1799, this initial period of success was followed by the amazing discovery in Egypt of the Rosetta Stone pictured here (from 196 BC and weighing 1,700 pounds). The astonishing find, a trilingual basalt stone, contained a royal decree (from 196 BC) by Ptolemy V to the priests of Memphis, Egypt, written in Egyptian hieroglyphic (top), a cursive form of hieroglyphic known as Demotic (center), and Greek (bottom). The stone provided the key to deciphering hieroglyphics and was crucial to understanding much of Egypt's history. This crucial find led to the publication of *Description de L'Égypte* (1809-1813), which greatly enhanced our understanding of Egyptian language, customs, and culture.

Archaeology would continue to gain acceptance in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through the amazing discoveries and research of Paul-Emile Botta (Iraq), Sir Flinders Petrie (Egypt), William F. Albright (Israel), and Austen Layard (Iraq)

Objections to Archaeology and the Discovery of Historical Truth

There are several objections to the knowability of history and to archaeology as a valid discipline. History is indeed a significant *contributing* factor to the discovery of truth. However, rarely, if ever, is it a *determining* factor in establishing a truth. There are several reasons for this:

1. Antiquity (the age of something) does not prove veracity. There are many old errors (for example, earth is the center of our solar system—geocentricity).
2. The evaluator of history is dependent upon fallible human senses that can, and do, often make mistakes. This is not to say that fallible investigators cannot make correct evaluations and draw accurate conclusions; rather, it is a call to humility and an acknowledgment of our limitations when approaching historical issues.
3. The historian is rarely presented with the luxury of possessing a complete, detailed account of past events or viewpoints. Rather, he

or she is offered brief vignettes or isolated portraits, and in some cases, it is secondhand information. Therefore, we must be content with conclusions based on partial knowledge. This should not deter the attempt at an objective investigation, since all disciplines are confronted with similar challenges by historical human frailty. The alternative is complete historical agnosticism, which is not acceptable, and may even be self-defeating.

4. The crucial issue of particular bias or prejudice and its ability to obfuscate objectivity inevitably enters into any discussion involving human historical evaluations. Though bias can be a real problem, we make no attempt to discount or altogether dismiss the presence of bias in this book. This is because all prejudices are not created equal. The question is not whether one *possesses* a certain bias, but whether our prejudices are moral and true. We are biased against murder, rape, lying, and theft, and these prejudices influence our evaluations and decisions in life in a healthy manner.
5. Finally, reminding ourselves of the distant vantage point from which contemporary archaeologists and historians interpret ideas and form conclusions about the past should be a call to academic charity. History can be known, and it is with the above assumptions and understandings that the current book is carried out.



Some would claim that archaeology is not a valid discipline and means for discovering historical truth. Usually these kinds of objections center around two false assumptions. First, the assumption that archaeology is not a science since it cannot *repeat* experiments under controlled conditions in the laboratory. In other words, history is past and cannot be duplicated in real time or tested by any empirical means as can the operation of our solar system. However, this objection confuses the role of *operation* science and *origin* science (as mentioned previously). *Operation* science examines *regularities* (things that occur multiple times and can be empirically studied, like the ocean tides and our solar system). Archaeology is an *origin*, or forensic, science, which studies *singularities* (things or events that only occur once and cannot be empirically observed in the laboratory, such as a person's birth, and other historical events such as the creation or evolution of the universe, and crimes). Despite this distinction between the sciences, archaeology is nevertheless a legitimate science, similar to any forensic science.