

A CASE FOR THE AFRICANISATION OF BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

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A case for the Africanisation of Biblical Archaeology

Abstract

This study critically examines the state of Biblical Archaeology on the African continent, and seeks to answer the question whether Biblical Archaeology can be considered an African scientific discipline. A *scientific* discipline is a well-defined field within science, characterised by its focus, methods, and body of knowledge. An *African* scientific discipline is viewed (Akpan 2011, 19) as a systematic body of knowledge, methodologies, and indigenous knowledge systems developed by African peoples to understand, explain, and manipulate their physical and metaphysical environment for the advancement of human life. An African scientific discipline is thus distinguishable from Western science by its holistic approach, combining empirical observation with cultural, spiritual, and communal values.

Through a comprehensive exploration, i.e., an epistemological, historiographical and colonial study of its origins, this research investigates the making and nature of Biblical Archaeology. Then, the relevance of Biblical Archaeology gets explored through a thorough review of African Biblical Hermeneutics, followed by a closer look into the great significance of Biblical Archaeology within African Biblical Scholarship. The Africanisation of Biblical Archaeology attempted in this study is still at its earliest stage; further research needs to follow.

Key Words

Biblical Archaeology, African Biblical Hermeneutics, Africanisation, African scientific discipline

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1. Introduction

1.1 Summary of the Study

Given the centrality of the Bible within African Christianity, it is important to make an effort to understand the Bible in its own context. However, my undergraduate theological studies showed no interest in (a) artefacts and ecofacts – the non-literary objects such as bones, weapons, pottery, jewellery, houses, streets, and city walls; and (b) literary sources – like form of monuments, ostraca, and papyri.

Yet, these literary and non-literary objects belong to the world of the Bible. So, I developed the question why African Biblical Scholarship appears disinterested in the discipline of Biblical Archaeology. And, eventually, I wondered how African Biblical Scholarship would look like if it paid closer attention to Biblical Archaeology?

As a result, this study critically examines the state of Biblical Archaeology on the African continent, and seeks to answer the question whether Biblical Archaeology can be considered an African scientific discipline.

The key research question is: How can Biblical Archaeology become an African scientific discipline? The following are the sub-questions that will enable the author to respond to the main research question:

- What comprises Biblical Archaeology?
- Why is Biblical Archaeology not part of African Biblical Scholarship?
- How can Biblical Archaeology be made into an African scientific discipline?

The objectives that will assist the author to achieve his goal are:

- To explore what makes up Biblical Archaeology.
- To investigate the reason behind Biblical Archaeology's non-incorporation into African Biblical Scholarship.
- To look into the ways in which Biblical Archaeology can become an African an scientific discipline.

1.2 Enduring Great Mysteries

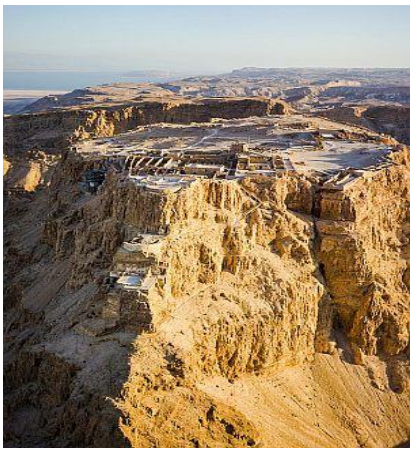
Masada and the Ark of the Covenant are two of the ever enduring great mysteries of the Bible, and their fascinating tales warrant my brief mention before I embark on the task at hand. The rationale for Masada's choice is its unique geological formation and its archaeologically interesting history of the Zealots. The choice of the Ark of the Covenant is based on the fact that it is a biblical narrative that is appealing to archaeology and this sacred relic is still elusive to the archaeologists. Furthermore, its Ethiopian version highlightes Africa as part of the Holy Land.

Finally, as this study is about the Africanisation of Biblical Archaeology, it is imperative for the author to briefly touch on African heritage sites, in particular the preserved architecture and residential structures on slavery in Stellenbosch (South Africa) and Ghana (West Africa).

1.2.1 Masada

Masada is a huge rock formation sticking out from the eastern edge of the Judean plateau, with a very steep drop on all sides (Pearlman 1967, 8). Its flat top is about 396.24 metres above the shore of the Dead Sea and is shaped like a diamond. It measures about 594.36 metres from its northern to its southern points and about 198 metres from east to west.





Masada and excavated ruins atop Masada (Messianic Bible, 2024)

Pearlman points out that though it was very difficult to climb to the top, it was doable from the two sides: one approach would be along the sharp eastern slope, negotiating its narrowness and constant meanderings that resembled a snake path. Walking along it was like balancing on a tight rope, and the least slip on either side would have meant certain death.

The other route would be from the west, along a spur which linked up the side of the fortress at some distance from the top. From there one had to walk cautiously upward over a series of menacing, zigzagging ibex paths.

As described above, Masada was a natural fortress and nature had provided excellent defences for those occupying Masada's summit. It is reminiscent of one southern African summit, namely Thaba Bosiu. Briefly, Thaba Bosiu is a sandstone plateau located approximately 24 km east of Maseru (Lesotho) with an area of about two square kilometres and a height of 1,804 metres above sea level. Mzilikazi attempted to attack Moshoeshoe I (King of Basotho nation) at Thaba Bosiu, trying to gather strength after escaping Shaka Zulu

rule with no success in his quest. Furthermore, European invaders in 1852 and the Boers of the Orange Free State were unable to storm Moshoeshoe's mountain stronghold during the attempted siege of Thaba Bosiu in 1865.

Furthermore, Nhlangakazi Mountain in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa is revered as a "Holy Mountain" by the Nazareth Baptist Church (Shembe), a major African-initiated church. The mountain is a unique spiritual site and considered a "Mecca" for the faith, where they believe the boundary between heaven and earth is thin It is a place of spiritual cleansing and communion with ancestors.

Lastly, Modimolle Mountain, located in Limpopo, South Africa, is also historically distinguished as a sacred, steep site often revered as a place of refuge and ancestral power. Because of its treacherous nature, legends warn that those climbing it to escape or defy the ancestors do not come back, historically functioning more like a spiritual stronghold than a conventional military hideout. But in the conflict context, it was a scene of battles including engagements between the Bapedi and Boers.

Besides its unique geological formation, what makes Masada so significant and archaeologically attractive is the history of the Zealots hidden in that fortress (66 CE), and what they did upon realising that the Romans' victory was certain – during the siege of Masada about 74 CE. This nearly impregnable fortress served as the last stand for the extremist group of as many as 960 Jewish Zealots, who fled there with their families in more or less 66 CE from Jerusalem.

> Yet, while freedom is our own, and we are in possession of our swords, let us make a determined use of them to preserve our liberties. Let us die free men, gloriously

> surrounded by our wives and children. And let us be expeditious. Eternal renown shall be ours by snatching the prize from the hands of our enemies, and triumph over but the bodies of those who dared to be their own executioners. (Pearlman 1967, 27)

In the above extract, Pearlman demonstrates how were these people fervently committed to this suicidal act on themselves and their families. It was very incredible that, when they proved their resolution, none of them faltered in such an arduous endeavour. They kept their love for each other to the bitter end, convinced that there could be no alternative to this regard.

Actually, while they hugged their wives and children, they simultaneously sobbed and stabbed them, consoled by the fact that this drudgery was not done by their enemies. They contemplated this action a necessary excuse for their highly valued and beloved friends not to fall by the hands of the Roman soldiers. This was a Jewish culture obtaining in the ancient world of the Hebrew Bible (e.g., 1 Samuel 31:4).

Afterwards the surviving man chosen to kill the family slayers – having inspected the bodies for any chance survivor – set fire to the palace, and then threw himself on his sword, among his companions. This tragedy, despite all its justification, is still mind-boggling and a telling of how far a human being can go when pushed into a corner.

Today, Israel's second most popular paid tourist attraction is a remote masterpiece of ancient ruins that has remained virtually inaccessible for about two millennia. These ruins called Masada, which are located approximately 56.327 kilometres south of Jerusalem on the eastern edge of the Judean Desert, are the Jewish People's greatest symbols of gritty determination (Messianic Bible, 2024).

However, some notable scholars and intellectuals (Paine, 1994; Vidal-Naquet, 1991; Shapira, 1992; and Ben-Yehuda, 1996) began to critically analyse the historical sources to reveal discrepancies and fabrications within the popular Masada story. According to these scholars, this Masada myth – the early Zionist retelling of the Siege of Masada – is just a selectively constructed narrative to achieve a certain purposes.

> On the professional level, we now know that the Masada myth is a particular selective historically invented sequence (narrative). . . . (Ben-Yehuda 1996, 307)

Furthermore, the critical scholars of Masada story challenge the historical accuracy of the mass suicide narrative, often identifying it as mythmaking or propaganda conceived in detail by Josephus to be convenient for Roman audiences. For instace, Godfrey (2010) asserts that the question of mass suicide cannot be substantiated beyond reasonable doubt by archaeology. “However, given the fact that archaeological excavations have failed to provide any confirmation of a battle, this scenario is more than likely pure fabrication” (Ben- Yehuda 1996, 7). Lastly, Wishau (2014) points out that “the majority of the text that Yadin wrote after the dig received the label ‘nationalistic’, ‘political’, and ‘moral ideological’” (Wishau 2014, 31).

In my humble opinion, the myth was one of the cornerstones of the Zionist Movement, whose desire was to renew the “Jewish life in Zion”, which is the land of Israel. Much as the Masada myth was intended for the good of Israel – such as Israeli national dignity, Israel identity, Israel national heroism and patriotism, and Israel tourism promotion – it was also utilised for Israel’s hidden agenda of propaganda and Israeli propagandist ideology.

1.2.2 The Ark of the Covenant

The Ark of the Covenant is another ever enduring great mystery of the Bible. In the ancient Hebrew Bible times the Ark of the Covenant was held in high esteem by the Israelites as the visible form of God Himself, an endorsement of His presence on earth, as the fortification of His power, and as the mechanism of His transcendent will. Constructed to accommodate (a) the gold jar of manna, (b) Aaron's staff that had germinated, and (c) the stone tablets of the covenant (Hebrews 9:4); it was a wooden chest measuring about 1.143 metres long by 0.686 metre high and wide. Additionally, it was lined internally and externally with pure gold and was surmounted by two winged figures of cherubim that faced each other across its heavy golden lid.



Ark of the Covenant (Study.com, 2024)

For years, the Ark of the Covenant played a pivotal role in the evolving Jewish faith. At the time King Solomon constructed the First Temple in Jerusalem his only aim was to build "an house of rest for the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord" (Hancock 1992, 4). However, between

the 10th and the 6th century BC, this uniquely precious and all-powerful object suddenly disappeared from its place in the Holy of Holies of that Temple – without a trace.

After the rule of King Solomon (970-931 BC), that wise and magnificent monarch, the Ark of the Covenant is virtually never brought up again in the Bible. The fact that an extremely valuable golden chest should simply vanish without a trace, is the main problem and a real historical enigma.

Relating to this it appears rational to point out that some kind of conspiracy may have happened – a deception fabricated by priests and scribes to make sure that the location of the holy relic would endure for all future time concealed. In that case, then it is a secret that masses have attempted to infiltrate and unravel – a confidential matter that has triggered a number of treasure-hunting expeditions. Alas, all of which have not been successful, thus far.

The theories on the disappearance of the Ark of the Covenant are: (a) Hidden by Josiah – some Jewish traditions suggest that King Josiah hid the Ark in the underground chambers or a cave on Mount Nebo before the Babylonian conquest; (b) Taken by the Babylonians – this theory proposes that the Ark was carried away as the spoils of war during the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem in 587/586 BCE (Romer 2023, 10); (c) Arabia tradition – seeing that the arks were still being brought into the battle in the 1920's – as per the traditions from Arabia – the Ark was taken into the battle field, and was seized by the Arabs from the Israelites in the battle and flung on a dunghill; and (d) Ethiopian theory – this popular tradition, especially among the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, states that King Menelik (Solomon's son) took the Ark to Axum (Ethiopia), possibly swapping it for a copy (Romer 2023, 13). On the above-mentioned versions as to the sudden disappearance of the Ark of the Covenant, the Ethiopian version, as expatiated on below appears to be plausible enough to this researcher.

The ancient Ethiopian traditions, inscriptions, and documents on the subject of the Ark of the Covenant – the most cherished asset of the Hebrew people – seem to be the solution to the split in the Hebrew Bible archaeology. The Beta Israel (Black Jews of Ethiopia) and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church maintain that the Ark was brought to Ethiopia in approximately 950 BC by Menelik, son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.

Perhaps the most comprehensive record of what occurred to the Ark is found in the Ge'ez (Ancient Ethiopic) epic *Kebra Nagast* (Glory of the Kings) collated in roughly 1314 CE in Aksum (Leeman 2011, 2). *Sheba-Menelik Cycle* is the earliest component document that is absolutely Israelite (pre-586 BC) and seems to have been initially written in Solomon's reign.

The Cycle commences with the story of the Queen of Sheba paying a visit to Solomon's most important city of Jerusalem. The queen settled for some months and only just before she left Solomon cunningly deceived her into having his child. Understanding that this would give rise to her forfeiting the right to wear the crown in Yemen, the queen delivered her son Menelik on the embankment of the Mai Bela stream in today's Eritrea, and kept her title as queen of the most important city at Aksum.

Upon reaching adulthood, Menelik kept on requesting that his mother revealed his father for he was fed up with his friends' ridicule. In the end, he accepted the queen's go-ahead to pay a visit to Solomon. Solomon was overjoyed to see Menelik – as he looked strikingly like King David – but when Menelik turned down his request to reside in Jerusalem, Solomon formulated some plans for the founding of a client Israelite state in Ethiopia managed by the eldest sons of the hierarchy of Solomon's kingdom.

However, that was not a happy arrangement for the eldest sons of the ruling elite led by Azariah, son of Zadok the high priest, and thus began a course of action to steal the Ark of the Covenant to strengthen and support them physically and mentally in their new land. Azariah administered certain kind of drug to the revellers at the farewell dinner and gained entry to the temple through a hidden door cart off the Ark from under its covering and substituted it with a wooden form.

Menelik was, however, unaware of the theft up until his party had covered some distance from Jerusalem, when Azariah revealed the Ark to him. Menelik was horrified but then agreed to the crime committed. The party moved with haste for Ethiopia. Zadok was alerted by Solomon's dream to realise that the Ark in the Temple was gone. Solomon gave an order for a pursuit at once but by the time his troops arrived at the coast, Menelik had already made his way across to Ethiopia opposite Mt Sinai.



Sabaean incense burners in the Church of Abun Garima at Adi Kaweh (Leeman 2011)

The most substantial inscriptional affirmation corroborating the Sheba-Menelik Cycle is discovered on two of three Sabaean incense burners retained in the Church of Abun Garima at Adi Kaweh in Ethiopia (Leeman 2011, 3).

The immense value of the Ark of the Covenant and its contents cannot be overemphasised. For instance, the Tablets of the Ten Commandments could be more (a) of great significance, (b) fascinating, and (c) mind-blowing of the entire treasures yet to be discovered. No other archaeological discovery would have considerable effect on the destiny of mankind. These Tablets are the bedrock of the Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Their discovery would give rise to a religious revival. Besides, it would inspire scholars and laymen to reassess the past, look closely into the present, and speculate on the future in the manner that cannot be imagined.

It is not known if the genuine Ark still exists, or if it will someday be found. However, if the Ark is discovered, there is a possibility that it may figure into end-time Bible prophecy. The Ark of the Covenant is one of history's enduring mysteries, and archaeologists are sceptical that this ancient artefact can ever be found. For centuries, people have tried in vain to locate and recover the Bible's most sacred relic.

1.2.3 The African Heritage Sites

Of all the historical sites in Africa (Packham, 2023), those associated with the slave trade are the most overwhelming. Combined, they give a sad but important part of the continent's history. Therefore, for a better understanding of Africa nowadays, these museums and structures – commonly referred to as the World Heritage Sites – are the best places to visit.

1.2.3.1 Stellenbosch Heritage Sites (South Africa)

The forced removal of more than twelve million Africans to the North and South America (Kamies, 2022) was one part of the trade-in human bodies. Another aspect, is the group of people who were transported on a ship to the Cape in Indian Ocean slave trade. From the

beginning, the Cape was a slave society, violently established on the backs of men and women who were stripped of their names, cultures and religions, and coerced to work in the kitchens and vineyards of their enslavers. The slavery was introduced in South Africa by Jan Van Riebeeck – a colonial administrator of the Dutch East Indian Company – on his arrival at the Cape with a group of men and women to establish a refreshment station in 1652.

Stellenbosch heritage sites (Kamies, 2021) are deeply interwoven with the labour and suffering of enslaved people, who built, farmed, and maintained the town's Cape Dutch infrastructure. Key sites such as Blettermanhuis, historic wine farms, and Stellenbosch Village Museum bring to the fore the lives of enslaved individuals from Africa and Asia who worked as domestic labourers, skilled artisans, and agricultural workers.

These sites are crucial to understanding that the beauty of Stellenbosch was built on the forced labour, skills, and sacrifices of enslaved men and women from Indonesia, India, Madagascar, and East Africa.

1.2.3.2 Ghana and West African Heritage Sites

Slavery heritage sites in Ghana and West Africa like Cape Coast Castle and Ouidah's Route des Esclaves (Packham, 2023), fulfil a purpose of depressing physical reminders of the transatlantic slave trade. These fotresses and routes operated as central holding points where millions of Africans were imprisoned, tortured, and ultimately forced through the "Door of No Return" to the North and South America.

These sites are today, saddening spaces of rememberance, educational, and tourism, especially, during "Year of Return" commemorations directed at the diaspora.

1.3 Conclusion

The two above-mentioned biblical wonders and African heritage sites have generated an interest in me, following a few years of theological studies, to critically examine the state of Biblical Archaeology on the African continent and wonder whether Biblical Archaeology can be considered an African scientific discipline. What sort of attitudes, challenges and benefits, if any, may accrue to African Biblical Scholarship, considering that Africa is part of the Holy Land with its richness in the untapped archaeological sites and young talent.

Part I – The Making of Biblical Archaeology

2. Biblical Archaeology

In this section we look at Biblical Archaeology as an academic field of study.

2.1 Archaeology as Backdrop

Basically, Archaeology could be defined as the study of the history of ancient peoples, utilising their material remains (Chidume 2023, 19). These material remains comprise objects having to do with all their activities including the remains of the people themselves, such as their bones which survive decay.

In actual fact, the term 'archaeology' is formulated from the two Greek words *archaios* (denoting 'ancient') and *logia* (denoting 'word, study of'). Hence, in its simplest form the term *archaiologia* refers to a study of ancient history or culture and the places from which they have its origin (Price and House 2017, 17). This poses a problem when the indigenous community whose ancient history and culture is studied without involving them in the whole process. A qualitative archaeological investigation in Africa is about the negotiation of knowledge with local and indigenous communities (Pikirayi 2015, 538).

Even though it is argued that what is standard to all kinds of archaeology is the retrieval and detailed investigation of the material culture of past civilisations (Price and House 2017, 17), definitions of archaeology may vary as per the different intents of an individual archaeologist. The common difficulty about these definitions and intents is that they are often idiocentric,

as every individual archaeologist is biased in favour of his or her specific cultural code, thought patterns, and social location (Adamo 2015, 33).

For Sailhamer (1998, 10), different kinds of human remains can be categorised into two essential groupings: (a) artefacts and ecofacts – which are non-literary objects that are the product of human activity such as bones, weapons, pottery, jewellery, houses, streets, and city walls – and (b) literary sources, which are written documents such as form of monuments, ostraca, and papyri. However, artefacts are usually more difficult to interpret for a broken piece by itself tells us very little about the historical events of the day in which it was made. A rare find of a complete literary document – due to fragmentary challenge (Immonen, 2024) – provide their own interpretation. But then, that does not follw that we can clearly understand the ancient languages of the biblical periods. Hence, philology will become handy in such an archaeological challenge.

Archaeology has contributed to the study of the Bible in twofold (Sailhamer 1998, 11): (a) archaeology has turned up with more information with regard to the world of the Bible, and such information has been of use to biblical scholars to understand the events about which the biblical authors wrote; and (b) the archaeological science has aided to demonstrate the historical reliability and trustworthiness of the Bible and archaeology has also furnished a must-have tool for determining the Bible's own trustworthiness in detailing events from the distant past.

Be that as it may, we need to be cautious as per the consideration of the following: (i) A good deal of the biblical material is not likely to be corroborated in direct artefactual or inscriptional evidence, becuse some items are perishable. Ancient texts written on wax tablets and papyrus paper could not have survived the elements. (ii) Most of the biblical narratives are about the

lives of ordinary individuals who have probably left little footprints of their lives. The best that archaeology can do, is to provide us with the times in which such individual lived. (iii) In the cases of prominent people (such as King David), only a small fraction of the ancient sites have actually been identified and excavated. This is because most ancient biblical sites are deliberately left untouched for a future generation of archaeologists with better developed methods and tools. (iv) Remarkably little of the material that is excavated ever gets catalogued and published and hence becomes available for analysis, for the archaeologists are – in accordance with what is moraly correct – hesitant to release the results of their excavations before all the data has been carefully sifted.

As of two centuries ago, the Bible has been subjected to considerable criticism regarding its historical reliability, especially in narrating past events. Some scholars argued that biblical authors were products of an ancient world vastly different from our own, in which little or no attention was given to the careful use of historical sources. In the absence or lack of actual records from the past, these scholars assumed that ancient men such as Moses or Joshua would be unable to write or could not have had access to ancient documents. It was asserted that they would not even have had an alphabet. Such scholars also maintained that most of the accounts in the early parts of the Bible were merely later stories that had been told and retold and often embellished. As they had never heard of such ancient people as the “Hittites” and the “Horites” from other sources, they presumed that the biblical authors simply made them up (Sailhamer 1998, 12). It is necessary to understand the biblical message in its original historical context before we can apply its truths in our time, for such possibility would enable us to add deeper meaning and more reality to our experience with the Bible. The Bible – as Old Testament – is a selective narrative of the history of a people and a place in relation to

God. Therefore, in my humble opinion, to discredit the historical claims of the Bible by demonstrating the absence of supportive data or even contradictory data is a bit unreasonable. In biblical archaeology we operate on the understanding that "the absence of evidence is not necessarily evidence of absence"(Wright 1887, 59). The inaccessibility of the evidence only points to the fact that we are not yet that technologically advanced to develop the right tool for determining such evidence.

However, texts written in ancient Canaanite – the language of the Old Testament books – are now widely verified from the very century in which Moses lived and even much earlier. Such texts – written in an alphabetic script – prove beyond doubt that language flourished in Canaan long before Moses and Israel entered the land and long before the Bible began to be written (Sailhamer, 1998). This archaeological discovery is a victory to the Bible and biblical studies. Not believing in the Bible does not hurt any of the people who believe, as they readily accept the biblical message without checking or proof. But, disbelief in biblical narratives is damaging to archaeology (Gunneweg 2015, 3). This is because, it looks like if field archaeology is unable to locate ancient material evidence, the conclusion is that the Bible is a myth. Today, fortunately, cutting edge analytical techniques in science can establish and detect much more than the human eye, and are able to prove certain facts with objective methods.

Excavations near the modern Turkish village of Bogaskoy have discovered thousands of ancient documents from the ancient capital of a major kingdom of the Hittite people, who once controlled an empire that stretched out into the land of Palestine (Sailhamer, 1998). This is a great archaeological story of how the discovery of a lost empire corroborates biblical history. The identity of the Hittites completely baffled both historians and archaeologists for a number of years. Up until recently, many thought of the Hittites to be an imaginary people

mentioned only in the Bible. Some – though it may seem strange – used the question as evidence of the Bible's fallibility. The prophets of doom argued that there was no archaeological or historical evidence to support their existence (Eames and Haddad, 2023). That being so, the biblical account either could not be trusted or was entirely not correct. Even though the early twentieth century saw the mounting evidence of the Hittite civilization, certain scholars persisted with eitherrejecting the presence of the Hittites completely or believing that the Hittites could not have been more than a small and insignificant tribal entity. Today, our understanding of the Hittites has changed remarkably as attributable to large-scale archaeological excavations, coupled with the discovery and successful interpretation of troves of clay inscriptions. Such exposure has assisted us in knowing more about the Hittites than ever. And, the understanding we now have of the Hittites closely parallels their description in the biblical record.

Scholars of History time and again referred to the Babylonian king Belshazzar, mentioned in the Book of Daniel chapter 5. They argue that the Bible was in error in recognising him as the last king of Babylon. These scholars contended that this king was merely a figment of the biblical author's imagination, as he was not only the last king but also there was no other mention of this king in ancient documents. However, ancient texts unearthed in this century from the last days of the Babylonian empire do mention Belshazzar by name. What actually happened, those texts identify Belshazzar's father, Nabonidus, as the last king of Babylon. We now know from ancient Babylonian records that Nabonidus fled Babylon in the last years of his reign and left his son Belshazzar to rule the city (Sailhamer, 1998). Belshazzar is named as the king who was ruling in Babylon on the night the kingdom succumbed to the army of Cyrus the Great of Persia. Actually, he was sharing power with his father, Nabonidus, who ruled over

Babylon for seventeen years (556-539 BCE). Belshazzar was unknown to history for a number of years, that is why ancient writers like Brossus (250 BCE), appear to be naming Nabonidus as the last king of Babylon (Burstein 1978, 28). This brought about some nineteenth century cynics to question the truthfulness of the narrative of Belshazzar in the Book of Daniel. For instance, Casar von Lengerke (1835) described it as “pure fiction” and “a palpable forgery”, thus “the whole story is disfigured and falsified by the author, who was neither an eye-witness of the occurrences, nor accurately acquainted with the history of them”. His synopsis was based on the fact that (Stuart 1850, 143-144): (a) the last monarch of Babylon was not named Belshazzar, (b) he was not a son of Nebuchadnezzar, and (c) he was not killed on the night Babylon yielded to the Persians. Other scholars (Josephus 2024; Zockler 1901) who willingly received the historicity of Daniel’s narrative presumed in general that Belshazzar was an alternate name for another Babylonian king. The identity of Belshazzar (windle 2024), has been firmly established since the nineteenth century through the translation of a number of cuneiform inscriptions, found at Ur (Iraq) in 1853. With these (and other) inscriptions the historicity of Belshazzar, the crown prince and the eldest son of Nabonidus has been firmly established. The complete number of royal inscriptions and datable letters from Babylon have filled in many details from the coregency of Nabonidus and Belshazzar. These, along with the testimony of ancient historians, assert quite a number of details in the biblical text that were once doubted by critical scholars of earlier generations.

The myriad of these findings correlate either directly or indirectly to the people, places, events, customs, and beliefs logged in the Bible. Hence, the contestation by critical scholars that the Bible’s historical descriptions are as the results of human masterminding can no longer be convincing without meeting head-on strong counterarguments. Instead, the

historical reliability of the Bible has assumed a definite or distinctive form, and has gathered improved momentum taking into consideration the latest discoveries unearthed through archaeological excavations of the Holy Land.

For present purposes, therefore, this study embraces the following definition of Biblical Archaeology:

> a special branch of archaeological study, shedding light on the Biblical text. Biblical archaeology is a scientific discipline, where the philological and exegetical study of the Biblical text is augmented with the study of archaeological material. Biblical archaeology is not only identical with the study of the archaeology of Palestine or Israel, but has a broader scope and includes as well the study of archaeology in other parts of the Near East and the Mediterranean. (Strange 2013, 64)

By characterising Biblical Archaeology as a scientific discipline, Strange understands that this branch of archaeology is a specialised, formalised branch of knowledge – like physics, biology, sociology, et cetera – defined by its own unique subject matter, theories, and systematic research methods, and it acts as a unit of scientific organisation, training, and professional communication (ScienceDirect.com). The connotation behind a philological and exegetical study is that Biblical Archaeology: (a) studies language in historical, written, and literary sources, focusing on the development, structure, and interrelations of languages through text analysis; and (b) is about critical, objective interpretation of a biblical text to uncover its original, intended meaning, instead of imposing personal views onto it. Strange's widened scope of the study of archaeology that includes the other parts of the Near East and the Mediterranean is quite workable, as it also recognises and incorporates African part of the Holy Land (namely, Egypt, Nubia, Ethiopia, et cetera).

2.2 The Rationale for Biblical Archaeology

Theology necessitates archaeological correctives to endure (Strange 2013, 75), for Christian theology is not an everlasting philosophy but a theology – that utilises biblical exegesis, rational analysis, and argument – rooted on the course of events in human history as per their Christian beliefs and practices. In his plea for the continuation of Biblical Archaeology, Strange observes that nowadays archaeology and theology have separated from each other. I would concur with his reasoning that besides the unavoidability factor this is needed for the development, to keep their intellectual integrity. However, to make use of these two disciplines in a sound and proper way, it is imperative that one acquires a solid archaeological education and practical experience, also a solid practical experience in Biblical exegesis. This is because both fields have since expanded and specialised to a level that it is this today not possible for any scholar to cover both disciplines. Therefore, it is essential that we establish a close cooperation between exegetes with enough experience in archaeology to understand archaeological reasoning on one hand and professional archaeologists with enough interest in Biblical studies on the other hand, so that the Bible study keeps its foundation in history and not dissolve in literary and philosophical theorising.

That being the case, Biblical exegesis is of vital importance for theological understanding and should think back to and inquire into the historical foundation of faith. Even so, this bedrock is to be figured out in the history and cultural history of the Levant which runs the risk of being systematically misunderstood in the absence of archaeology in its most eclectic sense.

Biblical archaeology is a portion of the wider field of Syro-Palestinian archaeology which is organised and carried out throughout the region encompassed by modern Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria (Cline 2009, 1). In actual fact, it is archaeology that sheds light on the

narratives, descriptions, and debates in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament from the second millennium BCE, the time of Abraham and the Patriarchs, through the Roman period in the first millennium CE. Consequently, the field of biblical archaeology – as Cline observes – is flourishing these days, with popular interest at an all-time high. For me, the media hype which comes with such popular interest in biblical archaeology is a cause for concern. Furthermore, in spite of the work of biblical archaeologists – more than a century ago – key questions still remain unresolved. For instance, the extent of David and Solomon's empires, an exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt, et cetera.

Biblical archaeologists directly check out the material culture of the lands and time periods indicated in the Bible, and the people, places, and events discussed in those ancient texts, to bring them to life and to re-establish the culture and history of the region. However, texts differ as some texts are more accurate than others. Hence, not all texts can be used to corroborate data obtained from field excavations. It is in the question of the historical accuracy of the texts where the interests of professional biblical archaeologists and the educated public overlap, seeing that it is the quintessential biblical questions that still intrigue the public. Alas, answering these basic questions is not always easy. Moreover, the question of the historical accuracy of the texts may also result in a clash between the archaeologists and indigenous community with regard to interpretation, namely the Western archaeologists and African communities. Notwithstanding the misconception obtaining, biblical archaeologists do not consciously and intentionally begin their work in order to either prove or disprove elements of the Hebrew Bible or the New Testament through archaeology (Cline 2009, 3). Professional archaeologists are concerned with the reinforcement, substantiation, corroboration, backing, and supporting of Biblical narratives utilising the archological finds.

However, that will depend on the availability of the archaeological discoveries, at times the evidence is yet to be uncovered to back or corroborate the biblical narratives. That is why we have maximalist and minimalist biblical scholars. With the minimalists the absence of the archaeological evidence implies that the biblical narrative is fictitious, whereas maximalists operate on the premise that the absence of the archaeological evidence is not necessarily the evidence that the biblical narrative is not true as the evidence may be uncovered by the archaeologists in future.

Archaeological practice has something to do with the insistence on the historical and archaeological records. Price and House (2017, 15) maintain that even though we cannot go back to the ancient past, it can reach us through the historical and archaeological records. The historical record comprises documents (plus the Bible) that have been kept possession of or retrieved in living societies to safeguard body of facts of earlier habits and practices. The archaeological documentation consists of culturally placed objects for safekeeping that are not any more involved in any progressing society however, once found, provide (a) substantiation, (b) support, and (c) corroboration along with the historical record of the ancient past. While these scholars emphasise the importance and value of record keeping in both history and archaeology, one should add that the continual care of accumulated and created data is an ethical obligation in the fields of archaeology and cultural heritage management (Clark 2015, 2). Having said that, this task has become complex owing to the increasing utilisation of digital methodologies in these fields and the complication of the resulting data. Digital data preservation companies have surfaced since this methodological move, but their policies – championing the democratisation of academic data – may clash with the legal obligations imposed by the countries where data originate. Hence, scholars face

an unavoidable option between two obligations, one ethical and the other legal. Whilst the amount of digital data increases and the choices for preservation remain essentially skewed with research norms and project workflows, the digital dilemma leaves the integrity of data in danger of loss.

In the event that the Bible is regarded as essentially a religious or theological document in contrast to the archaeological data, there will be less inclination to view the Bible as a dependable historical witness to the archaeological sites and the finds that are acquired from them.

Alternatively, the Bible will be given prime concern in both the choosing of archaeological sites and the inspection of their acquisition, if and only if the Bible is looked at as both a religious document and historical document acting jointly with the archaeological data.

These contrasting schools of thought have today developed into recognisably different camps referred to as “minimalism” and “maximalism”. Basically, biblical minimalist scholars minimalize (do not prioritize) the biblical data in deference to the archaeological data, whilst biblical maximalist scholars maximize (prioritize) the biblical data as regards to the archaeological data (Price and House 2017, 20). To simplify this further, maximalist scholars (Lendering, 2020) presume that the biblical narrative is more or less correct, unless archaeologists substatiate that it is otherwise; whereas minimalist scholars assume that the biblical account should be read as fiction, unless it can be corroborated archaeologically .

Minimalist scholars are disapproving of past rash interpretations of sites or their discoveries that make them in keeping with biblical texts, having knowledge that later digging ups have at times changed previous conclusions. Despite that, they are aware that latest discoveries

have nullified out-dated negative notions on the Bible. For instance, refer to the Babylonian King Balshazzar as mentioned in the Book of Daniel chapter 5 (Sailhamer 1998, 12) – and recounted above. Prhaps at this juncture, Sailhamer is emphasising an important point – which at times is overlooked – that a minimalist is not an atheist skeptic who denies everything. But, a biblical scholar who thinks (and pronounces) that the normal backing evidence is presently missing, which spurs other biblical scholars into vigorously searching.

Furthermore, minimalist scholars assert that the biblical data ought to be re-examined with respect to its historicity – although not its theological teaching – where the archaeological data could not demonstrate either the existence or occupancy of a site as stated in the biblical chronology. Case in point, the inadequacy of archaeological substantiation within a biblical chronology – for patriarchs, Exodus, Kings David and Solomon, and Jerusalem – has driven other minimalist scholars to come to the conclusion that such never existed. Thus, they (Price and House 2017, 21) hold that their recounts are the idyllic aetiologies or religious misinformation crafted in the postexilic period. Archaeologists delve into the depths of time, figuring out the remnants of ancient civilisations making every effort to rebuild their accounts (Andrews et al, 2000). However, the task is challenging because the ruins and archaeological sites encountered are fragmented puzzles, each piece offering a glimpse into a different aspect of the past. The complication of the archaeological ruins lies both in their physical disarray as well as in their temporal and spatial dispersion. The artefacts and structures unearthed are usually scattered across both time and space, making it difficult to recognise and understand a logical narrative. What is recognised and understood as a simple archaeological site nowadays is, in actual fact, the composition of layers depicting several periods and cultural practices.

Although minimalist scholars do not dismiss the usefulness of the Bible, they think of it essentially as religious or theological narratives that may comprise fragments of historical information instead of the whole and dependable historical record.

Quite the opposite, maximalist scholars evaluate the entire recorded corroboration of the biblical text – in a detailed and analytical way – and hold that the absence of evidence is not of necessity evidence of absence (Price and House 2017, 21). In other words, the maximalist biblical scholars operate on the premise that the lack of archaeological substantiation that the biblical narrative is true or real does not then serve as sufficient corroboration that the biblical account should necessarily be false or untrue. In simpler terms, failing to find the backing for a claim does not automatically support that the claim is false, and this may be an indication that a better tool is yet to be developed.

Biblical maximalist scholars are of the opinion that the archaeological data ought to be clear and in need of no further explanation before merging it with literary data, be it from the Bible or any other record. They discern that the Bible has compilation issues and that cautious handling should be considered before an effort is made to identify biblical or other historical similarities or connections. Even so, it is probable that the digging up in the sites (or possible sites) brought up in the Bible will have a point of contact with the history it registers.

Besides, in view of the inherent limitations[1] of archaeology, maximalist scholars maintain that the literary texts ought to be examined (and prioritised) as a comprehensive documentation

[1] The inherent limitations of archaeology are:

Fragmentary evidence – The limitation of fragmentary evidence in archaeology is the inherent insufficiency of the historical record, because at most a part of past material culture is recovered from sites, and this recovered material is often broken down by natural processes, looting, or incomplete excavation (Immonen, 2024). This fragmentation can conceal complete cultural practices, bias interpretations, and hinder comprehensive understandings of past societies.

on the understanding that the archaeological data is to recount its narrative in the detailed context of history.

Therefore, this task favours the maximalist approach as it believes: (a) in the critiquing of the complete documentary evidence of the biblical text; (b) in the archaeological data that speak for itself before combining with literary data, be it from the Bible or any other document; and (c) that owing to the inherent limitations of archaeology, accepts that the literary texts should

Subjective interpretation – Whilst endeavouring for a more 'accurate' or 'proper' interpretation of archaeological sites (Araya 2024, 169), it is imperative to discern the inherent limitations of such efforts. Every interpretative intervention, regardless how well-intentioned, brings in new layers of complexity and potential cacophony. Hardly does archaeology furnish a comprehensive bird's eye view of ancient realities (Araya 2024, 159); rather, it presents a selective picture moulded by methodological approaches, ingrained biases, and interpretative paradigms. Besides, archaeological practice and theory are many a time shaped by ideological underpinnings. Archaeology can be and has been utilised by nation-states and other powerful people to construct and legitimise specific narratives about the past, serving political, cultural, or social agendas. This reality, therefore, dictates that an essential and critical engagement with the interpretative processes and ensure that the voices and perspectives of diversified communities are brought on board.

Challenges in *reflecting societal structures* – Archaeology battles to reveal societal structures attributable to: (a) fragmentary evidence and (b) the inherent bias of subjective interpretation of material culture, which is the primary source of data. Incorporated impediments are: (i) the challenge of moving beyond technical actions to enact practical societal change, (ii) the subjective nature of classifying and understanding social forms, and (iii) the influence of the archaeologists' own social positions. Archaeology and archaeological work are closely related to contemporary societal challenges; and archaeology can contribute a lot to the understanding, contextualising, and working out of global issues from migration to environmental change (Huvila et al 2022, 296-305). In accordance with how archaeology impacts society, the society together with societal changes (and challenges) impact archaeology and its public mission of preserving and interpreting the physical and curating the informational archaeological record.

Problems of *resource-intensive research* – Since the past two decades, e-infrastructures have become forever critical for the conduct and progress of research in all branches of scientific enterprise (Vlachidis, 2017). Progressively collaborative, distributed, and data-intensive research necessitates the sharing of resources (such as data, tools, and computing facilities) via e-infrastructure along with the support for effective co-operation among research groups (ESF 2011; ESFR 2016). Additionally, there is a strong belief that – with large datasets, e-infrastructure and advanced computing techniques – new scientific questions can be sorted out. The archaeological research community has been quick to embrace several digital methods and tools for data acquisition, organisation, analysis and presentation of research results of individual projects. However, the provision of e-infrastructure and services – for data sharing, discovery, access and re-use for the heritage sector – is falling behind other research fields, like the natural and life sciences. The ramification is big-time fragmentation of archaeological data and limited capability for collaborative research across institutional and national, including the disciplinary boundaries (Aspock and Geser 2014).

be considered (and prioritised) as a complete record if the archaeological data will have its narration in the full context of history.

2.3 The Value of Biblical Archaeology

The elements on the importance of archaeology (Currid, 2021) are: First, archaeology refreshes our memory on the "crudeness" of the biblical narratives, as it provides us with the material cultural context of the ancient past. Additionally, archaeology helps in revealing how the ancients went on with their daily lives with regard to how they: grew their crops, built their structures, buried their dead, controlled their water sources, and other aspects and features of their physical culture. I presume that the concept of "crudeness " in this case refers to the biblical account that is about simple people living their simple lifeways in a simple environment that is ancient. In those days life was different from today's where we live in a sophisticated modern world, that is beset with all the trappings inherent to it.

Second, archaeology is on the subject of history, because archaeology provides material endorsement – support, substantiation, backup, reinforcement, and corroboration – of the reality that biblical events did occur in history.

Third, archaeology is a matter of interest – and a matter of curiosity, enthusiasm, and fascination – seeing that excavation work assists to stimulate the Christian's interest, and besides it is useful in making the Bible come to life.

Fourth and final, archaeology is about fellowship. This is specifically because archaeology becomes useful in making the Bible come to life. Besides, digging up work can boost comradeship spirit among Christian diggers.

Be it for personal or professional study (Bouma, 2018), it is inevitable that one will come across something in the Bible that connects or links to its ancient persons, places, or events. Consequently, there is no better way to understand this past context – in order to figure out the message in its historical context and utilise it in our own time – than to take advantage of the historical and archaeological record.

On a slightly different note from Currid (2021) above regarding the value of archaeology, Bouma (2018, 26) identifies four specific methods that archaeology utilises in its contribution to biblical studies:

First is to substantiate and back up the Bible. Archaeology brings historical material corroboration and endorsement to the historical accounts in the text of Scripture. Moreover, archaeological process pieces together a narrative from multiple, fragmentary, and conflicting Bible accounts.

Secondly, as for carefully conducting the original text into any receptor language, archaeology comes up with the underlying support for restoring the original form, grammar, and syntax of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek words of the Bible as well as helping to clarify their accurate meaning and usage in the time they were written down. Including, at times rectifying and clarifying our wording of the Bible.

Thirdly, as we do not live in the world of the Bible – in spite of the fact that some may geographically live in that region – archaeology comes in handy in shedding new light on the

world of the Bible. by accurately reconstructing the necessary context surrounding an event. Additionally, archaeology furnishes us with such data as to clarify the world of the Bible. And, such clarification makes certain that we desist from misinterpreting and misapplying the Bible.

Fourth and lastly, archaeology complements the Bible's historical, cultural, and religious information. Digging ups in the biblical lands have added a complementary witness to the biblical authors that both enhance the biblical narratives and lends more weight to their authenticity.

Even though, biblical archaeology has come up with more pertinent information that can be in agreement with the narratives of the Old Testament than with those of the New Testament, it has also contributed wonderful insights into both the Hebrew and Christian Bibles, including correlations with both.

Some scholars such as Cline (2009) contend that the Bible is an indispensable source of data that is useful in clarifying and making it easier to understand an ancient life and practices. In the event we temporarily set aside the religious significance and the controversial issues relating to the historical dependability and reliability of the text, it is beyond the shadow of a doubt that the Bible is a historical record of pioneering value (Cline 2009, 4). Besides, Bible is an ancient source that many a time comprises further details and descriptions of the Holy Land of the distant past. Additionally, it is a source that can be taken advantage of in illuminating the ancient world.

Biblical data are indeed historically conclusive, as maintained by Cline (2009) above, because two of the greatest twentieth century archaeologists (Albright, 1960 and Glueck, 1959) both

praised the Bible – even though they were non-Christian and secular in their training and personal beliefs – as being the single most accurate source document from history. On many occasions, the Bible has been found to be accurate in its places, dates, and records of events. No other "religious" document comes even close (Morris, 2026). Furthermore, the nineteenth-century biblical critics used to discredit the historicity of the Hittites, the Horites, the Edomites, and various other peoples, nations, and cities mentioned in the Bible. Those critics have long been silenced by the archaeological finds. However, few critics dare to question the geographical and ethnological reliability of the Bible. Nothing exists in ancient literature that has been even remotely as well-confirmed in accuracy as has the Bible.

When archaeology examines the historical data made available for use from a written source, it does have an advantage in shedding light on the limited data from the field – as exemplified by the Babylonian Chronicles[2]. And, when the Bible is properly deemed as a historical (not simply religious or theological) document, it may furnish the needed historical information to pinpoint archaeological sites and assist in the proper interpretation of finds.

The science of archaeology should be understood as a modern method of making interesting and significant information known, regarding the vanished record of the ancient world and the world of the Bible. Whilst its intention is not to prove or disprove the historicity of the people and events recorded in Scripture, archaeology could be of great assistance in substantiating the historical reality and accordance of the Bible and to demonstrate that faith has a factual foundation – in the specific case of the modernist (or post-Enlightenment)

[2] The Babylonian Chronicles are a collection of approximately 45 cuneiform clay tablets that document significant events in ancient Babylonian and Mesopotamian history on a year-by-year basis (Waerzeggers, 2012), from the reign of Nabonassar (747 BCE) to the Parthian period. Written by Babylonian astronomers, these chronicles provide reliable historical narratives about the Neo-Babylonian Empire and are invaluable for understanding the political history and for cross-referencing biblical accounts, especially concerning the Babylonian exile.

people. Besides, archaeology lends a hand in revealing and shedding light on the background and context of Scripture so that the strange world of the distant past becomes easily understood in this day and age.

Moreover, even though archaeology has regained possession of only a small part of the whole, that tiny portion has been a huge success in coming up with a positive corroboration of biblical historicity. Be that as it may, archaeology ought not to be thought of as an unbiased[3] and complete statement in connection with either historical or biblical interpretation.

To all intents and purposes, biblical archaeology is about tangible remains of the history of people and places within the biblical context. Whilst the Bible has a theological frame of mind, archaeology has a scientific standpoint. Be that as it may, upon their combination, a new discipline is brought into existence – linking archaeological research with biblical interpretation – to the benefit of both the academy and the pulpit. This combination proved to be a factor in the advent and advancement of archaeology.

In this chapter a lot has been said by different biblical scholars regarding the importance of archaeology as a discipline, but what is central to me – as a Christian in Africa – is the fact that archaeology has shown the historical reliability and trustworthiness of the Bible. As we read the Bible in the proper manner, we are at times drawn into delving deep into its ancient communities, places, and what took place in order to attain a firm mental grasp of the message in its historical context for our benefit in the present. To achieve this feat we rely on both the historical and archaeological records. Lastly, there will always be prolonged public

[3] Archaeology is not a science – to be rigid – but is generally considered a scientific discipline (Levy and Stewart, 2025), particularly when applying scientific methods and techniques to study the material remains of past human life and activities. While (biblical) archaeology draws on scientific methods and analysis, it also comprises aspects of the humanities, including the interpretation and understanding of human cultures and societies.

disagreements around the historical phenomena studied in inquiries, hence the existence of conflicting evidence remains. In the case of the Bible, such is sorted out through the handy archaeological process that pieces together an account from a number of fragmentary and contradicting Bible stories.

3. The Politics of Biblical Archaeology

3.1 Background

The entanglement of archaeology with politics in the Middle East (Blenkinsopp 2002, 169) dates back to the era of Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798. Palestine is the only place in that region where this problem has manifested its prevalence at an alarming proportion, as it begins with the initial phase of planning the land and changing the names of settlements which is then followed by the confiscations of properties belonging to the Arab residents. This action is founded on the main declaration of political ideology referred to as "the myth of the empty land".

In the time of the Hellenistic period – where the interest in the ethnic roots was high and Greek cultural influence reached its peak in the Mediterranean and beyond – archaeology made available for use justification for the initial Israelite invasion of and exclusionary claim on the land. In this manifestation (Blenkinsopp, 2002), the myth seems to be a retrojection on the claims of the land belonging to the ruling Judeo-Babylonian elite – in the time of the early Persian period recorded in certain sacred scriptures. The myth of the empty land is the fabrication of the Judaeo-Babylonian settler community which achieved social, economic and religious supremacy in Judah during the first century of Iranian domination. The notion that these diaspora Jews came back to a land emptied of inhabitants by the Babylonians had the advantage of avoiding embarrassing questions of legitimate ownership of real estate. This "return to Zion" is a defining moment in the consciousness of the Jewish people, and it was unavoidable that it would be seen as an expectation of and model for the Zionist settlement in Palestine in modern times. With equal inevitability, the question would come up whether

this empty land myth could find any backing in the archaeological record of the last phase of Iron Age Palestine, corresponding to the last half-century of the Neo-Babylonian period (586-539 BCE). .

Actually, the “myth of the empty land” started with the dominant Judaeo-Babilonian elite in Judah under Persian rule, and is inscribed in the book of Chronicles composed either shortly before or after the conquests of Alexander. During the Hellenistic period, at a time when interest in national and ethnic origins was running high, the myth then incited one of several narratives of the ‘initial’ Israelite occupation of the Palestinian hill country presumably empty of inhabitants. Together with the different account represented in the book of Joshua, and corroborated by numerous subsidiary myths – for instance, regarding the ethnic origins of the indigenous peoples – it served in due course as historical legalisation for an exclusive claim to territory, at least in the sense that others could share space only on condition established by those who claimed to be original settlers.

Besides, the influence of the myth is still utilised even today (Blenkinsopp, 2002). South Africa is the case in point. The Empty or Vacant Land Theory is a theory that was propagated by White settlers in nineteenth-century South Africa to back their claims to land. Nowadays this theory is described as a figment, the Empty Land Myth for there is no historical or archaeological evidence to substantiate this theory (SAHO, 2015). In spite of the evidence to the contrary many parties in South Africa, especially right wing nationalists of Western background, assert that the theory still remains valid to confirm their claims to land-ownership in the country (Holden 1866). Much of the notion of the “vacant land” myth in African colonial history rests on a White misunderstanding – though deliberate – of African sovereignty and land use. Most of the indigenous communities (Africans and Khoikhoi)

utilised the land in a rotation, often leaving large sections of land fallow whilst they cultivated another region or moved their herds to greener pastures. As pasturalists they would migrate through various grazing lands, as a result of that appearing to leave a grazing ground, not in current use “empty”. Lastly, the myth of the empty land had become a central principle of both British and Afrikaner identity in nineteenth-century South Africa and had been applied as a justification for the seizure and settlement of indigenous peoples’ land. The Apartheid Regime had transformed the myth to serve its own ends. They manipulated it to endorse the Homelands Act and to keep the indigenous African people (totalling 70% of the population) to particular localities -- comprising 13% of the total landmass -- arguing that the rest of the country had been “empty” and therefore could not form part of their Homelands. However, since the eighties both historical and archaeological evidence has demonstrated that the myth of the empty land simply cannot be supported (Marks 1980, 12). Instead of being a historical fact, it is a convenient invention that has served as a political tool.

3.2 Biblical Archaeology and Israeli Nationalist Archaeology

The subsections of archaeology such as biblical archaeology and Israeli nationalist archaeology have very little marked effect in the general archaeological debate, for – in the Middle East – its practitioners are only working with a deferrable segment and specific problems (Oestigaard, 2007). The key role of archaeology as a nationalistic discipline is to ‘anchor’ the nation by making it concurrently timeless and ancient, and hence nationalism itself has its reasons and its roots in the past (Sorensen 1996, 26). And, if a nation is ‘anchored’ in a certain territory, within that restricted geographical space or territory there are no possibilities for other nations to ‘anchor’. The ideology behind this ‘anchor’ is nationalism.

However, that being so, these sections of archaeology had in their possession virtually exclusionary power and influence over knowledge production on which Israel premises its nation state. Furthermore, some scholars (Hawari, 2022; Oestigaard, 2007; Whitelam, 1996) argue that the past is politically misused in the Middle East, and that biblical archaeological research and Israeli nationalist archaeology are prejudiced. “The picture of Israel’s past as presented in much of the Hebrew Bible is a fiction, a fabrication like most pictures of the past constructed by ancient (and, we might add, modern) societies” (Whitelam 1996, 23-24).

Archaeologists can ill afford (Oestigaard 2007, 7), (a) not to be realistic, (b) not to see things as they are, (c) not to see things from a logical standpoint, and (d) not to be able to think critically and objectively. Exemplar: In the Middle East there is a war that is persistent. Jerusalem is the holy city for three of the most prominent world religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Hence, in relation to the situation that is obtaining in that part of the world, Oestigaard contends that the work of the archaeologists can definitely not be confined to the excavation and analysis of pottery. Perhaps, the question as to why are archaeologists doing archaeology should not merely be responded to by the archaelogists themselves. The answer provided – that it is because archaeology is fun, interesting, and they love it – is true but innocent. However, there are other motivations (or persuasions) as well among archaeologists, which (reasons) are hardly a topic for scrutiny though they surely have an influence on the research. It should be recognised that archaeologists do not work and dig solely for themselves. Other social institutions and imterests are involved in the archaeological undertaking, defining the practice (partly by laws and regulations determining what is allowed to be excavated), financing the practice, publishing the results and deciding what kind of museums will be built for the presentation of various nationalistic pasts.

Thus, he asserts that for a realistic archaeologist it begins to be undoable to ascertain the length of arrowheads or pottery sherds without foregrounding how archaeological knowledge is put together and the manner it is utilised in present-day society. And, it is lamented (Oestigaard, 2007) that Biblical archaeologists at all times have a propensity to settle on the religious interpretation when the data permits for a variety of interpretations, whilst Israeli nationalist archaeologists on every occasion have a tendency to decide on the national interpretation when the data gives permission to a number of interpretations. Maybe, we have to be sincere and concede that there is no such thing as a non-political, value-free archaeology, and one of the ideologies that have had most impact on the development of archaeology throughout the world is nationalism. Nationalism is deeply implanted in the very notion of archaeology, in its institutions and its development (Diaz-Andreu and Champion 1996, 2-3).

It is tragic that in the Near East the possibility exists of tracking down a long history of politically motivated archaeology that has been damaging to archaeology, its material, and to ethnic minorities. The manner in which biblical archaeologists and Israeli nationalist archaeologists make a case is highly questionable and doubtful in view of the history of archaeological thought and the nationalistic and political manipulation of the past.

Though these sections of archaeology are excluded in the archaeological debate, they have possessed a considerable part in the putting together of knowledge about the Near East. Explicitly, Israeli nationalist archaeologists are extremely important in the establishment of Israel's past (Oestigaard 2007, 8). In addition, biblical archaeologists enjoy autonomy in their dialogue within Christian deliberations in other parts of the world – particularly in America – and their efforts have had huge marked effect in ethnic establishments in Israel and the

broader Middle East. Maybe again regarding this point we need to pose a question whether archaeologists are responsible for their knowledge production and if that is the case, what are they ought to do with the nations' use or misuse of archaeological knowledge. The use of archaeology to sanction the current situation in the Middle East as a question of interpreting the Bible, is the case in point. In the Middle East archaeology, nationalism, and religious dogmatism have been integrated. Archaeology has played a critical role in attempting to give substance to the truths and the authenticity of the Bible giving justification to the creation of Israel's nation-state. But, what if this nationalism is founded on inaccurate assumptions both archaeologically and theologically? (Whitelam 1996, 23-24). What is concerning is that, despite that biblical archaeology is no longer occupied with substantiating the Bible, the biblical account is however used in historical stories as if it was true.

The major difficulty in the debate has been its exclusivity. From one point of view, theologians dealing with the Hebrew Bible are to some extent marginalised from the discussion by biblical archaeologists for they fall short of "archaeological" debates or substantiations. Yet, from another point of view, besides biblical and Israeli nationalist archaeologists, hardly any foreign archaeologists have been keen on the ancient history of Israel and Palestine.

Therefore, the archaeological debate has within limits lived its own life despite theoretical turn of events in contemporary Western archaeology. Notwithstanding the fact that the international archaeological academy refutes any claims of biblical archaeology as being a serious and significant provider to the "scientific part" of archaeology, the Israelis in their practice of creating myths of ancient Israel make use of the body of facts produced by this branch of archaeology. The identified key difficulty here (Oestigaard 2007, 9) is about the fact

that the extremists who abuse knowledge for political point-scoring will at all times have a tendency to utilise almost all fanatically patriotic results in spite of its scientific content.

For Oestigaard (2007), the biblical archaeological and Israeli nationalist archaeological domination in knowledge production needs to be challenged. Even though several Israeli archaeologists disagree with the biblical archaeological supremacy and its exegesis, as Israelis having paid employment in Israel they have almost no chance of giving a bad press to the state. Strong condemnation should be coming from archaeologists outside the biblical-Israeli debate.

In my view, the socio-political entanglements of archaeology in the Middle East comprise the roots to the Israel-Palestine war. The conflict is still continuing, and the ideological contestations are to some extent stemming from archaeological exegesis, which sheds light on the strength of the ancient past and why and how it is utilised in present-day protracted serious disagreements and arguments. Archaeologists have a moral and legal obligation as accountable and liable scientists to make a firm decision on the limitations of the substantiation they are in charge of. The stage of being both accountable and liable is earned through hard-work, and is as well mutual among archaeological colleagues.

3.3 Case Scenario

In this section we look closely at the harsh realities of the political interference in Biblical Archaeology as mentioned above by focusing on what is obtaining in Silwan, a village southeast of the Old City of Jerusalem. This is done by making use of Mahmoud Hawari's

adapted article titled *"Silwan: Biblical Archaeology, Cultural Appropriation, and Settler Colonialism"* published in 2022.

3.3.1 The weaponization of Biblical Archaeology

Archaeological digging ups in the village of Silwan was set up in motion more than one and half centuries ago and have discovered many layers of civilisations dating from before 5000 BCE up to present times. Even though the site was located by certain European and Israeli archaeologists to be the biblical "King David's city" of approximately three millennia ago, no noteworthy material remains from this era have been discovered thus far.

From the invasion of Jerusalem in 1967, Israel has put into action policies designed at foisting a Jewish demographic predominance and reinforcing its dominion over the city. Dating back to the early nineties, the Israeli powers, and their puppet conservative settler organisations, have been deeply involved in an extensive project in Silwan – regarding the setting up of a Jewish settlement with a biblical-archaeological amusement park for tourism at the centre of the village. The master plan to accomplish this project is double: (i) to conduct large-scale archaeological digging ups to unearth structures and artefacts that are directly connected to "biblical" times, especially from King David's rule; and (ii) to seize and raze to the ground hundreds of homes, remove with force their Palestinian residents, and replace them with Jewish settlers.

This is how Israel weaponizes archaeology to establish an invented "biblical" account based on the would-be "City of David" to give a justification for its settler-colonial project in Silwan (Hawari 2022, 75). This say the opposite of the ethics of generally approved and used

archaeological practice and gives an unfairly prejudiced account of the site as “biblical” and “Jewish”, whilst disregarding its diversified multi-faceted history.

3.3.2 The Politicization of Biblical Archaeology

The rationale behind archaeological investigation and digging ups in Silwan over the past fifteen decades is to discover the tangible traces of the biblical account, in particular with respect to kings David and Solomon (1100-1000 BCE). But, the unavailability of material remains that can be traced back to this period has sparked off prolonged public disagreements, and strengthened the idea that the biblical narrative is mythical.

Once, it was revealed (Hawari, 2022) that the results of the digging under the Abbasi family house near Umm al-Daraj spring in Silwan exploded the biblical narrative that King David defeated Jerusalem from the Jebusites by gaining access to the city through the water system, known as Warren’s Shaft (Reich and Shukron 2009, 22-33, 72). The diggers came to the conclusion that the shaft was only reachable two hundred years after the assumed defeat, and the water system was kept safe by huge reinforcement constructed by the Canaanites at the time of the Middle Bronze Age, long before King David’s era. However, in spite of the important focal point of early periods and the absence of interest with post-Byzantine material remains (Galor 2017, 131), the importance of the finds in connection with the biblical narrative is little, if not totally missing.

Within the Israeli discipline, a lot of scholars (Geva 1992, 92-103) debate the question of politics of Israeli archaeology. Whilst the most important discourse has directed on the disciplinary practice, and the similarity between the state ideology and the contained ideas or subject matter within archaeological knowledge, no scholar has objectively addressed the

scientific epistemology. Notwithstanding, many essential works have centred on the manner archaeology performed a key role in the construction of Israel's settlement imagination, and in coming up with "facts on the ground" to give a justification for historical claims and nationality establishment (El-Haj, 2001).

Archaeological practice was used in the establishment of a secular Jewish Israeli colonial identity and gave assistance to corroborate the historical claims – even though providing no explicit evidence – to territory as "the national home". Explicitly, archaeology performed a twofold part: one within nation state-building, and the other within the aspects of settler colonisation in Palestine.

It was in Palestine under British colonial regime that the "new" Hebrew nation – with its settler-colonial society and ideology – evolved. And as such, El-Haj (2001, 4) maintains that the indigenous Palestinians were barred from attaining their independence seeing that Britain pledged Palestine to the Jews as their national home. The Zionist deployment of the past is settler-colonialist (Truini, 2020), as well as archaeology and heritage conservation come up as part and parcel of the act of committing a crime of settler-colonial violence.

International law states clearly that (Hawari 2022, 91) those Israeli archaeological diggings in Silwan are illegitimate. This law obligates Israel, as an occupying authority, to safe guard and conserve the cultural heritage in the occupied area of land – comprising archaeological areas and discoveries – and forbids it from making long-term and permanent changes. Besides, Israel's jurisdiction over the archaeological areas – and artefacts discovered there – empowers Israel to deny Palestinians access to these areas, and grant Israel the right to shed light on and present them as it pleases.

Eventually, Israel will be capable of exploiting the historical account of the site by foregrounding and promoting its religious and cultural significance for the Jewish community; contrary to, it reduces the role of other peoples and cultures in its history, especially depriving the Palestinians of their sites and expropriating their history and cultural heritage.

Whilst Elad's – right-wing Jewish settler group (Ir David/City of David Foundation) – account in Silwan concentrates exclusively on biblical history, it is vigorously entangled in the wiping out of Palestinian heritage and modern urban life. Elad pronounce clearly and distinctly the archaeological site (Pullan and Gwiazda 2020, 93) as a settlement in which new Jewish settlers' homes become an inherent part of the narrative of the heritage management.

Explicitly, Elad contemplates its colonial activity as a re-establishment of the biblical account with regard to the architectural and urban development of the site, which is made reference to as "residential revitalisation" and "Where It All Began … and Still Continues" (Hawari 2022, 91). Elad's final intention is to advance extensive tourism and Jewish "pilgrimage" to Silwan. The master plan is to construct an underground circuit that connects the "City of David" in Silwan and the "Western Wall" (also known as the "Wailing Wall") close to the Jewish Quarter, approached through tunnels.

Emek Shaveh – the Israeli NGO working against the politicization of archaeology in Israel – is one of the main critics of archaeological practices in Silwan. Its approach is pronounced clearly and distinct (Hawari 2022, 92) as follows: "Archaeological sites can ill afford to constitute proof of precedence or ownership by any one nation, ethnic group or religion over a given place". It ensures (i) that the activities of right-wing Jewish settler groups in East Jerusalem must be practically monitored, as well as archaeological activities; and (ii) that legitimate measures against the abuse of archaeology for religious or nationalist interests should be

taken. It further pinpoints and deals with a need for the advancement of a pluralistic dialogue regarding the divergence of the cultural heritage, and the shared heritage of all communities and peoples living in the land.

There is no uncertainty that Emek Shaveh plays a vital part in opposing the settler organisations' activities and backing up the local Palestinian residents of Silwan, particularly in their legitimate strife against settlers' schemes. But, their successes on the ground remain limited for there is disparity in power relative to settlers' groups, who are much more lavishly funded and enjoy the full back up of the Israeli authorities.

Be that as it may, Hawari (2022, 92) maintains that Emek Shaveh's approach does not address the foundational issues of reality on the ground: (a) the unlawful military occupation and annexation of East Jerusalem, (b) the banning of archaeological excavations by international law, (c) the kind of settler colonialism and ethnic cleansing perpetrated in Silwan, and (d) an all-inclusive understanding of Palestine's history and cultural heritage.

So, it seems that Emek Shaveh gives thought to the Israeli occupation and annexation of East Jerusalem as an irreversible accomplishment, contrary to their opposition to the occupation of the West Bank. They as well deem archaeological excavations in Silwan as an irrevocable agreement, and appear to agree to their definition of "salvage excavations".

A further oddity (Hawari, 2022) of archaeological diggings at Silwan is the prejudice of data collection, which characterises Israeli archaeology elsewhere, though of late, some rectifications can be noticeable. The favoured practice is the recovery of larger architectural structures and artefacts, representing important "biblical" or "Jewish" historical events that can be branded "First or Second Temple" (Iron Age to early Roman).

This irregularity has been made worse by the continuing use of bulldozers and mechanical diggers on archaeological sites that are utilised to remove top layers of earth to go deeper to the intended earlier strata as soon as possible. This unavoidably results in the complete destruction of “later debris” that comprises numerous archaeological strata that round off the whole history of the site. On the contrary, proper archaeological practice usually necessitates making use of slower digging techniques, namely trawling and sifting earth in search of finer artefacts and environmental remains, to rebuild various aspects of ancient lifeway.

Taking into consideration this abnormality, especially the contravention of archaeological ethical and scientific practices, the request by Emek Shaveh for greater all-inclusive archaeology under these disgraceful circumstances in Silwan will remain a saying – or an idea that has degenerated into the point of being dull and uninteresting – and cannot be achieve. To bring about an all-embracing reading of history (Hawari, 2022), new archaeological excavations – with a totally different approach and methodology, independent of ideological, religious, and nationalist agendas – are compulsory and non-negotiable in Silwan.

Archaeology is generally supposed to be a neutral scientific undertaking, an exercise of excavation that gives help to disclose the clues about past civilisations. Clearly, the diggings in Silwan misuse the basic ethics of archaeological practice (Uziel, 2022), in spite of the assertion that excavations are of “high calibre”. This assumed high quality archaeological work is missing in the critical explanation and demonstration of the site. Rather, what is on display is usually explained and demonstrated as “biblical” or “Jewish”.

Whilst such action has been condemned by Emek Shaveh for it "privileges one narrative or one history over another" (Mizrachi, 2022), it brings up several questions[4]. The response to those questions (Hawari 2022, 93) lies in positioning the history of ancient Palestine as a subject in its own right, outside the limits of biblical studies that has marginalised the huge major part of the population of the region trying to find the origin of modern Israel in the ancient past.

> It will be necessary to expose the political and religious interests, which have motivated the invention of ancient Israel within the discourse of biblical studies. It will also need to create its own space, in order to produce its own contested narrative of the past, thereby helping to restore the voice of an indigenous population which has been silenced by the invention of ancient Israel. (Whitelam 1996, 236)

Palestine has a history that dates back numerous periods of thousand years, consisting of manifold periods of regional and imperial rules. The population of Palestine comprises myriad ethnic and religious communities with diversified traditions, languages, customs, however with a good deal of shared features and aspects of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Native Jewish communities were part of the ethnic and religious body of the indigenous population of Palestine (Hawari 2022, 93).

It is only because of the emergence of Zionism as a settler-colonial organisation in the early twentieth century and the resulting political strife in Palestine that indigenous Jews were estranged from the main body of the Palestinian people to merge with the newly appearing

[4] Are there two different histories for two peoples in Israel/Palestine – one Jewish-Israel history and another Palestinian-Arab?
Why is the same criticism not levelled against the IAA's presentation at sites, such as Jaffa, Caesarea, 'Akka, or Hazor in Israel?

"Hebrew nation" and the Jewish State. The history of ancient Palestine persists to be formed by the biblical rhetoric supported by Israeli scholarship and modern Zionism, which refuses the indigenous people their inalienable right to have its own history.

Lastly, Hawari (2022, 93) points out that it remains vitally important that a greater and additional amount of evidence-based, all-embracing, impartial and unprejudiced narrative for the history of Palestine is put in place, one that is grounded on bringing back to consciousness the rich cultural heritage of ancient Palestine that substantiates, through its material culture, to the accomplishments of its multitudinous peoples.

In concluding this chapter, one cannot help but mention that the general entanglement of archaeology with politics obtaining in virtually all over the world that has almost become a norm, unfortunately. It is my humble opinion that whatever the circumstances, true grit archaeologists – for the sake of archaeology at least – ought to (a) be realistic, (b) see things as they are, (c) see things from a logical point of view, and (d) be able to think critically and objectively. It is lamentable that in many parts of the world one is able to detect the existence of a long history of politically motivated archaeology that wreak havoc on archaeology, its material, and ethnic minorities. Sadly, such a state of affairs always leads to the domination in knowledge production that is usually unchallenged, thus providing a leeway of weaponising archaeology for some ulterior motives best known to the powers that be.

4. Decolonisation of Biblical Archaeology

4.1 Introduction

Decolonising strategies in archaeology came about as a way to oppose the domination of colonial ideologies and make better the factuality of indigenous depictions (Bruchac, 2014). In accordance with history, the schedules of conventional archaeological practices have been designed by Western attitudes and behaviours, and classifications. Even though indigenous people have been utilised as informants for quite a long time, Western scientists have exercised power over indigenous property together with indigenous knowledges, and concerns have been swept to the sides. Decolonising has both political and practical issues (Bruchac, 2014); it changes power relations among scientists and subjects, whilst as well extending the volume and reliability of available indigenous data.

4.2 The rationale behind decolonisation

The history of early archaeological and anthropological practices which many a time treated ancestral remains, sacred objects, and places with the lack of respect (Mihesuah, 2000; Watkins, 2000; Atalay, 2012), has tarnished the distinction of these disciplines. Scientific research organised and carried out by “privileged white male scientists with roots in white settler populations” (Bruchac, 2014) and designed within the Western understanding of time, place, and interpersonal relationships – making use of colonialist terminology (namely savage, primitive, barbaric, et cetera) – brought about enormous torment to the indigenous peoples, stripping them of authority over their cultural heritage.

The politics and ethics of archaeological practice began to shift since the twentieth century, caused in particular by the indigenous activism of the sixties and seventies, giving rise to public and academic realisation of the injustices that indigenous people were encountering and undergoing as a direct result of archaeological research (Atalay 2006, 320). The claiming back of indigenous rights to physical and non-physical culture began to be a way to oppose colonial power and back up positive indigenous self-determination (Smith and Wobst 2005; Hollowell and Nicolas 2009; Bruchac 2014). All over the world, state and institutional regulations and protocols have come up that declare indigenous rights to identity, culture, and property (Bruchac 2014; Watkins 2006).

At times scientific knowledge excludes communities living around archaeological sites and actually discourages them from having an active relationship, even though in most instances these sites exercise enormous importance and purpose. Nevertheless, during a long period of time new ethical plans that value public meanings, clarifications and proprietorship rights of indigenous communities (Castaneda 2008; Bruchac 2014), have substituted the notion of archaeology as a universal science, compelled by giving precedence to conservation. In this period of significant transformation, quite a lot of archaeologists have turned to ethnography as a procedure for addressing the political, ethical, epistemological concerns and in the process of reforming the archaeological practices through participating with communities on the meanings of the past (Castaneda 2008, 2), hence, 'decolonisation'.

'Decolonising' endeavours in archaeology have entailed a detailed analysis and assessment of colonial ideologies and cooperation with indigenous communities to improve representation (Bruchac 2014). Besides, 'decolonising' archaeologies nowadays comprises primarily a critique of ideologies and a partnership with indigenous and local communities, concentrating

on the management of heritage against using those communities as "informants" only (Bruchac 2014; Smith and Wobst 2005). Explicitly, in archaeology (Betts 2012) 'decolonising' normally connotes 'decolonisation' – understood as the dismantling of colonialism – a process that decentres ruling ideologies and results in independence.

Decolonisation needs the discernment and review of the prevention of other knowledges. It as well necessitates the retrieval of portable and fixed cultural property, not simply physically (Bruchac 2014), but as it would be that their explanation is mainly within the cultural framework in which they were designed. Moreover, regarding the decolonising archaeological sciences, the majority of the deliberation and discourse has concentrated on genetic and biological topics (especially, the placement of human skeletal remains, the functions of modern and ancient DNA) instead of more archaeometric and analytical concerns – namely, the ethics of destructive testing[5]. A key feature of decolonisation is modifying the power dynamics and marked effects of a scientific research project (Bruchac 2014).

Furthermore, collaborations are a key strategy for decolonising archaeological practice. A decolonising agenda enlightened by community involvement necessitates that archaeologists are no longer "bosses" but instead are partners in joint ventures in which the narratives about the past move from own specific expert reading to the way they are recounted, spread about and accepted by the community (Haber and Gnecco 2007; Bruchac 2014). Hence, collaborative approaches amount to the broader agenda for decolonising archaeology in that they square up to enduring disparities with respect to who makes decisions and who benefits.

[5] The ethics of destructive testing (DT) are mainly concerned with the exchange between gaining critical performance data and destroying the test subject, a process that is often required for safety but is expensive and cannot be used on valuable components. Ethical considerations for destructive testing are: necessity and justification; information quality; minimising harm; cost and benefit analysis; and alternatives.

In fact, the essential strategies for decolonisation (Bruchac 2014) comprise: (a) critical analysis of social and political relations; (b) collaborative consultation and research design; (c) reclamation of cultural property; (d) restoration of cultural landscapes and heritage sites; (e) repatriation of human remains; (f) co-curation of archaeological collections; and (g) devising more culturally accurate museum representations. Therefore, decolonisation is crucial for indigenous archaeology.

To advance a more comprehensive approach to archaeology (Bruchac 2020), it is vital to recognise the diversified standpoints and procedures of understanding and learning. In a way that involves a set of methods and principles that are utilised (Bruchac 2014): a decolonised archaeology expressly works towards reinterpretation of materials that colonial power has lost or made invisible. The main illustrations of such invisible histories are the untold stories of Native Americans and Native Africans – subjected to assimilation and acculturation.

Ngugi (1998) demonstrates to us that language (tantamount to mind) colonisation is a deep-seated monster that decolonisation of the mind is a process that will take some years, as this monster took some centuries to bog us down. African writers have repeatedly expressed dissatisfaction with the neo-colonial economic and political relationship to the West (Ngugi 1998, 101), but through their continuing to write in Western languages, publicly showing great respect and honour to them, are the African writers not – on the cultural level – continuing that neo-colonial excessively submissive and cringing spirit? My take here, provided I am reading Ngugi well: If there are African writers these days who still maintain that Africa cannot survive without Western languages, then we are no where with our endeavour to rid ourselves, as Africans, of the burden (and scourge) of colonisation.

It is cynical that the Western missionary believed too much in his mission of conquest not to relate it in the languages most readily available to the people; and the African writer believes too much in "African literature" to write it in those ethnic, divisive, and underdeveloped languages of the peasantry. Another sarcasm is that what they have produced, in spite of any claims to the contrary, is not African literature but an Afro-European literature. Afro-European literature is another created hybrid tradition (Ngugi 1998, 102) of the literature written by Africans in Western languages, that has since produced Africa's most celebrated talent namely Achebe, Soyinka, Senghor, Busani-Dube, Jonas, Cele, et cetera. However, there came Obi Wali (1993) a Nigerian voice of reason who asserted that: African literature can only be written in African languages – the languages of the African peasantry and working class – the key alliance of classes in each of our nationalities and the agency for the imminent unavoidable revolutionary break with neo-colonialism. Ngugi in this text encourages Africans – especially the educated ones – to be proud of their own (continent, peoples, and cultures).

Not long ago, if an African writer was to write in his or her mother tongue that writer would be questioned, be faced with reprimand, and be thought of as being out of the ordinary. The very reason that what common sense dictates in the literary practice of other cultures was being questioned in an African writer, was a measure of how far colonialism had twisted the perspective of African realities, where the abnormal was viewed as normal and the normal viewed as abnormal. It should be believed and understood that a nation's language – an African language – is an integral part of the anti-colonialist struggles of the nation and African peoples. In schools and institutions of higher learning African languages – the languages of the many nationalities which make up Africa – were linked to the undesirable qualities of backwardness, underdevelopment, humiliation, and punishment. Those who went through

that school system were meant to graduate with a hatred of the people and the culture and the values of the language of our daily humiliation and punishment. My take here is that, no African child deserves to go through that ordeal of growing up in that colonialist-imposed tradition of denigration for the tools of communication developed by their communities and their history, to be able to transcend colonial isolation.

For Ngugi, colonial alienation is two-pronged: an active (or passive) distancing of oneself from the real world around; and an active (or passive) identification with that which is most derived from a source outside one's environment. It begins with a wilful disassociation of the language of conceptualisation, of thinking, of formal education, of mental development, from the language of daily interaction in the home and in the community. It is like separating the mind from the body so that they are occupying two unrelated linguistic spheres in the same person. Regarding this text, Ngugi is coaxing us that we should endeavour to contribute towards the restoration of the harmony between all the aspects and divisions of language so as to restore the African child to his or her environment, understand it fully with the purpose of being in a position to change it for his or her collective good. Furthermore, we need to work towards making African peoples' mother-tongues – our national languages – carry a literature reflecting both the rhythms of a child's spoken expression and his or her struggle with nature and his or her social nature. It is believed that with that harmony between himself or herself, his or her language, and his or her environment as his or her starting point, he or she can learn other languages and even enjoy the positive humanistic, democratic, and revolutionary elements in other peoples' literatures and cultures without any complications about his or her own language, his or her own self, and his or her own environment.

Be that as it may, it is exactly when writers open up African languages to the real connections in the struggles of peasants and workers that they will encounter their biggest challenge. For to the comprador-ruling regimes, their real nemesis is an awakened peasantry and working class. A writer who tries to relate the message of revolutionary unity and hope in the languages of the people, becomes a disruptive character. A democratic participation of the people in discussing their own lives in languages that allow for mutual comprehension is seen as being threatening to the good government of a country and its institutions. Thus, African languages addressing themselves to the lives of the people become the nemesis of a neo-colonial state.

Utilising conceptual decolonisation, Wiredu advocates a re-assessment of today African epistemic formations to achieve two aims. Firstly, he intends to undermine morally offensive aspects of indigenous traditions embedded in current African thought so as to make it more viable. Secondly, Wiredu wishes to undermine the unhelpful Western epistemologies that would be found in African philosophical traditios. He writes that “with an even greater sense of urgency the intervening decade does not seem to have brought any indications of a widespread realisation of the need for conceptual decolonisation in African philosophy” (Wiredu 1995, 23). Decolonisation itself is a problematic undertaking for it needs voluntarily abandoning of certain conceptual attitudes that informs one’s worldviews. Additionally, it normally entails an attempt at the retrieval of a more or less fragmented historical heritage. Therefore for Fanon (1963, 20), decolonisation is “a programme of complete disorder”.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) – through his book “Epistemic Freedom in Africa” – looks at the struggle for African people to think, theorise, interpret the world and write from where they are located, unburdened (and ‘uncaptured’) by Western-centeredness. The colonial rejection

of common humanity to other human beings meant that their knowledges and experiences lost their significance, hence their epistemic virtue is lost. For me, there could be no better way of insisting on the imperativeness of decolonisation if people of our nowadays are – in subtle ways – still enslaved, displaced, colonised, and racialised. And, no African child deserves to endure that ordeal as such an environment totally wrecks his or her mind.

Utilising his work – "Decolonising, Development and Knowledge in Africa: Turning Over a New Leaf" (2020) – Ndlovu-Gatsheni asserts that it is now high time that Africa breaks free from coloniality, the enduring, hidden legacy of colonialism, to achieve true liberation and development. He further calls for a "decolonial turn" in knowledge, politics, and economics, subscribing to the resumption of non-European knowledge systems and the decolonisation of education to create genuine African futures. Ndlovu-Gatsheni raises the following arguments: The Problem of Coloniality – he maintains that whilst colonialism as a political structure has ended "coloniality" remains, shaping African economies and minds; Epistemic Freedom – there is a need to free African knowledge from White domination, including challenging the "geopolitics of knowledge" which prioritises Western thought and intentionally disregards African intellectual traditions; Decolonising the University – he insists on a radical restructuring of African universities, transforming the curriculum and knowledge production to center African realities; Decolonial Development – he rejects the "imported" Western development models that have historically failed, proposing that sustainable development should be built on indigenous knowledges and local agency; and The Africa Renaissance – he calls for an "African Renaissance", necessitating a fundamental re-examination of African political economy and identity.

My observation is that all these African writers(Ngugi, 1998; Wiredu, 1995; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020; et cetera) come to a common understanding that decolonisation of Africans, epistemic freedom, decolonisation of the African (young) mind, are necessary and imperative items that need to be taken into consideration for African growth, progress, and sustainable development.

Alas, the difficulty is that disciplinary procedures and values came up from the very centres of colonial and imperial power and that being so, have been crafted to further their objectives (Bruchac 2014; Smith 2012). Anthropologists and archaeologists, specifically, on many occasions have worked to extract information and objects from places far away from the centres of imperial power, as well as from Indigenous peoples and excluded groups within them.

In concluding, I concur with Bruchac (2014) in maintaining that archaeology ought to endeavour to achieve the dismantling of the earlier deep-seated colonial systems of domination within the discipline by including – as a necessary and integral part – indigenous communities, and marginalised peoples in every step of scientific research, returning cultural property, and co-curating archaeological materials (Smith and Wobst 2005; Atalay 2006; Rizvi 2019; Schneider and Hayes 2020). Impacted on by gender studies and theories – like feminism, critical care, and post-colonialism – the decolonisation movement in archaeology has made significant progress in putting in place an environment where the study of the past is more fair, unprejudiced, and able to be mainained.

Moreover, all things being equal, open science (Bruchac, 2014) is of the utmost importance for decolonising archaeology. Open science is the movement to make scientific research – including publications, data, physical samples, and software – openly accessible and reusable

to everyone. It is a set of principles and practices whose goal is to make scientific research from all fields accessible to everyone for the benefits of scientists and society in general (Woelfle et al, 2011). Open science works towards increasing collaborations within the research community and bring scientific knowledge creation, evaluation, and communication closer to society. Achieving these goals will improve the capacity of science in tackling societal and global challenges.

4.3 Decolonisation and Reparation

In the latest decades, there has been growing interest in the long-established effects of colonialism within the academic world and the extended public domain, around arguments on decolonisation (Gani and Marshall 2022; Maringe 2023). The relationship between archaeology and colonialism is fundamentally complex seeing that the origins of archaeology are based on colonial ideology (Moro-Abadia 2006).

Bradshaw (2018) laments that not much has been attended to or accomplished in practice on the issue of the actual benefits of decolonisation for the field of archaeology in its entirety, even though there has been systematic investigation within archaeology around colonialism (Cipolla and Hayes 2015; Gonzalez-Ruibal 2013; Lemos 2023). The serious challenge is that the archaeology of colonialism has not made much progress, in spite of it rightly beginning to be an important sub-field.

Although the colonial past of archaeology requires to be recognised (Gonzalez-Rubial et al 2018), distance should be created to take to pieces the deep-rooted association between

archaeology, Indigenous communities, and coloniality. However, reclaiming archaeology should over and above that comprise decolonisation and reparation (Tuck and Yang 2012), which archaeology itself – as a weaponised subject – owes to the postcolonial world. The postcolonial notion developed towards the end of the twentieth century with the aim of demolishing the colonial-based account of history.

Archaeology and colonialism meet and cross on numerous different levels. The most apparent are the origins of the modern field of scientific archaeology, which benefitted to a great extent from colonisation and also served to justify it via the advancement of theories such as the unilineal model[6] of evolution (Negro et al 2023, 4). Archaeology played a critical part in this by supplying the material culture necessary to fill the typological display instances of the first museums, and also by providing artefacts utilised for comparison in the categorisation of Indigenous peoples as lower on the evolutionary scale.

However, the unilineal model of evolution is criticised (Collier and Munck, 2022; Blackledge, 2013) for its ethnocentrism, which presumes that Western cultures are the apex of progress and all other societies follow the same linear path to "civilisation". Other serious criticisms comprise its lack of empirical evidence, oversimplification of cultural diversity, and failure to account for local contexts. Critical scholars assert that it was founded on flawed presumptions and generalisations instead of objective data.

Besides, archaeology intersects with colonialism in much more cunning ways. For instance, the ways in which settler colonial nations – such as in the United States or Australia – have

[6] Unilineal Model of evolution relates to the notion that there is a set sequence of stages that all groups will pass through at some point, even though the pace of progress through these stages will vary greatly. For Morgan (1877), all societies progress through the same three stages of cultural development: from Savagery – where hunting and gathering is practised; to Barbarism – where a more complicated social system emerges; to Civilisation – which commences with the development of settled communities and the urban revolution.

managed the story relating to the prehistoric past; frequently gatekeeping archaeology from the very people whose past they are excavating (Negro et al 2023, 5).

The misleading assumption that indigenous peoples were uncivilised and barbaric, explained the ways in which archaeologists interpreted their discoveries by restricting technological creativity and cultural advancement to “superior” cultures. Furthermore, for five and half centuries colonial powers influenced landscapes applying the foisting of land use methods by effecting changes to local and Indigenous human-environmental ecosystems to the amassing and exploitation of local resources.

It is without a doubt that Western colonial methods very abruptly changed landscapes and ecosystems which were developed and controlled by Indigenous people employing cultural land utilisation practices. These Indigenous land utilisation systems, which comprised knowledgeable and strong management methods, formed and developed richly-biodiverse environments thought as “natural” by colonisers, and surprisingly modern scientists (Fletcher et al. 2021). Maybe, it is at most through careful thought and returning Indigenous cultural land management into place that the environmental legacy of colonialism can eventually be redeemed (Negro et al. 2023, 7).

Whilst archaeologists can definitely attempt to “decolonise” their methods by – for instance, focussing different accounts or community-based strategies – it is essential to bear in mind that “decolonisation is not a metaphor” (Tuck and Yang 2012, 1) and necessitates (a) real actions, (b) real consequences, and (c) real disturbances.

Furthermore, Negro et al (2023, 10) point out that there is an enduring parallelism between modern colonialism and ancient colonialism – namely Romanisation, Hellenisation,

Orientalisation, et cetera – based on which local pre-colonial material culture is applied to parallel the Indigenous communities colonised during modern neo-colonialism, revealing their "primitivism". Therefore, in the course of the decolonisation of heritage, there is a necessity to consider that the representation of the past itself can be colonised and needs challenging assumptions founded on colonial ideology. If not, all current decolonisation efforts of modern colonialism are without success.

Reviewing the past utilising archaeology is vital to rewrite history and decolonise the past, and besides to decolonise the present and the future. This is doable through "narratives of reparation" (Lemos 2023, 31), which involve the revealing of other histories to provide redress. Actually, even though a lot of archaeologists have been embroiled in the development of alternate postcolonial accounts for years (Negro et al 2023, 10), we become curious whether it could be that we are stuck to the notion of hybridisation[7], where it all began. These systems of ideas, or alternate accounts, are without doubt postcolonial, and have been a breakthrough in the academic world, however they are not fully decolonial as they do not provide reparation, which should be the focus of archaeologists moving forward.

The above argumentation is a demonstration of the diversified and transforming strategies in which modern archaeology is making great strides in shedding the skin of its colonial past. Whilst archaeology cannot remove all traces of its paradoxical early stages, there are several ways in which it can play a very significant part of being an agent of positive transformation

[7] Hybridisation in decolonisation refers to the processes of inter cultural, racial, and ethnic mixing which combines "traditional", "indigenous", and "modern" Western elements, even so these processes reinforce hierarchies among cultures and peoples.

both in the academic world and the broader world by impacting on the ways in which the past is (a) interpreted, (b) presented, and (c) evaluated.

In this chapter while the scholars (Bruchac 2014, Negro 2023, and others) have done a great job in unpacking the concept 'decolonisation', for me the notion of decolonisation is vast and inexhaustible to do justice on it within the scope of this task. Therefore, the following is a brief summary of my understanding of decolonisation as a process. Decolonisation is about: (a) the independent nation that is free from political control; (b) people's autonomy regarding their own political and economic future; and (c) people's reclamation of control over their resources an economies. Decolonisation is ridding people of social ills such as racism, social hierarchies, including imposing alien languages and cultural norms. It is in the matter of people's reclamation and celebrating their own history, identity, language, and culture; which (items) people were ashamed of in the past (or during the colonial period). Decolonisation in education is all about revamping the whole curriculum to embrace the indigenous knowledge systems and perspectives of the previously colonised people, rather than only paying particular attention to the Western way of thinking.

Furthermore, decolonisation concerns itself with personal unfair prejudices (namely, the unnecessary and costly striving for 'yellow bones' notion at the expense of 'black is beautiful' thinking, and the pointless and costly foreign 'beautiful' long hair mentality at the expense of the beautiful African short hair); and it always challenges colonial stories (that are, more often than not, based on the Unilineal Model of evolution, as well as concocted stories on historical domination and settlement) on a daily basis. Besides, decolonisation deals with institutional inequalities – like unfair working conditions and unequal access to education – that carry on

right through the postcolonial era. Lastly, decolonisation deals with the trauma (due to the dehumanization endured) and imbalances of power inherent in the colonial relation.

However, I beg to differ from the coined term 'rehumanization' as the notion put forward by the scholars of decolonisation in the University of the Free State. According to them this term is about the rehumanization process of the colonizer and the colonized. My bone of contention is that: How can you administer the same medicine to the patients that are suffering from different diseases? Explicitly, on one hand you have the colonized (the victim) that have traumatic experiences of endured dehumanization for apparently no reason. On the other hand, you have the colonizer (the perpetrator) who knew exactly what he was doing as he was systematic and calculating in his moves aimed at inflicting untold suffering to the victim. Pardon my myopia in this regard, I really do not see the suffering incurred from enjoyment that warrants the so-called rehumanization. I am, however, open to consider a convincing clarification regarding the issue.

PART II – The Relevance of Biblical Archaeology

5. African Biblical Hermeneutics

In this section we look closely at the relevance of Biblical Archaeology to African Biblical Scholarship by means of a thorough review of African Biblical Hermeneutics whereupon its inadequacy in respect of its gaps and weaknesses will be established.

5.1 Introduction

On the subject of African Biblical hermeneutics as a phenomenon, independent scholars have different conceptions and this is informed by the locatedness of the individual scholar as a reader of the Bible. Fundamentally, African Biblical Hermeneutics relates explicitly to the prioritisation of African religious and cultural presumptions and worldviews as viable hermeneutical lenses through which to interpret the Bible (Mbuvi 2017, 150).

This study adopts the broader sense of the word 'African' as in Adamo (2015, 32), where it is about: (a) people in the African continent geographically; (b) people of black colour who receive with open arms people of African descent all over the world; and (c) those who are in favour of African culture, religion and traditions. Explicitly, the idea of Africa is fully stretched out to accommodate all the people of African descents across the board.

Even though the majority of scholars are in agreement that the term 'hermeneutics' is about how to understand a written or spoken text, in this study Speckman's (2016, 205) notion of

the word ‘hermeneutics’ is employed: where hermeneutics examines how we (i) read, (ii) understand, and (iii) handle texts, mostly those written in another time or in another context of life from our own.

Finally, we observe that African Biblical Hermeneutics, as a discipline, has some inherent limitations and that being the case cannot claim absolute objectivity. In accordance with history (Adamo 2015, 33), there has never been an interpretation that has been with the absence of references (such as cultural code, thought patterns, and social location) of a particular interpreter. In fact, every single interpreter is unfairly prejudiced in one way or another. That being so, to speak of uniform, unconditional, universal, and absolute interpretation (or hermeneutics) is unreasonable. The interpreter has a tendency of bringing his (or her) own bias to bear, consciously or unconsciously, on the manner in which the message is understood.

5.2 The Rationale

The inability of the traditional hermeneutical strategies to tackle the genuine existential concerns of African peoples, has resulted in the African theologians gradually pressing for a change in the ways and strategies utilised to read the Bible on the continent (Mbuvi 2017, 154). African Biblical Hermeneutics was established as a strategy to reading the Bible in Africa in opposition to those approaches which view the Bible “simply as an ancient text” in the absence of any actual impact on the life of the African reader.

Another contributing fact to the growth of African Biblical Hermeneutics was the sort of biblical interpretation acquired from western missionaries, which was largely unfairly

prejudiced in favour of Western imperialism. Consequently, the biblical interpretation of the continent was fundamentally colonial, and comprised a series of actions which ostracised the African and his existential reality from the Bible (Adamo 2015, 34). These actions were: (a) the use of the Bible to inculcate foreign values and the systematic repudiation of African values; (b) the justification of violence against Africans; (c) the discrediting of African oral traditions; and (d) others (Adamo 2007, 22).

5.3 Concerns and Issues

In order for biblical hermeneutics in the (South) African context to begin to be available as another possibility or choice for Africans to adore and preserve (Ramantswana 2016, 179), it is obliged to put together a different path for reading the biblical text to the advantage of African communities, whilst exposing the hidden truth about the complex structures of coloniality that keep on sapping the African imagination.

Social location as a hermeneutical instrument in our African context cannot be moved apart from the dynamics of colonialism seeing that coloniality or the colonial situation (Ramantswana 2016, 181) relates to the cultural, political, sexual, spiritual, epistemic and economic oppression or exploitation of the subordinate racialised (or ethnic) groups by dominant racialised (or ethnic) groups with or without the presence of colonial administration.

We should become fully aware that to be black and to be socially located in Africa does not necessarily follow that one reasons from the subaltern cognitive location. The colonisation of the mind in the African continent was successfully brought about by way of violence, as

Africans had to undergo a difficult and unpleasant experience of having their cultures and knowledge systems cunningly and systematically caused to vanish, and obligated to adopt the settler's epistemic principle of "invidious comparison".

Therefore, Africa as a social location in which we read the Bible necessarily has to give thought to the colonisation of the African mind, which is the real world of the past and remains a current real world nowadays. That being the case, it is of necessity that African biblical scholars critically reflect on the information they are compiling, taking into account the past and the existing colonisation of the African mind (Ramantswana 2016, 185).

Besides, to succeed, African biblical hermeneutics scholars have to become involved in a process of "delinking" – which is about epistemic move from the foisted colonial way of thinking and the on-going reliance on Western categorisations. And, the view of "relinking" ought to be embraced – which is about epistemological reorientation in the present-day that rejects the abandonment of the rich heritage of the African ancestors and draws knowledge from the difficult period and unpleasant experiences of suffering from colonialism and coloniality.

Another key concern (Speckman 2016, 208), is the hold-up of African Biblical scholars in putting together a hermeneutical strategy that is essentially African in its distinctiveness ever since the beginning of African theology, and in spite of the endeavours of varying degrees – as well as the request for a "rewriting of the Bible". He pins this on the challenge of procrastination of Africans. And besides, Speckman regards this as a pointer that Africans could be in a "liminal" space – which is both unfortunate and problematic space of "betwixt and between".

Speckman disagrees with the determination that the diversified nature of African people and the magnitude of the continent, present serious difficulties in the project of putting in place an African biblical hermeneutics. The major problem is beyond the magnitude and diversity, but on the absence of focus and procrastination.

Several African scholars assert that the "African worldview" ought to be the plumb line for an African biblical hermeneutics. Besides, the African worldview must be identified by: the sense of community, the fact that the life of the individual finds meaning and interpretation with regard to the structure of relationships within the human community.

South African Hebrew Bible scholarship is still captured in Western ways of interpreting the biblical text (Farisani 2017, 1), consciously and intentionally keeping away from any worthwhile discourse with the African context; and the clearly visible disdainful attitude by some scholars – belonging to Western Biblical Hermeneutics – of African Biblical Hermeneutics as a wishful thinking or a myth.

Theologically, the division of South African society (Farisani 2017, 14) – economically, racially, ethnically, and religiously – will widen in the event that some scholars in Western Biblical Hermeneutics keep on with disregarding African Biblical Hermeneutics as nothing but (i) unscientific, (ii) affirmation theology, and (iii) a failed project.

5.4 Task of African Biblical Hermeneutics

African Biblical Hermeneutics has seven identified and important tasks as articulated by Adamo (2015, 34):

First, African biblical hermeneutics puts together a biblical hermeneutic that is both "liberational and transformational".

Second, it appreciates and understands the Bible and God in the African experience and culture, and "break the hermeneutical hegemony and ideological stranglehold that Eurocentric biblical scholars have long enjoyed".

Third, it delves deep into the ancient biblical tradition and African worldview, culture, and life experience with the intention of "correcting the effect of the cultural ideological conditioning to which Africans have been subjected" in the business of biblical interpretation.

Fourth, African biblical hermeneutics supports and actively encourages African culture and African identity that "seek to acquire and celebrate their God-given identity by delving into their indigenous resources and rejecting the superintending tendencies of western intellectual tradition".

In the fifth place, African biblical hermeneutics appreciates and understands God according to the scripture and culture of Africa, where our limited human knowledge (in scope and nature) and experience of God is utilised to say something in order to convey a message and to express a feeling about God who is all-embracing.

In the sixth place, it comprises "Blackening of the Bible" – the action of putting Africans at the centre of the world – which is an enthusiastic effort to make use of race as an instrument for re-imagining the scenery of the biblical world.

Lastly, in seventh place, African biblical hermeneutics interprets the Scripture in a way that relates to existence, being alive, and the meaning of life – which is a way of making interpretation pertinent to everyday experiences of Africans.

5.5 Distinctiveness of African Biblical Hermeneutics

The distinctiveness of African Biblical Hermeneutics (Adamo 2015, 34) relates to the following key distinctive methodologies that reflect African culture and tradition:

Communal Reading Approach – This is about reading with the community. This method has its origin in the understanding that the Bible is a community document, and both ordinary and scholarly readers are members of "a community of readers". The exchange between the ordinary and scholarly readers assists in having an effect on the understanding of the text in a variety of ways and the way the Bible functions in each context. The end results of the reading practiced together are quite remarkable, in the sense that the subjectivities of both readers are enlarged.

The Bible as Power Approach – This approach to the interpretation of the Bible is both existential (in the sense that it relates to existence, being alive, and the meaning of life) and reflective (in the sense that it is about thinking deeply about something). African Christians believe and respect the Bible in the absence of any attempt to defend it and apologise for it. As far as the Africans are concerned, the Bible is the Word of God and is powerful and its power is relevant to everyday life.

Africa and Africans in the Bible Approach – This is about the contributions of Africa and Africans in the Bible. Subsequent to the discovery of the myriad of citations of Africa and Africans in the Bible, African scholars arrive at an opinion by reasoning that the Bible would have never been in the shape it is today without Africa and African participation in the drama of redemption. With the assistance of this approach, African biblical scholars demonstrate that the Bible is not only an ancient Jewish document alone but it is also an African document.

African Comparative Approach – This approach compares the Bible text, religion and culture with the African text, religion and culture. This comparison of Africa and the Bible (and Christianity) brings out the pertinence of African culture to the study of Hebrew Bible, and the Hebrew Bible to Africa and Africans.

African Evaluative Approach – This approach has to do with African and non-African biblical scholars, and for the most part, specialising in their books or essays in criticising the works of African biblical scholars. This kind of criticism may be constructive, negative or both, and at most for progress, correction and readjustment in African biblical studies.

Using Africa to Interpret the Bible – This method makes use of Africa and Africans to interpret the Bible, and in turn employing the Bible to interpret Africa. In this approach the historical-critical method is utilised at most in the analysis of the text, and the anthropological/sociological method is applied in the analysis of the African culture and situation – for the purpose of understanding a particular biblical text in the light of African tradition and situation – or for the purpose of arriving at an authentic Christianity that is both African and biblical.

Distinctive Interest – This relates to the kind of interest that African biblical interpreters bring to the texts. There are two important interests (West 2009), namely the interpretative interests and life interests. While interpretative interests deal with those dimensions of the text that interest the interpreters, life interests relate to those concerns and commitments that drive or motivate the interpreters to come to the texts. Therefore, African biblical interpreters bring life interests to the interpretation of the Bible whilst the Western interpreters bring interpretative interests to the text.

African Christian Identity – This approach acknowledges that in the African and Christian identity there are key concepts that are important such as indigenisation, contextualisation, inculturation, and Africanisation. It further recognises six different things that are indispensable to identity, namely social institutions, ethical teachings, rituals, religious experiences, myths, and doctrine.

Blackening the Bible – This approach sets Africa and Africans at the centre of the biblical world and our interpretation. It is also about an enthusiastic effort to utilise (a) race, (b) religion and (c) culture as an instrument for re-imagining the scenery of the biblical world and interpretation.

Another very significant distinctiveness in African biblical hermeneutics is the interpretation of the biblical text in Africa (Draper 2002, 16) by making use of three key elements or poles: the pole of biblical text, the pole of the African context, and the pole of appropriation. This Tri-Polar Exegetical Model is at times regarded as the African Contextual Hermeneutics for it emphasises the specificity of our African context and is perceived as theoretical framework for reading the Bible in Africa.

5.6 Conclusion

A non-African biblical scholar, upon looking at the task and distinctiveness above, may be tempted to think that the intention of African biblical hermeneutics is to back a replacing or disregard of Western-centred approach (Adamo 2015, 47). African biblical hermeneutics does not castigate other methodologies or propose that the task and the distinctiveness of African biblical hermeneutics is the only valid and comprehensive one, but that it is one of the legitimate methodologies. In fact, it cannot work in seclusion as it interacts and builds on other hermeneutics to a certain extent. The task and the distinctiveness of African biblical hermeneutics try to decolonise the interpretation of the Bible in the light of African culture and tradition.

In this chapter, even though African biblical scholars are emphatic on the viable hermeneutical lenses (such as African religious and cultural presuppositions, and general African worldview) through which to interpret the Bible, the following identified issues (gaps and weaknesses) render the African biblical hermeneutics still inadequate in addressing the real existential concerns (like African religious and cultural beliefs and worldviews) of African peoples.

First, African biblical hermeneutics is yet to completely unmask structures of coloniality that persist in undermining the African imagination. As alluded to above, coloniality or colonial situation is: socio-cultural (cultural and sexual oppression); socio-political (political oppression, class system and social location); socio-economic (economic oppression and exploitation); socio-educational (academic oppression and advancement of colonised mentality); and socio-religious (religious oppression).

Second, (South) African Hebrew Bible scholarship is still 'captured' in Western-centred approaches of interpreting the biblical text, deliberately avoiding any meaningful dialogue with the African context; and the apparent dismissive attitude of African Biblical Hermeneutics as a wishful thinking or a myth.

Third, the African Comparative Approach – as one of the major distinctive methodologies in the African biblical hermeneutics that reflect African culture and tradition – compares the Bible text, religion, and culture with the African text, religion, and culture. This comparison of Africa and the Bible (and Christianity) is supposed to bring out the pertinence of African culture to the study of Hebrew Bible, and the Hebrew Bible to Africa and Africans. However, this process becomes difficult as black scholars were trained in the methods of Western Biblical Hermeneutics which at times remotely influence their outlook into the African Biblical Hermeneutics.

Fourth, to be successful African biblical hermeneutics scholars need to engage in a "delinking" process – which is an epistemic shift from the imposed colonial mentality and the continuing dependence on Euro-Western categories. And, adopt a "relinking" process – which is an epistemological reorientation in the present that refuses to abandon the rich heritage of the African ancestors and draws knowledge from the experiences of suffering from colonialism. However, these processes may drag due to the magnitude of the damage caused by coloniality.

Fifth, there is a problem of the hold-up by African biblical scholars in producing a hermeneutical approach that is essentially African. This is because of (a) the problem of procrastination among Africans, and (b) Africans might be in a problematic space of "betwixt and between".

Sixth and final, African Biblical Hermeneutics is a limited discipline, hence cannot claim total objectivity (Adamo, 2015). In short, every interpreter is biased in some ways. The interpreter tends to bring his or her own predisposition to bear – consciously or unconsciously – on the manner in which the message is perceived.

However, there are some positives in the African biblical hermeneutics. Firstly, African biblical hermeneutics is gradually conscientising western biblical scholars that the African lens involved in the African biblical hermeneutics dictates that they be led by African scholars in the matters pertaining to the African biblical hermeneutics.

Secondly, African biblical hermeneutics emphasises African theological reflection on traditional African values, cultures and social realities. Thus, scholars in this field are united by a focus on the past, and by an attempt to interpret the present and future on the basis of it.

Thirdly, African biblical hermeneutics is critical to the wellbeing of African society and is a methodological resource that makes African social cultural contexts the subject of interpretation. This is an approach that reassesses ancient biblical tradition and African worldviews, cultures and life experiences, with the purpose of correcting the effect of the cultural, ideological conditioning to which Africa and Africans have been subjected in the business of biblical interpretation.

Fourth and lastly, African biblical hermeneutics promotes that the Bible is interpreted with life interest and African identity. It explores methodologies that seek to dismantle patriarchal ideology, advancement of wealth and spirituality, as well as the concept of *Ubuntu* as a socio-epistemological and moral and hermeneutical lens.

Perhaps, at this juncture one needs to point out that there are African women scholars in African Biblical Hermeneutics. And, they utilise contextual, feminist, and liberation methods – notably bosadi (womanhood) including African women's theology – to re-read scripture through the lense of African cultural, socio-economic, and patriarchal experiences. Key scholars like Madipoane Masenya and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, critically engage with biblical texts to empower women, address issues such as poverty and HIV, and challenge Eurocentric interpretation.

Some prominent scholars are: Madipoane Masenya – a leading voice in South African Hebrew Testament Scholarship, she developed bosadi (womanhood) hermeneutics, an approach that centers the African woman's experience in biblical interpretation; Mercy Amba Oduyoye – a pioneer of African women's theology, focusing on the intersection of culture, church, and patriarchy; Musa Dube – a prominent scholar focusing on postcolonial feminist interpretation, especially with regards to HIV/AIDS and HIV-sensitive hermeneutics; Sarojini Nadar – known for her work in gendered African scholarship and the "Talitha Cum" approach, challenging patriarchy within religious texts; and Hulisani Ramantswana – collaborates with Masenya on challenging Western-centered methodologies and advancing decolonial, African-centered hermeneutics.

PART III – Biblical Archaeology of great significance

6. Biblical Archaeology within African Biblical Scholarship

6.1 The non-incorporation of Biblical Archaeology

The fact that the Bible is the most important part of African Christianity, dictates the essentiality of making an effort to understand the Bible in its own context. However, the students are deprived of such understanding of the Bible due to the disinterest shown by undergraduate theological studies in (a) artefacts and biofacts (which are non-literary objects such as bones, weapons, pottery, jewellery, houses, streets, and city walls); and (b) literary sources (like form of monuments, ostraca, and papyri) of the world of the Bible. In my case, that spurred me on to develop the question why African Biblical Scholarship appears uninterested in the discipline of Biblical Archaeology. And, I also wondered how African Biblical Scholarship would look like if it paid more attention to Biblical Archaeology.

Archaeological scholarship can be reoriented to reflect African epistemologies by shifting away from Western frameworks and adopting indigenous knowledge systems, which center on interconnectedness, ancestral connections, and community relevance. This reorientation involves moving away from extractive research to collaborative, “people centered” methods that empower local communities as active knowledge producers instead of simple subjects.

Major strategies for enriching archaeology through African epistemologies include firstly, integrating indigenous knowledge systems – which is about (a) incorporating oral tradition utilising local histories, forklore, and genealogies to complement, interpret, and validate

archaeological finds; (b) understanding sacred landscapes in recognising that African landscapes are many times permeated with ancestral, spiritual, and living significance, necessitating careful, respectful interpretation that avoids damaging sacred sites; and (c) adopting local temporal frameworks by surpassing linear Western time to include recurring or longitudinal views of the past that are pertinent to local ontologies.

Secondly, adopting community-based "people's arcchaeology" – which relates to (a) empowering local stakeholders involving communities in the planning, excavation, and interpretation phases, making cetain that archaeological work has direct relevance to their livelihoods and histories; (b) participatory action research treating local knowledge holders as experts whose input explains and contextualises scientific data, such as residue or metallurgical analysis; and (c) bridging heritage and archaeology by connecting academic research with practical community needs, like heritage tourism, and the protection of cultural property.

Thirdly, decolonising archaeological theory and interpretation – which involves (a) developing "made in Africa" approaches in crafting research methodologies rooted in African thought, like *Ubuntu*, which prioritise communal and relational interpretations; (b) centering African intellectual ideas through breaking the dependency on Western theories to explain African material culture; and (c) critiquing colonial narratives by actively deconstructing earlier archaeological interpretations that nullified African agency and innovation.

Fourthly and lastly, methodological reorientation – which is about (a) vernacular language utilisation in creating and teaching new knowledge about African history, including site reports, in local languages to make them accessible and meaningful to the community; (b) applying scientific techniques to local realities by making use of techninques like DNA or

isotopic analysis specifically to address locally pertinent issues relating to mobility, diet, and community origins instead of only general “global” interests; and (c) long-term engagement through shifting from short-term “parachute” research to long-term residency and building trust with local stakeholders.

Therefore, by prioritising local ontologies and modes of validation, archaeology in Africa can evolve from a tool of investigation to a tool of empowerment, bringing back historical pride and coming up with lessons for contemporary African societies.

6.2 Africanisation of Biblical Archaeology

The coupling of the discipline of Biblical Archaeology and the concept of Africanisation is quite a vast and complex one. This is because this subsection will have to touch on the following issues: African history and the importance of memory in African history; the value of insisting on both colonial and local accounts; the significance of the involvement of descendant communities in any narrative concerning their land; the worth of harnessing both local and general public; the difficulties experienced in the archaeological research; latest methods in archaeology and their challenges; the importance of indigenous knowledge systems in archaeological practice; and the awareness of the African politics and the long awaited process of decolonisation in the African (biblical) archaeology. All these points mentioned above have direct bearing on Africanisation as much as they relate to the discipline of Biblical Archaeology.

It is unfortunate that archaeology has colonial early stages, and it is this colonial baggage that archaeologists attempt to find a way of relieving themselves of, by pinpointing other features

that may be linked to a post-modern discipline. Over the past few years, critiques of archaeological method have laid down new agendas for it that are (a) politically aware of, (b) sensitive to, and (c) harmonious with the desires of descendant communities. There are pragmatic connotations of archaeological research for the descendant communities to whom it pays particular attention. For instance, introducing archaeology fundamentally as a "science" denies descendants' rights to their own viewpoints and understandings of the past and its usage today (Pikirayi, 2015). (Biblical) Archaeological research in Africa is not just an activity in knowledge production any more, but also relates to the deliberations of such knowledge with local and indigenous communities. Even though crucial in putting down new directions in archaeology, such a conversation has been absent in archaeological practice in Africa.

The centre of attention for (biblical) archaeology should be more on local knowledge in partnership with local communities. This approach objects to traditional archaeological theories and practices, as it hinges on the assumption that Western scientific approaches to archaeological theory and method are not of necessity the ideal way of interpreting the past. The lack of success in exchanging and relaying such knowledge has made archaeologists to be in charge of the pasts of others, which is no longer justifiable.

The general public has as well begun to be very cynical regarding the part of (biblical) archaeology in its portrayal of the past of communities it strives for to study. Participatory public archaeology in Southern Africa, in particular, remains relatively new method. Furthermore, of significant influence is the objection registered by the general public and local communities (Pikirayi, 2015), due to their association of archaeology with theft and dismantling of cultural and religious material, and the violation of cultural heritage together

with sacred places. Additionally, local communities and the public in general are gradually beginning to be having reservations relating to the knowledge assertions of a discipline that is confined within a Western system of values and whose pertinence is not discernible. Hence, it is apparent that (biblical) archaeologists are so far not completely postcolonial in their methodology, with colonial traditions continuing in numerous parts of the continent.

In actual fact, (Biblical) Archaeological research in the African continent is beset with the problems of: ever-present issue of environment; political instability; internecine warfare; religious battles; terrorism; shortage of funds for archaeological research; and unavailability of properly trained indigenous archaeologists due to the West's deliberate underdevelopment of Africa (Willoughby 1991, 114). Consequently, these problems militate against progress in archaeology. Thus, these challenges stifle the Africanisation progress in (Biblical) Archaeology.

The major difficulty in Africa regarding (biblical) archaeology, is the conception among its interpreters that it is a direct 'science' of delving into the past, with no bearing on the present time. Besides, (Biblical) Archaeology has come short of challenging social ills such as racism, poverty, and critical issues of equity – especially in South Africa – where in spite of efforts towards embracing a transformative agenda there is a great deal of resistance by archaeologists (Meskell, 2011).

Latest methods in modern archaeology challenge the issue of universalism by pursuing relative theorisations that investigate the variety of local contexts. Universalising (biblical) archaeology foisted obstructions on the practice of archaeology in Africa (Pikirayi, 2015), with researchers eagerly embracing methods and epistemologies from Western academic institutions, at the cost of those found in Africa. Hence, this brought into existence very

unclear, unequalled and numerous theoretical sceneries, hardly any of which were pertinent to the African context.

Another challenge with (biblical) archaeology in Africa was the lack of success in involving both colonial and local accounts, as an effort in source criticism and as a method in putting together alternate histories and archaeologies of societies. Societies in Africa have complicated histories of migration and settlement, interwoven with memory, history, and landscape. The recording, proveniencing, and tracing out of "cultures of orality" dictate methods that are specific to the continent. African history is envisaged distinctively in African contexts, and this ought to have an impact on how we organise and carry out our research and make a note of the past.

Resorting to memory in African history-making relates as well to how indigenous knowledge systems have an effect on and make a marked change in the nature of their pasts. Local knowledge systems have many different aspects or features and a lot more complicated, and preferred to Western knowledge which was and continues to be utilised to sap other knowledge systems (Pikirayi, 2015). There ought to be no exclusive, rigid, and powerful account relating to the past in Africa. The resilience of local communities and African knowledge systems – that have been regarded as impertinent by Western scholarship – is crucial, because the emancipatory value of indigenous knowledge systems is that they compel us to contextualise the contradiction between the written word and the spoken word in history and (biblical) archaeology in Africa.

The persistent rejection of the endeavours to re-interpret the past of Africa within the conceptual structure intended to serve as a support for indigenous knowledge systems and epistemologies or philosophies in much of Africa (Pikirayi, 2015), and especially in South

Africa – because their Western critics deem these as "unscientific" – constitutes a lack of success in the understanding that (biblical) archaeology, in Africa, needs to decolonise itself totally. And that one of the paramount methods in which it can accomplish this is by refusing the philosophical inheritance of Western modernity, and especially that value set of the Enlightenment.

Lastly, in countries like South Africa, with the contorted racial demographics, where (biblical) archaeology persists in being ruled by a minority of white archaeologists, coupled with a slothful pace of change, especially in the training and development of black and indigenous archaeologists, comprises a critical problem to the discipline of (biblical) archaeology. Furthermore, these threats or barriers are neo-colonial in character – meaning new and revived form of colonialism – and will only be abolished through both the formulation of the law and continuous curriculum innovations.

6.3 Can Biblical Archaeology become an African scientific discipline?

(Biblical) Archaeology is neither a pure science[8] nor natural science, however is in most cases thought about carefully as a scientific discipline (Levy and Stewart, 2025), particularly when employing scientific methods and techniques to study the material remains of past human

[8] Pure science is basic or fundamental science that is research driven by curiosity to expand knowledge and understanding of the natural world (National Science Foundation, 2014), instead of the need to create a product or solve a specific problem. It consists of the fields like Mathematics, Chemistry, and Physics, et cetera. Its principal objective is to develop and refine scientific theories relating to how the universe functions through observation, experimentation, and theoretical analysis. It is characterised by goal, motivation, methodology, and application.
Natural science is the study of the natural world and how it functions, using systematic observation and experimentation to understand phenomena (uopeople.edu, 2021). It is a branch of science that is founded on empirical evidence and comprises major fields like Chemistry, Life Science, Physics, Astronomy, and Earth Science. The aim is to develop a reliable understanding of patterns in the universe through rigorous methods and theories. Its core principles are: empirical evidence, systematic study, objectivity, and prediction.

life and activities. While it enjoys some features and aspects of the humanities as well, its dependence on the scientific approaches makes it a scientific field.

The following points characterise the scientificity of archaeology as a discipline:

(a) Scientific Method – Archaeology makes use of scientific method, inclusive of: asking questions, developing hypotheses, gathering evidence, and testing those hypotheses.

(b) Interdisciplinary Nature – Archaeology many a time combines with other fields such as anthropology, history, geology, chemistry, geophysics, geo-mathematics, and others. This interdisciplinary approach enables for the utilisation of diversified scientific instruments and techniques to analyse archaeological remains.

(c) Material Remains – The most important focal point of archaeology is the study of material remains, such as artefacts and ecofacts as well as literary sources, which provide substantiation of past human activity and behaviour.

(d) Scientific Analysis – Archaeologists apply scientific methods to examine and interpret the remains, which include techniques similar to carbon dating, DNA analysis, and chemical analysis.

For instance, studying the building techniques of the Pyramids by assessing worker quarters near the site or making use of radiocarbon dating to establish the age of artefacts, are typical cases of scientific archaeology.

However, we concede the dual nature of (biblical) archaeology. Whilst (biblical) archaeology draws on scientific methods and analysis, it does over and above that have aspects and

features of the humanities, including the interpretation and understanding of human cultures and societies.

Therefore, for a Biblical Archaeology to become an African scientific discipline the following requirements ought to be met:

First, Biblical Archaeology should be in existence to discover solutions to a variety of the root problems confronted within its cosmology. This scientific discipline ought to be put in place in such a manner that it fits with African native thought systems.

Second, Biblical Archaeology need not become harmful to the environment like the Western science, which is currently responsible for serious environmental issues. Besides, there is a necessity for this scientific discipline to provide protected and adequate energy to the world.

Third and last, on becoming an African scientific discipline, Biblical Archaeology ought to derive from the utmost need to establish an indigenous brand of African logic embedded within the African thought system.

All in all, (Biblical) Archaeology should be Africanised so that archaeology can be practised within the new agendas that are (a) politically aware of, (b) sensitive to, and (c) harmonious with the goals of the descendant communities.

Finally, on becoming African scientific discipline, Biblical Archaeology should be able to afford its practitioners to demonstrate the capacity for pertinence, as African traditional scholars are required to be exceptionally good at various interdisciplinary fields such as geology, palaeontology, biochemistry, history, geo-mathematics, life sciences, geophysics, archaeometry (to name a few), as well as classical languages.

7. Conclusion

In this study, I critically examined the state of Biblical Archaeology on the African continent, and attempted to answer the question whether Biblical Archaeology can be considered an African scientific discipline. This was pursued by looking at the making of Biblical Archaeology through a comprehensive exploration of Biblical Archaeology. Then, the relevance of Biblical Archaeology to the African Biblical Scholarship was explored by means of a thorough review of African Biblical Hermeneutics whereupon its inadequacy (gaps and weaknesses) was established. Finally, I concluded by looking closely at the great significance of Biblical Archaeology within African Biblical Scholarship.

At the end this is what I managed to arrive at:

First, on the making of Biblical Archaeology it was further observed that Biblical Archaeology is beset with human factor which manifests itself in the form of politics and coloniality. However, the growing problem of the entanglement of archaeology with politics manifesting itself in almost all over the world, is a matter of great concern. And, the importance of decolonisation is noted in its ridding people of such social issues as racism, social hierarchies, and also imposed queer or alien languages and cultural norms.

Second, regarding the pertinence of Biblical Archaeology, this discipline adds value to the African Biblical Hermeneutics of support, confirmation, and justification. This is because Biblical Archaeology not only deals with tangible things, but also deals with people by allowing ancient objects to speak on their own terms. Biblical Archaeology is all about making sense of our past as dealt with in the African Biblical Hermeneutics. However, Biblical Archaeology is

not a panacea and cannot address all the gaps and weaknesses identified within African Biblical Hermeneutics.

Third, with respect to the great significance of Biblical Archaeology within the African Biblical Scholarship, the unfortunate problem of non-incorporation of Biblical Archaeology was looked at and suggestions were made towards the improvement of the situation. Furthermore, the possibility of Africanisation of Biblical Archaeology was delved into and the way forward was submitted.

Fourth and last, an attempt was made towards responding to a question whether Biblical Archaeology can become an African scientific discipline. It is my humble observation that the Africanisation of Biblical Archaeology is still at its earliest stage. More research on this endeavour is needed to eventually succeed. This arduous undertaking is a must welcomed and acceptable challenge, especially to African researchers, to make this Africanisation of Biblical Archaeology work.

My goal in this study has been to critically examine the state of Biblical Archaeology on the African continent, thereby seeking to answer the question whether Biblical Archaeology can be considered an African scientific discipline. This study is in no way complete and closed. It is a continuing deliberation that is open-ended for the benefit of academia, as both Biblical Archaeology and African Biblical Hermeneutics are dynamic disciplines.

Furthermore, it is my hope that this study will stimulate dialogue and promote additional thinking about how we can make better use of the utility of Biblical Archaeology – within African Biblical Scholarship – as an African scientific discipline in the third millennium.

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