

Preliminary Notes on Recent Historiography: Centralization and the New Imperialism¹

Keith W. Whitelam
Department of Biblical Studies
University of Sheffield
Sheffield S10 2TN
UK

1. Introduction

1.1 It was agreed at the last meeting that we would try to offer a series of working papers or working notes on the conceptualization of space in historiography on ancient Israel. These thoughts are offered in light of that request and should be understood as a series of reflections and working ideas rather than a finished paper.

1.2 These thoughts are part of a wider project on the poetics of the historiography of ancient Israel. Previous papers to this seminar have outlined some of my thoughts on how space has been represented in the study of the history of ancient Israel. Given the polarisation of the recent debate, my initial intention was to investigate two recent works on historiography which are commonly perceived to be on opposite sides of the divide: Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman's *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of its Sacred Texts* and William G. Dever's *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?*² Both are best selling works which have reached wide audiences. They bring a more specialized debate, with varying degrees of success and sophistication, to a wider audience but are also influential in terms of the scholarly divide (a spatial, political, and ideological divide). Given that the battle lines have been drawn around the monarchy, I thought it might be instructive to look at the conceptualization of space in their respective chapters dealing with this topic, particularly with a view to seeing whether or not they offer different understandings of space. However, in thinking about some of the issues raised in these chapters, I have become increasingly interested in the connections between Dever's work and its social and political context. These notes then are less a comparison of the two works, or particular chapters, than thoughts on the conceptualization of space in the work of Dever and its worldly affiliations.³

2. Methodological Imperialism

¹A working paper for discussion at the Constructions of Ancient Space Seminar (SBL/AAR Atlanta, November 2003).

²Although I am interested in the rhetorical strategies of these works, I have ignored the personal insults throughout Dever's volume. These have been addressed in 'Representing Minimalism: the Rhetoric and Reality of Revisionism' in the festschrift for Robert P. Carroll.

³There is much more to be done here. For example, Claudia's comment that 'the very imagery of "in front of" the text and "behind" the text is already spatial' drew my attention to the title of Dever's chapter, 'Getting at the "History behind the History": What Convergences between Texts and Artifacts Tell Us about Israelite Origins and the Rise of the State' (2001: 97–157).

2.1 One of the reasons for the change of intended focus was that although both works share fundamental assumptions about centralization and statehood, their rhetorical strategies are significantly different.⁴ Dever's work, and a number of his other publications in recent years, represent an attempt to impose his own methodological imperialism on the discipline. The rhetoric throughout the book—as well as in a whole series of pronouncements, particularly claims as to the incompetence of opponents—reveals his own 'territorial ambitions within disciplinary space', to adapt Gregory's (1994: 45) description of the work of Durkheim. It is a methodological imperialism which is designed to control the 'contemporary constellation of power-knowledge' (Gregory, 1994: 44). Reflection on this need to try to impose this methodological imperialism raises interesting questions concerning the worldly affiliations of scholarship, particularly the social and political context in which current discussions are situated.⁵

2.2 Dever claims, for example, that the single most significant criterion for defining 'statehood' is the centralization of power (2001: 126). A fact that the revisionists are said to be unable to understand because it seems they have no knowledge of the voluminous literature on state formation (2001: 124). This unfamiliarity, or lack of competence, will come as a surprise to Flanagan, Frick, Coote, Whitelam and others who regularly debated the literature on state formation and its relevance to understanding the Israelite monarchy in the SBL/AAR seminar on 'the sociology of the monarchy' some 20 years ago.⁶ No precise references are given to this literature, again a common technique in the imperialist control of knowledge, but an authoritative claim is put forward which is designed to delegitimize the claim of opponents to participate in the debate. It is an attempt to control disciplinary space. The spatial categories employed in the work are presented as though they are neutral and self-evident, an objective platform for supposedly disinterested claims to truth.

3. Centralization and the Ordering of Space

3.1 Dever (2001: 91) is anxious to stress the existence of what he terms 'convergences' between the biblical text and artifactual evidence. The historian working patiently with the text is able to dig out nuggets of truth (2001: 97). It is 1–2 Kings, apparently, 'that will provide the best test-case for our attempt to mine "historical nuggets" from biblical texts', he says. Strangely, 1 and 2 Samuel are passed over in silence. Whether or not we can find nuggets of truth here is not

⁴The question of the dating of particular architectural features to the 10th or 9th centuries, the topic which has dominated recent debates, seems to me a side issue and distraction. It distracts from the fundamental question of whether or not it is centralization and statehood that is being observed, whatever the date of the structures. The focus is on the question of chronology and not the assumptions underlying the spatial organization.

⁵This is part of a larger project which will consider the contextualization of a range of works on historiography. It is not being suggested that this volume is somehow peculiar in its worldly affiliations.

⁶ See Coote and Whitelam, *The Emergence of Early Israel in Historical Perspective* (1987, pp. 139–166), for an early discussion of this literature and the relevance of Carneiro's circumscription theory. In fact, the issue had been addressed in a paper read to the meeting of SOTS in London in 1984.

revealed immediately. The reader is offered a résumé of common sense, widely accepted rules for establishing ‘facts’ (2001: 106), one of the most important being that whenever the biblical text and archaeology as witnesses converge in their testimony, ‘a historical “datum” (or given) may be said to have been established beyond reasonable doubt’ (2001: 107). The following section, ‘Convergences in the Biblical Period of the United Monarchy’, provides unquestionable proof of the existence of a centralized state under David and Solomon in the 10th century BCE.

3.2 The facts on the ground, which only the most prejudiced and cynical of historians could possibly doubt, are laid out clearly and precisely for the reader. At least a dozen sites in 10th century Palestine, it is said, would qualify as ‘cities’ by clear-cut criteria that have been developed for the small-scale entities of the southern Levant in the Iron Age. The essential point is that ‘today nearly all archaeologists recognize a small-scale but authentic “state” in central Palestine in the mid-late 10th century, or the beginning of Iron II, on archaeological *grounds alone*.’ (2001: 128; emphasis added). No convergence of witnesses it seems is necessary here. The label ‘Israelite’, we are told, could be extrapolated from the Egyptian reference on the Merneptah stele to an ‘Israel’ in Canaan c. 1210 BCE and the continuity of Iron I–II material culture ‘that all archaeologists acknowledge’.⁷ The capital of this centralized state does not really pose a problem. The refusal to accept Jerusalem as a state capital before the 7th century BCE is an argument from silence. Few 10th century archaeological levels have been *exposed* (his emphasis) in the deeply stratified and largely inaccessible ruins of ancient Jerusalem, ‘so the paucity of finds means nothing,’ he says. The reader is reassured that there is growing evidence of extensive occupation.⁸

3.3 The clinching convergence of our witnesses comes with 1 Kgs. 9: 15–17 and the finds at Gezer, Hazor, and Megiddo. The gate at Gezer was dated, he reassures his readers, on ‘commonly accepted *ceramic grounds*’ (2001: 132) to the 10th century BCE.⁹ The mention of Solomon’s building programme in 1 Kings 9: 15–17 thereby provides ‘convergence’ and so a historical datum beyond reasonable doubt. The defences could only have been constructed, he says, by a sort of “Royal Corps of Engineers’ under Solomon’s highly centralized administration. Thus we can be assured that there is evidence of centralization at Gezer, as well as at Hazor and Megiddo, and so proof of a Solomonic “state” in the 10th century...’ (2001: 133). The archaeologists, he claims, did not create the ‘convergence’ with the biblical text, ‘we simply *observed it*’ (Dever 2001: 133; emphasis added).

3.4 He sums up his argument by saying that ‘the considerable archaeological evidence that I have summarized here regarding centralized planning and administration reflects what is regarded in the literature as the *principal* trait of state-level organization’ (2001: 137). The evidence does not stand alone but is only the tip of the

⁷Elsewhere, his most important argument is an appeal to the material continuity from the twelfth to the sixth centuries BCE that shows a ‘national Israelite material culture’ deriving from the monarchic period (1995: 72).

⁸What that evidence might be is not revealed.

⁹See Finkelstein (1996: 178) for the way in which the biblical traditions were used to date key structures in the archaeology of the united monarchy.

iceberg: he stresses that the city defences and all the rest are part of a dramatic, large-scale process of organization and centralization that utterly transformed the landscape of most of Palestine in the period from the early 10th century to early 9th century. He then claims (2001: 138; his emphasis) that ‘*all* archaeologists are in absolute agreement that the phenomena of urbanization and centralization characterize this horizon accurately.’

3.5 If this was not enough to dispel doubts and suspicions in the reader’s mind, Dever then appeals to administrative lists, which although edited by the Deuteronomistic Historian from a late preexilic or postexilic perspective, ‘fit well with what we know of the 10th century from extrabiblical sources’ or could ‘scarcely be placed anywhere else’ (2001: 139). In addition, he claims that there is evidence for a number of ‘district capitals’, ‘presumably’, he says, ‘with some evidence of larger-scale, centralized planning’ (2001: 142–4). Gezer, Megiddo, and Hazor are all evidence for state-formation the reader is informed and ‘would likely’ have been the capitals of their districts. In addition, he claims that Level VII-A of Tell el-Far‘ah (North) would have served as a district administrative centre for Solomon with a two-entry way city gate, large public place near the gate with a shrine, several contiguous blocks of four-room courtyard houses, ‘so well laid out’ he says, ‘that they reflect a measure of urban planning.’ He then concludes that ‘thus Tirzah may well have been the administrative capital of Solomon’s northern district of Ephraim.’ If Gezer is not the administrative centre of Benjamin, then he believes that Beth-Shemesh is a good candidate. He concludes, after a discussion of the temple in Jerusalem, that ‘before leaving Solomon, perhaps a bit diminished now’ (2001: 155), every single detail in the Bible’s complicated description of the Jerusalem temple can now be corroborated from the Late Bronze and Iron Ages.¹⁰

3.6 There is no reason to dismiss the ‘era of David’ since despite Deuteronomistic redaction, ‘the main elements of the story probably derive from ancient sources and depict actual conditions at the time’ (2001: 268). He then concludes that:

Archaeology *can*, however, document in the mid-late 10th century an era of relative peace with the Philistines, a highly centralized administrative system in operation throughout most of Western Palestine, a growing and increasingly prosperous population, and the construction of such monumental architecture as impressive city fortifications at many sites and in all likelihood a national temple or shrine in Jerusalem that was modeled on similar structures in the surrounding Canaanite-Phoenician regions of the Southern Levant. The biblical writers did not “invent” Solomon, although they have aggrandized him out of their intent to glorify the Davidic line of kings.

¹⁰Note that all the features, including ashlar masonry, decoration, etc., he attributes to Canaanite/Phoenician influence in an attempt to argue that the temple was known to biblical writers. But the argument also shows continuity in material culture and undermines his argument about a national material culture. The temple he cites as a direct parallel (2001: 155) comes from a later period, 9th-8th century BCE!

Nevertheless, if *they* had not described him, we archaeologists would have to imagine a “Solomon by another name,” simply to account for the actual evidence of kingship that we now have.

(Dever 2001: 269)

4. Observation and the Ordering of Space¹¹

4.1 Dever’s discussion illustrates, unwittingly, two issues that have been of particular interest to the seminar: Soja’s observation (1998: 169) that ‘history was socially produced, while geography was naively given’ and Lefebvre’s contention (1976: 31—see Soja 1989) that space is ‘a product literally filled with ideologies’. What he claims to observe, through archaeology, is a hierarchically ordered space. The reader is encouraged to accept the claim to disinterested truth through the language of observation and particularly the emphasis on the distance between the observer and what is being observed. Strikingly, the landscapes are devoid of human beings: the spaces illustrated are part of a hierarchy of ‘royal’ installations and sites but are not inhabited. There is no recognition of the ‘unruly autonomy of the local’: it has no place in a space that is supposedly ordered and controlled from the centre.

4.2 Dever is not observing ‘facts beyond doubt’ but employing a typology of spaces which is hidden from view. Dever’s methodological imperialism, his desire to control disciplinary space, is mirrored in his understanding of 10th century Palestine as something that can be charted, ordered, and controlled, the very impulse of territorial imperialism. It is a view which is shaped by assumptions which have their roots in earlier scholarship but which take on a particular resonance within the contemporary context in which power, knowledge, and territory are becoming subject to a new imperialism.

4.3 Nadia Abu el-Haj’s (2001) account of the role of archaeology in the construction of nationalist ideology, nation-state building, and territorial expansion includes a stinging critique of the ideology of facticity. She points out that a series of ‘low-level generalizations were built on basis of things that could be seen’ (2001: 129). Observable empirical facts (e.g. ‘Israelite’ pottery) formed the foundation of archaeological knowledge. Observation was understood to be a privileged source of knowledge. Thus she argues:

It was through the very process of naming particular facts that an empirical body of evidence, including (Israelite) architectures and (Israelite) pottery forms, came into being. Once established, those empirical facts were *observable* and discoverable, and, moreover, they were generative of additional historical knowledge (which could prove or disprove specific aspects of the Bible’s textual accounts).

¹¹My earlier observations on the projection of the modern nation state into the past, bounded notions of ethnicity, and the construction of boundaries are relevant to the discussion. Members of the seminar will be relieved that they do not need to be repeated here.

Dever is not ‘observing’ centralization. He is utilizing a typology of space which allows him to impose a notion of ‘centralization’ on the objects he observes. This typology of space—the transition of ancient space from city-state to nation state—is taken to be so self-evident, a matter of common sense, that it is rarely if ever questioned in discussions about ancient Palestine.

5. Observing Centralization: the Stange Case of the Middle Bronze II

5.1 Dever, in his attack upon the revisionists, is keen to reassure the reader of the self-evident and common sense nature of his arguments. The evidence of monumental gate structures and fortifications at Gezer, Hazor, and Megiddo, along with its so-called convergence with the biblical text, provides a datum point beyond reasonable doubt for centralization, the most significant criterion for statehood. Yet, if we look at the Middle Bronze II, we find a period of major settlement and demographic expansion with the appearance of a number of very large well fortified sites. The Middle Bronze period’s urban character has always been cited as its hallmark by acknowledged experts on the period such as Dever and Mazar (Ilan 1995: 297). It is seen as being characterized by massive earthen rampart fortifications, triple entry gateways, monumental architecture, international trade, and settlement hierarchy, among other factors (Ilan 1995: 297). An earlier study by Broshi and Gophna (1986) of settlement distribution and site size suggests that demographic growth was urban based. They estimate (1986:88, n.1) that 80 percent of the total area of Middle Bronze IIA occupation and 66 percent of Middle Bronze IIB occupation was accounted for by large rampart settlements. The further development and diffusion of medium-sized sites during the Middle Bronze IIB and C periods indicates an increasing complexity of regional and interregional economic and communication links as well as a significant increase in population. New urban complexes were built on old settlement mounds at Dan, Hazor, Megiddo, Beth-Shean, Beth-Shemesh, Tell el-Far‘ah (Tirzah of Dever’s account) (North), Shechem, Aphek, Jericho, Gezer, Tell el-Hesi, and Tell Beit Mirsim. Hazor, at 80 hectares was the largest city in Palestine before the Hellenistic period, while a number of other sites covered as much as 40 hectares. The fortifications throughout Middle Bronze sites are extremely impressive with thick walls at Megiddo, Shechem, Aphek, Gezer, and Tell Beit Mirsim. While none of the palaces at Hazor, Megiddo, Shechem, Aphek, or Tell ed-Duweir or Tell el-Ajjul have been completely excavated due to their size and poor preservation, they extended for more than 60ft (50m) with several courtyards. Wright (1971: 293) describes this as the greatest period of prosperity in the country’s history, which was not to be surpassed until the phenomenal economic and demographic expansion of the Roman-Byzantine period. According to Dever (1976:8), the pottery of the Middle Bronze IIA represents ‘the finest locally made pottery in the history of the country, both in its aesthetically pleasing forms and its exquisite workmanship and finish.’

5.2 Why does the evidence here not point to ‘a highly centralized administrative system in operation throughout Palestine’? Although we do not have texts describing the ruler of this centralized state, surely archaeologists would have to imagine a ‘Solomon by another name’ to account for the impressive remains, particularly when

compared to the beginning of the Iron II period. Yet surprisingly, according to Fritz (1994:114), and many others, Palestine in the Middle Bronze II was covered by individual city-states whose individual local rulers were independent and permanently in conflict with one another. Kempinski (1992: 210), for instance, claims that the Middle Bronze II saw the reincarnation of the Canaanite city-state system; a sociopolitical formation, he says, that continued unchanged through the Bronze Age and even into the Iron Age.¹² Characteristic of these city-states are extremely strong fortifications, a new type of courtyard house, large temple buildings, extensive palace complexes, and pottery that is strikingly beautiful in shape and decoration. Why does none of this point to centralization or central planning, the so-called key characteristic of state formation? If it is argued that the remains at Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer represent evidence of a centralized state in the 10th century of Palestine's history, why is the same reasoning not applied to the even more impressive remains of the Middle Bronze period. Yet Ilan (1997: 303) claims that despite a certain degree of political consolidation and readjustment, this does not imply the unification of the entire Palestinian littoral. Why is this not evidence of a major state, more impressive than the supposed state of David? Jerusalem, for which there is no evidence of monumental architecture in the period of David, is confirmed as the capital of a centralized state, whereas a site such as Megiddo covering 80 hectares and with monumental architecture and fortifications is only an isolated city-state. Kempinski (1992: 198) can state that the gates at Dan, Acchor, Hazor, Shechem, Megiddo, Tell el-Far 'ah South, Beth-Shemesh, and Yavne-Yam, 'all have an identical plan, in general terms, though they differ in details of the staircases or towers. The near identity of the gates found in the Land of Israel', he says, 'and those found in Syria shows that they were part of a single concept of fortification.' Yet he still continues to talk of fortified city-states (1992:166). Why is the explanation for the similarities in design not evidence of a centralized corps of engineers traveling the country with their blueprint? This is even more puzzling when Ilan (1997: 317) points out that the ramparts at Hazor contained 1,000,000 m³ of earth, or Shiloh contained 45,000m³, and that a worker could move approximately 1m³ of earth a day. Thus it can be seen that it would require considerable labour over a very long period of time to construct these defence systems alone. Why are the impressive sites of Hazor, Gezer, and others in the Middle Bronze II not evidence of 'district capitals' just as much as the far less impressive sites of Tell el-Far'ah (North) or Beth-Shemesh in the Iron Age in Dever's account.

5.3 Why does the archaeologist not have to invent a king like Solomon to account for the archaeological reality that we find in the Middle Bronze II period? Here we have some of the most impressive cities, fortifications, gate structures and monumental architecture in the history of Palestine. Here we find an increasing complex development of urban centres of various sizes, much more impressive than anything at the beginning of the Iron II. But strangely no state, no centralization, no unknown king whose centralizing decree stretches the length of the land, or whose engineers travel the kingdom with their blue prints building structures to the majesty of their

¹²Yet Mazar (1990: 197) claims that the great fortification systems were the products of social organization, centralized authority in the cities, and rivalry between the various city-states. Where is the common sense or consistency of argument here?

royal patron. Here are ‘facts on the ground’. But seemingly they are not self-evident nor is it common sense, it seems, to apply the same rules of logic offered in observation of a centralized state in the 10th century BCE. The reason being, of course, that what is being observed is not ancient space but a modern space: the typology of political organization which sees a natural transition from Canaanite city state to Israelite nation state. A typology of space that is essential to the imperialism of the western powers who took control of the land in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

6. The New Imperialism

6.1 Harvey (2003: 50) notes how in the post-World War II period, the US sought to conceal imperial ambition in an abstract universalism. He cites Neil Smith as saying that the effect was to deny the significance of territory and geography altogether in the articulation of imperial power. He then notes that Henry Luce, an isolationist, in his influential 1941 cover editorial in *Life* magazine entitled, ‘The American Century’, considered that history had conferred global leadership on the United States and that this role, though thrust upon it by history, had to be actively embraced. The power was global and universal rather than territorially specific, so Luce preferred to talk of an American century rather than an empire. Smith (2003: 12) remarks:

Whereas the geographical language of empires suggests a malleable politics—empires rise and fall and are open to challenge—the ‘American Century’ suggests an inevitable destiny. In Luce’s language, any political quibble about American dominance was precluded. How does one challenge a century? US global dominance was presented as the natural result of historical progress, implicitly the pinnacle of European civilization, rather than the competitive outcome of political-economic power. It followed as surely as one century after another. Insofar as it was beyond geography, the American Century was beyond empire and beyond reproof.

The focus on centralization in the Davidic monarchy as the key feature of this ancient space and the natural way in which it is seen as part of historical progress—the root of western civilization—invites an analysis of the context in which such a view arises.

6.2 Methodologies and knowledge embodied in scholarly disciplines are not universal and timeless but socially and culturally constituted and therefore historically specific like other realms in human affairs (Berkhofer 1995:1–2). Recent attacks on ideology, and appeals to objectivity and facts, mark a return to the intellectual climate of the 1950s. Novick’s classic study *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession*, which argues that the pre- and post-World War II periods saw American culture turn toward affirmation and the search for certainty (Novick 1988: 281). At the time when the mobilization of American power was conceived as a permanent struggle on behalf

of the “Free World” against “totalitarianism”, whether Fascist or Communist, so the humanities and social sciences were an expression of the demise of moral relativism and of the triumph of ‘objective science’ and ‘the objective fact’ (Novick 1988: 287). The celebratory tone of scholarship in this period, which is mirrored in the works of Albright and his followers, both reflected and reinforced the confidence in objectivity.

6.3 This is reflected in the triumphant tone of Bright’s history, the Albrightian theology of history with its confident evolutionism, the pronouncements of the Biblical theology movement, and the confidence in the handling and in the historicity of texts which characterized biblical studies at this time. The period of American exceptionalism is reflected in the presentation of the uniqueness of Israel, whether its material features—the four-roomed house or collared rim ware—its political and social organization, for George Ernest Wright it was a unique mutation, and its theology and sacred literature. The works of this period are imbued with the language of ‘manifest destiny’, the frontier, and democracy. Recent attacks on ideology, and appeals to objectivity and facts, mark a return to the intellectual climate of the 1950s. The American historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr remarked in 1963 that ‘surely the basic conflict of our times, the world civil war of our own day, is precisely the conflict... between ideology and democracy’ (cited in Novick 1988: 300). The insistence by postwar biblical specialists and others in the humanities that their work was free of ideological taint provides, as Novick (1988: 301) notes, a textbook illustration of the truth of Mannheim’s assertion that the greatest strength of ideologies in the subordination of intellect to power is that they are commonsense.

6.4 While Dever’s work, and his notion of space, draws upon the Albrightian tradition and a utopian appeal to the ideology of facticity, it needs to be understood within the contemporary context. It is set in the context of a radical shift in American foreign policy towards unilateralism. As Harvey (2003: 75) notes, what we have seen is a shift towards coercion rather than consent, towards a much more overtly imperial vision, towards a reliance upon its unchallengeable military power. The ideas set out under the umbrella of ‘the Project for the New American Century’ (PNAC), which are the basis for this shift in policy, are not new.¹³ In looking at the worldly affiliations of current scholarship it is as well to remember that the current doctrine of the new imperialism was contained in documents that have been in circulation since at least 1991–92.

6.5 The PNAC describes itself as a non-profit educational organization dedicated to a few fundamental propositions: ‘that American leadership is good both for America and for the world; that such leadership requires military strength, diplomatic energy and commitment to moral principle; and that too few political leaders today are making the case for global leadership.’ In its statement of principles it claims that ‘such a Reaganite policy of military strength and moral clarity may not be fashionable

¹³Harvey (2003: 191) points out how the Project for the New American Century repeats Luce’s move to disguise the territoriality of empire in the conceptual fog of a ‘century’.

today. But it is necessary if the United States is to build on the successes of this past century and to ensure our security and our greatness in the next.’ The adherence to moral principle, hierarchy, and the ordering of space are important threads in the various pronouncements of the PNAC. The primary objective of this neo-conservative agenda is ‘the establishment of and respect for order, both internally and upon the world stage. This implies strong leadership at the top and unwavering loyalty at the base, coupled with the construction of a hierarchy of power that is both secure and clear.’

6.6 Dever chooses to characterize his response to the so-called minimalist-maximalist debate as a defence of western civilization. It should be of concern, he claims, to all who cherish the western cultural tradition, derived in large part from the values enshrined in the Bible (2001: 245). Thus the very foundations of western civilization are under threat: ‘the life of the Church and Synagogue; the fundamental value of the Western cultural tradition; and indeed all dispassionate and intelligent discourse...’ (2001: 291). Moral clarity and leadership is something that Dever bemoans in his critique of ‘revisionists’: ‘There was a time when professional biblical scholars—those presumably best qualified to read and understand the texts handed down to us—could be looked to for some sort of moral enlightenment and leadership’ (2001: 297). It is a rhetoric which accords with the pronouncements from the Bush administration on the so-called ‘war on terror’ and the identification of internal and external threats to American values and civilization.¹⁴ Dever appeals to Gress’s book *From Plato to NATO: The Idea of the West and its Opponents*. He concludes: ‘Take away the historicity of the central events narrated in the Bible—our “core history” here—and you undermine the foundations of the Western cultural tradition’ (2001: 292). Dever thus reveals his own worldly affiliations and connects his own work strongly to the war against terror.¹⁵

6.7 It is not ancient space which is being revealed in this narrative but a reflection of contemporary attempts to export a new imperialism. The methodological imperial made explicit in the claims to disinterested truth are mirrored in the territorial imperialism that lies hidden within the narrative. The focus on time elsewhere in the book—expressed in its title—draws attention away from the claims about the hierarchical ordering of space which is presented as both natural and commonsense.

¹⁴This is reflected in the increasingly McCarthyite language of the final section of the book. He describes the revisionist agenda as a ‘new quasi-religious vision’, with the warning that ‘if it could be carried out, [it] would ...see not the advent of a secular Utopian “Brave New World” but rather anarchy, chaos, and ultimately those conditions of despair that have often historically led to Fascism’ (2001:291).

¹⁵This imperialist vision, is captured in a different way in Dever’s 1995 complaint that American influence in Biblical Archaeology is declining at an alarming rate with loss of influence of American scholars in archaeology in Israel and Palestine, the rising status of non-American archaeologists in the discipline, the steady erosion of financial support for American scholars and the loss of US university positions. He claims in ‘The Death of a Discipline’ that ‘we [American scholars] are being increasingly marginalised, often reduced to the status of spectators at a game we invented’ (1995: 52---3). Leaving aside whether or not his analysis of the decline of university posts, funded projects, or opportunities is correct, and there are many who question his analysis, his assumption that archaeological investigations in the region are the domain of American scholarship is revealing.

The typology of space employed—one that is embedded within the discourse of biblical studies—implies that there are certain spaces (and peoples) which require domination and which will benefit from the imposition of the values of civilization.

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