Recent discoveries at Sepphoris and their relevance for biblical research

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ABSTRACT
The results of the University of South Florida excavations at Sepphoris are described and related to New Testament studies. Some attention is paid to the relationship between archaeology and New Testament studies, discussing theory and the question of models in social science theory. Some suggestions as to what the impact of the excavations at Sepphoris and elsewhere might be for New Testament studies in general.

1 INTRODUCTION
The purpose of this paper is to describe the results of the University of South Florida excavations at Sepphoris and to relate them to biblical studies or more specifically, New Testament Studies. I believe that New Testament studies in particular should never be the same again because of our excavations, but I will explain more of that later. Suffice to say for now that we have lead the way for no less than five expeditions to begin work at Sepphoris after our entree in 1983: The Joint Expedition to Sepphoris, The Tel Aviv University Expedition, the Duke University Expedition, the Hebrew University Expedition, and the LaVern University Expedition.

This paper will proceed as follows. First, I will describe the results of The University of South Florida Excavations at Sepphoris, supplying interpretations as I go along. I am mindful that this readership consists both of archaeologists and of biblical scholars, so I will try to be attentive to both groups in framing my remarks. I will then turn my attention to some discussion of archaeology and New Testament Studies, attempting to advance the discussion between the two disciplines by paying attention to theory and the question of models in social science theory. Finally, I will try to state what the excavations at Sepphoris and elsewhere might do for New Testament Studies in general.

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2 THE EXCAVATIONS AT SEPPHORIS 1983–2000

In 1983, when we first entered the field, our first objective was simply to probe the stratification beside the 'Citadel' or Fortress at Sepphoris (Strange & Longstaff 1984). There was little from which one could formulate preliminary hypotheses from previous excavations, but the hope was that enough remains of the ancient city would persist in the stratification to reconstruct architecture, living patterns, and economic life, but also make certain comparisons to village life in the Galilee. We also hoped to be able to determine whether Sepphoris was a Jewish city, as many maintained, or a mainly Gentile city, as others maintained.

Another objective was to check the findings of Dr Leroy Waterman, who had dug one season at Sepphoris under the auspices of the University of Michigan in 1931. Dr Waterman had excavated a structure which he had interpreted as a church. Not only did he think it was a church, but he also thought that Christians had built it before Christianity was a religio licita, which had implications for the course of Christianity in Palestine in general and in the Galilee in particular. We set out to test the hypothesis of Avi-Yonah (1977), who suggested that it was more than likely a villa. Avi-Yonah turned out to be right.

The findings were, first, that the Tower on top was not Crusader in date, which surprised us the most. It appears that it was certainly used and renovated in the Crusader or Fatimid periods, but its founding was mid-fourth century CE. It appears to have been a Roman military tower. Those who built it destroyed houses and other buildings down to their foundations. In the area of about 90X180m, they built the tower in the center and built other structures nearby, apparently all for military reasons. They paved the whole with a layer of lime and clay on top of as much as a meter of mixed debris from the destruction of the city.

In terms of the aims stated, namely, to seek information to correlate with biblical studies, the finds were scant. Nevertheless, it was clear that the Sepphoreans built all the foundations of all the houses which we investigated on bedrock during the second century BCE. There was a second major period of building in the transition from the first century BCE to the first century CE. In other words, on or about the birth of Christ, following the usual chronologies, the Sepphoreans rebuilt their city directly on the foundations from the earlier city. This seems to accord with the history of Sepphoris as read in Josephus (Ant 17.289; JW 2.56), who wrote that Varus destroyed the city when it revolted at the death of Herod the Great (cf Strange & Longstaff 1984).

This occupation sequence tends to be confirmed by the history of some underground chambers cut beneath the remains of houses. The earliest accumulations on the floors of the cisterns (dipping jars and cooking pots lowered on strings to dip water) were from the Late Hellenistic period or the second century BCE. We propose that this is a remnant of the Hellenistic city. In the course of the first century BCE–CE workmen associated with the house which we found in our third square cut two new cisterns. They did not know by this time of the earliest cistern, which had gone out of use.
This picture of building in the Late Hellenistic period and rebuilding at the turn to the first century CE tended to emerge everywhere we dug on top the hill of Sepphoris. The character of life in these buildings was everywhere the same also. That is, we found intense domestic use with storage of foodstuffs, but also storage of ceramics, olive oil and perhaps wine, and impounding of water in cisterns. The economic level of the people was not poor, but neither was it necessarily rich (cf Strange 1992a).

All the houses which we probed came equipped with miqvat or ritual baths beneath their floors. Users entered each bath by a narrow staircase that usually turned to the right or left, perhaps to save room in cutting the feature out of bedrock. The baths were small, only large enough for one person at a time. The builders plastered the interior on all surfaces, even the ceiling, with a strong, white plaster suitable for holding water. The plasterers took care to round off all corners so that no user would injure himself when entering and leaving the chamber.

Why are we so convinced that these are ritual baths and not simply baths? The answer is not complicated. First, in the large villa which Waterman first uncovered and which we re-excavated, there do exist at least three rectangular, stepped chambers in bedrock which are most easily interpreted as baths or even bathtubs. Waterman interpreted one of them as a baptismal font, but he did not mention the other two, though they appear in his plans or in the plans of Mr. Makhouly. That one is simple and the second more complex itself suggests separate uses. Only the fully plastered chambers cut with staircases fulfill the requirements for immersion.

We also noticed that there was a species of chalkstone vessel which appeared in the early Roman strata but never in the later strata. The exception is when well-worn fragments appear which clearly stem from earlier occupation. In other words, the inhabitants of the city used some small stone vessels and some large stone vessels, all cut from the local chalkstone of the hills of Lower Galilee.

We now know the source of these vessels, namely at ancient Abila, which also happens to be the origin of one of the aqueducts that serviced Sepphoris. These vessels appear in recent archaeological and historical literature as veritable markers of the practice of Judaism (cf Deines 1993). This is because these vessels are not subject to impurity according to the Mishnah, Kelim 10:1: 'These vessels afford protection with a tightly-stopped up cover: vessels of dung, vessels of stone, vessels of earth, vessels of clay, and vessels of alum.' A similar sequence appears in m.Yeda'im 1:2: 'With all sorts of utensils do they pour [water] for hands, even with utensils made of dung, utensils made of stone, and utensils made of clay.' It is apparently the firing that makes vessels of clay or earth susceptible to uncleanness, as witness m.Kelim 4:5: 'Clay vessels, from what time do they receive uncleanness? When they are fired in the furnace. And that is the completion of their manufacture.' It appears that the rabbis classified stone vessels as natural vessels, since firing was not part of their manufacture (cf Magen 1994; Strange 1997a).

The presence of miqvat under the floors of all houses so far excavated at Sepphoris coupled with the presence of chalkstone vessels in the Early Roman strata...
tends to confirm that the majority of the population at Sepphoris was Jewish during that period, even if we do not know precisely what kind of Judaism they practiced. This was true as early as 108 BCE when Ptolemy Lathrys besieged the city unsuccessfully on a Sabbath (Ant 13.338). Presumably, Ptolemy thought that the Jewish inhabitants would not defend themselves on a Sabbath. He did not know that this issue had been settled since the Maccabean War.

Is there more evidence to suggest the character of this city during the Early Roman period? The answer is of course 'yes', and I turn to this evidence now.

We approached the Roman theater at Sepphoris with some curiosity. After all, there are not that many Roman theaters in ancient Palestine proper, so the matter of date remained an intriguing problem. Waterman had suggested that Herod Antipas had built the theater. W F Albright in a visit to the site later published a comment that the stones looked second century to him.

The dating of the theater remains a bone of interpretation between the Hebrew University and ourselves, but we are relatively certain that it was indeed Antipas who built the theater. Our finds in the foundations of the west end of the stage showed us extensive rebuilding after the Early Roman period, but set the building of the theater in the first century CE. This was determined from pottery in the foundation trenches and in drains beneath the foundations that is exactly parallel to pottery of period Ib from Qumran. The date also rests upon the feature of engaged columns built into the façade of the theater, a feature known otherwise only in the combination hippodrome and theater built at Jericho by Herod the Great (cf Netzer 1993).

This date also accords with what we know of Antipas. He had lived all his life in Rome as a Roman, undergoing the education of a Prince. He knew the first century theaters of Rome and perhaps of other localities such as Pompeii. It seems clear that the first appearance of a theater that early at Sepphoris would have required royal patronage, and specifically patronage of the Herodian family, who were romanophiles.

In 1987, the USF Excavations at Sepphoris examined the surface of the ground on the eastern slopes of the hill of Sepphoris. No digging took place. While forcing our way through thistles as tall as our tallest staff member and through thorns up to our knees, I stumbled upon the bottom of a heart-shaped column still in situ. Because of its size, it was clear that the building we were standing in had to be very large. Of course none of us knew its date. Hardly five meters away another staff member dusted off the remnant of a white mosaic floor virtually at the modern surface. The combination of heart-shaped column (or corner column) and mosaic floor bespoke major architecture (see Strange, Longstaff & Groh 1988, 1989).

In the years of excavation since then our expedition has determined that there was a very large building on this spot which measured about 40×60 m overall. It was rectangular in plan, with roughly half the plan occupied by four porches. Two rows of columns graced the interior, but it was not the case that there was one entrance at either end, nor was there a single entrance on one broad side, except perhaps on the
north. Rather the enclosed building was a more or less square enclosed space with rooms on either side of the longitudinal axis. On the east side the simplest architectural solution from the traces of wall which we have is that there were four porches, each with its collonade of columns.

There was second story collapse at the west end of the building. That told us that there were offices upstairs at least in that part of the building. The materials found in the collapse of the second story included intact storage jars. We do not know what the jars contained, but one may infer that there was at least some storage upstairs.

In the excavations from 1993 we discovered to our surprise that the corridor on the north side of the building was much wider than that on the south side. We had no reasonable explanation. In the 1999 and 2000 excavations, we discovered that there was an enormous vaulted cistern exactly underneath the wide corridor, which explained its width. The cistern held up to 60 cubic meters of roof run-off, though we have not yet found where it empties or for what the use of the water was.

The interior of the building in its first, that is, Early Roman phase was plastered everywhere on the walls in white. The floors were also white mosaics. Everywhere we could check beneath the white mosaics, they dated to the Early Roman period. Everywhere we could check in the foundations of the building, it was clearly early Roman, though to the north some of the foundations were re-used from Hasmonaean period structures.

We also discovered to our astonishment that there were three interconnecting rooms beneath the mosaic floor on the north side of the building. Someone used this basement apartment, as it were, for centuries right up to the middle of the fourth century CE, when the entire structure was destroyed. Even in the second half of the fourth century, someone was using the room at the northeast corner of the enclosed building, accessing it from the street to the north. In the next century, when more than a meter of material washed in from the upper hill, workers dug down into these rooms and used part of the space again.

On the north side of the building stood one entrance from the street. This entrance was not directly opposite an entrance on the south. Rather the traffic pattern includes entry near the southeast corner of the building into the corridors, and entry in the middle of the north side into the corridors. The corridors invite one to walk around the two central spaces.

Is it possible to deduce the nature of the interior space of the building and therefore the use of the building? We start with the plan itself. We noticed that there are five rooms along the south side of the building and five on the north, but the builders took no care to place them symmetrically. One enters the rooms to the south only from inside the building, as far as we know, for there are no thresholds for doorways in the south side of any of these rooms. On the other hand, there are at least five entrances into a narrow corridor from the street on the south side of the building. This is odd, for we expect a line of entrances to let directly into space for shops or offices.
One of the south entrances is a main entrance into the building. In this case, visitors walked through a double-leaf doorway into a vestibule. To the right one saw a decorative pool whose top stood higher than the mosaic floor. From that point one was guided into a rectangular corridor that traversed the east end of the building with columns around a central space and connected with a second central space to the west. The central space to the east was about 5 centimeters higher than the space of the corridor. Two parallel black bands seven centimeters wide in the floor of the corridor directed traffic around the space and through a north-south corridor between two rows of columns and between two spaces. The north-south corridor apparently led to a doorway which exited to the north street.

The second central space to the west was surrounded by columns and furnished with two pools to the north and south. One entered the shops or offices directly from this inner space. A beautiful mosaic with birds, fishes, and animals decorated the western space, while geometric colored mosaics decorated the eastern space. Neither space was provided with a Tribunal or Bema.

One of the most interesting features of the western rectangular space, aside from the birds and fishes mosaic, is the beautifully cut threshold which lay between two larger columns. The stones are among the most beautifully cut, finished, and placed stones which I have seen anywhere. It was not until this summer that our architectural team discovered that there are wear marks on this threshold from some kind of a door. The reason that I say 'some kind' is that there is no provision for doorjambs on either side as in an ordinary entrance. There is a finely cut square mortise hole on the side end of this threshold, but no doorjamb.

About the only kind of door which would fit this feature would be one which pivoted on a single hinge on the south, as determined by the circular scrape marks on the threshold. This door could not reasonably have been very tall, if there are no jambs. I propose that this was a special kind of door no more than a meter high which formed a kind of low barrier to entry into the eastern space from the central corridor. Since the threshold is almost devoid of wear from walking upon it, I would suggest that it was in fact seldom used as a doorway, but when it did the bottom of the door scraped the relatively soft stone enough to leave its marks.

There may well have been inscriptions in the floor which named a donor, or gave the name of a governor or Caesar, but none has come to light. Three times in the eastern rectangle of mosaic one reads the word 'eutuxws', one each on each of three sides of the rectangle. This is most easily read as an adverb derived from €UTUXEW. In that case, the inscription is wishing the viewer good fortune. This is not recognisably Jewish, Christian, or necessarily pagan, but more or less a generic greeting. It may be quite deliberate so that citizens of any religious persuasion might use the building.

We have not discussed the streets on four sides of the building, but they have an interest in themselves. The street on the west side of the building was no more than a sidewalk and street, each about two meters broad. The sidewalk paved with stone stood about 20 centimeters above the street, itself also paved with stone.
Workers paved the north street with crushed limestone, not with cut stone. Next to be building there was a curbing made sometimes of the same crushed limestone and sometimes of cut stones about 25 centimeters thick. This curb effectively protected the building from the water which rushed down the street to the east during the rainy season.

The street on the east side of the building, apparently the Cardo Maximus, was originally paved with the same crushed limestone, as presumably was the south street. The cardo was provided with cut stones cut into blocks for a sidewalk in the early Roman period. This raised sidewalk kept citizens from the wet and dirty street. In the second century CE, renovations at Sepphoris included adding cut stone paving stones to the cardo above its original pavement of crushed limestone.

The building stood at the intersection of the Cardo and of the Decumanus, so we were sure it was important public space. Is it possible to deduce what the building was used for in the first century?

Given the description of the inner space, we can deduce at least three uses of the space. First, the four porches or stoas on the east side of the building bespeak public space very powerfully. In some ways the porch or stoa and the basilica, the descendent of the stoa, is a quintessential statement of Roman public space in the sense that citizens stroll together, pass the time of day, or transact business out of the weather. Vitruvius understood this aspect of public space very well (Vitruvius Ten books on architecture 5.9ff).

A second use of the space is for economic activity. In the last use of the building many coins—small bronzes—were found directly upon the mosaic floor. These coins must have had little monetary value to their owners, for no one bothered to seek them out in the relative gloom an architectural volume illuminated by shafts of light from high above the floor. Since small nails also appeared on the floor, then presumably frames or shelves may also have stood in this space. Admittedly, this inferred economic usage is dated to the middle of the fourth century CE, but it is an activity that could occur at any time during the life of the building.

Since offices or shops line the north and south sides of the building, it is possible that the building housed administrative offices. I think this is unlikely for the simple reason that the administrative offices excavated elsewhere are very small structures. On the contrary, the sheer size and grandness of this buildings suggests that these offices or devoted to those who rent them for special purposes, perhaps for some kind of services.

A fourth possible use of the building is for government. In this case, some high official of the realm met with his retainers and suppliants in one of the rectangular spaces surrounded by columns and walkways or corridors. Such a state of affairs suggests intermittent use of the birds and fishes mosaic with its threshold as a special gathering place. Many gatherings could qualify for this imprint in the archaeological record, but I favor judicial uses or for high officials, perhaps for the governor of the toparchy.
If the building was owned by the city of Sepphoris, then it may even have served for the boule or city council from time to time. This will remain hypothetical until other excavated details tend to confirm or disconfirm this usage. This is an attractive hypothesis, for it helps us to understand why such grand space was built at all, particularly beginning in the 2nd century, when it seems that the owners replastered the interior, and painted the plaster with panels of primary colors, but some with plants and birds. Such painted plaster is well attested in Roman structures elsewhere in the Empire.

In sum, we have discovered housing of the first century at Sepphoris which is surely Jewish in nature. We have investigated primarily one villa, but our finds cohere nicely with the finds of the other expeditions, all of whom have excavated houses. We have also satisfied ourselves that the first phase of the theater comes from the time of Herod Antipas, though we must leave open the possibility that Herod the Great initiated building of this specifically Roman building.

Finally, we have provided evidence for a large building, perhaps a civil basilica, which served special needs of the people of Sepphoris for 350 years. In terms of the implications for New Testament studies, we point out that an enormous structure with a tiled roof dominated the intersection of the two main streets of Sepphoris. It was large enough to be visible from the top of the ridge above Nazareth about four miles to the south.

3 TWO PROPOSITIONS IN NEW TESTAMENT ARCHAEOLOGY

I would like to emphasise that archaeology is archaeology and exegesis is exegesis. This is not to say that the two disciplines can never intersect, as in fact they will. Rather, the data of the two disciplines is disparate, even though their general goal, namely 'understanding,' is the same. It is simply that they seek to understand different subject matter (cf Strange 1992b:23-59).

I make the point another way; namely, that archaeology cannot affect exegesis, for exegesis by definition is 'The process of careful, analytical study of biblical passages...The goal of exegesis is to know neither less nor more than the information actually contained in the passage' (Stuart 1992). One will note that this process is necessarily linguistic and literary in its presuppositions, though surely it presupposes contextualisation or 'cultural embeddedness' of the text in question.

The idea of 'contextualization' leads me to two propositions, the first of which is that the primary point of intersection of archaeology and New Testament studies is the reconstruction or construction of the social world of Jesus and his compatriots. In this reconstruction, archaeology plays as large a role as exegesis of any text.

1 'Literature is here not studied for the sake of literature, but as an integral part of the culture to which it belongs' (Deist 2000:93, emphasis original).
To be more specific, archaeology reconstructs or constructs the social world of the times by making inferences from patterns and correlations among patterns in the distribution of artifacts, architecture, and stratigraphy at a site or sites. I have already pointed out that a current favorite marker of the practice of Judaism in the material record is the presence of *miquvaṭ* and chalkstone vessels.

However, it is not merely presence or absence of any given type of artifact that has alerted the archaeologist. Rather, the archaeologist has observed that a pattern is present. Since the pattern is repetitive, he or she seeks to disconfirm or confirm the presence of the pattern. In practice, this means that the archaeologist digs more at the same or a different site, carefully watching for the same pattern or patterns in the new data.

Furthermore, the archaeologist seeks to explain the pattern by positing repeating human activity 'caused' by social structures. These repeated activities leave those patterns in the data. Think of how human beings tend to walk so that footpaths appear in the landscape. Those who continue to walk in that landscape tend to repeat their behavior, that is, to walk in the same paths. The important point is that what causes people to walk in one direction on one path is often a social structure such as 'going to market.' People are walking back and forth from home to market to buy and sell. The result is that the social structure (buyer, seller, market, and so forth) gives rise to repeated behaviors (recurring intentional walking) which in turn determines structures in the landscape. The archaeologist's job is to detect the path in the landscape and eventually infer the social structures that produced the paths, streets, and roads. I submit that this process is analogous to the exegete's detection or discovery of stereotypical (repeated) phrases and rhetorical structures in Paul, Mark, or Q.

There is more to the archaeologist's interpretive work. He or she predicts what artifacts will appear and in which patterns they will fall in order to test the explanatory hypothesis of a specific social structure or a characteristic of a social structure. If the social world of Galilee in the first century appears to stimulate certain, patterned human activity, then it follows that an imprint of this world's social structures should appear in the material culture under consideration.

Of course this work is never finished, for the archaeologist will detect new patterns from time to time, disconfirm a hypothesis about the social structure of that world from time to time, and even generate new hypotheses and explanations which will require comparison to new data. There will be adjustments or enlargements of the explanatory hypotheses, but the archaeologist tries not to tinker simply endlessly with the hypothesis so that the same hypothesis accounts for the absence of data.

3.1 Example:

An archaeologist observes a scatter of coins on the floor of our civil basilica in a certain period. The scatter appears not to be random, but seems to follow a pattern. In other words, the archaeologist notes a correlation of coin presence at a specific eleva-
tion on the floor and in relation to specific architectural features such as columns or doors or walls.

The Archaeologist posits human economic activity (such as buying and selling) in specific places in the building (the architectural variable) and at a specific depth in the debris (the stratigraphic variable).

The Archaeologist enlarges his or her hypothesis about buying and selling to include possible commodities. He or she reasons that that traces of the commodity will be found in the same pattern as the coin scatter, perhaps fragments of glass vessels or oil lamps or bronze castings.

The archaeologist reviews the previous data which gave rise to the buying and selling hypothesis to look for traces of commodities. He or she discovers that glass fragments always appeared on the floor in the same areas where coins came into sight. Nails of the type that go in furniture or frames tended not to appear within the coin scatters. The archaeologist reasons that the glass fragments have something to do with the commodity, which is an interpretation not advanced before. The people who are buying and selling are also handling glass vessels, some of which they accidentally drop. The hypothesis of buying and selling tends to be confirmed, and now the hypothesis is enlarged to include the commodity, glass vessels.

Now the Archaeologist may enlarge the archaeological activity to test the hypothesis that there was wine or other liquids for sale in the glass vessels, or whether the glass vessels themselves were for sale. For example, scientific analysis of traces on the inside of the vessel may reveal molecules that stem from wine.

Eventually the Archaeologist posits an explanation of a social system for the production, storage, and sale (trade) of glass vessels. This system includes ultimately raw material for glass, glass furnaces, manufacture of raw glass, manufacture of glass vessels, storage facilities for raw glass and glass vessels, a distribution system for the raw glass and the glass vessels, and a system for presenting and selling raw glass and glass vessels. A similar set of systems exists for production and distribution of wine.

What I have not made clear in the foregoing few paragraphs is that the archaeologist largely accomplishes the task of interpretation by constructing a narrative or telling a story about the finds. What I mean is that he or she continually explains what the finds mean or how they are important to visitors to the site, to governmental officials, to funding agencies, and to fellow archaeologists. This construction of narrative is identical to the process of hypothesis formation and testing so dear to the philosophers of science (cf Hodder 1999:53–56).

After construction of social life and social structures from the archaeological data, the archaeologist then turns to the data from ancient literature, including the New Testament. The archaeologist attempts to test, that is, confirm or disconfirm elements of his or her reconstruction from archaeological data from the data of the

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2 In practice the data from the New Testament and other early literature is already in the archaeologist's head. This is what Hodder (1999:49) calls 'pre-understandings'.

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literature. Likely some will be called into question because they are not present in the literature, but a more likely result is that certain elements of the reconstruction from archaeology (the narrative) must be modified to take into account the evidence of the literature.

The second proposition stems from a proposal of Christopher Tilley (1999), namely, that any given artifact is a 'solid metaphor' for the culture or society which produced it (cf Deist 2000:110–113). By analogy, a gospel, epistle, or other New Testament writing is an extended textual metaphor for the culture or society which produced it (cf Deist 2000:93). The full implications of this thesis remain to be seen.

According to Tilley (1999:13), a given artifact of a given culture evokes memories and experiences associated with that artifact and which are unique to the artifact. For example, in an ancient culture a cooking pot evokes memories of the preparation and consumption of food, the smells, tastes, textures, and even emotions associated with those activities. For the archaeologist the cooking pot also evokes memories of excavation events, excavation reports, conversations with colleagues, and a host of other activities associated with interpreting previous examples of the cooking pot. One of the tasks of the archaeologist is to deduce the meaning of the artifact. This is accomplished by inferring the associations it had in antiquity. The method of deduction relies upon, at least in part, the recall and use of the new associations (memories of excavation events, excavation reports, etc). He or she will re-construct a world implied by the cooking pot, not that implied by his or her excavation activities. This is analogous to the task of the interpreter of the New Testament to understand the text as originating from an ancient culture somewhat alien to his or her own.

Tilley (1999:13) also invokes 'the compactness thesis'. That is, solid metaphors (like spoken metaphors) enable communication between members of the same culture in the simplest and most efficient way possible. If I see my neighbor dressed against the weather with a scythe in his hand, that communicates his intent to reap with an intensity and immediacy that words may not achieve.

Third, 'the vividness thesis' states that solid metaphors connect subjective and objective experience. They facilitate memory and recall information in a graphic or vivid manner. For example, the handles on the cooking pot remind me that it is to be moved from fire to table and back. Its narrow neck but globular body calls to mind that the contents are hot and will stay hot much longer than they will in an open bowl. Even its blackened base prompts me to remember (or learn) that it rests on coals when in use.

Solid metaphors also enable users to produce novel understandings and interpretations of the world, as is the case with metaphor in language. For example, if in any given ancient house all cooking was accomplished by slaves, then the cooking pot becomes a metaphor for 'slaves' work.' Or, if women carried out all food preparation and cooking, then a cooking pot is a metaphor for 'women's work.' I can evoke that metaphor by simply gesturing or nodding toward the cooking pot, never mind speak-
ing. Furthermore this aspect of metaphor mediates between abstract thought and concrete thought about the world. In this case ‘cooking’ cannot be an abstract notion, if I am handling the pot and preparing food. 'Cooking' is a tactile and pungent experience, not an abstraction, and the pot is one of its metaphors.

This idea of ‘solid metaphor’ is a relatively new idea, and I advance it here in hopes that someone will take up this tool and extend the analysis of archaeology and perhaps of text as metaphor. I have one foray into this area myself (Strange 2000).

Meanwhile the processes of interpretation will take place in the offices of New Testament scholars scattered around the globe. It is the hope of many archaeologists that New Testament scholars will learn to use archaeological data as well in this exercise. It will be interesting to see if archaeologists and New Testament scholars can come to a kind of consensus about meaning using the notion of metaphor in both spheres.

4 A WORD ON THE USE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE MODELS

In recent years, there has been a rather fruitful exchange between social scientists and New Testament scholars, though I am not persuaded that every such exchange has been helpful. I think of the work of Bruce Malina, just to mention one scholar out of dozens, whose work has provoked thought and insight (cf Malina 1986, 1996).

Apart from this wider contact between two disciplines, there is also a more specialised use of social science methods by New Testament scholars which I do not always find helpful. I am thinking here mainly of the work of certain historical Jesus scholars, especially the work of John Dominic Crossan. Crossan (1993) uses a specific social science model of the peasant and of peasant society in his exposition of the Jesus traditions.

The social scientists exhibit a certain critical attitude towards their models which is often unknown in New Testament scholarship. Fundamentally, there seem to be two attitudes toward social science models. In the one, which I find in the work of Crossan, the researcher conceives the model to have the power to organise the data and to get us closer to proximate truth. Therefore no data is exempt from sculpting by the model. Furthermore the model has an autonomous existence apart from the present facts which the researcher seeks to understand. I would call this a deterministic understanding of models. In the case of historical Jesus studies, the social science model of ‘peasant’, which is an economic model, cleaves away entire pieces of data to arrive at ‘understanding’. One believes the results to be closer to the historical truth than the results of using other models, such as South Syrian holy man, rabbi, Cynic philosopher, wisdom teacher, and so forth.

In the other, which I would call a heuristic understanding of models, one gains a rather clear idea from surveying the data what social systems are emerging and what social structures pertain. One then looks around for models of that type to see to what extent they help us organise, categorise, and eventually understand the data. The point
is, however, that we already know what the approximate outcome will be, although sometimes there are surprises. The reason there are surprises is that the model may use certain parts of the data that we may not have noticed before. For example, if we use a model for the first century with a category that includes women’s economic production, then certain archaeological data will emerge fitted into the economic landscape, even if we did not think of that category in our initial analysis.

A major point about models is that they operate, metaphorically speaking, like black boxes. One cranks literary and archaeological data through the black box labeled ‘peasant’, and Jesus and the gospel stories emerge from the other end shaped into a ‘peasant’ and a series of narratives of an ‘oppressed farmer’. This black box will never fail us. It will never produce a Cynic philosopher or a Pharisee unless we have elected to use one of those black boxes. The peasant model will also ignore women’s economic production, for there is no category within it that allows the data to emerge unscathed.

In archaeology one learns to use black boxes, that is, social science models, to work with the data and form preliminary interpretations. One is well advised to understand the limitations of models in interpretation and to use them critically.

5 THE RELEVANCE OF ARCHAEOLOGY FOR BIBLICAL RESEARCH

I believe that there several reasons why New Testament scholars should read archaeology carefully, and why New Testament scholars need training in the use of archaeological evidence. First, knowing archaeological evidence will preserve the scholar from making certain kinds of blunders about first century BCE to CE Galilee. Perhaps we have given up most of these, but here are mistakes that are ruled out or called into question by archaeological evidence, and which are repeated in New Testament classrooms:

- Sepphoris was a Gentile City, as was much of Galilee (Klausner 1949:173; Clark 1962:344–347).
- Sepphoris and Tiberias were of no importance to the countryside in Galilee (Murphy 1991:68).
- Galilee itself was a completely rural area, even deserted (Klausner 1949:173).
- Literacy was virtually non-existent in Galilee.

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3 Deist (2000:83) believes that there exists a position midway between these two, which regards theories (models) as explanatory tools which establish relations between observations, but theories (models) must be continually revised to fit the facts.

4 I owe the articulation of this insight to Marianne Sawicki, Professor of Religion at Baltimore State College, and to Steve Turner, Professor of Philosophy at the University of South Florida. See Sawicki (2000) and Turner (1986).


6 For the view that literacy was not widespread, but that children learned the Hebrew scriptures see Goodman (1983:73). For the view of more widespread literacy in Israel before the Exile see Millard (1992). See also the reasoned argument in Botha (1999).
- The Galileans were desperately poor and turned to dissent, rebellion, thieving and banditry to survive (Horsley 1995:73–75).
- There were no Pharisees, Essenes, or priestly families in Galilee (Klausner 1949:173; Horsley 1995:74; Murphy 1991:331).
- There were hardly any passable roads in Galilee, so Galileans did not travel.7
- There were no creature comforts to be had in Galilee outside the palaces of Herod the Great and his family.
- The Judaism of the Galileans was hardly observant or ‘orthodox,’ so Jews from Judea barely recognised the Judaisms of the Galileans (Vermes 1983:3–5).
- Galileans hardly ever took part in pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Horsley 1995:145).
- Galileans did not tithe to the Temple in Jerusalem (Freyne 1980:293).
- Galileans did not build synagogues until the third century CE (Ma’oz 1992; Kee 1999).
- Galileans produced no art or literature.

Some of these assertions are wrong because we have archaeological evidence to the contrary. Some of them are merely inadequate because the convergence of evidence that we have suggests so. Some of them we cannot yet evaluate, since they are speculations and assertions without proper underpinning from archaeological and literary data.

Second, if the exegete of the New Testament does not know the ancient world he finds presented in Matthew, Luke, or Paul, including its material culture, then he or she will have two choices. (1) One may simply substitute his or her own culture and lifeways for that of the New Testament book in question (Deist 2000:48). We all decry in theory this kind of uncritical acceptance of an inappropriate context for exegesis, but it is surprisingly difficult to know that one is doing this. Indeed, some do not seem to notice their own cultural biases at all. As Stephen Connor has pointed out, ‘More importantly, both attitudes [neutrality or relativism] appear to embody a self-contradiction insofar as they offer to take into account every perspective but that of the cultural analyst, whose own values and interests are mysteriously evaporated away’ (Connor 1997:221). (2) One may substitute another model such as the Linsky model (the one John Dominic Crossan uses) for the New Testament world. On this choice see my remarks on models above.

Third, it seems clear that the steady and careful use of archaeological data will help us not to generalise about Galilee and therefore about the nascent Jesus movement in ways which simply go beyond what we can legitimately infer. For example, since the Galilee presents a network of largely unpaved roads in the first century, it seems inappropriate to insist that the Galileans stayed home and did not travel to market. On the other hand, it seems odd to take the opposite attack and assert that Galileans set up no barriers to Hellenisation. A more reasoned approach would be to suggest that

the road system provides an indigenous means for trade in goods and ideas in Galilee, just as it did in Judea and Samaria (Strange 1997a:39–48).

Fourth, I believe that we are now in a position to write a set of hypotheses about Galilee written from both archaeological and literary evidence. Some have already made an excursion into this area (Strange 2000a; Reed 2000). Those hypotheses are in the nature of the case testable, and they will change as new data appear. I believe that we will conclude with a picture of an agrarian society peopled largely by Jews. Most of them were neither rich nor poor, but somewhere in between. We will allow that the economics of the household includes income from women’s production, which is a more nuanced picture that we typically allow. We will understand that village economy is more complex than historians and others have often permitted, for entire villages sometimes devoted themselves to a single economic specialty such as glass or pottery. We will find that people in ordinary houses often made provision for ritual purity, but we will not yet know to what extent they did so in every town and village. We will find luxury goods in the villages at about the same rate as we find them in the cities, though the cities will show more clearly the results of accumulation of capital in monuments and imposing architecture. I also think that we will hypothesise that towns and villages built specialised structures, namely synagogues, for declamation of Torah and prayer, but also for other gatherings. Finally, I think we will hypothesise a picture of public space in which often there will be too few statues from the point of view of ordinary Roman culture elsewhere in the Empire, but too many form the point of view of certain Jewish citizens.

Certain social institutions will not yet appear with any certainty in our set of hypotheses. We will not yet be able to hypothesise much about educational institutions. We will not yet be able to hypothesise much about the presence of the military in Galilee during the ministry of Jesus. We are as yet unclear how to hypothesise critically about the number of people who ordinarily occupy a house in the first century. Specifics about the percent of population which engages in particular religious observances will continue to elude our firm grasp. Yet scholars will continue to hypothesise that some of the citizens of Galilee will have allied themselves with the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes, and the emerging Jesus movement. The sum of these developing insights will allow us to contextualise the New Testament gospels and other writings.

WORKS CONSULTED


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