

BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

— A Parable —

Or

Your Guess Is As Good As Mine

by Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

—Introduction —

Biblical scholarship deals with many issues: when was a book of the Old or New Testaments written? Who wrote it? Where was it written? In order to settle these issues, biblical critics depend heavily on what they refer to as "inner evidence." "Inner Evidence includes such things as style of language, the names given to towns or other locations, the names and value of the coinage in use, etc. Sometimes these tools are useful, and sometimes they are quite misleading. They are misleading because the historical records themselves are so inconsistent or incomplete. What archaeologists are often doing, basically, is rummaging through old garbage dumps or devastated ruins, and trying to date things as best as they can. It is true that much has been discovered using these methods, but what people don't realize is that a great deal depends on how archaeologists interpret what they've found. There is a great deal of speculation.

For example, as author R. R. Reno writes in First Things (July, 2010):

"Beware of modern self-delusions. It is not the case that modern biblical study refrains from abstractions and remains intimately engaged with the biblical text. Efforts to reconstruct the original context for the book of Exodus or the Gospel of John are elaborate speculative enterprises that rely on countless sociological, psychological, and theological assumptions [emphasis ours]. Redaction criticism can be used to dismember books of the Bible, and one often finds modern scholars using this technique to explain away rather than interpret passages."

When our monastery in Boston was founded and a small brotherhood was formed, the abbot often received correspondence from various people asking information on this or that subject. The monastery's secretary at that time was a young man born in central California. So, whenever the abbot needed to correspond, he would summon this young monk, and tell him, in so many

words, what he wanted to say in his letter to such and such. The monk would take brief notes, and then, later, would write the letter, using the idioms, expressions, verb forms, etc., that he had learned and used in central California. Then, the letter would be read by the abbot, and if everything was in order, it would be typed, signed by the abbot and sent on its way.

Many years later, another young monk came from Britain to join the monastery in Boston. Since the monk from California had other duties to tend to, the monk from Britain became the monastery's secretary. So, whenever the abbot needed to answer someone's letter, he would summon the young British monk, who took brief notes about what needed to be said. Later, he would write the letter, using the idioms, expressions, verb forms, etc., that he had learned and used in Britain. Then, the abbot would check the letter, and if everything was in order, it would be typed, signed by the abbot and sent on its way.

With all the above-mentioned information in mind, please read what follows:

Concerning the So-called "Brookline Letters"

(from the periodical *Rummaging Around Wrecked Ruins* [Fall, 5575])

Many scholars today believe that sometime around the year 2055, a terrible earthquake struck the city of Boston, an urban center on the east coast of the region once known as America. The entire city was destroyed, and great parts of the city's core sank into the Atlan Ocean (then known as the *Atlantic* Ocean). The surrounding areas, likewise, suffered utter devastation and not a single building was left standing in the catastrophe. In similar fashion, an Orthodox Christian Monastery, which stood only five miles from Boston, is said to have been completely leveled and all its inhabitants perished as the large brick structure disintegrated. This is what some historians claim.

The destruction was so vast and so complete, they say, the entire area was abandoned, since it was far beyond the means of any government to restore the city and its environs.

Many millennia passed, and it was only fairly recently, in the year 5530, that some archaeologists began to excavate the ruins. That is when they discovered the buried ruins of an ancient monastery, as some believe. As they were removing the earth from the site, they came upon an old vault

which contained, apparently, some of the institution's archives. What a momentous find this was for the archaeological world!

Sealed as they were in a vault, these archives had resisted the ravages of time and climate, and had remained intact, for the most part. With enormous effort, language experts were able to decipher the incredibly difficult Early English texts — which, by the way, even the best scholars today struggle to decipher (no one, for example, knows how it was pronounced) and that's when they came upon "the abbot's correspondence," as some call it.

However, something was seriously wrong here. One set of letters that purport to be the abbot's were written in one style, and the second set, dated somewhat later, were written in a completely different style of Early English. The first style is referred to in today's academic circles as Cowboy American. The second style is called Stuffy British by today's scholars. Yet, the letters are signed, apparently, by the same abbot. Were there two successive abbots with the same name? But why is the signature the same? What is going on? Why this great discrepancy in writing styles? This was all *very* suspicious.

These serious problems have led many scholars today to the conclusion that the letters are actually forgeries, written at a much later date. This only serves to fortify the scientific community's consensus today that nothing can be definitively known about early Boston and its surroundings, except for the fact that it was nothing more than a sleepy, sun-drenched little vacation town all year round, with lofty palm trees lining its vast beaches washed by the warm, crystal clear waters of the Atlan Ocean— much as it is today.

Any talk of "monasteries", "hospitals," "centers of higher education" and "harsh climates" are the inventions of much later writers.

We may draw these conclusions with considerable assurance, thanks to the tools of modern scholarship.

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Some *True* Examples of Modern Blunders in Archaeology

Example One

A stone with mysterious etchings was uncovered by archaeologists among prehistoric Native American relics in the Grave Creek Mound in West Virginia in 1838. Over the next century, the stone

continued to stump scientists and more than sixty linguists, who were unable to decipher the strange carving. In 1930, a young man photographing the famous mystery stone from a variety of angles accidentally discovered the solution. Like the popular optical illusion puzzles in which greatly elongated letters can be read only when they're viewed at an extreme angle, the photograph solved the nearly 100-year-old mystery. The carving on the stone read:

BILL BUMP'S STONE

October 14, 1838

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Example Two

In October 1971, the Arbeia Roman Fort and Museum in South Shields, England, was proudly displaying an exhibition of Roman artifacts found nearby. (The museum is located near the end of Hadrian's Wall, built by the Romans around A. D. 160). One case contained a Roman sesterces coin, identified by museum experts as having been minted sometime between A. D. 135 and A. D. 138.

But one visitor, nine-year old Fiona Gordon, claimed to have seen similar coins minted much later than that — given out as tokens by a local soda bottler. She pointed out the soda bottler's trademark on the reverse of the coin. The museum officials had originally taken to mean "Roman" actually stood for the soft drink manufacturer — Robinson's. The realization they had been displaying a fake Roman coin made the curators look like imbeciles.

To which we would like to add: "Thank you, Fiona!" A nine year old outwits the "expert" archaeologists.