

Eric Cline, *Digging Up Armageddon: the search for the lost city of Solomon.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020. Pp. 424. ISBN: 978-0-69116-632-2. \$35.00 HB.

The fascination of *Digging up Armageddon* is not so much the archaeological discoveries made at Megiddo in the early years of the Chicago excavations, although Eric Cline, the book's author, doesn't neglect to report these findings and provide some discussion about their significance vis-à-vis the Bible and the wider Near East. Rather, what makes this book so absorbing is its report of the antics of a dysfunctional team of diggers at Megiddo and how their various interpersonal struggles often led to bad-tempered resignations and abrupt firings. The remote locale of the malaria-ridden tell-site of Megiddo, which in 1920s and 1930s British Mandate Palestine was accessible only by a long, rough dirt road, meant that members of the archaeological team had to depend a great deal on each other for both work and companionship. Naturally, there developed clashes among its ill-assorted characters. Cline has realized that a focus on the people on an archaeological project makes for lively reading, something that became apparent as he probed the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute's archive of Megiddo's letters, cables, and diaries, and began to keep track of the cast of characters and their various interactions. The result is a detailed analysis of the 'dirt' of the project, in which Cline gives careful consideration of the personality of each of the Megiddo team members, and the conditions and circumstances that led to various disagreements and struggles among them. His enthusiasm for this kind of research drew him beyond the papers of the Megiddo expedition to other sources such as family letters and reminiscences, ancestry websites, obituaries, memorial plaques (in the case of an American woman who "owned" Megiddo), even a poignantly described book dedication (to Clarence Fisher by a teammate from Nippur who would have died if Fisher – evidently infatuated with this man – had not nursed him back to health). Cline packages these accounts in chapters with tantalizing titles such as "Please Accept My Resignation", "A Fairly Sharp Rap on the Knuckles", and "The Most Sordid Document", hinting to the reader of further bad behavior to come. To be honest, while the archaeological discoveries at Megiddo made for interesting reading – the finding of "Solomon's Stables", a massive water tunnel and a Bronze Age palace chock-full of gorgeous carved ivories – these often felt outdone by the *schadenfreude*-like experience of learning what new troubles were brewing in the Megiddo dig-house, and who was going to get sacked next!

The overall tone of the Megiddo expedition was set by the field director. It needed a strong, decisive and energetic leader, especially given the challenges of the site's remote location, its complicated, stratigraphic excavations and long seasons of work. Unfortunately, the first two field directors were not well-suited to the task. The sensitive and bookish Clarence Fisher (field director, 1925-1927) suffered from what was described as "nervous trouble" that often made him feel paranoid and persecuted. In addition to having poor physical health, Fisher's meek temperament did not allow him to be a strong authority figure, and he was impractical and disorganized. P.L.O Guy (field

director, 1927-1934) had no knack for organization either. He was also self-centered and felt threatened by others he perceived to be more qualified or educated. Most of all, Guy was a foot-dragger; the excavations during his eight-year tenure progressed very slowly through Megiddo's many ancient layers from latest to earliest, something that perpetually frustrated James Henry Breasted, the project's manager back in Chicago. Things definitely took a turn for the better under Gordon Loud (field director, 1935-1939), who brought a level of vitality to the expedition, and who successfully oversaw some of Megiddo's spectacular Bronze Age discoveries. But his term came to a premature close with the onset of World War II.

Cline's account of the Megiddo excavations reveals an interesting truth about the practice of archaeology: just because someone has studied archaeology and comes with the right academic credentials, that doesn't necessarily make them good at fieldwork. One must also be able to withstand extreme physical demands and discomforts, and yet have the mental and physical fortitude to get on with things and produce results. The Megiddo Expedition was fortunate to have two individuals with these qualities, yet neither had been trained as an archaeologist. Robert Lamon was a 22-year-old geology student when he signed on to the excavations in 1928, and ended up working for the next eight years on the site, even serving as the acting field director for a stint. Geoffrey Shipton, a high school dropout when he started at Megiddo at the age of 17 and with no scientific training, stayed even longer, over 11 years. Yet, as Cline relates, Lamon and Shipton wrote up some of the most important and highly-regarded excavation publications for Megiddo, far more than any of the site's directors. Today, their names are the ones most well-known and associated with the early years of the Megiddo excavations, given their substantial contributions.

Digging Up Armageddon shows that some aspects of digging at an archaeological site haven't changed a great deal over the past century or so. One may still witness interpersonal struggles among team members on an excavation today, along with eccentric behavior and widely varying qualities of leadership. Other things, thankfully, have seen some change for the better. Women in 1920-30s Megiddo were deemed disruptive and inconvenient. When the wives of diggers had to be accommodated, they were kept away from important archaeological tasks such as drafting and recording. Blatant anti-Semitism reared its ugly head several times among members of the Megiddo team, while the disparagement of the local workers seems to have been fairly commonplace. Of the practice of archaeology, certain methods feel downright shocking today. No one, for example, would endeavor to clear entire levels of occupation from an ancient site, as was undertaken at Megiddo, with the result that the two latest strata of site were completely erased. It is all the more disturbing that few daily records were kept of these tremendous earth-moving operations at the time.

The Megiddo expedition also employed a large workforce of over 200 individuals, far greater than what is used on archaeological projects today. Nevertheless, these workers were an essential part of the expedition. Composed of trained excavators from the village of Quft in Egypt and local workers from Lejun, the village near Megiddo, these

individuals would have undertaken most of the actual digging, and would have played an active role in all of Megiddo's major archaeological discoveries. The workers would have been the first to lay bare the stone piers of "Solomon's Stables" and they were the ones who would have carefully exposed the caches of delicate gold and ivory objects of the Canaanite palace rooms. Occasional hints of the workers' forceful presence pop up in the notes of the archives: they went on strike several times for higher pay. They also protested after they had been cursed at and kicked by one of the foreign expedition members. Even so, the Megiddo papers appear to underrepresent this vital group, so it is encouraging that they are well documented in the book's photographs. While mostly unnamed, the workers can be seen in the trenches with their picks, shovels, baskets and wheelbarrows, in the sherd yard where they sorted and mended pottery, and at the dig house, where they provided essential domestic service and maintenance support to the foreign team members.

Overall, this book has been smartly researched, engagingly written, and nicely illustrated. Even so, there is at least one subject that could have been probed further. With so much solid work presented on illuminating the project's personalities, inter-relationships, and life on the dig at Megiddo, we wonder if Cline could have delved deeper into how these things impacted the generation and presentation of knowledge about Megiddo's ancient past. This type of investigation would be predicated on the awareness that all interpretations are strongly conditioned by one's upbringing, education, training, and the personal and professional conditions under which knowledge was being produced. Thus, any interpretation about the archaeology of Megiddo bears the imprint of the people who made it. We can see, for example, how the team, and especially the field director, P.L.O. Guy, strongly adhered to a biblical narrative based on their firm Judeo-Christian upbringing, and this led to the interpretation of the date and function of the tripartite pillared buildings of Stratum IV as "Solomon's Stables". There are certainly many other instances of such bible-based assumptions and conclusions. Further investigations might also look at how the personalities of project members such as Lamon and Shipton, and the specific ways they experienced excavation work and their understanding of antiquity, affected how they conveyed the excavation results in their final archaeological reports. Such investigations would underscore the scholarly utility of the discipline of the history of archaeology. In addition to the production of a colourful chronicle of the exciting, early days of digging, an informed analysis could get at the root of assumptions that have been made about Megiddo's past. It would highlight interpretations that have been largely shaped by the beliefs, ideals, predilections and prejudices of an assortment of predominantly Western, white men of the more recent past, and expose those which continue to impact our perceptions of this fascinating city to this day.

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