The Architecture of Ancient Israel: From the Prehistoric to the Persian Periods


The purpose of this posthumous fest-schrift in honor of Immanuel Dunaevsky, the dean of Israeli excavation architects is: (a) to present the reader with (as far as possible) an up-to-date survey of the ancient architecture of Palestine, from its beginnings to the end of the Persian period; and (b) to make available to students of archaeology in Israel a clear guide to the data, opinions, and conclusions of a variety of scholars that are dispersed throughout the scientific literature" (p. xii).

The first part of the avowed purpose of the volume was in the main achieved: the bibliography is up-to-date as of 1985-87, with some references as recent 1989-90. Each of the twenty-seven chapters discusses the main issues involved for each topic, citing parallels not only from Israel, but from the entire eastern Mediterranean as far east as Mesopotamia. Dwellings, palaces, temples, fortification systems, and settlement planning are treated for each of the periods covered. The articles are packed with information. The text or notes usually do a good job of presenting debated issues. The plans provide a good feel for the buildings or settlements discussed, though not every building mentioned is illustrated.

One of the most interesting sections is that on "Material and Fashions of Constructions" which covers the types of materials and architectural elements used in buildings in ancient Israel and also how massive structures are constructed and destroyed. It is unfortunate that we are still at a stage where archaeologists must debate how thick a mud-brick wall must be to support a second story. Perhaps some day experimental archaeologists working with civil engineers will be able to help answer such vexing questions.

Unfortunately, the work focuses on architectural features the size of a house or larger, including Shiloh's chapter on water systems. Absent are treatments of smaller features such as kilns, storage pits, cisterns and drainage systems, ovens, and presses (grape and olive). Tombs also receive inadequate treatment; only dolmens and structural tombs of the Middle and Late Bronze Ages are discussed. In addition, some important sites are not mentioned at all (e.g. Kuntillet Ajrud).

The volume's second purpose of serving as a guide for students cannot be said to have been achieved. There is no master bibliography, only footnote references and a list of abbreviations. There are editorial lapses. One occasionally finds references to "Chap 00 in this volume" (p. 145 n. 15). Although the chapters have numbers, the numbers are not in the table of contents, which makes checking cross references time-consuming, unless one pencil in the numbers in the margin.

Some of the photographs are washed out; most do not contain captions giving the number(s) of the features shown or the area of the tell in which they are located; nor are they keyed directly to the text. There are also lapses in keying the text to the building plans; not all rooms cited in the text are on the appropriate plans. Page 237 contains a math error. If 15 buildings were found in an area of 1,200 m² (= 1.2 dunams), then the building density is 12.5 per dunam and an area of 26 dunams would contain 325 dwellings, not 137 as in the text. On the positive side, the volume does contain a glossary of architectural terms.
and an index of sites discussed in the text (but a map of the country showing the sites cited would have been helpful). Only a few of the authors tabulate their data, which would have made comparing sizes and orientations much easier.

If the book is intended for students, the authors and editors must have had a graduate audience in mind, one which will profit from the up-to-date treatment of the topics selected and which is accustomed to digging references out of footnotes. The format is not user-friendly enough for undergraduates.

Finally, one notes that the chapters dealing with town planning primarily used sites excavated fifty years ago or more. This is not the fault of the authors. Current excavation methods, which at best only uncover a few adjacent buildings, let alone town quarters, insure that scholars interested in town planning will be limited to an almost never increasing data set (single period sites or sites with lower towns occupied for only a short time are the exceptions). One hopes that the "newer" archaeology will one day begin to deliver new data useful to all scholars.

Jeffrey Zorn
University of California at Berkeley


Over 365 entries by 205 archaeologists fill 1552 large (9"x14") pages of NEAEHL, with relatively fine (just over nine point) type generously enhanced by an average of two or three illustrations per page, in all, over 4000 maps, plans, charts, and drawings. Interspersed throughout are over 75 color plates in these handsomely bound volumes. Each entry, or segment thereof, is followed by its author's name. The work is fully crossreferenced. Each article includes a bibliography.

This English edition updates to 1991 the Hebrew edition which was updated to 1990. Both replace the English edition published in 1975-1978 which updated the first Hebrew edition of 1970. The chronological scope of the present volumes extends from the dawn of human creativity to the Ottoman period. The geographical scope extends to the traditional boundaries of the Holy Land on both sides of the Jordan River and from the sources of the Jordan in the north to the Sinai in the south. In addition to entries on sites and geographical regions, there are also entries on collective subjects. While there is an entry on marine archaeology there is none on archaeology as such. Other topical entries include types of architecture, such as churches, synagogues, and monasteries, but not on fortresses, castles, or mosques, although, as mentioned above, the chronological scope is said to continue to the Ottoman period. E. Stekelis' EAEHL article on megalithic monuments is replaced by one on dolmens. The map of dolmen distribution is better, because sites are now identified by name. Two of the illustrative photographs definitely lack proper illumination, which is unusual for NEAEHL.

The first volume begins with an introduction to the English edition, a Users' Guide, an editor's forward, and alphabetical lists of authors, entries and abbreviations, followed by the individual site entries. Each volume repeats the abbreviations, and a map of all sites covered in the set is repeated in the front and back inside covers of each volume. The final volume concludes with chronological tables, a chronological chart of the alphabet, a very fine and extensive glossary followed by indices of persons, places, biblical references, and an index of color illustrations.

Printing and binding considerations undoubtedly dictate the placement of color plates which appear together in alphabetical sequence according to sites. A reference in the article itself, e.g., Ashkelon, to color plates would help a person reading the detailed description of the Ashkelon calf (p. 106). Otherwise, the color plates are very pleasing and quite informative.

The brief introduction to the English edition sketches the history of archaeological research from earliest known attempts to preserve selected material cultural remains to the founding of formalized archaeological societies and large-scale excavations. Special notice recognizes the architecturally-based Israeli style of large-scale excavation, and many entries reflect this. Extremely helpful architectural and site plans abound; pottery assemblages appear frequently. Section drawings illustrative of stratigraphy are rare. Demonstrations of pottery sequences essential to establish ceramic typology as a basis for stratigraphic chronology are beyond the scope of this work, but identification of sources used to establish ceramic typology are not. They are greatly appreciated when they appear. Reasoning for specific ceramic dating often seems to be largely intuitive. This is not a shortcoming on the part of NEAEHL, but a reflection of the current state of archaeological research. It is important to undertake comparative studies based on factual typologies rather than assumed, interpretive chronologies.

Each entry begins with a site identification—with grid references where available—and history, followed by a history of excavations. Excavation results, the main focus of the publication, are given next, according to chronologically separated archaeological and military-political divisions. The latter are