

Dr. David B. Schreiner, Pondering the Spade, Session 4, Some Other Important Finds Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Schreiner, Pondering the Spade, Session 4, Some Other Important Finds, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. David Schreiner's "Pondering the Spade, Session 4" lecture discusses several archaeological finds and their implications for understanding the Old Testament. **Key sites** examined include Kuntillet Ajrud (with its debated inscriptions), Ketef Hinnom (and its early scriptural quotations), and Mount Ebal (potentially Joshua's altar). The lecture also **explores the Dead Sea Scrolls**, highlighting their contribution to textual criticism and understanding early Judaism's diversity, and **the Ugaritic texts**, revealing insights into Canaanite religion and the Late Bronze Age collapse. Finally, the lecture **analyzes Khirbet Qeiyafa**, a controversial site whose dating and significance are still debated, concluding with a call for nuanced interpretation, rejecting simplistic "maximalist" and "minimalist" approaches.

2. 26 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Schreiner, Pondering the Spade, Session 4 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Introduction & Languages → Introductory Series → Archaeology).



**Schreiner_Ponderin
g_Session04.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided source, "Schreiner_Pondering_EN_Session04.pdf," with relevant quotes:

Briefing Document: "Pondering the Spade" Session 4 - Key Archaeological Finds & Convergences

Overview This document summarizes the key points from Dr. David Schreiner's "Pondering the Spade," Session 4, focusing on significant archaeological finds and their convergences (or lack thereof) with biblical narratives. The session is presented as a rapid-fire overview of several key sites and artifacts. Schreiner emphasizes the importance of understanding the *context* of each find and cautions against a simplistic "archaeology proves the Bible" approach. Instead, he encourages a case-by-case analysis that considers both textual and material evidence, noting that a convergence may be "broad" or "narrow." He rejects the maximalist/minimalist dichotomy.

Key Finds and Themes:

1. Kuntilet Ajrud: Syncretism and Votive Inscriptions

- **Location & Context:** Situated at the intersection of ancient trade routes in the Sinai Peninsula, likely an "ancient truck stop." This context is key for understanding its function and the nature of its inscriptions.
- **Finds:** Numerous icons, graffiti, and votive inscriptions, notably on large storage jars (pithoi).
- **Votive Inscriptions:** "I bless you by Yahweh of Samaria and his Asherah" and "I bless you by Yahweh of Teman and his Asherah."
- These inscriptions explicitly link Yahweh with "Asherah," raising questions about the nature of ancient Israelite religion.
- **The Asherah Debate:** Is "Asherah" a reference to a pagan goddess or to a wooden symbol representing that goddess? The debate is complicated by a third-person masculine singular possessive suffix.
- **Grammatical Issue:** The possessive suffix on "Asherah" is unusual if it is a proper name, leading some to view it as a reference to a symbol of the goddess.

- **Rick Hess's Argument:** Challenges the suffix interpretation, proposing it is an archaic double feminine ending: reading as "Yahweh of Timan and Asherah," not "his Asherah."
- **Syncretism:** Regardless of the interpretation of "Asherah," the invocation of a blessing by both Yahweh and a pagan entity suggests syncretism, which the Old Testament prophets railed against.
- **Quote:** "Given the monotheistic framework of the Old Testament, Deuteronomy, the theology of the prophets, etc., Isaiah, it's monotheism, it's Yahweh alone. So, this is a syncretistic idea."
- **Schreiner's Interpretation:** Sees Kuntillet Ajrud as an example of the syncretism that the prophets condemned, a "narrow convergence."
- **Image and Inscriptions:** The Pithoi also included pagan iconography, with some debate as to whether the iconography is directly related to the text. Some have wondered if the pithoi were used as practice pieces.

1. **Ketef Hinnom Amulets: Early Scriptural Quotations**

- **Location & Context:** A large, sophisticated burial site overlooking the Hinnom Valley near Jerusalem, suggesting a high socioeconomic status for those buried there.
- **Burial Practices:** Multiple internments; bodies decomposed, bones collected in ossuaries, items buried with the body placed in repositories.
- **Finds:** Two small silver scrolls (amulets) discovered in a repository.
- **Contents:** The scrolls contain quotations from Numbers 6:24-26, the Levitical blessing: "may the Lord bless you and keep you, may He make us..."
- **Significance:** The earliest scriptural quotations found to date, pre-exilic (Iron Age II). This provides evidence that the priestly tradition was codified early enough to be used in popular contexts, not just in the priesthood.
- **Quote:** "This silences this debate because this thing, as a silver scroll, as a silver amulet that was put on the neck of average Joe or average Jane, used for whatever reason, they were buried with it, it's got a quotation from Numbers. So, the tradition was established enough, it was codified enough to be disseminated outside of priestly circles."

- **Implications:** The discovery challenges the theory that the Pentateuch (and especially priestly traditions) were composed post-exile. It indicates that it was in use and held authoritatively during the Iron Age.

- **Function:** Possible amulets to ward off evil spirits.

1. **Mount Ebal: Joshua's Altar?**

- **Location & Context:** In the modern-day West Bank, politically sensitive.
- **Finds:** A cultic site excavated by Adam Zertal in the 1980's.
- **Dating & Development:** Two phases (strata). Stratum 2 is more modest than Stratum 1, which suggests an expansion of the site in its later use. Dates to Iron I, approximately the time of the Israelite settlement.
- **Features:** Stone wall demarcating sacred space, a courtyard, charred animal bones (all considered eligible for sacrifice, with no pig bones) on a ramp leading to a square altar.
- **Textual Connection:** Schreiner believes this is the altar described in Joshua 8:30-35, where Joshua re-ratifies the covenant.
- **Quote:** "If it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, and looks like a duck, is it a duck? I mean, honestly, that's a question we have to ask ourselves... If it looks like an altar, smells like an altar, seems to function like an altar, is it an altar?"
- **Debate:** While some scholars have argued for alternative interpretations, such as a watchtower, the evidence strongly points towards a cultic site
- **Schreiner's View:** An example where archaeology "proves the Bible," a "narrow convergence."

1. **Dead Sea Scrolls: Textual Criticism and the Diversity of Early Judaism**

- **Discovery:** Found in caves near the Dead Sea in the late 1940s. Publication of the texts was initially slow due to bureaucracy and political reasons.
- **Significance:** Thousands of manuscript fragments. Revolutionized our understanding of early Judaism and textual transmission.
- **Story of Publication:** The texts were eventually released to the public due to the actions of graduate students and a professor at HUC.

- **Early Judaism:** Shows there was a diversity of "Judaisms" in the first century, not a monolithic entity.
 - **Textual Criticism:** The scrolls demonstrate concurrently existing versions of biblical texts (e.g., different versions of Jeremiah and Daniel). The Dead Sea Scrolls offer a window into this complex history before standardization.
 - **Quote:** "What the Dead Sea Scrolls allow us to see is the evidence of concurrent traditions... It forces us to ask the question, how are literary traditions, how are they developed, how are they perpetuated, and how do changes occur in between communities?"
 - **The Canonical Process:** Schreiner outlines a process where individual texts, traditions, and administrative documents were standardized, compiled, and copied.
 - **The Importance of Iron Age:** He states that the standardization of the texts largely happened during the classical age of Israelite culture (Iron Age).
 - **Geographic and Socio-Political Factors:** These factors, along with human error and alterations, contributed to variations in the texts.
 - **Qumran's Importance:** The Qumran community was just before a documented movement towards standardization, showing "a plurality of texts."
1. **Ugarit & Ugaritic Texts: Understanding Canaanite Culture & Poetry**
 - **Location & Context:** An ancient site in modern-day Syria, a major urban center during the Late Bronze Age.
 - **Discovery:** The site was found by a local farmer after striking a stone that led him to an ancient royal gravesite.
 - **Finds:** Well-preserved city architecture and, importantly, a priest's library containing tablets that clarified Canaanite religious myths (e.g., Baal cycle).
 - **Canaanite Religion:** Provides a fuller picture of Canaanite deities, moving beyond the limited perspective of the Old Testament. Reveals that it was an agriculture-based religion.
 - **Biblical Poetry:** Ugaritic texts show parallels to biblical Hebrew poetry, especially parallelism, which helped clarify and understand this key feature of Old Testament poetry.

- **Uncanny Similarities:** Similarities have been found between some Psalms and Ugaritic texts, suggesting that Israelite culture adapted Canaanite poetry by replacing names of gods.
- **Quote:** "If we actually take this word in the Ugaritic and put Yahweh there, that's essentially the same thing."
- **Obscure Ideas:** Clarified obscure ideas, such as the meaning of "Noqed" and a word used for Hezekiah's healing poultice.
- **Late Bronze Age Collapse:** Provides a snapshot of the world's first truly global economic network just before its violent collapse around 1200 BCE.
- This collapse caused a political vacuum that made the area open for the settlement of the Israelites.
- **Significance:** Important for linguistic, historical, and cultural understanding.

1. Khirbet Qeiyafa: Debated Site & Early Iron Age Israel

- **Location & Context:** Overlooks the Ela Valley (where David faced Goliath).
- **Controversies:** The site has been highly controversial, with debates centered around dating, identification, and an ostrakon.
- **Finds:** Sophisticated fortification system with a casemate wall and two gates, a large central administrative complex.
- **Dating:** Relative (pottery chronology) and absolute (carbon-14) dating methods were used. Initial dating placed the site during the time of King David and the United Monarchy, leading to substantial pushback. The debate over whether it is Iron Age II or Late Bronze Age continues.
- **Identification:** Excavators identified the site with biblical Sha'arayim (meaning "two gates"). Other alternatives have been presented.
- **Ostrakon:** Found potsherd with writing. The writing is very difficult to decipher. It is unknown what direction the text is supposed to be read. There is even some debate as to whether it is Hebrew or Phoenician.
- **Schreiner's Interpretation:** He leans toward the excavator's dating (Iron II) and sees the site as potentially part of a United Monarchy expansion/colonization effort of the Shephelah. He references Avraham Faust's theory of a failed attempt by the United Monarchy to colonize the area due to Philistine power.

- **Quote:** "I think we're dealing with a site that was probably in use during the era of the United Monarchy, and I think based on the material culture, it seems to suggest evidence that the polity in Jerusalem, the United Monarchy in Jerusalem, is trying to extend itself."

Rejection of Maximalist/Minimalist Dichotomy

Schreiner strongly rejects the maximalist/minimalist framework in biblical archaeology:

- **Maximalists:** Believe the Old Testament is historically accurate and always true.
- **Minimalists:** See the Old Testament as an ideological, slanted text and favor extra-biblical evidence.
- **Schreiner's Stance:** This black-and-white approach is too simplistic. He argues for a case-by-case analysis that considers both biblical and archaeological evidence, seeking to understand convergences and acknowledging nuances. He says to "jettison" those schools of thought.
- **Quote:** "We cannot answer that question in a black-and-white cookie-cutter answer. But rather we have to engage this on a case-by-case basis... How does archaeology intersect with the Old Testament? Well, it's intersecting in a variety of ways."

Conclusion

Session 4 of "Pondering the Spade" presents a wide range of archaeological discoveries, from inscriptions on pithoi to textual fragments and building ruins, all while emphasizing the necessity of careful and nuanced interpretation. Schreiner's approach encourages his students to move beyond simple verification of the Bible to focus on understanding what the archaeological and textual evidence reveal about the cultures and contexts of ancient Israel and the broader ancient Near East.

4. Schreiner, Pondering the Spade, Session 4, Some Other Important Finds

Pondering the Spade: Session 4 Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is significant about the inscriptions found at Kuntillet Ajrud?
2. What are the two main interpretations of the word "Asherah" in the Kuntillet Ajrud inscriptions and what is the grammatical debate that complicates these readings?
3. What is the importance of the Ketef Hinnom amulets and what do they reveal about the development of priestly tradition in ancient Israel?
4. Why is the site of Mount Ebal considered significant, and how does it relate to the biblical narrative?
5. What is the importance of the Dead Sea Scrolls for understanding early Judaism and textual criticism?
6. How do the Dead Sea Scrolls evidence the diversity of early Judaism?
7. What are some of the ways that the discovery of the Ugaritic texts has advanced our understanding of the Old Testament?
8. What is the significance of the Late Bronze Age collapse, and how does Ugarit offer insight into this event?
9. What are some of the controversies surrounding the site of Khirbet Qeiyafa, and how does this site relate to the United Monarchy?
10. What are the maximalist and minimalist approaches to interpreting the relationship between archaeology and the Old Testament, and why does Schreiner reject these categories?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The inscriptions at Kuntillet Ajrud are significant because they link the divine name Yahweh with a geographic location and the noun Asherah, leading to debate about syncretism and the nature of Yahwistic worship. These inscriptions use a votive formula and contain a benediction for the addressee.

2. The word "Asherah" is interpreted either as the proper name of a pagan deity or as a wooden symbol representing that deity. The grammatical debate centers on the consonantal possessive ending (his Asherah), which is unusual for proper names, leading some scholars to argue for an archaic double-feminine ending.
3. The Ketef Hinnom amulets are important because they contain the earliest scriptural quotation of the Levitical blessing from Numbers 6:24, providing evidence that priestly traditions were codified and disseminated outside of priestly circles before the exile. This silences the idea that the Pentateuch was composed after the exile.
4. Mount Ebal is significant as a potential cultic site that aligns with the biblical description of Joshua's altar in Joshua 8, thus demonstrating what Schreiner calls a "narrow convergence." It shows a distinct structure with a ramp, courtyard, and evidence of ritual sacrifice during the Iron Age.
5. The Dead Sea Scrolls provide crucial evidence for the diversity of early Judaism, demonstrate that there were multiple textual traditions of the Old Testament and offer critical insight into the textual transmission process.
6. The Dead Sea Scrolls reveal that early Judaism was not a monolithic entity but consisted of diverse expressions, including the apocalyptic community at Qumran, whose unique interpretations of religious traditions demonstrate competing ideas.
7. The discovery of Ugaritic texts has advanced our understanding of Canaanite religion, clarified the function of Hebrew parallelism and poetry, and shown uncanny similarities between some psalms and Ugaritic psalms. Ugarit has also shed light on some obscure words in the Old Testament.
8. The Late Bronze Age collapse was a major disruption of the ancient world, characterized by a breakdown of the first global economy and creating a power vacuum in Syria-Palestine. Ugarit offers a snapshot of pre-collapse life and the events that led to its demise.
9. Khirbet Qeiyafa is controversial due to debates about its dating (Late Bronze Age or Iron Age), its identification as biblical Sha'arayim, and the interpretation of an early Hebrew ostrakon. It may represent an initial, failed attempt by the United Monarchy to colonize the Shephelah.
10. The maximalist approach sees the Old Testament as historically accurate, while the minimalist approach views it as an ideological document with a slanted

historical presentation. Schreiner rejects these categories, advocating for a nuanced, case-by-case analysis that considers both textual and archaeological evidence.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Answer each question in a well-developed essay format.

1. Analyze the significance of the Kuntillet Ajrud inscriptions, considering the different interpretations of Asherah and their implications for our understanding of Israelite religion and its relationship to paganism.
2. Discuss how the archaeological finds at Ketef Hinnom and Mount Ebal support or challenge our understanding of the development of priestly traditions and the early history of Israel as described in the Old Testament.
3. Compare and contrast the impact of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Ugaritic texts on our understanding of the Old Testament, focusing on their contributions to textual criticism, the understanding of biblical poetry, and the cultural context of ancient Israel.
4. Evaluate the evidence from Khirbet Qeiyafa, including the debates surrounding its dating, identification, and the interpretation of its ostrakon, and discuss how these debates shed light on the complex relationship between archaeology and biblical narratives of the early Israelite monarchy.
5. Critically assess the maximalist and minimalist positions regarding the historicity of the Old Testament, and argue for an approach that incorporates both archaeological and textual evidence to better understand the history of ancient Israel.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Pithoi:** Large storage jars, such as those found at Kuntillet Ajrud, often used to store provisions.
- **Kuntillet Ajrud:** An archaeological site located in the Sinai Peninsula, known for its votive inscriptions linking Yahweh and Asherah.

- **Votive Inscription:** An inscription that is dedicated or offered in fulfillment of a vow or for a blessing.
- **Tetragrammaton:** The four Hebrew letters (YHWH) representing the divine name Yahweh.
- **Asherah:** A Canaanite goddess or a wooden pole or pillar symbolizing her. The term appears in the Kuntillet Ajrud inscriptions.
- **Syncretism:** The merging or blending of different religious beliefs and practices.
- **Predominant Suffix:** A grammatical suffix that indicates possession in Hebrew.
- **Ketef Hinnom:** An ancient burial site near Jerusalem where silver amulets with scriptural quotations were discovered.
- **Multiple Internments:** The practice of burying remains in stages; initially in a common area, later moved into an ossuary.
- **Ossuary:** A container or receptacle for holding bones.
- **Levitical Blessing:** A well-known priestly benediction found in Numbers 6:24-26.
- **Mount Ebal:** A mountain in the West Bank where an altar was discovered that may correlate with the biblical narrative in Joshua 8.
- **Iron Age:** A period in ancient history characterized by the use of iron tools and weapons, including the time of classical Israelite culture.
- **Dead Sea Scrolls:** A collection of ancient Jewish texts discovered in caves near the Dead Sea.
- **Textual Criticism:** The process of analyzing and comparing different versions of a text to determine its original form.
- **Qumran:** The site near the Dead Sea where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered.
- **Ugarit:** An ancient city on the Mediterranean coast of Syria, known for its texts which shed light on Canaanite culture and religion.
- **Late Bronze Age Collapse:** A period of widespread societal collapse around 1200 BCE that affected much of the eastern Mediterranean region.
- **Khirbet Qeiyafa:** An archaeological site in the Shephelah, controversial due to debates over its dating, identification, and its ostraca, and the site's implications for the United Monarchy.

- **Sha'arayim:** A biblical place name meaning "two gates," which some scholars believe to correspond with the site of Khirbet Qeiyafa.
- **Ostrakon:** A piece of pottery with writing on it.
- **Relative Dating:** A dating method that compares artifacts or layers to others in order to place them in sequence.
- **Absolute Dating:** A dating method that provides a specific date or date range, often through methods such as carbon-14 dating.
- **Maximalists:** Scholars who tend to accept the Old Testament accounts as generally reliable and historically accurate, preferring textual explanations over archeological ones.
- **Minimalists:** Scholars who tend to view the Old Testament as ideologically driven and historically unreliable, relying more on extra-biblical evidence.
- **Shephelah:** The low hills between the coastal plain and the central highlands of ancient Israel.
- **United Monarchy:** The unified kingdom of Israel under kings Saul, David, and Solomon.

5. FAQs on Schreiner, Pondering the Spade, Session 4, Some Other Important Finds, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions About Biblical Archaeology

- **What is the significance of the Kuntillet Ajrud site?**
- Kuntillet Ajrud, located in the Sinai Peninsula, is significant for its votive inscriptions on pithoi (large jars) that invoke Yahweh (the Hebrew name for God) alongside the noun Asherah, often interpreted as a pagan deity or a symbolic representation. This raises questions about syncretism in ancient Israel and how it aligns with the Old Testament's emphasis on monotheism. It also highlights a debate about the precise grammatical meaning of "Asherah" in the inscriptions, whether it refers to the goddess or a wooden symbol and if it's possessed by Yahweh. Additionally the site's location at the intersection of ancient trade routes likely influenced these religious expressions, suggesting a "truck stop" context where diverse beliefs may have intersected. The site is also known for its large amount of iconography, with graffiti and images on the pottery.
- **What are the Ketef Hinnom amulets and why are they important?**
- The Ketef Hinnom amulets are tiny silver scrolls discovered in a burial site near Jerusalem. They are significant because they contain the earliest known scriptural quotations, specifically the priestly blessing from Numbers 6:24-26. This pre-exilic find demonstrates that priestly traditions were codified, disseminated, and had authoritative status well before the Babylonian exile and even indicates that this tradition was used outside of priestly circles. It challenges the idea that priestly material in the Old Testament was entirely post-exilic, and shows that these blessings were used for personal use in amulet form.

- **What is the significance of the Mount Ebal site?**
- Mount Ebal is a site in the West Bank which many scholars, notably Adam Zertal, believe to be the altar constructed by Joshua as described in Joshua 8:30-35. This is based on several factors: its dating to the Iron Age I, the presence of a massive cultic structure with a ramp, a courtyard, and thousands of charred animal bones that were all eligible for cultic sacrifice, and the absence of pig bones. The site's characteristics align remarkably with the biblical account, prompting some to consider it a strong example of archaeological evidence confirming a biblical narrative. The site is also important as evidence against claims that these religious sites were watchtowers instead of cultic sites.
- **How have the Dead Sea Scrolls changed our understanding of the Old Testament?**
- The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in caves near the Dead Sea, comprise thousands of manuscript fragments, including biblical and extra-biblical texts. They reveal the diversity of early Judaism, challenging the notion of a monolithic faith and showing that multiple forms of Judaism co-existed in the Second Temple period. Crucially, the scrolls demonstrate the complexities of textual transmission, showcasing multiple editions of biblical books, like Jeremiah and Daniel. This evidence underscores that the Old Testament is the result of a complicated process involving compilation, editing, and copying over centuries and is further evidence against claims that the Old Testament is the product of the post-exilic period, since these texts are pre-exilic.
- **What is the importance of the Ugaritic texts?**
- The Ugaritic texts, discovered at the ancient city of Ugarit, provide crucial insights into Canaanite religion, culture, and language. They offer a non-Israelite perspective on deities like Baal and Asherah, complementing and contrasting with the Old Testament's views. Ugaritic literature also significantly clarifies biblical Hebrew poetry, showing a close parallel in literary structure like parallelism. Ugaritic texts also help us understand the cultural and political landscape of the Late Bronze Age, a period that ended with the collapse of the global trade network. Also, it helps in the understanding of the language used in Old Testament, allowing better translations.

- **What makes the Khirbet Qeiyafa site so controversial?**
- Khirbet Qeiyafa, overlooking the Ela Valley, is highly controversial due to debates about its dating, identification, and the interpretation of an ostrakon (a pottery sherd with writing). The dating is disputed between the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age II. Its unusual double gate design has led some to identify it as the biblical city of Sha'arayim. The ostrakon discovered at the site is incredibly difficult to decipher, its writing is in a very early state, and we are not even sure of what direction it's written in. It may be an early form of Hebrew, but there is some argument that it might be Phoenician instead. The site is associated with the United Monarchy, with material culture similar to the central highlands, suggesting a colonization effort that may have failed.
- **What is meant by "maximalist" and "minimalist" approaches to biblical archaeology, and why are they problematic?**
- The terms "maximalist" and "minimalist" are used to describe two polarized approaches to the historical accuracy of the Old Testament. Maximalists tend to assume that the Old Testament is historically accurate and interpret archaeological evidence in support of biblical claims. Minimalists view the Old Testament as a primarily theological and ideological text, distrusting its historical claims and prioritizing extra-biblical sources and archaeology. These categories are problematic because they oversimplify a complex issue, demanding a nuanced approach on a case-by-case basis rather than a rigid, all-encompassing method. A nuanced view of the Old Testament should use both literary and archaeological evidence in its arguments.
- **How should we approach the relationship between archaeology and the Old Testament?**
- The relationship between archaeology and the Old Testament is complex and should not be forced into a simplistic black-and-white understanding. Each case should be approached individually, thoroughly analyzing the evidence from both the biblical text and the archaeological record, and then noting the specific convergences and divergences. The main goal should be to fully understand the historical context, material culture, and the demands of the text, not to simply "prove" or "disprove" the Bible. Instead, the goal should be to fully understand the history and cultural development of the cultures of the Old Testament period.