Jericho: From archaeology challenging the canon to searching for the meaning(s) of myth(s)

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Joshua 6 functions as a test case for the idea of Biblical Archaeology *par excellence*. In this article it will be probed (by referring amongst others to the work of Garstang and Kenyon) to what extent the archaeological excavations at Jericho have been influenced by a literal reading of Joshua 6 (e.g. Garstang) and to what extend the excavations (by Kenyon) had compelled exegetes to read the text of Joshua 6 historical critically. In the consideration of a wide range of possible approaches to Joshua 6, some recent conservative opinions in which there is a continued search to harmonise the archaeological and textual information in order to secure a 'historical' reading of the text, will also be noted. Arguing not for the abolition, but rather for a broader interpretation of the concept 'canon', some hermeneutical remarks will be made regarding Joshua 6 as a 'cultic myth', in view of its positive communication.

Introduction

In the Revised Standard Version (RSV) Bible translation in my possession, in Joshua 6, there are two pen sketches. The first portrays a city wall (which rather looks medieval) with many palms sticking out from the inside above the walls. The second sketch portrays seven ram horns. I am sure these sketches affirm in the mind of the ordinary Bible reader the historical reality of the miraculous events described in Joshua 6. These sketches also seem to corroborate Garstang and Garstang's ([1940] 1948) view that:

> of the many stirring episodes narrated in the Old Testament, probably none has impressed itself upon the popular imagination as the description in the Book of Joshua of the fall of Jericho. Indeed, were it not for that narrative, the place would hardly have been remembered. (p. 19)

If the walls really 'came tumbling down' as described, surely there should be archaeological evidence for it. So the search for the walls began. Kenyon (1967:264) is indeed correct in claiming that a 100 years of archaeology was inspired by the story related in Joshua 6.

As somebody teaching Biblical Archaeology I have often encountered the popular notion that 'archaeology has proven the Bible to be correct', an idea propagated by Keller's (1981) popular book, *Und die Bibel hat doch Recht*. Sixty years since the publication of the latter work, after the tremendous growth in insight and knowledge in the field, one would have expected that the optimism would have abated. Not so. The *NIV Archaeological Study Bible* (2005), which contains about 500 short articles and 500 colour photographs, providing the archaeologically interested reader with much valuable information, notes in its article entitled 'The walls of Jericho' the following:

> The details surrounding the destruction of Jericho City IV thus closely parallel what we read in the Bible. Unfortunately, the date of the fall of this city remains a problem. If, as Watzinger and Kenyon argued, Jericho fell around 1550 BC, there would have been no significant city when Joshua arrived around 1400 BC. (p. 312)

So far, so good. However, the the article concludes that:

> Nevertheless, however one deals with the chronological problem, there is much about City IV to encourage the Christian reader about the reliability of the Joshua 6 account. (*NIV Archaeological Study Bible* 2005:312)

The article, after recognising the chronological problem, declares it as of no serious consequence. So much for cognitive dissonance![1]

Finkelstein and Silberman (2002) recall that because of 13th century destruction layers found at Bethel, Lachish and Hazor, archaeology seemed to confirm the biblical account regarding the conquest, for much of the 20th century, a view especially advocated by Albright (1957; see discussion in Dever 1990:43–47). The interaction between archaeology and the hermeneutical interpretation (not merely exegesis) of the Bible seemed to be clearly on the table. However, asking the question: Did the trumpets really blast?, Finkelstein and Silberman (2002) conclude:

1.A concept coined by L. Festinger. Congnitive dissonance exists when there is disharmony between two or more cognitions, in other words, when contrary views are held simultaneously (see Gouws *et al.* 1997:154).

In the midst of the euphoria – almost at the very moment when it seemed that the battle of the conquest was won for Joshua – some troubling contradictions emerged. Even as the world press was reporting that Joshua's conquest had been confirmed, many of the most important pieces of the archaeological puzzle simply did not fit. … Jericho was amongst the most important. As we have noted, the cities of Canaan were unfortified and there were no walls that could have come tumbling down. In the case of Jericho, there was no trace of a settlement of any kind in the thirteenth century BCE, and the earlier Late Bronze Age settlement, dating to the fourteenth century BCE, was small and poor, almost insignificant, and unfortified. There was also no sign of a destruction. Thus the famous scene of the Israelite forces marching around the walled town with the Ark of the Covenant, causing Jericho's mighty walls to collapse by the blowing of their war trumpets was, to put it simply, a romantic mirage. (pp. 81–82)

The implication of these remarks is, that whether one accepts the biblical chronology dating the settlement to the early 14th century on the basis of 1 Kings 6:14, or the more widely accepted (as established by historical-critical research) late 13th century date (relating the conquest to Ramesses II and the Mernephtah stele) – in both cases there was no wall to fall, indicating the 'historical incorrectness' of the vivid story of Joshua 6.

Palomino (2010) in an Internet article, and thus accessible to a broad popular audience, took Finkelstein and Silberman's remarks a step further, interpreting them in terms of *lies and deceit*:

Also sind ... die Posaunen, die die angeblichen Stadmauern von Jericho zerstören sollten, gelogen. (Keine Stadmauern und keine Bevölkerung: Das ist doppelte Unwahrheit.)[2] (n.p.)

His use of the words '*gelogen*' and '*doppelte Unwahrheit*' definitely do not seem to have 'encouraged' Palomino about the 'reliability of the Joshua 6 account' as noted by the *NIV Archaeological Study Bible* (2005) quoted above.

The use of the words 'unfortunately', 'encourage the Christian reader', 'reliability', '*gelogen*' and '*doppelte Unwahrheit*' (*vide supra*) has of course everything to do with the Bible as *canon*, as an authoritative measure or criterion for Christian faith, as the 'Word of God'.[3] Hence the hope is expected that archaeology, as a science could 'prove' the Bible to be 'correct', in other words to support the claims to its authority. And 'correct' here implies not only, but especially 'historical correctness'.

Below I will pursue the hermeneutical issue of the relationship between archaeology, historical reliability and faith (which for current purposes will be viewed as 'the positive appropriation of texts') further. In order to facilitate that, a short overview of the archaeology of Jericho is called

for. This I will do by paying attention to the strategic *location* of Jericho, the *history* of excavation, the *occupation* history, and some excavation *results*.[4] This will be followed by noting the wide diversity of different interpretations of Joshua 6 in view (or not) of the archaeological excavations at Jericho. Following this will be some hermeneutical considerations pertaining to the search for the (positive) meaning of biblical myths.

Digging up Jericho and its challenge
The strategic location of Jericho

Jericho (*Arīḥā* in Aabic) is a town in the currently disputed West Bank area occupied by Israel since 1967 (Figure 1). It is one of the earliest continuous settlements in the world, dating perhaps (cf. the discussion of the 'round tower' below) to about 9000 BC.

Also called the 'City of palms' Jericho is mentioned more than 50 times in various biblical books in the Old Testament. Its strategic location accounts for the role it played in the history of Palestine. It is situated in the Jordan valley, more precisely in the Jordan Rift or *beka,* the chasm in the earth's surface which is responsible not only for the Dead Sea but also the Eastern African lakes, far away from Palestine. The Old Testament town of Jericho is associated with Tell es-Sultan which is situated about 8 km west of the river and 10 km north of the Dead Sea. At 150 m above the Dead Sea it is still 250 m below sea level. The *tel* itself reaches a height of about 20 m above the surrounding plain. It is the lowest town on earth, and, as already referred to, probably also the oldest (see Encyclopedia Britannica 2007).

Because of meagre rainfall (about 140 mm a year) occupation of Jericho was only possible due to the water of *ain es-Sultan* (Elisha's well) directly next to the *tel*. According to Kenyon (1993) occasional interruptions of water supply (caused by earth movements or military interventions) may account for the periodic abandonments of the city throughout its history.

Furthermore, in Kenyon's view, the geography and archaeology of the *tel* indeed throws light on the text of the book of Joshua, however not in terms of the 'tumbling of the walls' as a dramatic, miraculous and religious event, but in terms of the perspective reflected in the book that any invasion or immigration into Palestine from the East had to pass through Jericho as a gateway (Kenyon 1993). This was the case during the narrated date of the book of Joshua (13th century) as well as the date of the book's final narration (composition), in all probability during the exile as part of the Deuteronomistic history.

Jericho is of course not confined only to Tell es-Sultan (Figure 2). The name was also used for New Testament Jericho nearby (1.6 km south of the *tel*), the 'City of palms' or Tulul Abu el Alayiq, famous for the Lukan Jesus's encounter with Zacchaeus (Lk 18) and the role it played in the parable

2.'So the trumpets, which were supposed to have destroyed the city walls of Jericho, are a lie. (No city walls and no population: that is doubled untruth)' (translation).

3.For a traditional definition and discussion of the concept canon as authoritative scripture see Van Zyl (1976:1–20), for a more informative one see Van Aarde (2012) and for a historical-critical one (referring to the library of Qumran as a 'canon') see Davies (1998:152–168). See also the extensive work by Venter in which various aspects of the canon, its problems (Venter 1987), diversity (Venter 2006), authority and meaning (Venter 1983, 1998a, 1998b, 2001) are reflected on, as well as its relation to specific biblical texts (Venter 1989, 2002, 2009).

4.This is the scheme followed by Scheepers and Scheffler (2000) as applied when reporting on the archaeology of Tel Dan, Hazor, Megiddo, the City of David in Jerusalem, Kirbet Qumran, Tel Arad and Tel Beersheba. Regarding Jericho, various scholars (e.g. Garstang & Garstang [1940] 1948; Kenyon 1957, 1993; Bartlett 1982; Bienkowski 1986) have treated these aspects in detail, hence the short overview.
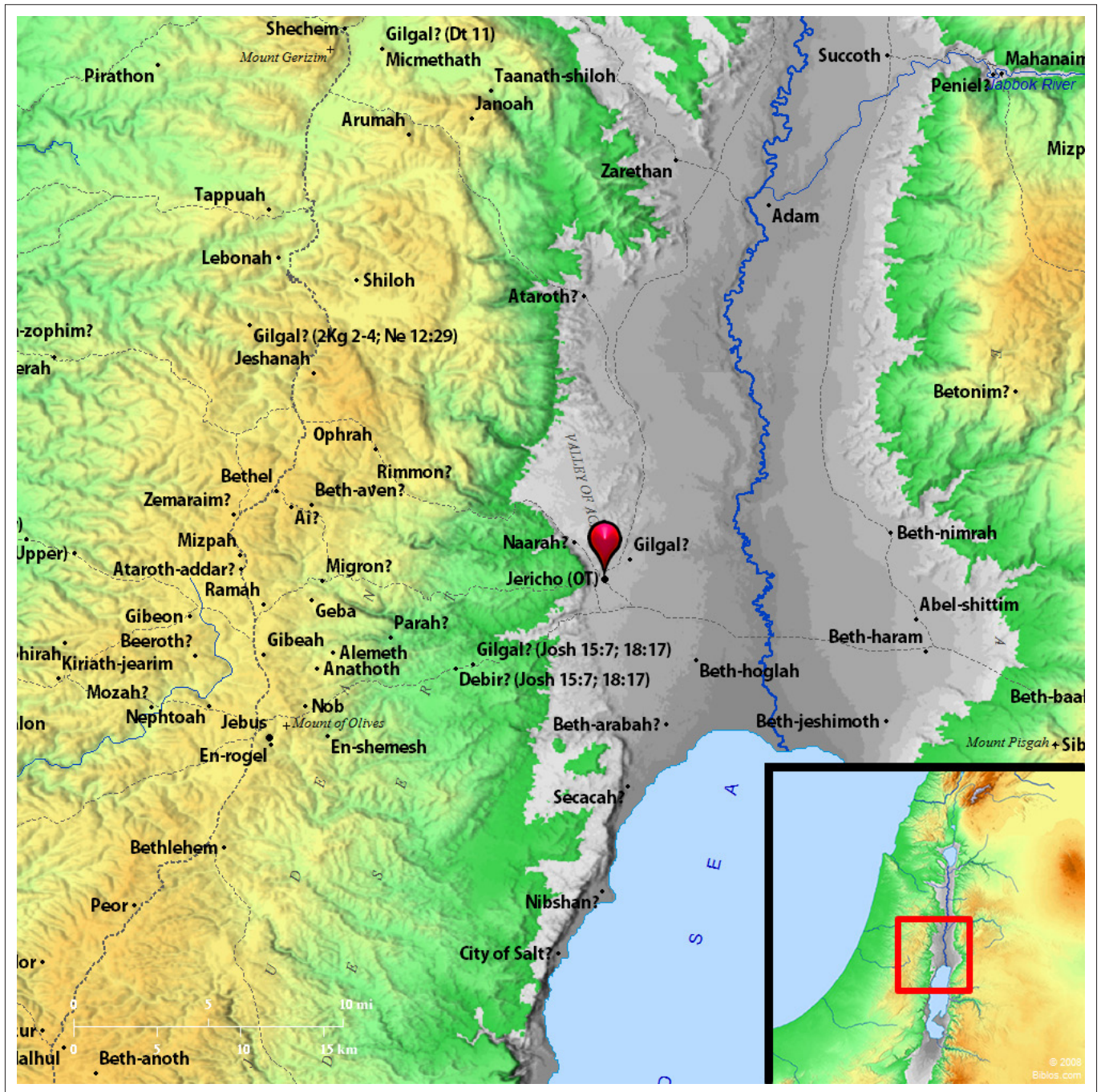
Source: Image provided courtesy of Bible Hug at Biblos (http://bibleatlas.org/)

FIGURE 1: Jericho and surrounding area.

of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25–30; cf. 2 Chr 28). Spectacular archaeological work was also done here (e.g. the exposure of the Herod's winter palace where he in fact died in 4 BCE). However, our present concern remains the relation between the archaeological work carried out at Tell es-Sultan and its (non)influence on the interpretation of the event described in Joshua 6.

Of the history of archaeological excavation at Jericho and its results

Above reference was already made to Kenyon's (1957, 1993) assertion that more than a hundred years of excavation at Tell es-Sultan had been motivated and inspired by the Joshua

story. In the light of the eventual outcome, this is in fact tragic since it reflects the failure to understand the biblical text according to its true nature containing various literary genres (of which religious myth-making constitutes an essential part), and not as a text reflecting historical accuracy in the first place. However, fortunately the excavations delivered results which are to be appreciated in their own right, irrespective of its relation to Joshua 6. Four excavation expeditions explored Jericho:

After sinking some shafts into the *tel* in 1868, Charles Warren concluded that nothing was to be found at the mound. Clearly a classical example of an *argumentum e silentio*, since

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FIGURE 2: Tell es-Sultan (ancient Jericho), aerial south-east.

Kenyon's excavations 80 years later revealed that he missed the big round tower by approximately one meter.

The second expedition (1907–1909) by Ernst Sellin and Carl Watzinger revealed part of the Early Bronze Age (EBA) city wall and many houses to the north of the *tel*. A great trench was dug across the centre of the *tel* penetrating into Pre-Pottery Neolithic levels (9000–5500 BCE). However, the establishment of chronology by pottery was not yet known, thus a clear-cut interpretation of the results was hampered. To a community who expected the 'walls of Jericho' to be discovered (thereby 'proving' the Bible to be correct) the excavation results were a disappointment because of the excavator's early dating of the defensive wall (no later than 1600 BCE, cf. Dever 1990:46).

The motivation to find the 'tumbling walls' remained strong with the result that John Garstang (British Director of Antiquities in Palestine) and company conducted a campaign from 1932–1934, funded by – who Dever (1990:46) calls 'the well-known British conservative' – Sir Charles Marston. Although the dating by pottery chronology was better, the absence of a detailed stratigraphy, lead to guesswork in terms of dating. Garstang found a defensive wall which he dated to the Late Bronze Age (LBA) and the destruction of which he associated with the coming of the Israelites (1400 BCE, according to biblical chronology). His unearthing of a deep Pre-Pottery Neolithic accumulation is regarded by Kenyon as his 'most important discovery' (1993). After the publication of his book *The story of Jericho* in 1940 and 1948 the public and Garstang and Garstang ([1940] 1948) seemed to be satisfied for they concluded:

> The graphic description of Jericho in the Bible has now been amplified by an examination of the ruins themselves; for remains of a walled city have been found and traced beneath the debris of later times which corresponds in all its material remains with such descriptive details of the city as can be gleaned from the biblical narrative. (n.p.)

We would not know whether his conscience bothered him for finding what he wanted, but it is noteworthy that he invited Kenyon (his student) in the late forties to re-evaluate all his finds, and already on Garstang's own finds Kenyon concluded that his dating of the defensive wall to LBA was wrong. For her the Middle Bronze Age (MBA) constituted a more appropriate date, thereby being more in accordance with Sellin and Watzinger's earlier finds.

In view of the present-day re-evaluation of the evidence by people like Wood and the above mentioned *NIV Archaeological Study Bible* (2005), the question should be asked whether Kenyon's own excavations from 1952–1958 – popularly reported in her book *Digging up Jericho* (1957) – was not subconsciously motivated to prove her evaluation of Garstang's work to be correct. She made three trenches at the northern, western and southern end of the *tel* and concluded firmly that Garstang's LBA wall was to be dated to the MBA. Kenyon's excavation methods were much more developed which lent credibility to her results. Moreover she made many other important discoveries, for instance, the round tower from the Pre-Pottery Neolithic Age (PPNA) dated by her to the 9th century, the ivory head of a bull from the EBA and a variety tombs with various furnishings (MBA).

In terms of her own presuppositions, it needs to be said that Kenyon was not a sceptic who wanted to disprove the Bible. In the last chapter of her book entitled 'Jericho and the coming of the Israelites', she concludes:

It is a sad fact that the town walls of the Late Bronze Age, within which period the attack by the Israelites must fall by any dating, not a trace remains... It will be remembered that the summit of the Middle Bronze Age Rampart only survives in one place. The Late Bronze Age town must either have re-used this, or a new wall may have been built above it, so nothing remains of it... One can visualise the Children of Israel marching round the eight acres of the town and striking terror into the heart of the inhabitants, until all will to fight deserted them when on the seventh day the blast of the trumpet smote their ears. But as to what caused the walls to go flat, we have no factual evidence. We can guess it was an earthquake, which the excavations have shown to have destroyed a number of the earlier walls, but this is only a conjecture. It would have been very natural for the Israelites to have regarded such a visitation as divine intervention on their behalf, as indeed it can be regarded. (Kenyon 1957:264)

It is clear that, despite her own excavations, Kenyon did not treat the events described in Joshua 6 as fictitious. She did not internalise Alt's ([1925] 1966) view (already expressed in the first decades of the 20th century without the pressing evidence of archaeology) regarding the legendary character of the story (cf. also Noth [1937] 1953). One cannot but conclude that cognitive dissonance also characterises Kenyon's thought (cf. the 'sad fact'), as well as rationalisation as far as the miraculous nature of the event is concerned (cf. the reference to an earthquake).

Summary of the occupation history of Jericho and excavation results

Archaeologists often look for specific results (e.g. walls) but ultimately they are not in a position to dictate what the spade will uncover. Such also was the case with Jericho, whose most important archaeological results actually represent a 'non-find' in terms of the archaeologists' original aim. Scientific integrity therefore demands that we should at least take note of the positive finds and the occupation history of the *tel*. A very limited number of these results, (also those relevant to the contingent debate) are summarised below in tabular form, corresponding to the occupation history of the *tel* (Table 1).

According to the Bible, Jericho was first attacked by the Israelites under Joshua after crossing the Jordan River (Jos 6). After the destruction, according to the biblical account, it was abandoned until Hiel the Bethelite established himself there in the 9th century BCE (1 Ki 16:34). Archaeologically, virtually no trace has been found of the 9th century BCE occupation attributed to Hiel, but there was some settlement in the 7th century BCE, ending perhaps at the time of the second Babylonian Exile in 586 BCE. Tell es-Sultan was then finally abandoned, but the town continued to expand to the south (cf. above).

In a positive way, however, excavations indicated a very long history of Jericho *before* the biblical period, and the site's great importance is that it gives evidence of the first development of permanent settlements and thus of the first steps toward civilisation. Traces have been found of Mesolithic hunters, dated by carbon-14 to about 9000 BCE, and of a long period of settlement by their descendants.

By about 8000 BCE the inhabitants had grown into an organised community capable of building a massive stone wall around the settlement, strengthened at one point at least by a massive stone tower (cf. Figure 3). The size of this settlement justifies the use of the term town and suggests a population of some 2000–3000 persons. A thousand years had seen the development from a hunting way of life to full settlement, including the development of agriculture, with cultivated types of wheat and barley being found. To provide enough land for cultivation, irrigation had probably

TABLE 1: Jericho: Excavation history.

Period and phase	Date	Excavation results	Comments
Epipaleolithic	9600–7770 BCE	Natufian culture (Kenyon)	Some evidence discovered in wadi Natuf
Pre-pottery Neolithic A	9000–7000 BCE	Stone wall, round tower (8 m) Plastered human skulls	Defensive system = the oldest city? Religious ritual (ancestor worship?)
Pre-pottery Neolithic B	7000–5500 BCE	Clay human heads Plastered human skull	
Pottery Neolithic A	5500–4800 BCE	Diverse ceramic evidence	Reliable dating possibilities
Pottery Neolithic B	4800–4200 BCE	Diverse ceramic evidence	Reliable dating possibilities
Chalcolithic	4200–3300 BCE	Absence of material	Gap (not in rest of Israel)
Early Bronze Age I	3300–3000 BCE	Fortified city	
Early Bronze Age II	3000–2650 BCE	Fortified city Domestic structures Storage bins	
Early Bronze Age III	2650–2300 BCE	Violent end, gap	
Early Bronze Age IV	2300–2000 BCE	Pottery of the north New comers Rock-cut tombs, 7 types Town wall destroyed by fire	Amorites? Seasonal camp Sudden end
Middle Bronze Age	2000–1550 BCE	Major town **Massive rampart wall system** (Kenyon) Family tombs (house furnishings) Destruction by fire (1550 BCE)	Plague?
Late Bronze Age	1550–1200 BCE	**Wall** (Garstang, cf. Middle Bronze Age) **No wall** (Kenyon) Oven with juglet (14th century)	
Iron Age	1200–539 BCE	Gaps; meagre occupation	
Persian to Byzantine	539–636 CE	Tell es-Sultan abandoned	New Testament Jericho to be associated with Tulul Abu el Alayiq

Source: Image provided courtesy of ToddBolen/Bibleplaces.com (http://www.bibleplaces.com)

FIGURE 3: The round tower from the 8th century, BCE excavated by Kenyon and indicating the urban character of Jericho (causing it to be regarded as 'the oldest city in the world'.)

been invented. This first Neolithic culture of Palestine was a purely indigenous development. These occupants were succeeded about 7000 BCE by a second non-indigenous group, bringing a culture that was still Neolithic and still not manufacturing pottery, indicating the arrival of newcomers from one of the other centres, possibly in northern Syria, in which the Neolithic way of life based on agriculture also had developed. Of these groups, plastered human skulls (today to be seen in the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem) were found, indicating sophisticated burial practices and (due to all the objects found in the tombs) probably a belief in the afterlife.

More than about 3000 years after this the city was again fortified, according to Kenyon in the MBA 2000–1550, with a massive wall and rampart system which perhaps had been preserved in collective memory to the extent that its actual destruction towards the end of the MBA had to be accounted for after the eventual settlement of the Israelites in Palestine at the end of the LBA. The MBA (which Kenyon [1957:210–233] indicated to be the 'age of the Patriarchs') was revealed by her excavations as one of a developed civilisation and town life ('of simple comfort but by no means of luxury' [Kenyon 1957:252]). At least 59 tombs were cleared (1957:233–255) and the findings that were preserved for more than three millennia (due to the unique weather conditions) correlate with the massive defensive wall that protected the city. According to Kenyon (1957):

> These tombs have therefore preserved for us for about 3500 years wooden objects from five-foot tables to boxes an inch or so high, rush baskets and mats, fragments of textiles, and even portions of flesh and human brains. (p. 248)

This is but another example of what occurs so often in the archaeological endeavour: one does not find what one is looking for, but is often surprised by what one does not expect.

In a relatively short chapter entitled 'Jericho and the coming of the Israelites', Kenyon (1957:256–265) reports on the LBA

and what the main goal of the excavations (the link to the Joshua narrative) was. The result is negative (and according to her 'sad', cf. above). There was a virtual gap in occupation during this time and no large wall was found (contrary to Garstang who dated the MBA wall wrongly) which one would have expected if Joshua 6 were to be interpreted literally.

Joshua 6: A diversity of interpretations

Joshua 6 is by no means the only biblical text that reports on the invading Israelites's capture of Jericho. In Joshua 24:11, as part of a summary of Israel's history put in the mouth of YHWH, the latter states:

> When you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho, those who held Jericho fought against you, as did the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites… but I put them all into your power.

Besides being reported by YHWH himself, this represents a straight-forward 'non-mythical' account of the capture of Jericho, without the direct involvement of divine intervention as one would have expected in view of Joshua 6 (cf. also Jos 12:3). Here (not in Jos 6) it is mentioned that the people of Jericho at least rendered some resistance. This is even more remarkable since divine intervention is mentioned in verse 12 regarding the Amorites (cf. the hornets of Jos 24:12). What is more noteworthy is that, what is usually thought of when the capture of Jericho is mentioned, is the vivid story of Joshua 6, and not the more 'historical report' of 24:11 (e.g. Noth 1960). The incorporation of mythical elements therefore seems to have the function of enhancing the memory when history is related.[5]

Only extreme fundamentalist readers of the Bible can deny (and then with an almost unbearable degree of cognitive dissonance) that archaeology has challenged the face value account of Joshua 6 as a reliable historical record. As such it has therefore also challenged naive notions of the Bible as 'canon' and the authoritative 'word of God'. In other words notions that do not allow for the Bible to have different genres and which demand that 'canon' and 'authority' automatically imply 'historical truth' or 'correctness'. But if Joshua 6 should not be read as history in the first place, how should the text be understood and how (if at all) could it be interpreted to have a positive meaning? To this question we now turn, first considering the text of Joshua 6 and some of its interpretations.

The text of Joshua 6 (RSV)[6]

In order to facilitate the discussion, the text of Joshua 6 is printed below with subheadings and certain characteristic mythic, legendary and kerugmatic features highlighted. Joshua 5:13–15 is added to indicate its close connection with Joshua 6.

5.In the South African context the traditional rapport the Battle of Blood River in the memory of Afrikaners who see themselves bound by the 'Vow of The Covenant' can be mentioned.

6.The text of the Revised Standard Version (1952) used with minor alterations.

Reading Joshua 6 as fiction without archaeology

Noth ([1937] 1953) concluded before Kenyon's excavations that:

> Mit der ätiologisch begründete Erzählung von der Einnahme des alten und mächtigen Jericho wird die mit der Hilfe Gottes gelingende Überwältigung der kanaanäischen Vorbewohner des verheissenen Landes auf Grund einer speziell benjaminitischen Überlieferung dargestellt. (p. 43)

Noth's view is in accordance with that of Alt ([1925] 1966; cf. also Hertzberg 1953) who argued already in 1925 that the legend originated when the Israelites at a later stage had to account for their children how they had 'captured' a deserted Jericho. Noth and Alt were not forced by the archaeological excavations of Kenyon to come to this conclusion, nor did the excavations of Garstang (1932–1934) with their 'positive' results make them retract their views (Noth 1960:82,149; cf. however Hertzberg 1953:39)

For Fritz (1994:68–69, 1996:13–15; see also Schwienhorst 1986; Weippert 1971) the story of Joshua 6 is not even an etiological legend that developed over time (contra Noth), but a premeditated narrative fiction consisting of the command of YHWH and its scrupulous execution, thereby communicating that the capture of Jericho was a miracle which *in toto* can only be ascribed to YHWH. It represents a theology in which '*geschichtliches Handeln allein auf Gott zurückgeführt wurde.*' To evaluate Joshua 6 in terms of historiography and even archaeology is to misread it and to deny its genre. Fritz's view is in accordance with the recent views of Armstrong (2009:2–4; 24–27) that myths in the Bible were created by their authors to be 'programmes of action', and not history. They were thus not once considered history by the ancients, and modern critical readers also proved them not to be history. The intellect of biblical authors should not be underestimated. Conservative 'fundamentalist' readings that argue for the historicity of these narratives or that judge these narratives by their lack of historicity are thereby exposed as uninformative, misplaced readings.

Reading Joshua 6 as fiction because of archaeology

On the basis of the archaeological evidence provided by Kenyon (1957) that there is no trace of a LBA II occupation at Jericho, some scholars conclude that the biblical story of the fall of Jericho is not historical (Bartlett 1982:34; Bienkowski 1986) and that it 'seems to be invented out of whole cloth' (Dever 2003:41–47). The same archaeological evidence also lies at the basis of a similar conclusion by Finkelstein and Silbermann (2002:80–82) referred to above. However, one should note the difference between those who argue for the fictitious character of the story on literary (genre) grounds *vis-à-vis* archaeological considerations. Since the latter are compelled by archaeology to concede that the story is fiction, their basic approach is historical and an element of being 'cheated' forms part of the rhetoric of their presentation of the story as fiction (hence the sarcastic references like

BOX 1: Joshua 5:13–6:1–27: The miraculous conquest of Jericho.

1 The appearance to Joshua of the commander of YHWH's army
[13] When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a *man stood before him* with his drawn sword in his hand; and Joshua went to him and said to him, 'Are you for us, or for our adversaries?'
[14] And he said, 'No; but as *commander of the army of YHWH* I have now come.' And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and *worshiped,* and said to him, 'What does my lord bid his servant?'
[15] And the commander of YHWH's army said to Joshua, 'Put off your shoes from your feet; for the place where you stand is *holy*.' And Joshua did so.

2 The shutting up of Jericho by the Israelites
6:1 Now Jericho was shut up from within and from without because of the people of Israel; none went out, and none came in.

3 YHWH's command to Joshua
[2] And then *YHWH said* to Joshua, 'See, *I have given into your hand* Jericho, with its king and mighty men of valour.
[3] You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city *once.* Thus shall you do for *six days.*
[4] And seven priests shall bear *seven trumpets* of rams' horns before the ark; and on the *seventh day* you shall march around the city seven times, the priests blowing the trumpets.
[5] When they make a long blast with the ram's horn, as soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up every man straight before him.'

4 Joshua's command to the people (priests)
[6] So Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, 'Take up the *ark of the covenant*, and let *seven priests* bear *seven trumpets* of rams' horns before *YHWH's ark*'
[7] And he said to the people, 'Go forward; march around the city, and let the armed men pass on before *YHWH's ark*.'
[8] And as Joshua had commanded the people, the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before YHWH went forward, blowing the trumpets, with the ark of the covenant of YHWH following them.
[9] And the armed men went before the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard came after the ark, while the trumpets blew continually.
[10] But Joshua commanded the people, 'You shall not shout or let your voice be heard, neither shall any word go out of your mouth, until the day I bid you shout; then you shall shout.'

5 The compassing of the city for six days
[11] So he caused the *ark of* YHWH to compass the city, going about it once; and they came into the camp, and spent the night in the camp.
[12] Then Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the *ark of* YHWH.
[13] The *seven* priests bearing the *seven* trumpets of rams' horns before *YHWH's ark* passed on, blowing the trumpets continually; and the armed men went before them, and the rear guard came after the *ark of* YHWH, while the trumpets blew continually.
[14] And the second day they marched around the city once, and returned into the camp. So they did for *six* days.

6 The seventh day: The capturing of the city
[15] On the *seventh day* they rose early at the dawn of day, and marched around the city in the same manner *seven times*: it was only on that day that they marched around the city seven times.
[16] And at the *seventh time*, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, 'Shout; for YHWH has given you the city.
[17] And the city and all that is within it shall be *devoted to the LORD* for destruction; only Rahab the harlot and all who are with her in her house shall live, because she hid the messengers that we sent.
[18] But you, keep yourselves from the *things devoted* to destruction, lest when you have devoted them you take any of the *devoted things* and make the camp of Israel a thing for destruction, and bring trouble upon it.
[19] But all silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, are *sacred to the LORD*; they shall go into the treasury of YHWH.'
[20] So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown. As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people raised a great shout, and the *wall fell down flat*, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.
[21] Then they utterly destroyed all in the city, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and asses, with the edge of the sword.
[22] And Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, 'Go into the harlot's house, and bring out the woman, and all who belong to her, as you swore to her.'
[23] So the young men who had been spies went in, and brought out Rahab, and her father and mother and brothers and all who belonged to her; and they brought all her kindred, and set them outside the camp of Israel.
[24] And they burned the city with fire, and all within it; only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of YHWH.
[25] But Rahab the harlot, and her father's household, and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved alive; and she dwelt in Israel to this day, because she hid the men whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

7 Joshua's final command and fame
[26] Joshua *laid an oath* upon them at that time, saying, '*Cursed before YHWH* be the man that rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho. At the cost of his first-born shall he lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest son shall he set up its gates.'
[27] So *YHWH* was with Joshua; and his fame was in all the land.

'romantic mirage', '*doppelte Unwahrheit*' and 'invention out of whole cloth'). This seems to be important, since for them any positive appropriation of the story as myth seems to be (for the moment) precluded.

Reading Joshua 6 as some kind of history in spite of archaeology

Not considering some conservative scholars who did not take sufficient note of the archaeological record (e.g. Harrison 1970:173–175; Unger 1980:161–162; Thompson 1982:76–79), there have been several scholars who could not fully stomach the implications of the evidence. Amongst them is Kenyon herself who gave a rational explanation of the story in terms of 'erosion' and an 'earthquake' (1957:265, 1967:273). Recognising the problems regarding Jericho, Albright (1957:276) and Wright (1962:78–80) still maintained some kind of historical conquest, whereas De Vaux (1978:608–612) and Bright (1981:130) regarded the matter as inconclusive. Recently there have also been deliberate attempts, taking full account of the archaeological evidence to argue for the historicity of Joshua 6 (e.g. Wood 1990a, 1990b, refuted by Bienkowski 1986, 1990). The problem with the latter view (e.g. Kennedy 2011:101–102) is that the date of conquest is again (on the basis of biblical chronology) shifted back to about 1400 BCE (cf. Scheffler 2001:33–34). Moreover, the arguments of Kenyon, Dever and Finkelstein (not even to mention Alt, Noth and Fritz) are not at all accounted for.

Jericho and the search for the meaning of myth
Joshua 6 as cultic myth

If myth is strictly defined as a narrative in which different divine characters are involved in a drama (e.g. the Gilgamesh epic), Joshua 6 is not one. It should then rather be classified as a legend in which the divine (YHWH in Jos 6) enters reality in a supernatural miraculous way.[7]

It seems to be clear by now that in the consideration of Joshua 5:32–6:27 (the Jericho narrative) that the following features of the text mark it as a 'fictitious cultic myth':

1. Joshua 5:13–15, seeming (because of our received chapter divisions) to precede the actual story, actually functions together with Chapter 6 as an integrated unit, and by the virtue of its being a theophany like Exodus 3 (YHWH appearing to Moses at the burning bush) makes the deity a participant in the story, thereby lending a mythical flavour to it.[8]
2. The number 7, which is commonly recognised not to be read literally but as a number indicating 'completeness', 'totality' or 'perfection' features prominently in the story. For *seven* days the Israelites marched around the city and

on the *seventh* day (recalling the Sabbath) they did it *seven* times, after which the walls crumbled by supernatural intervention.
3. The fictitious character is convincingly emphasised by Fritz (see above) that the story is '*ein sorgfältig gebautes Stück, das aus einer Anordnung Jahwes und deren fast wortgetreuer Ausführung besteht …von Anfang an läuft die Handlung auf das Wunder zu*' (Fritz 1994:68). In view of the remarks above the story is therefore to be understood as a fictitious cultic myth that attributes the conquering of Jericho to the miraculous intervention of YHWH.

Searching for the (positive) meaning(s) of myth

In most of the literature and discussions about Joshua 6 and the archaeology of Jericho, the issue of the *reliability of the Bible* and the question of faith always loom beneath the surface of the debate. It often happens that critical minds, when they discover the fictitious character of biblical stories, reject the Bible as 'myth' and therefore per definition as 'untrue'. Many become atheists, not realising that the (non)existence of God does not even depend on the Bible at all. 'Myth' is then evaluated in terms of an inherited fundamentalist faith (where everything in the Bible is regarded as historically 'true'), with the result that the conclusion is drawn that the Bible is 'not true' and therefore false. Such views (e.g. Dawkins 2006:282–286) can be regarded as 'fundamentalist atheism' and is but the counterpart of those (e.g. Keller 1981) who think that the Bible can be proven to be 'correct' (with the consequence that God's existence is also proven) by means of archaeology. In the process the possible positive meanings of myths are not even considered (cf. Drewermann 1992:164–392).

Archaeology should in the first place be carried out *in its own right* as though the Bible does not exist. Although this should be strived for despite the fact that it is impossible, archaeologists and Bible readers (whether popular or scholarly) should be aware and transparent about their presuppositions. The preoccupation with the historical reliability of the Bible has the sad consequence that precious finds of archaeology in their *own right* are overlooked, for example, Jericho as the oldest city, the architecture and function of the round tower, religious rituals, or burial practices that reveal the world view of the ancient inhabitants who lived there long before the Israelites.[9] This information has also the value of providing a relief against which the (unique) faith of subsequent Israel can be understood.

It is noteworthy that archaeological excavations at Jericho, especially those by Kenyon, compelled and do compel conservative exegetes to look differently at the interpretation of the Bible. This brings them in line with older critical biblical exegetes like Alt, Noth and recently Fritz who did not need archaeology to read the Bible according to its true nature. The latter amounts to the recognition of various types of literature or genres (which covers the wide range from ancient historiography to fictions like fables, parables and

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7.According to Dibelius 1971:265, '*Nicht jede Erzählung von mythischen Personen ist ein Mythus, sondern nur eine solche, die eines besonderen Sinnes voll ist, die auf einer besonderen Beziehung beruht, sei's dass sie Vorgänge der Weltentstehung, des gestirnten Himmels, der Vegetation oder des Menschenschicksal nach dem Tode schildert, sei's dass sie eines Gottes Wesen in Form der Erzählung zu typischer Erscheinung bringt – irgendeine solche Beziehung gibt der Göttergeschichte Sinn und Wert für die Kultgemeinde, die sie erzählt …*'

8.For one perspective a story can already be classified as a myth when one character is a deity, for others when various characters are deities (e.g. the Gilgamesh epic).

9.Cf. Rohls's (1991:11) reference to the Jericho excavations in his history of ethics.

myths, and even the erotic poetry of Song of Songs). Apart from their possible 'historical reliability' these genres were consciously created to convey a (positive) message. This also applies to myths which have incorrectly been regarded as history in the past.

Most of the discord about the archaeology of Jericho and Joshua 6 arose from the fact that Christianity and Judaism are basically *conservative* (the literal interpretation of miracles are deemed to be an ingredient of faith) and Christians are slow to change their faith in view of scientific evidence. Some even see faith as holding on to beliefs that are per definition contra scientific evidence. This fact also contributed to the lack of investigation into the positive meanings of the Jericho-myth.

The preoccupation with the walls of Jericho in the narrative of Joshua 6 (e.g. the archaeological question, the notion of holy war) also has the result that some other motifs of the legend are not fully appreciated, for example, the role of the prostitute Rahab who became an Israelite. What social comment is made by the Rahab story in terms of the acceptance of *outcast women in society?* How is this motif underlined by the cultic motifs of the story? Do Old Testament scholars ignore what the author of Matthew's Gospel perhaps grasped by his inclusion of Rahab in the genealogy of Jesus?

The idea of *holy war* functions to caution humans against the *hubris* about their own (military) achievements. Perhaps this was one of the purposes behind the composition of Joshua 6 and one of the positive meanings of this myth.

The metaphorical reading of the Bible allows for the singing of songs by which faith communities are *encouraged* through stories such as the falling of Jericho's walls. Such songs (e.g. the well known Negro spirituals, also the one on Jericho!) are usually sung when people are in distress (individually or socially) and the legend or myth functions as a reminder of God's help. The graphic portrayal of the legend (like water departing with the Jordan crossing and walls falling) functions to underline the reality of God's power to encourage the believer.

Faith communities today can hardly identify with the *violence* portrayed in Joshua 6 and the book as a whole. History however dictates and readers should appreciate the contingency of the earlier stages of history; compare for example the hatred expressed in Psalm 137 (and many others) concerning the enemy. Empathetic understanding of the views expressed in biblical traditions does not constitute approval of those views.

The story of Jericho and its interpretation provides insight into *how religion works*, how religion can function to foster human interests. Every myth does not per definition contain only 'positive aspects', and sometimes a 'positive' message is to be distilled by exposing the negative ideology of a myth (the biblical text communicating what should not be done).

The development of critical thinking through human history has been accelerated by the natural sciences and also archaeology. Although not initially composed as such, even in biblical times the stories of their past seemed to have been 'literally' interpreted as is clear not only from Psalm 106 but also from Josephus. Conservatives of today have indeed brothers and sisters in ancient times. However, the progress of knowledge (e.g. regarding evolution and the universe – there is no way the sun could stand still!) should be incorporated into appropriate ways of thinking about and the function of religion and the myths which every religion carries.

Psalms 44 and 114 clearly indicate that within the biblical tradition itself the miraculous (divine interacting) events relating to the conquest in the book of Joshua are used in a later situation to encourage the people amidst their suffering. The 'miraculous' character is emphasised, but the appropriation (or interpretation) does not dwell on the historicity of the events as such, but on the existential meaning for later contemporary situations which, as far as its historical aspects are concerned, were different from that of the world of the narrated text. Seen from this perspective, the capture of Jericho had to become a myth or a legend in order to have a forceful meaning in later situations. After all, the more 'historical' report of Jericho's capture in Joshua 24:11 hardly functions in the minds of even present-day informed readers: it is the Joshua 6 story that made the impact.

Conclusion

One can conclude – on the basis of the archaeology of Jericho – that the Israelites did not literally conquer the city as related in Joshua 6. However, concluding on the basis of the archaeology of Jericho that the Bible is a lie and untrustworthy, having no positive message, and should actually be discarded as a book of faith, boils down to not understanding the Bible.

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Competing interests

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