

THE PORTRAIT AND THE POTS

By

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Most of Literary Club history is preserved in papers and documents; but there are also objects that illustrate that history preserved in the art and various artifacts on the walls in the rooms surrounding us in the Club. Today I want to call your attention to three of these objects: a portrait and two clay pots. (I will describe them for you.) The portrait, hanging in the Reception Room, is a drawing of Nelson Glueck, which became the cover of *Time Magazine* in the issue of December 13, 1963. The cover describes him as an “archaeologist,” involved in the “search for man’s past.” The two clay pots —on the mantel in the Reading Room— are likely the most ancient artifacts in the Club’s collection. The pots were unearthed, probably from tombs, in the vicinity NE of Hebron, which is today located in the West Bank territory of Israel. These pots are products of the civilization that existed there almost four thousand years ago and were donated to the Club by Nelson Glueck. Together, the portrait and the pots invite us to remember Glueck, his 45 year career as a dedicated archaeologist, and his 30 years as a member of our Literary Club.

Nelson Glueck, to be sure, can also be remembered for many other significant accomplishments, in addition to having been a famous archaeologist. He was a longtime Professor of Bible and Archaeology at the Hebrew Union College here in Cincinnati. Later, as its President, he led the school to become an international institution: merging with the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, and subsequently establishing additional branches in Los Angeles and Jerusalem. This evening, however, my focus is on Glueck’s archaeological career. The gifts he made to the Literary Club suggest that this is how he would have wanted to be remembered here. Indeed, this is the focus that emerges when one reads through the eighteen papers that he delivered over the 30 years during which he was a member, from 1941 until his death in 1971. *All* of his papers evoke ideas, images, and experiences that relate to his life’s work as an archaeologist. They are what he chose to share within the fellowship that he enjoyed here as a member of the Literary Club. And, to add a personal note: I am living in Cincinnati because I was hired by Nelson Glueck to join the faculty at the Hebrew Union College; and I had the privilege of digging with him at Tell Gezer in Israel in the 1960s where I was a staff member of the excavation team. I distinctly remember being surprised to discover that when he was digging in Israel, Glueck seemed to me to be a different person from when he was in Cincinnati. In Israel he was more relaxed; he was lively and would tell stories; he was more open and accessible as a person. My family and I traveled with him in 1967 visiting ancient sites in the Negev desert. I remember him teaching my young daughters how to identify Nabatean pottery, which he was delighted to examine and confirm when they brought him fragments of pottery they found on the ground. My daughters still fondly recall this experience; they can also still identify Nabatean pottery! I believe that, here, too, at the Literary Club, Glueck found a temporary oasis; he was removed from the cares and challenges of being a College president, away from administration and finances. The Literary Club was a place where he

shared his passion for history and archaeology, which was abidingly central to his intellectual life and identity.

It all began here in Cincinnati. Nelson Glueck was born on June 4, 1900, part of an immigrant family at that time living on west Court Street downtown; but by 1918, with more prosperity, the family had moved to Hutchins Avenue in South Avondale. Glueck's interest in relics from past human history went back to his early youth. In looking back on his career, he recollected that, already as a boy, "My father used to take me . . . to the fossil hill on lower Clifton Avenue, as it makes a sharp turn westward down to the city basin proper. That hill is a fascinating conglomeration of dirt and extraordinary fossils of such importance as to have justified a special collection from it in the Smithsonian Museum. I still possess and sometimes look at the fossils I collected on my early excursions with my father. Other times he would take me to the Indian mounds in the vicinity of Cincinnati, and I still have some of the arrowheads . . . that I collected in those early days."¹

Nelson's early interests and his intellectual development were nurtured by his formal education. He took his studies seriously. Nelson entered Woodward High School at thirteen; and a year later, at fourteen, began his studies at Hebrew Union College here in Cincinnati. He finished High School in 1916 and entered the University of Cincinnati—all of this concurrently while also studying at HUC. Nelson had registered for the draft in June 1918 and he, along with other college men, began training that summer. But the war ended in 1919 and he was thus able to continue with his studies at UC and HUC. He graduated from the University of Cincinnati in 1920 and was ordained as rabbi by HUC in 1923. Nelson became very deeply interested in the Bible while studying at HUC. He was motivated "to learn more about the lands in which the Bible had its roots and about the civilizations and peoples reflected in its pages."² Dr. Julian Morgenstern, who was then president of HUC, supported Glueck's ambition to pursue advanced studies; and so Morgenstern provided him with a scholarship to study at a university in Germany and earn his Ph.D. there. Why Germany? One needs to remember that in those years, before the Nazis gained power, Germany was a world center of higher learning in biblical scholarship, especially in association with the disciplines of history, philosophy, as well as in the study of the ancient languages from biblical times. Dr. Morgenstern had taken his own Ph.D. at the University of Heidelberg in 1903, and undoubtedly saw Glueck as worthy of being a future faculty member for his school. What Morgenstern wanted, was that HUC develop a faculty of American-born scholars who were on a par with those of Europe.³ When in Germany, Nelson, too, spent some time at Heidelberg but eventually chose to write his Ph.D. at the University of Jena. Glueck wrote his dissertation in German, in the

¹ Nelson Glueck, "Why I am a Biblical Archaeologist," *Cincinnati* (Cincinnati: Greater Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce, 1968) 1/9 50-59. Citation is from p.52 of that periodical.

² *Ibid.*

³ See Jonathan M. Brown and Laurence Kutler, *Nelson Glueck: Biblical Archaeologist and President of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion*. Alumni Series (Detroit: Hebrew Union College Press/Wayne State University Press, 2005) 28. Brown and Cutler cite Samuel Cohon, "The History of Hebrew Union College" in *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, September 1950, 38.

area of philology and translation of texts in the Hebrew Bible; and he completed his Ph.D. in 1926.⁴

Glueck did not immediately return to Cincinnati. Dr. Morgenstern agreed that he might spend 1927 as a post-graduate fellow at the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was at that time part of Mandate Palestine; the Mandated area was governed by Great Britain and included what we today know as Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza strip, and Jordan. These territories had all been part of the Ottoman Empire, which was abolished after WWI. Glueck, while living and studying at the American School in Jerusalem, devoted himself to learning about the historical geography and material culture of ancient Palestine in biblical and pre-biblical times. His mentor was William Foxwell Albright, who was the Director of the Jerusalem School and a pioneer in Palestinian archaeology. In 1926 Albright had begun to excavate the ancient mound or Tell, Tell Beit Mirsim, a site located between Jerusalem and Beersheba, in an area that in biblical times had been part of ancient Judea.⁵ Glueck formally joined Albright's excavation as a staff member in 1928, which was the second season of excavation. There were to be two more seasons in 1930 and 1932 in which Glueck also participated as a member of the staff. Tell Beit Mirsim was an important, "game-changing" excavation, providing archaeologists with a standard matrix or sequencing of material objects that enabled Albright to map out the history and development of ancient Palestinian pottery from c. 2300 to 300 BCE.

I should say a bit more about the study of ancient pottery. The two pots, according to the inventory of the Literary Club, were dated by Glueck to the Middle Bronze period, from between 2000 to 1730 BCE. How is it possible to date pottery objects buried in the ground in the absence of written inscriptions? I can tell you how this ability has come about. Pottery vessels of clay, baked to hardness in ovens, were ubiquitous in antiquity; pottery vessels, after baking, were able to contain either wet or dry contents; pottery was cheaper to manufacture than containers of metal or stone; pottery was therefore available for everyday use. Pots could be made in many styles, sizes and shapes; colors could be created within the baking process; or paint decoration could be applied afterwards. But there was a drawback in that pottery vessels might break when dropped or struck by harder materials. But this drawback was a boon for archaeologists, because the broken shards of baked pottery were virtually indestructible. They were generally never 100% collected; as a result, broken, discarded fragments remained in the ground, left there, to be paved or built over as if they were not present in the dirt. The result is that pottery fragments or shards as they are called, can be found in every site of ancient human occupation as well as at the edges of ancient mounds, where the shards become visible through erosion caused by the action of water and wind on the soil. The manufacture and use of pottery has a long human history that we now know goes back ten thousand years in Palestine. So it was only natural for archaeologists to try and see if the study of this ubiquitous pottery might provide historical information. —whether in fragments or in whole vessels that occasionally survived.

⁴ Nelson Glueck, *Das Wort hesed im alttestamentlichen Sprachbrauche als menschliche und gottliche gemeinschaftsgemässe Verhaltungsweise repr.* BZAW 47 (1961). The dissertation was later translated: *Hesed in the Bible*, trans. Alfred Gottschalk (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1967).

⁵ Albright thought it might have been the biblical town of Dvir, which is mentioned in Josh. 10:3.

The typology and dating of Palestinian pottery was a science that developed in stages, beginning in 1890, when a British archaeologist, named William Flinders Petrie, excavated the ancient city mound of Tell el-Hesi located in what we now call the Gaza strip. By good fortune, he began his work in a section of the mound into which erosion had opened a long vertical gash exposing almost every layer of occupation and settlement. These layers, “read” from bottom to top, clearly portrayed the passage of time and history as well as revealing the differences in pottery over the ages. As Petrie himself reported in 1891 “In these happy circumstances a few weeks sufficed to obtain pottery of each age, from the Amorite to the Greek times.”⁶ Petrie recognized that there was a progression between the layers and the pottery within them, but he was unable to continue his work at Tell el-Hesi, because he was sent by the British Museum to Egypt.

Petrie’s new assignment was to excavate what turned out to be an area with some 4000 graves, which we now know went back to prehistoric and early dynastic periods in ancient Egypt. In other words, from times before any Pharaoh ruled in Egypt to the time when the earliest kings ruled. These ancient graves were not stratified within mounds or tells, so Petrie created *artificial* levels or “virtual layers” by measuring the depth in the ground of each grave. He devised a scheme of 50 levels of depth into which the graves and the objects they contained were located and mapped. Petrie meticulously described every object in each grave as well as its depth in the ground; this catalogue of objects was feasible because in ancient Egypt, corpses were buried along with pottery vessels containing food and drink, as well as along with household items that in their belief would be used by the dead in their afterlife. The number and range of objects varied with the wealth and status of the dead persons; and out of the 4000 graves, Petrie selected some 1000 graves that supplied him with a rich catalogue of objects, including pottery, buried at various depths in the earth. In 1899 Petrie published a revolutionary study recounting his method and laying out key findings which laid out the styles of pottery and other objects, recording both their continued use and changes in style, within the 50 artificial levels, which, were based upon the depths in the ground where the objects had been located and found.⁷ Petrie referred to this arrangement within these 50 levels beneath the earth as “sequence dating.” By this arrangement, Petrie’s sequence dating based on depth in the ground created a *relative* chronology of objects, including pottery. And thus a working, relative chronology could be reconstructed out of the pottery coming from different graves.

Another, unexpected but huge benefit of Petrie’s careful analysis was his discovery that he recognized some of the pottery and objects in the Egyptian graves; they were in fact the same size, style, and type as pottery and objects that he had seen ten years earlier at Tell-el-Hesi in the Gaza area of Palestine located adjacent to the Sinai Peninsula. He realized that there had been ancient trade between the two lands even in those prehistoric times; the Egyptians imported olive oil, aromatic resins, and wine in pottery vessels coming from Palestine; and, at the same time, some Egyptian utensils and luxury items were exported or

⁶ W.M. Flinders Petrie, *Tell El -Hesi (Lachish)* (London: Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund by A.P. Watt, 1891) Chapter VII, p. 40.

⁷ W.M. Flinders Petrie, “Sequences in Prehistoric Remains,” *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 29/3-4 (1899) 295-301.

brought to Tell-el-Hesi by officials who represented Egyptian rule over the coast of Palestine.

A final bonus for Petrie was his discovery that in the uppermost levels of his Egyptian sequence there were objects bearing the names of early Egyptian kings; Egypt was in a unique position of having a written history that was older than that of Palestine. Petrie was thereby able to link a still prehistoric Palestine with early dynastic Egypt; and through the imported pottery and objects, he could offer a likely dating for what was being called the “Early Bronze Period” in Palestine. Early Bronze in Palestine was approximately the same age as the Old Kingdom in ancient Egypt.

Petrie’s discoveries were soon recognized and they generated a careful reexamination of Palestinian sites that had been excavated, as well as the excavation of new sites. It became evident that there were foreign imports to be found in Egypt in subsequent periods that likewise established links between ancient Egypt to sites in Palestine and even beyond to Syria and Mesopotamia, which also had longer traditions of writing and written history! Taken altogether, these efforts yielded a working chronology of pottery forms and types in Palestine.⁸

Albright’s excavation at Tell Beit Mirsim—in which Glueck was a participant—incorporated and built upon the advances made by Petrie; Albright succeeded in integrating the findings at Tell Beit Mirsim into a virtual “textbook” of pottery study and typology, against which pottery from all over greater Palestine was evaluated and catalogued. The young Nelson Glueck assisted Albright in building this catalogue of Palestinian pottery. This catalogue came to embrace and control not only the Early Bronze period but also the Middle Bronze, Late Bronze, and Iron Ages. And so it became possible to determine the chronological ages of pottery from pre-biblical into biblical times. And this is how scholars were enabled to estimate the age of individual pieces of pottery like we have before us here at the Literary Club.

In 1967, Albright, in celebration of Glueck’s twentieth year as President of HUC, gave a speech entitled “A Hero of Biblical Archaeology.” In his speech, Albright recalled:

Of all my students Nelson Glueck learned the most field archaeology from several seasons on excavation with me. Fortunately, he came at a time when we were just working out the archaeological chronology of Palestinian pottery, and he devoted himself with the most unusual persistence to learning how to date pottery. I have

⁸ Helene J. Kantor, “The Relative Chronology of Egypt and its Foreign Correlations before the Late Bronze Age” in *Chronologies in Old World Archaeology*, Robert W. Ehrich ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954) 1- 46,60. The importance and prevalence of early trade from Egypt to Mesopotamia is further discussed in William F. Albright, “Some Remarks on the Archaeological Chronology of Palestine before 1500 B.C.” in that same volume, pp. 47– 60.

never had another student who approached him in [such] intense application in the field to the task of mastering the chronology of Palestinian pottery.⁹

Glueck used this expertise in dating pottery as a pathway to make new and further contributions. Beginning in 1932, Glueck began to travel around Palestine and date the periods of human occupation in unexcavated ancient sites. He did this by “surface exploration”, i.e., by personally visiting and walking about hundreds of currently unoccupied and abandoned ancient sites, where he carefully examined and recorded the variety and types of pottery shards that were left scattered about the site. This enabled him to reconstruct its history of occupation over centuries of time. While the method of surface exploration might miss some data, results from a single site gained additional validity in the aggregate, when the record of occupation from one site was correlated with the pottery found at many neighboring sites in the vicinity. Collection of surface data would also ultimately inform archaeologists on where to dig. Since the ancient mounds can be both tall and wide, excavation can be expensive and time-consuming. Surface data would help archaeologists select sites likely to yield findings relating to periods of history in which they were interested.

Glueck turned his focus to Eastern Palestine, which is now the Kingdom of Jordan. He was drawn to the exploration of Eastern Palestine, because its archaeological history was less explored than the Western part of Palestine, which is now the area of Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza. In biblical times, Eastern Palestine was home to the biblical lands of Moab, Ammon, Gilead, and Bashan. These lands were situated within a fertile stretch of area that was watered by the Jordan River and its tributaries. Some of the tributaries are rivers that flow all year round; but many more are only seasonal streams, or *wadis* that flow in the rainy season but turn dry in the summer. This fertile stretch of land is where most of the population lives today as they did in the past because beyond the river valley, the topography consists of mountainous desert-like highlands. These highlands, in the absence of irrigation, were able only to support Bedouin, who are nomadic pastoralists moving around with their flocks of livestock in pursuit of grazing. Glueck also extended his exploration into the desert area that was the biblical land of Edom, from south of the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqabah, which is the Eastern arm of the Red Sea. Between 1932 and 1947, Glueck explored and published data from over 1000 ancient sites in the Eastern Palestine region. During many of these years, Glueck also served as Director of the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem from 1932-33, 1936-40, and 1942-1947.

In 1937 Glueck went beyond surface exploration, when he excavated a Nabatean temple complex; and, again, in 1938-40 he excavated a fortress-like site near the Gulf of Aqabah.¹⁰ He published preliminary findings on each, but his work was interrupted by WW 2 and was not fully published until some years later. In 1942, Glueck volunteered his services to the US government and was assigned to the Office of Strategic Services (the

⁹ “A Hero of Biblical Archaeology,” Address by William F. Albright on the occasion of the 20th Anniversary of Dr. Nelson Glueck’s presidency of Hebrew Union College, October 23, 1967, Netherlands Hilton Hotel, Cincinnati, Ohio. (mimeograph copy).

¹⁰ The Nabatean site is Khirbet et Tannur; the “Edomite” site is Tell el-Kheleifah.

OSS), which later became the CIA. Publicly, he was to continue with his archaeological explorations in Palestine and in the Sinai Peninsula. Only many years later, after his death, was it revealed that Nelson's real assignment was to use his knowledge of topography and water resources to map out possible routes of retreat for the British army if they were to be defeated in their attempt to hold Egypt and the Suez Canal. You may recall that the Nazi army led by General Erwin Rommel had entered North Africa in 1941 and had steadily advanced from Morocco to Egypt. The British felt the need to make contingency plans to evacuate their troops into Iraq in order to protect their vital supply of oil. Fortunately, that retreat never happened; the British army stopped Rommel's advance in the second battle of El Alamein in October 1942. And a month later, in November 1942, the US army invaded North Africa from the Atlantic side and began the drive to totally eliminate the forces of Germany and its allies—Vichy France and Italy—from North Africa.

Glueck experienced significant changes in his life and career in 1947. His archeological career was again interrupted by new circumstances in the Middle East. Great Britain gave up the Palestine Mandate and the United Nations voted to partition Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab State—effective in May 1948. In that same year of 1947, Glueck became President of the Hebrew Union College; Dr. Morgenstern was ailing and wanted to retire.¹¹ Morgenstern and many influential persons in the Jewish Reform movement urged Glueck to accept this job for the sake of the school; and so Glueck somewhat reluctantly agreed and assumed these new duties. After the State of Israel was formally declared in May 1948, war broke out between Israel and all of the surrounding Arab states. Glueck was no longer permitted to continue his explorations in Jordan and lost access to his pottery and other materials that had been housed in the American School of Oriental Research near the Old City of Jerusalem. That part of Jerusalem was captured by the Jordanian army and remained part of Jordan in the Armistice agreement of 1949. It was not until 1967, almost twenty years later, that Glueck regained contact with his materials in Jerusalem; this occurred after the “Six-Day War,” when Israel conquered the Old City of Jerusalem. However, he was unable to finish publishing the complete, final reports on the excavated sites; they ultimately were completed by younger scholars after his death.

During these years, Glueck of course had been busy with his duties as President of HUC; he did try to continue with his archaeological work through writing a number of well-received popular books. Eventually, he found time to pursue new field work, exploring the Negev desert in the southern part of Israel, where between 1952 and 1964, he explored over 500 additional ancient sites through analysis of their surface pottery. He encountered many Nabatean sites in the Negev and was fascinated by the ability of the ancient Nabateans to collect and conserve water from the rainy season; they built dams, conduits, cisterns, and created landscaped runoff areas in order to maximize the amount of water they collected. They were able to plant fields and gardens. These Nabatean settlements all date to Hellenistic Roman times, and they prospered as part of a trading network that imported spices from Iran and India. The Nabatean lands were taken over by imperial Rome in the first century of the Common Era and many of these sites were gradually abandoned. Glueck's explorations helped remind those of us living in modern times that the soil in the Negev is not all sand; great sections of this soil are what is called loess.

¹¹ Brown and Kutler, *Nelson Glueck*. . . (2005), 108–115.

Loess can support agriculture when, with conservation, the soil can be irrigated with even modest amounts of water. This ancient process of farming that was practiced by the Nabateans has been resurrected and practiced in modern Israel. Israel's first prime minister, David Ben Gurion, was an enthusiastic supporter of Glueck's explorations in the Negev.¹²

Looking back now, some 50 years since Glueck's death and over 80 years since he began his work in Jordan, we see his legacy. He was the first archaeologist to apply the revolutionary pottery typology developed by Petrie and Albright in surveys using surface exploration. His publications are still considered as a major source of information and are quoted regularly by scholars who have continued his work through new survey and subsequent new excavations. He remains one of the Twentieth Century great pioneers in the study of the ancient civilizations that flourished in the lands of the Bible.¹³

There was, however, one criticism of Glueck's work and writing that erupted even while Glueck himself was alive. Because he always looked for biblical connections to his archaeological explorations, Glueck was accused of trying to prove that the Bible was factual and correct. But this was untrue. In a paper entitled "Tradition and Discovery" presented to the Literary Club on Feb. 8, 1960, Glueck asserted that "The Bible is first and foremost a theological document." At the same time, however, the Bible did contain "large numbers of historical, topographical and geographic references that contribute" a vital "body of knowledge about the ancient history of Israel and of the Holy Land and the forces which affected them both." But in the end, he said, one should not confuse "facts with faith . . . history with holiness, science with religion. . . . There is [in fact] a vast difference between history in the Bible and the Bible as history."

Glueck's deep emotional and intellectual connection to the Bible was acknowledged and celebrated upon in the memorial that was offered to the Literary Club after his death, on May 10, 1971. The memorial was written by Charles D. Aring, Joseph W. Sagmaster, and Samuel Sandmel, Chairman. I offer you this slightly edited excerpt:

How did it happen that a man whose bent was to explain words and ideas became so eminent an archaeologist? The answer lies in the circumstances that the archaeology Nelson turned to was biblical archaeology. . .the archaeology that could help illumine a book. . . Nelson moved on to archeology because of his devotion to the Bible. . . . With Nelson . . .the greater he grew in science, the deeper became his love of ScriptureThe more he analyzed, the more his synthesis bound him to such an identification with the characters of the Bible that for him to speak of walking in the footsteps of Abraham was not a figure of speech but a humble statement of fact. . . .Nelson was not preeminently a historian, not preeminently a theologian. He was much simpler than all that. He was a man who loved books, who loved especially the books of Scripture.

¹² Brown and Kutler, *Nelson Glueck* . . .(2005) 144-150.

¹³ Eveline J. van der Steen, "The Archaeology of Jordan: A Condensed History," *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology and Heritage Studies* 7/2 (2019) 149-164 see pp. 157-158.