Negotiating the Real and the Hyperreal: Nineteenth-Century Experiences of the Bible in the Context of Ancient Near Eastern Discoveries

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Abstract

The emergence of Near Eastern archaeological explorations by European nations in the nineteenth century led to a new impulse to contextualize the Bible within an Egyptian and Mesopotamian setting. As people became more familiar with the visual culture of the ancient Near East, a concomitant rise in literacy, rise in transportation technologies, and rise in theologies privileging personal experience of the Bible compelled people to situate the Bible in an historical framework of world progress and decline, in which world-historical cultures were categorized in relational hierarchies to contemporary European societies. Beyond the obvious justifications for European imperialist programs, these ventures allowed Europeans to experience the Near East and indirectly experience the biblical world. Despite the positivist trappings of academic contextualization attempts, for non-specialists, this experience of biblical lands was a personal and potentially destabilizing experience. Through text, image, and object, nineteenth-century educators, showmen, and evangelists created novel methods for experiencing the Bible in its 'authentic' setting. Yet closer examination of these attempts show that many of these experiences were designed to minimize the 'otherness' of certain elements of biblical culture and to structure new understandings of difference. For example, esoteric approaches to the Bible, inspired by archaeological evidence (but not 'limited' by scholarly interpretation) were used by groups such as the Freemasons and Theosophists to create collective group memories, integral to the construction of their identities. This paper will explore some of the ways that popular biblical reception in nineteenth-century Britain was influenced by the growing prevalence of Near Eastern archaeology in different media and how a new ethos of archaeological authenticity emerged in public thinking about the Bible. While archaeological discoveries informed Biblical reception throughout Europe and North America over the course of the century, this paper uses British society as a case study to explore the diversity of media in which these interpretations were performed (although reference to examples outside of Britain are relevant as these media were not isolated).

George Smith, in his address to the Society of Biblical Archaeology on December 3, 1873, announced the discovery of a cuneiform version of the flood myth, and elaborated on one of the key Victorian conceptualizations of the ancient Near East. About Mesopotamia, which he referred to as the 'Plains of Chaldea', Smith stated:

> This country, the cradle of civilization, the birthplace of the arts and sciences, for 2,000 years has been in ruins; its literature, containing the most precious records of antiquity, is scarcely known to us, except from the texts the Assyrians copied, but beneath its mounds and ruined cities, now awaiting exploration, lay, together with older copies of this Deluge text, other legends and histories of the earliest civilization in the world.[1]

This statement may seem somewhat self-evident and not particularly noteworthy. That is to say, most working in the field of Assyriology today would scarcely question the assertion. What Smith is pointing to is the importance of memory, or, more specifically in this case, the importance of remembering what has been forgotten. Beneath the mounds of Assyria lay the forgotten records of biblical events written from the perspective of one of the many 'others' of the Bible. In what was a monumental shift in how Mesopotamia came to be used in biblical reception (that had begun with Layard's excavations of 'Nineveh'[2]), Smith was actually picking up on what had already become a major theme of Egyptology and biblical studies in the nineteenth century, beginning with the investigations conducted by Napoleon's savants in Egypt. This was the theme of archaeology: the peculiar ways in which memory seems to be stored in objects and the belief in the potential that archaeologically informed biblical studies had for the unlocking of ancient memories trapped in 'ancient things'. Despite the hopeful positivist dreams of archaeologically based biblical studies providing objective evidence of the past, the reality of the study of these objects of memory was that they were often treated as solipsistic vessels for the reification and construction of varieties of nineteenth-century identities. This paper explores some of the ways that archaeologically informed biblical studies led to new avenues for the popular experience of the Bible in the nineteenth century: how this approach assumed a particular memory function of ancient objects and how

1. George Smith, 'The Chaldean Account of the Deluge', *Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 2 (1873), pp. 213-34 (234).

2. George Rawlinson had initially identified the site of Layard's excavations as biblical Nineveh. This was a mistake; Layard worked at Nimrud but due to the incredible popularity of Layard's writings about his discoveries, his name is still synonymous with Nineveh. It should also be noted that Layard was initially hesitant to emphasize any biblical connections with his excavations, due to the potentially sacrilegious connotations such identifications may have had with the general public. He eventually, however, embraced this approach to public outreach, and emphasized the importance of Assyrian discoveries for understanding the Bible.

experiences of antiquities formed new memories for audiences. These experiences were encouraged by the new encounter with the materiality of the ancient Near East (perceived as 'real' by those that experienced it) but was transmitted into hyperreal forms that were more appealing to non-specialist consumers.[3]

As Susan Pearce has noted from a museum studies perspective, there is a certain power that authentic antiquities hold over museum goers—the power of the real.[4] There is an intangible quality that impresses, excites, and convinces those that encounter an 'authentic' object. In the nineteenth century, this power of objects emerged within biblical reception, as the Bible came to be illustrated by archaeological findings. This was not an assumption that the Bible needed to be corroborated with what came out of the ground (that idea came later) but rather a recognition that the archaeologically authentic (and representations of the authentic) added to the experience of the Bible. Pearce also notes a Saussurian tension in objects—a tension between an individual response to an object and the expectations of interpretation provided by the interpreter's community.[5] As archaeology developed in the nineteenth century, especially in relation to biblical studies, an individual brought his or her own expectations to an encounter with antiquity, but expectations that were increasingly focused (or constrained depending on one's point of view) by readings of the Bible situating the stories in an historical rather than a mytho-poetic setting (in which historicity was not of interest).

Despite growing knowledge of Egypt and Mesopotamia, the ancient Near East was still remarkably open to interpretation in the nineteenth century. In some ways, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Iron Age Israel (less so Roman civilization and Roman-era Judea) functioned as meta-symbols within Victorian society, with, for example, references to Jerusalem and Babylon abounding in political discourse.[6] As Malcolm Quinn has shown in

3. Hyperreality is a well-established concept in cultural studies. Perhaps Jean Baudrillard's use of Disneyland best illustrates hyperreality as a kind of reality that never existed but that experiencers wish did. See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* [trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman; New York: Semiotext[e], 1983). Lynn Meskell has explored this concept in relation to the reception of ancient Egypt and her treatment is recommended (*Object Worlds in Ancient Egypt: Material Biographies Past and Present* [Oxford: Berg, 2004]).

4. Susan M. Pearce, 'Objects as Meanings; or Narrating the Past', in *Interpreting Objects and Collections* (ed. Susan M. Pearce; London: Routledge, 1994), p. 20.

5. Pearce, 'Objects as Meanings', p. 27.

6. For example, in July 1885, W.T. Stead wrote a series of newspaper articles on child prostitution in the *Pall Mall Gazette* titled 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon'. Whereas Babylon signified moral corruption and decay, Jerusalem signified potential for renewal (especially in response to industrialization), as in William Blake's poem *And Did Those Feet in Ancient Time* (also known as *New Jerusalem*), the basis of the anthem *Jerusalem*.

his insightful analysis of uses of the swastika, meta-symbols like the ancient Near East point to an ancient reality but are still empty enough of meaning for that meaning to be filled in by the appropriator of the symbol.[7] The emptiness of the content of the symbol of the ancient Near East concomitant with the rise in media for experiencing archaeological information created two related trends in biblical reception. On the one hand, the power of the authentic object led to greater demands for an historical reading of the Bible, not necessarily a suspicion regarding its historicity but a desire that the presentation of the Bible would make reference to the 'real'. On the other hand, increasingly commercial presentations of the Bible and theologies that privileged individual experience of the Bible necessitated the creation of hyperreal spectacles of the Bible and the ancient Near East.

Much of the meaning that could be discerned from Victorian approaches to the ancient Near East grew out of academic and artistic orientalist approaches. Since Edward Said's *Orientalism* was first published over thirty years ago, the orientalism implicit in Biblical studies and ancient Near Eastern studies more generally has been carefully explored. It is not the goal of this paper to survey that work specifically, but it is important to note some of the theoretical foundations derived from this scholarship that are applied to the examples that follow. Of particular interest in an examination of archaeologically-inspired hyperreality is how orientalist subjects are presented in what seems to be a documentary (in the case of visual culture) or academic (in the case of scholarly works) *veritas*. As Linda Nochlin suggests, it is important 'to clarify *whose* reality we are talking about'.[8] Nochlin and others have shown that a key aspect of the orientalist approach is to make the viewer forget that the representation is a representation.[9] Archaeological representations were convincing in the same manner (and still are). The materiality of the objects obscures the fact that their interpretation is an act of interpretation and when applied to Biblical Studies, presents what may be a deceptive authenticity. Archaeology, used in this way, seemed to bring the Bible out of the realm of myth and into the realm of history.

While Victorian public audiences were impressed and excited by the authenticity of ancient objects and the seeming authenticity of Orientalist treatments of Mesopotamia and Egypt, these 'real' or 'real-seeming' manifestations produced an imagined spectacle of the past—a hyperreality

7. Malcolm Quinn, *The Swastika: Constructing the Symbol* (London: Routledge, 1994).

8. Linda Nochlin, *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), p. 34.

9. Nochlin, *The Politics of Vision*, p. 39.

rooted in the ancient material. Frederick Bohrer, working on how Mesopotamia was imagined, described these hyperreal interactions as: 'shared dreams: social projections situated in unique, discontinuous contexts.'[10] Building on the works of Walter Benjamin, Homi Bhaba, Hans-Robert Hauss, and Edward Said, Bohrer argues that the production of meaning surrounding Mesopotamian artifacts should be understood as a system of meaning mediated by exoticism. For Bohrer, exoticism is an arrangement in which 'two distinct cultures' are 'separated by a palpable remoteness' and yet that remoteness is surmounted by a proximity between the cultures either through emulation or explicit reference to the other.[11] Similarly, Eitan Bar-Yosef has approached popular discourse about the Holy Land through two conceptual schema: vernacular Biblical culture and vernacular orientalist culture.[12] It is an amalgam of these approaches that is followed here in seeking to explore how the archaeologically 'real' inspired hyperreal representations of Biblical times.

Perhaps the earliest of these authentic representations of Bible lands emerged in response to the works of Napoleon's savants. As part of his failed military expedition to Egypt, Napoleon had brought with him a team of scholar-artists to document the history and natural history of Egypt, the end result being extremely realistic scientific illustrations of Egypt's antiquity and the first large-scale accurate visual record of Egyptian antiquities.[13] This is not to say that these images were politically neutral; rather, they reflected Egyptian art and architecture in a visually realistic manner that had not been available to a wider European audience.[14] Later, the paintings of David Roberts, with their ancient ruins set amidst panoramic natural landscapes,

10. Frederick Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture: Imagining Mesopotamia in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 3.

11. Bohrer, *Orientalism*, p. 15.

12. Eitan Bar-Yosef. *The Holy Land in English Culture 1799–1917: Palestine and the Question of Orientalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), pp. 11-12.

13. Andrew Bednarski has argued that the impact of the Napoleonic expedition was not as extensive early on as has been traditionally argued. That may in fact be the case and much of the impact on early nineteenth-century visual culture may actually have stemmed from Vivant Denon's popular account of his journeys with the Napoleonic team. See Andrew Bednarski, *Holding Egypt: Tracing the Reception of the* Description de l'Egypte *in Nineteenth Century Great Britain* (Egyptology, 3; London: Golden House Publication, 2005); Dominique Vivant Denon, *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Egypte* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1998 [1802]).

14. The images from the Napoleonic expedition have been deconstructed by a number of scholars. For a good example of this approach, specifically related to Vivant Denon's images, see Abigail Harrison Moore, 'Voyage: Dominique-Vivant Denon and the Transference of Images of Egypt', in *Tracing Architecture: The Aesthetics of Antiquarianism* (ed. Dana Arnold and Stephen Bending; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 111-29.

built on these Napoleonic themes that illustrated the failed splendor of Egypt from an orientalist perspective merging the visually realistic with the romantic. With these new images of ancient buildings and artifacts, biblical scholars and promoters now had a setting in which to place biblical scenes.[15] Especially for Protestants, suspicious of the 'false sacred geographies in the Holy Land' (as Tromans refers to them), Egypt better functioned as a setting for biblical action than Palestine.[16]

The Napoleonic influence is readily apparent in Gustave Doré's illustrated Bible. It first appeared in print in 1866 and became a highly successful work, deeply influencing biblical visual culture and popular notions of what the ancient Near East looked like. A major exhibition of his work was held in London in 1867 and he became a household name. A contemporary art critic and reviewer claimed that Gustave Doré achieved more recognition in his own lifetime than any artist previously had.[17] Whether or not this claim can be upheld, Doré was widely popular in Victorian Britain and in many ways has become synonymous with the 'genre' of Victorian illustration. Much of his approach to visual culture reflects Victorian sensibilities; if anything, it is unusual in how many peculiarly Victorian approaches to art he was able to merge in his oeuvre. His works are detailed and realistic yet he manages to convey elements of Gothic, romance, and fantasy. Many of his illustrations are violent or sexual (sometimes both) and often feature semi-nude figures depicted in an anatomically realistic fashion. Doré's popularity in London and scorn amongst Parisian art circles led to mixed critical reviews of his works. His realistic detail was highlighted by critics, as was his lack of concern for accuracy within those same details, transforming real settings for artistic purposes. His popularity led to the typical criticisms from the art community towards work that is too commercial. Also noteworthy were the divergent moral evaluations of his work. As Herendeen has pointed out, '[s]ome regarded his paintings, drawings, and illustrations as elevated, refined, pious, and yet powerful, while others found them dangerous, lewd, corruptive—and powerfully so'.[18] The

15. The influence of the Napoleonic expedition on European visual culture has been studied in depth in regard to 'Egyptomania' in design and architecture. James Curl has labeled the impact of post-Napoleonic Egyptomania expedition on European visual culture as 'archaeological', referring to the new ability for designers to appeal to an historically authentic aesthetic. See James Stevens Curl, *The Egyptian Revival: Ancient Egypt as the Inspiration for Design Motifs in the West* (London: Routledge, 3rd edn, 2005), p. 196.

16. Nicholas Tromans, 'Introduction: British Orientalist Painting', in *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting* (ed. Nicholas Tromans; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008) pp. 10-21 (18).

17. W.H. Herendeen, 'The Doré Controversy: Doré, Ruskin, and Victorian Taste', *Victorian Studies* 25 (1982), pp. 305-22 (308).

18. Herendeen, 'The Doré Controversy', p. 316.

art-critic and Christian social activist, John Ruskin (1819–1900), despised Doré's art and argued that his concentration on the physicality of the body of biblical figures through explicitly violent and sexual themes was inappropriate.[19] Yet this moral ambiguity was ideally suited for a Victorian audience, which could view the book or attend his showings and feel as though they were being both pious and scandalous at the same time. Doré's biblical illustrations were certainly not his most scandalous works although the very nature of the subject meant that they could not fully escape controversy. That the Bible would be illustrated with scenes of semi-nude men, erotically charged women, and scenes of graphic violence seemed shocking despite the fact that these illustrations well reflect the contents of the Old Testament. Doré's illustrations also well reflect typical nineteenth-century artistic and intellectual approaches to the Near East and certainly communicated these to a more general audience than would have initially been exposed to them. It is this commercial success of his work (and its popularity in England) that makes Doré of interest here, since this was work that was widely experienced by a large cross-section of Victorian society.

As was typical of his approach, Doré used authentic settings as foundations for his art but freely reinterpreted these details for romantic purpose. The Egyptian scenes in Doré's Bible are clearly dependent on the Napoleonic illustrations. In 'The Egyptians Urge Moses to Depart', Pharaoh kneels before Moses in an Egyptian hypostyle hall, replete with hieroglyphic writing and deities dressed in Osirian garb. In 'Moses and Aaron before Pharaoh' Doré has created a court based on images he had seen of the Hathor temple at Denderah.[20] Both of these illustrations reflect a hodge-podge of actual Egyptian architecture, drawn in the style of Napoleon's team. Thus the images convey the realism of the Napoleonic images without the accuracy. This is typical of his approach.[21] Doré uses academic sources for inspiration but does not actually place the biblical characters in an historically identifiable structure. Viewers, however, will feel that the background is accurate and would have then been able to imagine biblical events taking place against the archaeological background.

The Patriarchs and other early biblical figures are depicted as nineteenth-century Bedouin, reflecting the Victorian notion that the inhabitants of Palestine lived as people did in biblical times. Doré's 'Eliezer and Rebecca at the Well' features Eliezer crouching on the ground, leaning against the well

19. Herendeen, 'The Doré Controversy', pp. 320-22.

20. Helen Whitehouse, 'Archaeology Wedded to Art: Egyptian Architecture in Nineteenth Century Painting', in *Imhotep Today: Egyptianizing Architecture* (ed. J. Humbert and C. Price; Encounters with Egypt, London: UCL Press, 2003), pp. 41-55 (54).

21. It is also typical of nineteenth-century orientalist painting in general in which eastern locales are depicted in minute detail but without individuality. See Nicholas Tromans, 'Introduction', p. 14.

and his shepherd's crook. Rebecca stands upright, balancing a large pithos on the wall of the well. Other women carrying similar pithoi stand in the background waiting for their opportunity. Camels and men dressed as Bedouin are in the distant backdrop. Numerous other Old Testament scenes represent nineteenth-century ethnographic images.

Whereas Doré's treatment of Old Testament materials can be understood as orientalizing, many of his New Testament scenes are explicitly not orientalizing. In these images, Jesus and his followers are clad in what appear to be the loose robes of nineteenth-century Bedouin, but the landscape is a landscape of 'sameness'—not distinctly Middle Eastern in the particulars but perhaps evocative of rural life in general (such as in 'Jesus Preaching to the Multitude'). Often the background may be interpreted vaguely as a desert or tropical locale (for example, 'Jesus at the House of Martha and Mary') but there are decidedly few cultural features that signal the location. Thus, the exotic Old Testament is subtly contrasted with the more familiar Christian New Testament.[22]

Doré was not the only artist who used archaeological materials (especially the Temple at Denderah) as inspiration for the settings of biblical scenes.[23] Photography, especially after 1860, fueled further desire for *veritas* in visual culture and allowed further direct access to Near Eastern archaeology. This shift toward an archaeologically authentic aesthetic in the depiction of Victorian biblical art led to greater expectations for biblical readers in regards to historicizing approaches. It was no longer sufficient to treat the Bible as stories—now these stories had to be contextualized within an historical framework.

22. Already by the nineteenth century, there was a long-standing tradition in British, French and United States visual culture of claiming ancient Rome as part of a grander tradition of Western heritage; thus use of Roman backgrounds in European biblical illustrations likewise function to symbolize the self, to some degree. For an overview of ancient Roman reception in the United States, see Margaret Malamud, *Ancient Rome and Modern America* (Classical Receptions; Malden, MA; Oxford: Wiley–Blackwell, 2009). For an extended discussion of the continued uses of Greco-Roman architecture throughout European history, see George Hersey, *The Lost Meaning of Classical Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998).

23. For example, the zodiac roof from the Temple at Denderah can be seen behind Pharaoh's throne in Adrien Guignet's *Joseph Interpreting Pharaoh's Dream*. Orientalism (and Biblical Studies) in nineteenth-century art is a well-studied subject and the topic cannot be dealt with adequately here. Interested readers can find a well-illustrated treatment (with significant bibliography) in: Nicholas Tromans (ed.), *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008). Although not illustrated, an historically informed discussion of major British Orientalist painters can be found in Kenneth Bendiner. 'The Portrayal of the Middle East in British Painting 1835–1860' (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1979).

The illustrations of the Napoleonic expedition were influential in more explicitly fictional public spectacles of the Near East. Opera backdrops often had realistic Near Eastern settings, especially influenced by the Napoleonic drawings and even unrealistic subjects, like *The Magic Flute*, were reimagined with reference to the archaeological. The Paris Opera House had a whole series of Egyptian sets that were re-used throughout the nineteenth century. The climax of these kinds of tendencies can be seen in Verdi's *Aida* (1871), produced at the behest of the Khedive based on a story by the Egyptologist Auguste Mariette, who also provided archaeologically informed costume and set designs. It was not just the stagings of the opera that informed audience members about the ancient Near East. Continental music at this time was heavily influenced by Orientalist themes (apparent in the works of Verdi along with musicians such as Anton Rubenstein and Camille Saint-Saëns.[24] Thus it is likely that eastern-inspired music provided aural inspiration for Victorian thinking about the Bible.

Theatrical performances, especially melodramas, provided Victorian audiences with gothic adventure stories set in the pyramids or ancient Mesopotamia. References to specific biblical issues on stage were illegal in London in much of the first half of the nineteenth century.[25] The Examiner of Plays enforced this on the major stages (and in the minor playhouses after 1843).[26] Thus for the most part, theatrical audiences were not directly exposed to the Bible through plays. However, isolated performances illustrate how the scenic elements of plays were thought to be informative. An 1833 performance at Covent Garden, *The Israelites in Egypt; or, The Passage of the Red Sea: An Oratorio, consisting of Sacred Music, Scenery, and Personation*, featured music from Handel's *Messiah* played in front of paintings designed to evoke ancient Egypt. The Examiner of Plays censored much of this performance, despite the fact that the Bishop of London had sanctioned it, and so further biblically based performances were cancelled.[27] Thus the biblical content staged in London tended more to evoke biblical times than to dramatize biblical events.

An example of the use of biblical times in stage performances divorced from any actual biblical narrative is *Azäel the Prodigy*. The play was written

24. A full exploration of how orientalist music may have influenced Biblical reception is beyond the scope of this paper. For further study of musical orientalism, readers are recommended to peruse Martin Clayton and Bennett Zon (eds), *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire, 1780s–1940s* (London: Ashgate, 2007).

25. For a good overview of the complex relationship between theatre and religion in the nineteenth century, see Richard Foulkes, *Church and Stage in Victorian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

26. Edward Ziter, *The Orient on the Victorian Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 133.

27. Ziter, *The Orient on the Victorian Stage*, pp. 133-34.

by Edward Fitzball (1792–1873) and first performed in 1851. It merges quasi-biblical characters, Egyptian settings, and Arabian Nights flourishes in a fairly traditional story about a young man who leaves his family for adventure only to discover that he prefers life at home and the woman he left behind. Azäel is the hero, son of Reuben, who is described as the chief of a tribe of Israelites. Azäel leaves the caravan of his family to go to Memphis, where he witnesses an elaborate procession of the god Apis installed on a golden chair, a sacred bull, and various initiates in the mysteries of Osiris. Throughout the various exploits, romances, and mistaken identities that are typical of Victorian melodrama, the play presents characters evocative of the Bible (with reference to the patriarch Reuben) who have adventures in Egypt, in front of sets based on actual Egyptian models. There is a mix of fantasy (imagining what types of situations the Israelites might have found themselves in into that are not recorded in the Bible) in a setting that is referring to (but confusing) an archaeological aesthetic of Egypt.

The Earthquake: or, the Spectre of the Nile, an earlier play written by Fitzball in 1829 similarly mixes Egyptian and Arabian design but is more dependent on an earlier fictional work, *The Life of Sethos: Taken from Private Memoirs of the Ancient Egyptians*, written by Jean Terrasson (1670–1750) and published in 1731. Here, the story takes place within a pyramid and involves a Christian girl being forced into the worship of Osiris. Audience members would have witnessed the secret rites of the mysteries of Osiris and Isis being performed before sets designed in reference to images from the Napoleonic expedition. The temporal setting of the play is a bit confused. Fitzball was unconcerned with historical accuracy in this way; the play presents a Christian message of the importance of faith in an alien setting.

From the 1850s onwards, especially under the influence of Charles Kean (a member of the Society of Antiquaries), 'pictorial drama' rose in prominence. Especially as manifest in Kean's performances, pictorial dramas emphasized historical accuracy and detail in sets, props, and costume designs. Thus works such as those of the Napoleonic expedition were useful reference tools for those staging dramatic spectacles. These performances influenced popular audiences, not so much by directly educating them about the Bible but in creating new understandings of the visual culture of biblical times. That audiences came to expect a certain level of authenticity in their experiences of fictional performances speaks to the growing prominence of the ancient Near East and Egypt in the visual culture of the time, a prominence that was reinforced and promoted by commercially motivated fictional portrayals.

Charles Kean's plays were publicized as edifying entertainments and much of his promotional strategy involved arguments for the authenticity of his work. In his 1853 revival of Lord Byron's *Sardanapolus*, Kean attempted to correct the original book on the basis of more recent knowledge of Mesopotamia

(such as correcting references to the positions of cities in relation to the Tigris and Euphrates rivers). More importantly, he attempted to stage the play on the basis of artifacts and architecture excavated by Layard and even had Layard himself 'authorize' the play. As Kean explained, 'until the present moment, it has been impossible to render Lord Byron's Tragedy... upon the stage with proper dramatic effect, because, until now, we have known nothing of Assyrian architecture and costume'.[28] In the preface to the script of the play, Kean further connects his version of *Sardanapolus* with Assyriology:

> I have humbly endeavoured to convey to the Stage an accurate portraiture and a living picture of an age long since past away, but once as famous as our own country for its civilisation and power; and more intimately associated with the destructive wars of the Jewish race than any other people. No pains have been spared to present to the eye the gorgeous and striking scenery, that has been so unexpectedly dug from the very bowels of the earth. The Sculptures now in the British Museum have been rigidly followed; and where recent discovery has failed to give authority for minor detail, I have, wherever it has been possible, borrowed designs from surrounding nations, flourishing at the same epoch.[29]

Here Kean refers to the archaeological work upon which the staging of the play is based and explains that the subject is of interest partially in how it relates to Jewish history. As Shawn Malley has noted about this performance of *Sardanapolus*, Kean's staging is as much an 'authentic' version of Byron's play as it is a celebration of British ingenuity (in being able to recover the lost civilization archaeologically) and a means of drawing connections between what was perceived as the world's first great empire (Assyria) and its current great empire (Britain).[30] Both the authenticity and the celebration of empire would have influenced the Victorian audience's experiences of his performance with their experiences of the Bible. The rhetoric of authenticity would have, as Malley paraphrases Michael Shanks and Mike Pearson's work on theatre and archaeology, legitimated the theatre by 'sanctioning the performance *as* knowledge'.[31] The rhetoric of empire would have helped the audience associate themselves with biblical times and draw a political/emotional/spiritual connection to those times.

By the turn of the century, authentic historical settings had become common for fictional plays illustrating life in biblical times.[32] Wilson Barrett's

28. Charles Kean, *Sardanapalus, King of Assyria: A Tragedy, by Lord Byron, Adapted for Representation by Charles Kean* (London: T.H. Lacy, 1853), p. 4.

29. Kean, *Sardanapolus*, p. 3.

30. Shawn Malley. 'Theater/Archaeology: Performing Material History in Charles Kean's Adaptation of *Sardanapalus*', *Nineteenth-Century Studies* 21 (2007), pp. 139-61 (142).

31. Malley, 'Theater/Archaeology', p. 141.

32. In the United States, circus performances presented similar theatrical spectacles,

The Daughters of Babylon, first performed in 1897, exemplifies this approach to using historical fiction to teach about biblical times but without directly performing (in a potentially sacrilegious manner) stories directly taken from the Bible. *The Daughters of Babylon* attempted to show Victorian audiences what life must have been like for the Israelites during the exile in Babylon. It is a tragic romance, based on Deuteronomic laws (and Talmudic interpretations) that decree death by stoning to a woman and her lover, when she has already been betrothed to another man.[33] Barrett uses these laws as the basis for a Victorian melodrama that depicts the difficulties the Israelites encountered in trying to live virtuous lives within the sinful city of Babylon. That this was an explicitly educational play (or at least advertised as such) is apparent in the comments made in a souvenir program that accompanied the play. After lauding the efforts of Layard and others, the writer of the program (perhaps the author of the play himself) writes:

> To breathe the breath of life into the dust he [the Assyriologist in general] had unearthed, to reconstruct a civilisation ages ago crumbled and extinct, lies, however, beyond the power and the province of the explorer, artist and poet though he be. To the dramatist and the actor, and to them alone, belongs this inestimable privilege.[34]

The pictures that accompany the program show actors in various costumes, dressed either in costumes based on Assyrian reliefs or in robes resembling nineteenth-century Bedouin. The stage sets also refer to Assyrian reliefs and statuary that were (and are still) on display in the British Museum. Here, much as Kean had done with *Sardanapolus*, Barrett has legitimated his performance with the 'scientific' authority of archaeology and explicitly used this authority as a type of biblical exegesis of Levitical law.

Although stage performances were very popular in the nineteenth century, far larger audiences were able to engage with archaeological materials through newspapers and other types of periodicals. The importance of Victorian print culture on the dissemination of information about the ancient Near East cannot be overemphasized. Perhaps just as important for creating an 'archaeological' visual culture in which to situate the Bible were the printed illustrations that accompanied the news stories of the

involving biblical and Assyrian themes. Burke O. Long presents an in-depth discussion of one circus performance titled 'The Sublime Historic Bible Spectacle, Fall of Nineveh' which opened the Adam Forepaugh Circus in Philadelphia in 1892 and merged Byron's version of Sardanapalus with the story of Jonah. See Burke O. Long, 'The Circus', in The Blackwell Companion to the Bible and Culture (ed. John F. A. Sawyer: Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006; Blackwell Reference Online, 08 May 2012, http://www.blackwellreference.com/subscriber/tocnode?id=g9781405101363_chunk_g978140510136324).

33. Deut. 22.23-24.

34. Wilson Barrett, *Souvenir of 'The Daughters of Babylon'* (London, 1897).

exploration of the ancient Near East. The readership for periodicals in the nineteenth century was vast and, as Robert Altick has argued, numerous patrons of a coffee house read one copy of a journal over the course of a few months and conceivably all members of a household (including staff) could peruse a copy purchased for the home.[35] In this burgeoning journalistic setting, popular writers used the Bible as a 'hook' to evoke reader interest in archaeological discoveries or in artifacts displayed in museums (especially the British Museum and the Louvre). In some cases, as Shawn Malley has demonstrated, this was part of a deliberate dissemination strategy on the part of the excavators to raise funds and popular support for their work.[36] Malley notes Austen Henry Layard's initial reluctance to situate his finds from Nimrud within a biblical context. Layard eventually relented, urged on by advice such as that from Sir Charles Alison, the Oriental Secretary at Britain's Embassy in Constantinople, who recommended that Layard 'fish up old legends and anecdotes, and if you can by any means humbug people into the belief that you have established any points in the Bible, you are a made man'.[37] Since that time, biblical connections have made Assyriology more commercially viable (or at least less commercially disastrous).

The *Illustrated News of London* was particularly influential in its shaping of a popular archaeological-biblical visual culture, due to its high quality illustrations and its wide circulation. In numerous instances, the newspaper explicitly claimed to provide a guide to the collections at the British Museum. Given the difficulties that most would have had in visiting the museum (at least until the latter half of the nineteenth century) and the lack of descriptive material provided by the museum, this periodical was one of the most important means through which people experienced the museum.[38] The authors of the articles connect these archaeological finds with biblical exegesis and contemporary political events (especially related to empire and technological progress).

Often the actual connections to biblical interpretation were somewhat strained. This is certainly the case in an 1851 article describing a sculpture of tribute bearers from Nimrud. It is reported:

35. Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800–1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 83.

36. Shawn Malley, 'Austen Henry Layard and the Periodical Press: Middle Eastern Archaeology and the Excavation of Cultural Identity in Mid-Nineteenth Century Britain', *Victorian Review* 22 (1996), pp. 152-70 (157-58).

37. Shawn Malley, 'Shipping the Bull: Staging Assyria in the British Museum', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 26 (2004), pp. 1–27 (5).

38. For an example of an article described as a 'guide' to the British Museum, see *Illustrated London News*, June 26, 1847, p. 412.

> These two slabs ... are not only interesting because they are of the finest Assyrian sculpture that has yet arrived in this country and because they are in a high state of preservation, but more particularly because they embody a metaphor frequently used in Psalms, and other of the sacred Books of the Old Testament, expressive of the interference of the Divinity in human affairs. Thus, in the 16th Psalm it is said, 'The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of *my cup*: thou maintainest my lot'. And again in the 23rd Psalm, 'Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest mine head with oil; *my cup* runneth over'.[39]

The connection here seems to be merely that one of the slabs has a cup depicted on it and that both of these verses mention cups. Yet, the newspaper's approach to the topic of biblically informed archaeology was not always uncritical. An 1873 article, for example, rejects claims that biblical Ophir had been found in Zimbabwe.[40] Generally though, the newspaper did reinforce a popular sense of archaeology as providing the 'things' that can illustrate the verses of the Bible, and often, as is common in Anglo-Protestant exegesis, the verses being illustrated are removed from their larger literary context.

That this was an effective approach to constructing an understanding of the Bible situated in the archaeological discoveries of the ancient Near East is hinted at by a letter to the editor (signed simply A.M.) that responds to an Assyrian sculpture published in a previous issue. The letter reads:

> Now I find, in the 7th chapter of the prophecies of Daniel, that the Babylonian Kingdom (which was a part of the Assyrian Empire) was represented under this very figure of a lion with eagle's wings. Might not this be used justly as a strong argument for the antiquity of Daniel's prophecies, and that they were written at a time when the Assyrian Empire was remembered, or the Babylonian Empire (its most important part) was known by this figure. Allow me to refer to your readers to the whole of the 7th chapter, and to the 2nd chapter also, in which (under the figure of an image of divers metals) the same successive empires are spoken of. On this point all writers are agreed. I write only a first impression.[41]

Although this type of studied response to the sculptures may not have been typical, it does demonstrate how these illustrations made the Bible come to historical life for the readers of the *Illustrated News of London*.

Just as ancient material culture assemblages were presented as the new 'props' for biblical interpretation, new visions of Near Eastern landscapes were presented as the 'sets' for biblical stories. In art circles, these landscapes were presented through paintings and drawings by masters like

39. 'The Nimroud Sculptures at the British Museum', *Illustrated London News*, December 21, 1850.

40. 'The Ophir of Scripture', *Illustrated London News*, January 11, 1873.

41. 'Letter to the Editor', *Illustrated London News*, December 28, 1850.

William Holman Hunt, David Roberts, J.M.W. Turner and Elihu Vedder.[42] For popular audiences, panorama shows in which large-scale images of various locales were presented alongside narrated lectures were the media through which landscape and Bible interpretation merged. The landscape painting and the panorama were intrinsically related, as Altick has demonstrated, since both involve the construction of the illusion of three-dimensionality on a two-dimensional surface.[43] In fact, many panorama shows were put on by landscape painters (such as Fredrick Catherwood) and many images were presented both as typically sized canvasses and as larger-than-life panoramas. The more important difference was audience. Elites could afford the expensive volumes of landscape paintings whereas the middle and working classes could afford to see an occasional show (such as a panorama) in the evening if the subject was interesting enough. Two of the most popular subjects of these shows were the antiquities of Egypt and locations in Jerusalem.

As Edward Ziter has noted, images of the Near East, especially Jerusalem, presented places divorced from secular time.[44] A panorama of Jerusalem presented an authentic representation of mythological place. Burke Long has called this development of a tangible mythological place 'geopiety'. In his words, geopiety refers to 'that curious mix of romantic imagination, historical rectitude, and attachment to a physical place'.[45] As biblical place came to once again play a role in European experience, Long describes how European understanding of Bible and geography changed, from 'a non-earthly utopian space—imagined in poetry, song, and liturgy—to an idealized, touchable place—a fantasized reality on the ground'.[46]

With this growing sense that direct experience of the Bible lands was possible, Victorian audiences craved more interactive venues than those that could be provided through art shows and panoramas. Throughout the course of the nineteenth century, primarily driven by commercial motivations, showmen developed hyperreal settings that allowed the Victorian public to directly experience the ancient Near East without actually travelling there. As the amusement park came to offer a respite from the realities of urban life and the village fete expanded to accommodate the anomie of the city, infotainment, merging the exotic with the educational, found the

42. For further discussion on the relationship between nineteenth-century landscape art and Biblical studies, see Nicholas Tromans, 'The Orient in Perspective', in *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting* (ed. Nicholas Tromans; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 102-25.

43. Altick. *Shows of London*, p. 128.

44. Ziter, *The Orient on the Victorian Stage*, p. 29.

45. Burke O. Long, *Imagining the Holy Land: Maps, Models, and Fantasy Travels* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 1.

46. Long, *Imagining the Holy Land*, p. 2.

Bible a natural setting. Similar tensions between romanticism and realism played out in these performances of the ancient Near East and Bible lands. These experiences created memories for the viewers that they would bring to bear on their own interpretation of the biblical text. Despite the varieties of levels of engagement people would bring to interpretation, hyperreal experiences of Egypt and the Holy Land had a lasting impact for biblical experience, even if only as the setting for the imagining of the stories told in Sunday church services.

It was Giovanni Belzoni, however, the ex-circus strong-man and master showman of Egypt's antiquities, who first reconstructed an Egyptian site for Londoners to actually walk through. In 1821, Belzoni displayed an accurate reproduction of Seti I's tomb at the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly, providing those that could afford the exorbitant fee with a chance to see real antiquities and experience the Valley of the Kings. The Egyptian Hall was an exhibition space in urban London with an architectural façade modeled after the Egyptian Hathor Temple at Denderah. Thus it provided an ideal setting for Belzoni's exhibition of Seti I's tomb. This was a 1/6 scale replica of the tomb from the Valley of the Kings, made in plaster, with lighting designed to recreate the experience of traveling through a tomb. Here, Belzoni pioneered the now common approach to displaying mummies for public exhibitions in glass cases.[47] Egyptian artifacts from Belzoni's personal collection allowed visitors to see 'real' ancient Egyptian things alongside recreated, but authentic ancient 'places'. The incredible commercial success of this show set the stage for later commercially driven hyperreal Egyptological exhibitions (a trend that continues to this day). Here an archaeological aesthetic was merged with hyperreal presentation and although Egyptian tombs do not play a prominent role in biblical stories, no doubt this experience of ancient Egyptian materiality was easily brought to bear on stories of the Hebrews' sojourn in Egypt.

By far and away, the most influential of these hyperreal settings was the Crystal Palace, a theme park located in Sydenham, constructed in 1854 by a group that wanted to make the Great Exhibition of 1851 a more permanent affair. The original Great Exhibition had little to do with the ancient Near East, but the Crystal Palace was designed to showcase the history of art, architecture, and aesthetics from a world history perspective and thus included exhibits on Egypt and Mesopotamia. In its first year, the Crystal Palace attracted approximately 1,332,000 visitors, of whom about 71,000 were children.[48] In its first few years, despite having to take a train to get

47. Alex Werner, 'Egypt in London—Public and Private Displays in the Nineteenth Century Metropolis', in *Imhotep Today: Egyptianizing Architecture* (ed. J. Humbert and C. Price; Encounters with Ancient Egypt, London: UCL Press, 2003), pp. 75-104 (86).

48. Liza Picard, *Victorian London: The Life of a City, 1840–1870* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2005), p. 229.

there from the center of London, more people went there than the British Museum and the Tower of London combined.[49] It is estimated that in the course of its 80-year history, over 100 million visitors passed through its turnstiles.[50] Unlike the British Museum of the time, the Crystal Palace was designed to be informative to a diverse audience that did not necessarily have any particular educational background. As J.R. Piggott notes, in the address at the opening of the park, the Crystal Palace was described as an 'illustrated encyclopaedia' and it was said that it would 'combine scientific accuracy with popular intention'.[51] The sheer volume of visitors to the Crystal Palace and the emphasis on mass education shows that the Crystal Palace had a significant impact on the popular reception of the Bible in this and later periods.[52]

The Egyptian, Assyrian, and Classical 'courts' allowed visitors to walk through extremely accurate replicas of ancient buildings and sites. Although each court was actually a hodgepodge of different buildings from different times and places, this fact was signaled to the visitors. Thus, a Victorian child could walk into the Egyptian court and experience different phases of Egyptian architectural history, walking through replicas of a Middle Kingdom tomb from Beni Hasan, portions of Temple of Karnak, and the New Kingdom statues from Abu Simbel, with displays of artifacts in cases and accurate reproductions of art and hieroglyphs on the walls. These displays created settings for the biblical stories in the imagination of the visitors and no doubt many visitors later pictured the stories of Joseph before the pharaoh in the halls of the Crystal Palace version of Amenhotep III's courtyard.

In many ways, the Crystal Palace (and its predecessor, Belzoni's reconstruction of Seti's tomb at the Egyptian Hall) set the stage for later public experiences of the ancient Near East that could be characterized as a type of hyperreality. This particular approach to the ancient world has become especially prevalent in Egyptology, which can be experienced in hyperreal formats such as the Luxor hotel in Las Vegas. These hyperreal loci

49. Ian Leith, *Delamotte's Crystal Palace: A Victorian Pleasure Dome Revealed* (Swindon, Wilts: English Heritage, 2005), p. 11.

50. Leith, *Delamotte's Crystal Palace*, p. 20.

51. As quoted in J.R. Piggott, *Palace of the People: The Crystal Palace at Sydenham 1854–1936* (London: Hurst & Company, 2004), p. 53.

52. The influence of the Crystal Palace is apparent in an 1870 unofficial guidebook to the British Museum, which makes an off-hand reference to the Crystal Palace which speaks to the ubiquity of its role in nineteenth-century visual culture. The guide reads: 'We need not dwell upon the expression of the face [of the sphinx], with which the representations in the Crystal Palace have made every reader familiar, and which has become the type to our imaginations of all that is secret and inscrutable'. See T. Nichols, *A Handy-Book of the British Museum for Every-Day Readers* (London: Cassel, Petter & Galpin, 1870), p. 39.

of experience provide popular audiences with the ancient Egypt that they would like to 'have been', although often (to the aggravation of Egyptologists) this deviates substantially from scholarly reconstructions of the past. A type of imagined dreamscape is created with enough ambiguity for experiencers to fill in what they wish. Yet what is striking about the earlier hyperreal approaches to the Near East, especially as manifest in the Crystal Palace, were the efforts to provide an authentic recreation rather than merely a form of infotainment.

One of the main messages of the Crystal Palace and other world expositions that presented the world's cultures in one location was to show how these cultures made sense in relation to one another. This was one of the great tensions of the multi-cultural environment of the British Empire—how to make sense of difference within a colonialist framework. World 'expos' signaled the elements of similarities and differences amongst world cultures. These expositions created hierarchies of cultures, informed by unilinear cultural evolution and diffusionist models, which, although they do not really make sense in tandem, were unified through a Christian teleology, illustrating the heights that cultures (such as the Egyptians) could reach despite the inevitable collapse of these cultures that lacked the Christian message. For Victorians, the encounter with technologically advanced cultures that had collapsed was a destabilizing experience, especially since much of Victorian identity was based on an ethic of hard work, technological progress, and a perceived leadership role with respect to the entire globe. Yet in some ways this reading of technological superiority as symptomatic of moral and spiritual authority was difficult given biblical writings that emphasize the subaltern position of Jewish and Christian culture in relation to the Egyptians, the Assyrians and Babylonians, the Persians, and the Romans. The approaches to resolving this intellectual conflict (which most often was probably consciously ignored, anyway) are quite apparent in the different approaches to the hyperreal in the performance of ancient empire and of the ancient Holy Land. Although the messages about the relationship to the ancient Near East should not be understood as consistent and straightforward, generally the empires of Mesopotamia and Egypt were connected to Britain through their prior role as world leaders. However, the cultures of the ancient empires were depicted as exotic and 'other'. This 'otherness' was minimized in popular presentations of the Holy Land, drawing connections between the Christian (or proto-Christian) cultures of biblical times and Christian Britain.

As Eitan Bar-Yosef has noted, the sorts of dreamscapes that were created for the Holy Land in the nineteenth century allowed for an internal pilgrimage.[53] These hyperreal places served an almost diametrically opposed

53. Eitan Bar-Yosef, 'Jerusalem, my Happy Home: The Palestine Exhibition and the

purpose to that which has just been ascribed to the Crystal Palace. Whereas the Crystal Palace informed and exoticized these locales, bringing orientalist and other notions into a more tangible form for the general public, Bar-Yosef's work on traveling exhibitions of the Holy Land has demonstrated that there was an urgency to smooth over the 'otherness' of the Bible. In the face of growing evidence of the Near Eastern background of the Bible, there arose the possible threat that the Bible would seem too distant and alien to the general public. As Bar-Yosef has shown, hyperreal events allowed the biblical ancient Near East to be equated with the home, with domesticity and with the familiarity of the English countryside.[54]

Exemplary of the hyperreal approaches to the Bible lands is the Palestine Exhibition, which was a travelling show put on throughout late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century England by the Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, an evangelical organization that believed (and still does in its contemporary forms) that the conversion of the Jews is a necessary step in preparation for the second coming of Christ.[55] In guidebooks to the event, the organizers state that inhabitants of nineteenth-century Palestine live much as people did 2000 years earlier and that these static lifestyles are a gift from God that provides contemporary Scripture-readers with direct access to the practices of biblical times. As Samuel Schor, in his guide to later versions of this exhibition, puts it:

> And God has made it possible for us to examine the subject thoroughly; for He has, as by a miracle, allowed the Land and its inhabitants to remain unchanged throughout these many centuries. Most countries change over and over again. They alter their habits, their dress, their furniture; they advance in education and culture; but Palestine has practically remained unchanged. Its life to-day is the life of Bible times. Visit that land, and if you have eyes to see and ears to hear, you will be able to throw yourself back in imagination to the times of Abraham, David, or our Lord.[56]

Essentially, this exhibition was a travelling Bible carnival that would set up in town halls and feature sets and shops that replicated those of Palestine.

Limits of the Orientalist Imagination', in *Victorian Prism: Refractions of the Crystal Palace* (ed. J. Buzzard, J. Childers, and E. Gillolly; Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2007) pp. 186-202 (189).

54. Bar-Yosef. 'Jerusalem, my Happy Home', pp. 191, 197.

55. Palestine Park, in Chautauqua, New York, founded in 1874 is an excellent example of an American approach to this type of biblical hyperreality. For extended discussion, see: John Davis, 'Holy Land, Holy People? Photography, Semitic Wannabes, and Chautauqua's Palestine Park', *Prospects* 17 (1992), pp. 241-71; Long, *Imagining the Holy Land*; and Yorke Rowan, 'Repackaging the Pilgrimage: Visiting the Holy Land in Orlando', in *Marketing Heritage: Archaeology and the Consumption of the Past* (ed. Yorke Rowan and Uzi Baram; Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2004), pp. 249-66 (257-58).

56. S. Schor, *Palestine and the Bible* (London: The Book Society, 20th edn, 1934), p. 1.

Local members of the community would dress up as biblical or Bedouin characters and interact with other attendees. Bar-Yosef has seen this as an attempt to help emotionally colonize the Bible lands and help believers become more comfortable with the undeniably exotic otherness of the Bible.[57] By play-acting Bible characters and roles, the community participants were able to internalize a type of 'sameness' or 'self-association' with the Bible, much in the same way that acting out the nativity and other biblical scenes in liberal Protestant churches today helps convince members that the Bible has relevance to their own lives.

These traveling Bible carnivals replicated the experiences of travel without the expense, discomfort, or actual encounter with the other. Many of these public spectacles were informed by travel literature related to the Near East, especially Edward Robinson's 1841 best seller *Biblical Researches in Palestine, Mount Sinai and Arabia Petræa: A Journal of Travels in the Year 1838*.[58] Certainly Robinson's book and others had allowed Europeans to experience travel in the Holy Land vicariously.[59] By the late-nineteenth century these experiences no longer had to be vicarious for the (upper) middle classes. The Thomas Cook tour had become well established in Egypt and was becoming gradually more so for the less accessible Bible lands. By purchasing advance train and steamer tickets (and reselling them to tourists), billeting travelers in hostels with clean amenities, and selling promissory notes that could be used as funds (the precursors of Thomas Cook travelers' checks), Thomas Cook made travel less difficult and threatening. The influence of his particular approach to mass tourism in the latter half of the nineteenth century cannot be overestimated. According to Ruth Kark, for example, four-fifths of all American and British tourists to the Holy Land between 1881 and 1883 had their travel facilitated by a Thomas Cook agency.[60] Kark provides other figures that provide a similar sense of the transformation that these tours brought to the region: 'The annual total [of tourists to the Holy Land] rose from between 2,000 to 3,000 in the first half of the century to around 7,000 in the 1870s and around 30,000 on the eve of

57. Bar-Yosef. 'Jerusalem, my Happy Home', p.197.

58. Edward Robinson, *Biblical Researches in Palestine, Mount Sinai and Arabia Petræa: A Journal of Travels in the Year 1838 by E. Robinson and E. Smith*, 2 vols. (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1841).

59. By 1847, travel accounts from amateur orientalists had become so common that could be parodied by Thackeray in Chapter 51 of *Vanity Fair* (W.M. Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, originally 1847]), p. 644.

60. Ruth Kark, 'From Pilgrimage to Budding Tourism: The Role of Thomas Cook in the Rediscovery of the Holy Land in the Nineteenth Century', in *Travellers in the Levant: Voyagers and Visionaries* (ed. Sarah Searight and Malcolm Wagstaff; Durham: ASTENE, 2001) pp. 155-74 (157).

World War I'.[61] Not all of these 30,000 travelers were traveling through Cook agencies, since by that time a number of competitors had arisen, but the basic approach to travel was modeled on Cook's.

Guided tours allowed the Victorian tourist to experience the exotic and the other and at the same time claim that exotic other as part of their own experiences. Souvenirs and later photographs became objects of memory for the tourist, encapsulating both the otherness of the experience and providing an object narrative of the individual experience. Memory was transformed into object and the object helped formulate a new identity of the tourist who had mastered the other's space. As Susan Stewart has noted, the narratives surrounding souvenirs are not narratives about the objects themselves but narratives about the possessor.[62] Thus the souvenir became a material manifestation of how 'otherness' had become part of an individual's identity. For travelers to the Holy Land, these experiences became part of their personal biblical reception, shared informally with friends and family and more formally in church settings. Souvenirs of the Holy Land became markers of a physical connection to the Bible—contemporary 'sacred relics' and hyperreal objects that mediated experience. These were experiences that to the tourist seemed like an objective encounter with the biblical other. Yet in many ways this type of tourism more reflects a romantic reaction to the historically authentic. Privileging personal experience and willfully allowing hyperreal commodified staged tourist experiences to stand as 'authentic' encounters with the other (which in fact they are, just not in the way framed by both parties), an 'historical' Bible could take on a tangible reality to the European participant. A feast at an 'authentic' Bedouin camp could become synecdochal for experiencing the lives of the Patriarchs.[63] The exotic Bible Lands could become part of an individual European's sense of self through tourism.

The Victorian mapping out of relationships between their society and the ancient Near East was not always as straightforward as interpreting Egypt and Mesopotamia as exotic but the Holy Land as mimetic. In many cases this kind of bifurcated analysis breaks down and the boundaries of self and other seem to have been quite ambiguous and often fluid. This fluidity is well exemplified in the adoption of the Near East (and Egypt in particular) by secret societies and various occult movements throughout the nineteenth century and in the way these esoteric understandings are positioned

61. Kark, 'From Pilgrimage to Budding Tourism', p. 165.

62. Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993 [originally Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983]), p. 136.

63. The issue of authenticity in travel is an important theme in tourism studies. For a good introduction to these issues, see Sine Heitmann, 'Authenticity in Tourism', in *Research Themes for Tourism* (ed. Peter Robinson, Sine Heitmann and Peter U.C. Dieke; Wallingford, Oxon: CABI, 2011), pp. 45-58.

in relation to the Bible. The newfound materiality of the ancient world facilitated a form of Bible reception that subverted the dominant modes of biblical reception and provided an entryway to biblical exegesis that allowed the creation of hyperreal dreamscapes. Partially as a consequence of recognizing that the Bible emerged from a wider cultural framework than had previously been understood, and partially as a consequence of increased emphasis on personal spiritual experiences, the Bible came to be read as a document of mystery. Biblical history was rewritten as esoteric groups *wished* it 'had been', not how they had been *told* it 'had been' by ministers, priests and rabbis, and by theologians and scholars. Egyptian concepts and Hermetic traditions were read into the biblical text.

The formation of various esoteric groups in the late nineteenth century was sometimes inspired by scholarly work on the Near East, which merged personal experiences of the divine or divinities with ancient Near Eastern material culture and traditions. Esoteric traditions privileged revelation over reason and a sense that the Bible holds hidden messages that can only be 'revealed' became fundamental to the reception of the Bible among these groups. Madame Blavatsky's 1877 book *Isis Unveiled*, which was formative for the Theosophical movement, is still influential amongst these communities.[64] In this work, Blavatsky explains that the Bible is a 'veiled' document, hiding within it secret and sacred truths that the uninitiated cannot fully understand. Blavatsky's description of the Bible reflects source critical understandings of the Bible that were prominent in German biblical criticism of the time. She writes:

> There is no real history in the *Old Testament*, and the little historical information one can glean is only found in the indiscreet revelations of the prophets. The book, as a whole, must have been written at various times, or rather invented as an authorization of some subsequent worship, the origin of which may be very easily traced partially to the Orphic Mysteries, and partially to the ancient Egyptian rites in familiarity with which Moses was brought up from his infancy.[65]

The first part of this paragraph well reflects nineteenth-century German source criticism and later source-critical interpretations of the Bible. However, her comments in the latter half of the paragraph, regarding the Egyptian origins of the Bible, reflect her own unique take. Blavatsky uses scholarly works and archaeological discoveries (especially from Egypt), but, in esoteric fashion, relies on interpretation derived from revelation rather than reason and provides her own understandings of these texts.

64. H.P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, 2 vols. (London: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1877).

65. H.P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*. II. *Theology* (London: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1877), p. 441.

As Erik Hornung has noted, esoteric approaches to the ancient Near East like Blavatsky's were informed by (and continue to be informed today) by the works of E.A. Wallis Budge.[66] In particular, his notion that the Egyptians should best be understood as monotheists and that Osirian religion prefigured the Christian resurrection were immensely popular with fringe groups and esoteric organizations. His popularity within esoteric movements is in part based on the way that he fits ancient Egypt into a progress narrative that is mediated by Christianity, seeing ancient Egypt as a basis for much of Western ideas, especially in his understanding of the myth of Osiris as prefiguring the Christian resurrection. These esoteric groups attempted to claim Egypt for themselves and understood themselves as intrinsically connected to Egypt—as though they had some sort of special relationship with Egypt and this relationship facilitated their reading of the Bible as a document bearing secret Egyptian wisdom. Thus rather than merely just exoticizing Egypt, these esoteric groups were constructing a sense of internal exoticism, and constructing identities for themselves that purposefully lay on the margins of Victorian society. Their relationship to the Bible was a privileged one since they could truly understand its secrets.

Freemasons likewise felt that they had a privileged relationship to the Bible and the archaeological exploration of the ancient Near East reified this sense. Margaret Jacob situates the origins of Freemasonry in the general weakening of the guild system in the 1650s, during which guilds began to function less as artisanal professional organizations and more as social clubs.[67] As it developed in the 1750s, Freemasonry came to take on esoteric traditions, in response to growing anti-Christian tendencies in the wake of the wars of religion, the scientific revolution, and the early Enlightenment. Throughout the nineteenth century, Freemasons became heavily reliant on the ancient Near East as a source of inspiration for their own practices. In the early stages of the nineteenth century, prominent Freemasons used Egyptian themes and design in their organization of ritual space and lodges.[68] Much of this is related to the French revolution (especially manifest in the Revolutionary Church of Reason) and the rampant anti-clericalism that followed the revolutionary period. Thus, there was a purposeful search

66. Erik Hornung, *The Secret Lore of Egypt: Its Impact on the West* (trans. D. Lorton; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 199. See also A.A. Barb, 'Mystery, Myth, and Magic', in *The Legacy of Egypt* (ed. J.R. Harris; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd edn, 1971), pp. 138-69.

67. Margaret C. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), pp. 114-15.

68. For more on this, see John Hamill and Pierre Mollier, 'Rebuilding the Sanctuaries of Memphis: Egypt in Masonic Iconography and Architecture', in *Imhotep Today: Egyptianizing Architecture* (ed. J. Humbert and C. Price; Encounters with Egypt; London: UCL Press, 2003), pp. 207-20.

for non-Christian approaches to ritual that reflected the political attitudes of the time and the Deism that typified eighteenth-century Masonry. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, this context had been forgotten and pseudo-historians within the Masonic community started scouring Egyptian art for evidence of the early origins of Freemasonry.[69]

What was arguably most important for the conscious development of this tradition was the articulation of a history rooted in ancient Egypt that saw Masonic predecessors involved in an alternative biblical history. Some Masonic traditions argue that Abraham and Euclid (the Greek mathematician) went to Egypt together and taught the Egyptians the key mathematical and engineering principles necessary for the construction of monumental architecture along with moral and spiritual teachings. Masons celebrate Hiram Abiff as the chief architect of Solomon's Temple, who had access to this combination of spiritual and practical knowledge, derived from Egypt. The name Hiram Abiff is never mentioned in the Bible, although three men named 'Hiram' are mentioned in reference to Solomon's Temple: Hiram King of Tyre (2 Sam. 5.11; 1 Kgs 5.1-10); Hiram son of a widow from the tribe of Naphtali and the son of a Tyrian bronze-smith (1 Kgs 7.13-14); and Huram-abi from Tyre, whose mother was of the tribe of Dan (2 Chron. 2.13-14). The name Hiram Abiff is likely a mistaken rendering of the name Huram-abi in 2 Chron. 2:13, and this Hiram is probably meant to be identified with the Hiram mentioned in Kings (with a discrepancy in the genealogical information). The Masonic story of Hiram Abiff describes him as having been murdered by three men, when he refused to give up the secret passwords of the Master Mason. The murder of Abiff has come to be one of the most important mytho-historical moments for Freemasonry, and it is ritually reenacted in the Third Degree Initiation rites, emphasizing the architectural history of the Craft as well as the importance of keeping the secrets.[70]

In the imagined space of Solomon's Temple (destroyed in 586/587 BCE), preserved only in the accounts of its construction and layout presented in detail in 1 Kings 5–9, the Masons articulated the foundational narrative

69. Masonic historians like John Weisse (writing in the 1860s) were excited to discover, in the wake of increased popular knowledge about Egypt brought about by the growth of archaeology as a discipline, that there were many similarities between mid-nineteenth-century Masonry and ancient Egypt. These historians, not aware that similarities had been purposefully constructed, took them as evidence of an unbroken line of secret knowledge that could be traced back to antiquity.

70. The source of these 'ancient Egyptian' traditions is likely Jean Terrasson's fictional *Life of Sethos: Taken from Private Memoirs of the Ancient Egyptians* (1731) which, according to the style of the genre, purported to be based on a 'discovered' manuscript from ancient Egypt. See, for example, Mary Lefkowitz, *Not out of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), pp. 120-21.

of their society. The imagined physicality of the Temple gave the Masons their ancient pedigree, combining the reality of their origins as a construction guild with their new role as a society for moral and spiritual guidance independent of any specific Christianity but still respectful of its traditions. Renewed European access to the Holy Land meant that the Masons could 'return' to Jerusalem and investigate the Temple. Since nineteenth-century masons saw themselves as the intellectual and spiritual heirs of the ancient craftsmen who built Solomon's Temple, explorations were of more than historical interest to Masons. They provided insight into the earliest stages of their craft. Charles Warren, a Mason, conducted the first major excavations in Jerusalem (between 1867 and 1870) including explorations of the Temple Mount. Warren's results were widely communicated to other Freemasons in his scholarly publications. In an address to the Masonic Archaeological Institute, a representative of Warren provided an explanation of what Warren uncovered. He does not offer specific lessons about Masonry on the basis of the exploration of the Temple Mount, but hopes that his fellow members will apply this information to their own understanding of the Craft. He ends by stating:

> And speaking here, as an unworthy member of the Royal Craft, I may be permitted to express hope that, as the work is being conducted by a Mason, so it may find among the brotherhood a fitting exponent of its lessons—one clear-sighted enough to see, and with sufficient ability to show to the world the right conclusion, stated as a whole, which lesser men could only partly guess.[71]

Thus, for this community, there was great value in a Mason engaging in these kinds of excavations, both in terms of the special relationships that Masons have with the data and of the way these explorations will help Masons learn about themselves. Here, then, a new mode of biblical reception was argued for that merged new readings of the traditional biblical narrative, Masonic esoteric knowledge, and archaeology.

These are only a few of the complex ways in which nineteenth-century biblical reception was informed through new experiences of the ancient Near East provided by the colonial encounter and informed through archaeological approaches to biblical times. Tensions between the real, the hyperreal, and perhaps the mytho-poetic emerge in Victorian popular biblical reception as expectations arose that the Bible should be understood through all three of these approaches simultaneously. It was, for example, now no longer easy to accept the ambiguity of the 'Pharaoh' of the Exodus—it was necessary to identify the specific pharaoh of the story. As well, the increasing materiality of the biblical world, as experienced in hyperreal settings,

71. PEF Archives: JER/WAR/35.

created memory events that could be brought to bear on biblical reception throughout the rest of an individual's life. At times, specifically new identities were crafted (perhaps most explicitly obvious in the rise of secret societies). But biblical reception was also influenced by new ways of thinking about otherness and sameness, such that a progress-oriented Victorian British woman could see herself as spiritually connected to a nineteenth-century Bedouin (but disconnected materially) and spiritually distinct from an ancient Egyptian (but perhaps materially connected).

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