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Integrating Biblical Archaeology into Christian Theological Education in West Africa: Its Prospects and Challenges

Paul-Kolade Tubi
Federal University Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria
paul.tubi@fulokoja.edu.ng

Abstract

The study examines the current state of development of biblical scholarship in West Africa. The problem addressed is the limited integration of scientific archaeological education into biblical studies in the region which thereby creates a gap in interdisciplinary and contextual scholarship. It is this lacuna that the study seeks to fill. Methodologically, the study is applied theological advocatory research, which is expository and descriptive. It uses a mixed-method approach. This involved field-sourced data collected from physical on-site archaeological investigations in Israel and the use of semi-structured, in-depth interviews and examination of theological curricula in selected seminaries and faculties of Christian religious studies at universities in Benin, Ghana, and Nigeria. Using data sources, it engages in critical debates in biblical archaeology and assesses its prospects and limitations. It also engages in a review of the relevant literature. Data analysis is historical-analytical. Research findings indicate no integration of biblical archaeology in the syllabuses of Christian religious studies in the region. It considers this a serious lacuna in Christian theological training. In summary, this study supplies insights into West African Christian theology and justifies the imperativeness of biblical archaeology. The study concludes that archaeology provides a valuable interdisciplinary framework for biblical studies. Building on these findings, the study

calls for institutionalising biblical archaeology as a theological pedagogical tool in West Africa.

Introduction

Pioneer sources on the imperative of biblical archaeology have come with diverse interests from scholars such as Albright (1960) and Thompson (1980) and from the Vatican (Pius XII 1943). Ongoing developments in the field of biblical archaeology have substantiated its credibility as a scientific tool for biblical analysis. Therefore, the study seeks to employ biblical archaeology as a critical pedagogical tool, which the study notes is critically lacking in West African Christian religious education. The study opines that biblical archaeology remains a critical pedagogical tool for advancing comprehensive theological discussions and therefore seeks its integration into the curriculum of Christian theological institutions in West Africa. As the debate on methodological questions in African biblical study continues (Uwaegbute 2023), the study seeks a new frontier for theological expression in West Africa that includes biblical archaeology. It adopts the views of critical writers like Agboada (2023), Mensah (2023), Oduyoye (2001) and Ukpong (2000, 2002) who shift Christian theology from 'What are Europeans saying?' to 'What is the Bible saying in Africa through Africans?' These engage in decoloniality and the critique of Western-imposed epistemologies. By addressing the future directions of West African theology and the need for new contextual resources in theological reflection, they explore traditional exegesis as a pedagogical tool in biblical study. It is envisaged that this approach sets the pace for the integration of biblical archaeology and Christian religious education in the region.

As noted by scholars, archaeological investigations in the Fertile Crescent in general have contributed immensely to modern biblical research (Picardo 2021; Tubi 2025). The spadework of professional archaeologists so far has yielded immense data on the Bible and the cultures associated with it, and it has become acceptable for archaeology to be considered a necessary tool for biblical scholars and theologians, critics and people of faith alike (Cline 2009, 2025; Lim 2024). The call for the integration of biblical archaeology in West African theological education stems from two fronts: the opinions of scholars

who argue that biblical archaeology holds the key to authentic examination of the Bible (Picardo 2021; Dever 2020, 2026) and African scholars who argue for contextual and historical-cultural theology (Maluleke 2022; Mensah 2023). The study also highlights the limitations of biblical archaeology and raises critical debates over topics such as incomplete archaeological evidence, the inability to prove faith claims, limited correlation with biblical narratives, and researchers' biases, amongst others. In this study, an engagement with causality produces an examination of the causes and effects behind archaeological data unearthed in biblical lands and their applicability to African theological education. Thus, rather than merely engaging in a descriptive study of artefacts, structures, and ecofacts, the study engages with context, to understand Afrocentric questions of *why* archaeological materials came into existence, *what* factors influenced their emergence, and *how* they relate to biblical and African societies.

Statement of the Problem

The issue addressed by the study is the near absence of biblical archaeology in Christian education in West Africa. The study observes that Christian theological scholarship has grown in the region; however, theological discourses are largely limited to textual, historical, intercultural, and dogmatic approaches. This has created a gap in achieving valuable Afrocentric and comprehensive exegesis. Recently Uwaegbute (2023) raised the question of methodology in African biblical studies; he was silent on biblical archaeology. The absence of biblical archaeological study in the region imposes a decontextualised interpretation of biblical narratives. Thus, the situation raises questions about the adequacy of current theological curricula and the extent to which scholars equip themselves. By challenging the absence of biblical archaeology in Bible colleges and Christian theological schools in West Africa, the study seeks to bridge the gap in knowledge which may manifest as a reduced comprehension of the Bible, weaker apologetics, an absence of critical historical data, and less interdisciplinary engagement. Importantly, the limited application of biblical archaeology in theological curricula raises critical questions about how sociocultural and historical-contextual tools are prioritised within theological education in West Africa.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The prime aim of the study is to examine the relevance and prospects of integrating biblical archaeology as a pedagogical tool in Christian theological education in West Africa, in order to enhance biblical interpretation, historical understanding, and theological education. The objectives that helped to achieve the aims were: (1) to assess the current level of integration of biblical archaeology in Christian religious studies in West African institutions, (2) to examine the contributions of biblical archaeology to the understanding and interpretation of biblical texts among Christian scholars in the region, (3) to identify the challenges hindering the effective integration of biblical archaeology into Christian religious studies and propose practical strategies to overcome the challenges.

Methodology of Research

The study adopts an applied theological, advocatory, qualitative research design, which is based on a mixed-method approach using historical-analytical and interdisciplinary methods. As historical-analytical research, it examines historical archaeological data and the realities of the biblical world and its implications for contemporary Christian pedagogy, and it interprets ideas, historical evidence, and scholarly literature rather than numerical collection and analysis. It is interdisciplinary in integrating biblical archaeology and Christian studies, drawing on African studies, epistemology, and theology.

The collection of data was based on (1) open-ended questions and semi-structured, in-depth interviews, (2) an extensive review of literature that is germane to the discussion, and (3) critical examination of theological curricula in selected seminaries, Bible schools, and faculties of Christian religious studies in higher institutions in Nigeria; and, importantly, (4) the study gained from direct participation in archaeological exploration in Israel by me, the researcher. I am a professional archaeologist who participated in archaeological fieldwork at Hippos Sussita, one of the cities of the ancient Decapolis of Israel, and made an extensive survey of archaeological sites in Israel. I have also written on biblical archaeological themes (Tubi 2016, 2025). Analytical procedures involved identifying gaps in existing Christian theological scholarship in West Africa. The study also uses archaeological, ecclesial, and

theological literature. Archaeological interpretations of the chronological provenance of artefacts are applied to data, and historical-cultural analysis was used to explain biblical passages, employing thematic analysis to discuss the relevance of biblical archaeology.

To gauge the state of biblical archaeology in the region, open-ended, semi-structured interviews were used to collate a sample of opinions and measure degrees of knowledge of archaeology among Christian theological institutions in West Africa. It helps the research to have firsthand the knowledge that seminarians have about archaeology in general and biblical archaeology in particular. On-site focused sampling was carried out in Catholic theologates, which were chosen because they have been in existence for a long time and they have pontifical approval. These were the Grand Séminaire Saint-Gall de Ouidah, Benin Republic, a pontifical Catholic institution which admits students from Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Niger, and Burkina Faso, and, in Nigeria, the Major Seminary of Saints Peter and Paul, Ibadan, Dominican Institute, Ibadan, and St Thomas Aquinas Major Seminary, Makurdi. A long-established Protestant theologate, Immanuel College of Theology, Ibadan, which trains Anglicans and Methodists for priestly ordination at diploma and degree levels, was also chosen. Random online examination of syllabuses of Christian religious studies at l'Université d'Abomey-Calavi, Benin Republic, the University of Ghana, and the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, was carried out, while physical examination of the syllabuses for Christian religious studies was conducted at Federal University Lokoja, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and Kogi State University, Ayingba, which are public institutions. In addition, more random samplings were conducted at a few Christian universities in Nigeria, namely, Dominican University, Veritas University, Redeemed University, and Caritas University.

Conceptual Framework

The framework for the study is grounded in the interdisciplinary relationship between archaeology, biblical studies, theology, and cultural heritage. Rather than treat biblical archaeology as a discipline limited to research in the Near East, this framework views it as a methodological approach that enriches biblical exegesis through material-cultural, historico-cultural, and scientific

analysis. In this context, biblical archaeology bridges the gap between empirical scholarship and Bible studies, enabling students to critically engage with biblical texts within their historical and cultural context. This integrative framework contextualises learning by equipping students with analytical tools to evaluate archaeological discoveries alongside biblical narratives.

Conceptually, it synthesises existing perspectives, archaeological findings, and theological scholarship to propose a new framework for integrating biblical archaeology into Christian theological education in West Africa. It proposes that theologates in West Africa should integrate biblical archaeology into their curricula. It is envisaged that such integration would not only enhance theological pedagogy but also encourage comparative studies between the ancient biblical world and ancient West African civilisations. Ultimately, the conceptual framework positions biblical archaeology as a catalyst for producing historically informed, academically competent, culturally sensitive contemporary scholars.

Understanding Biblical Archaeology

Etymologically, *archaeology* is derived from two Greek words: *archaios*, meaning ancient things, and *logos*, meaning organised study. Archaeology, an anglicised form of the Greek word *archaeologia*, literally means 'the science of ancient things'. Archaeology emerged from a background suffused with antiquarianism, dilettantism, grave digging, and exotic plundering of ancient monuments, before it became a specialised field of study (Gitin 2021; Lim 2024; Philip 2013). Archaeology is an organised study: the science and art of retrieving, classifying, and interpreting artefacts which shed light on human life and cultural activities in antiquity. This task is done through the discovery and examination of materials abandoned by humans, called artefacts (movable objects) and features (immovable materials). Biblical archaeology is a special type of scientific archaeology that looks at biblical narratives dispassionately (Lim 2024; Picardo 2021). It unearths the Bible in a way no other discipline can (Finkelstein 2022), and it always has a special ring about it. Highly valuable in Christian theology, it has been undertaken as part of modern scriptural scientific study, which must not lose its neutrality. It should be stated at the outset that, on the one hand, it is not the task of biblical

archaeology to prove that the Bible is true, in line with those who take a literal approach to biblical stories, and, on the other hand, it does not seek to disprove the Bible (Dever 2020; Schreiner 2022). One of the leading lights in this approach is the modern Catholic approach to the Bible, which views archaeology as a valuable tool for analysis, exegesis, and dogma. Concerning this approach, Pope Pius XII stated in his encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943:316),

> The interpreter must, as it were, go back wholly in spirit to those remote centuries of the East, and with the aid of history, archaeology, ethnology and other sciences, accurately determine what modes of writing the authors of that ancient age wished to use and actually did use.

Literature Review

The literature review incorporates the writings of experts in the Bible, archaeologists, Afrocentric scholars, postcolonial scholars, and contextual hermeneutics writers. Popular pioneer treatises on biblical archaeology come from Albright (1960) and Thompson (1980), which highlight the impossibility of carrying out a thorough biblical study in this modern climate without drawing data from archaeology as a veritable handmaid of the Bible. Biblical archaeology, having emerged as a specialised field of inquiry aimed at biblical contexts, was initially motivated by the desire to verify the historicity and reliability of the Bible. Accordingly, archaeology provides concrete data that shed fresh illumination on biblical narratives. Rather than proving and validating the Bible, modern scholarship engages in contextual debates which view archaeology as providing cultural and historical contexts for a proper interpretation of the Bible. The scholars Dever (2020) and Schreiner (2022) argue that biblical archaeology should be construed primarily as the archaeology of the Fertile Crescent or Levant and not solely as an apologetic tool. Dever emphasises that the discipline provides independent data capable of confirming, challenging, completing, or negating biblical narratives. Several excavations conducted in Israel and surrounding areas have been used by scholars to shed light on settlement patterns, agriculture, warfare, social organisation, and religious rites, among other things. These developments

have inevitably broadened the scope of biblical archaeology, making it an essential tool for understanding the cultural and historical contexts of the Bible and not as a mere tool of validation (Dever 2020, 2026; Schreiner 2022).

The Bible is held sacred by both Jews and Christians as the inspired word of God in human language and it is read by millions of people for sundry purposes; therefore, many believe its content is literal truth, accurate history, and scientifically accurate. This belief, however, flies in the face of critical biblical archaeological studies, which have raised some difficulties with such a literal interpretation of the Bible and simplistic admission of its narratives. The study observes that lacunae need to be filled here and there, and some biblical stories and obscured periods in the Bible remain silent, seeking elucidation. Accordingly, archaeological data, including inscriptions, pottery, architectural remains, and manuscripts, continue to shed light on various aspects of the ancient Jewish way of life. As observed by scholars like Gadot (2026), Kennedy (2026), and Rodston (2025), biblical archaeology makes concrete contributions to important narratives of the Bible and enriches theological scholarship by providing datable data. This is where archaeological research has its most enduring impact in biblical studies, which is missing from African theological institutions.

To achieve profound insight into the imperatives for biblical archaeology in theological education in West Africa, we shall be examining two scholarly fronts; firstly, we shall look at Africa-based archaeological treatises, which demonstrate the relevance of archaeology to religious and cultural studies in general, and, secondly, we shall examine the submissions of African scholars that call for an interdisciplinary approach to Christian theology.

Within Afrocentric archaeology, scholars continue to demonstrate the relevance of archaeology in unearthing, deconstructing, and documenting the ancient religious systems of Africa. The work of Shaw (1970), whose excavations in Igbo Ukwu shed immense light on ancient West African religious practices and transformed our understanding of the dynamics of African civilisation, is important. Shaw's discoveries form an essential archaeological reference that provides a methodological and historical model for how archaeological data can shed light on religious traditions and cultural history. Similarly important is Ogundiran (2020, 2023), whose studies on the social

complexity and cultural heritage of ancient Yoruba people have enriched African archaeological scholarship. His studies underscore the need to use archaeological data to reconstruct historical narratives and beliefs of indigenous peoples. His studies provide a model and serve as an impetus for integrating archaeology into religious studies. Though their works were not primarily about biblical narratives, their methodologies reinforce the value of archaeology as a theological tool of inquiry.

African biblical scholars have made significant contributions to global biblical scholarship. In working on textual data, they make impressive contributions to the aspect of Christian theology. Along this trajectory, Mensah (2023) states that theology in Africa must engage meaningfully with the lived experiences and historical realities of Africans. It is at this juncture that biblical archaeology makes its meaningful impact by enabling African theologians to connect biblical stories with contemporary African contexts, and this is very valuable to theologians seeking to contextualise biblical narratives within African social-cultural realities. The works of scholars like Malukeke (2022) and Ukpong (2000, 2002) on inculturation and trado-hermeneutics emphasise the role of reading biblical texts through the lens of African contexts. This position is enriched by biblical archaeology, which supplies historical and cultural data that enhance exegetical positions and theological interpretations. In such a situation, biblical archaeology serves as the bridge between Christian theology, African theological reflections, and cultural studies and performs an important pedagogical and apologetic role. The discipline also contributes to the decolonisation of theological knowledge, which makes Maluleke (2022) and Oduyoye (2001**)** state that Christianity was rooted within concrete historical and cultural contexts and therefore the development of theological methodologies in Africa must reflect African realities and traditional indigenous knowledge systems. Biblical archaeology is best suited for making this intervention because it is concerned with primary data rather than relying exclusively on Western paradigms. This position fosters the emergence of indigenous Afrocentric theological perspectives that are both academically rigorous and contextually grounded. However, the addition of archaeological evidence would give a shared platform for comparative religious studies and the envisaged constructive engagement of African and Jewish traditions. It is biblical archaeology that engages with cultural material that offers tangible

evidence, which illuminates the contexts in which biblical traditions and narratives emerged.

These West African theologians argue that theology should not remain abstract but must engage with concrete historical and social realities. This approach supports the argument that biblical archaeology is not merely about recovering ancient relics but about enriching contemporary African theological reflection through contextual interpretation. They contend that authentic African theology must emerge from the concrete experiences of Africans and that contextual theology conceives Christian theology as arising from concrete experiences and historical realities rather than from abstract doctrinal formulations. This approach provides a valuable framework for integrating biblical archaeology into African theological discourse. However, the exploration of biblical archaeology as a pedagogical tool has not been well advanced, and the exploration of how biblical archaeology can be systematically integrated into biblical education and missionary formation remains untapped in West Africa. This lacuna drives the imperative to further the advocacy of biblical archaeology in enriching the curricula of theological institutions and fostering a thoroughly informed biblical scholarship in the region.

Research Findings: The State of Biblical Archaeology in West Africa

When Pope Pius XII (1943:316) wrote about promoting modern biblical scholarship, he said,

> Let them neglect none of those discoveries, whether in the domain of archaeology or in ancient history or literature, which serve to make better known the mentality of the ancient writers.

After over eight decades it is apparent that West African biblical scholars have not adopted this endorsement. The result of the study shows that curricula for Christian religious studies in West African seminaries and universities are devoid of thorough biblical archaeology but typically engage in a general

overview of the Old Testament and selected New Testament books, biblical doctrines, ethics, church history, biblical languages, and the inculturation of biblical tenets. Syllabuses adopt a multidisciplinary approach combining history, philosophy, and systematic and cross-cultural perspectives. In all these, biblical archaeology and church archaeology are not taught. It is to be noted that in the same region Islamic archaeology is taught as a compulsory course in some universities within the Department of Islamic Studies.

The advent of Christianity and the Bible in West Africa involved a very complex, intricate, and multifaceted history which intertwined the economy with religion. According to Asamoah and Kpalam (2023), the Bible first landed in West Africa in the fifteenth century through Portuguese explorers and missionaries. This was more pronounced in ancient coastal communities in present-day Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal. The Portuguese established flourishing trading networks with coastal territories, which were accompanied by Christianising missions by the Capuchin friars. However, this venture collapsed when European missionaries and West Africa experienced a hiatus. The second missionary efforts, which began in the nineteenth century yielded immense success and persist till today. This was achieved through the efforts of Catholic missionaries (Society of Africa, White Fathers, Augustinians), Methodists, and Baptists. European missionaries brought back the Bible, established schools and dispensaries, and baptised converts (Ayegboyin and Ogunewu 2022). The study observes that, despite the long history of Christianity, so far archaeological education has not been added to the Christian educational system in the region, and the advances made in biblical education through archaeology are yet to penetrate West African theological scholarship.

Imperatives for the Integration of Biblical Archaeology in Theological Education in West Africa

It has been noted that biblical archaeology is an integral part of biblical study and the discipline can occupy a unique pedagogical position within African theological discourse by providing an empirical and historical framework through which biblical narratives may be critically examined and contextually interpreted within the African milieu. The study now focuses on a general

thematic explanation of specific ways in which biblical archaeology makes meaningful contributions to biblical education.

Usefulness in Contextual Theology

Integrating biblical archaeology into Christian theology in West Africa serves as the agency of contextual African theology. As observed by Agboada (2023), the works of Kwame Bediako, John Mbiti, Justin Ukpong, and Charles Nyamiti provide a decolonial background, and similarly Maluleke (2022), along with these writers, has advocated for a contextual approach to biblical scholarship that engages with the lived experiences of Africans.

It is Valuable for Scriptural Translation and Exegesis

One of the most pressing needs of the church in Africa is accurate translation of the Bible into our local languages, which would provide a nearly accurate rendition and explanation of the pages of the Bible. This is best achieved through the aid of up-to-date discoveries from biblical archaeology. As observed by scholars like Cline (2025) and Picardo (2021), difficult texts in the Bible have received new illumination through the discipline. Also, Maeir (2024) argues for the epistemological value of biblical archaeology and opines that exegesis has benefited tremendously from archaeological data drawn from kindred languages to Hebrew, which helps to situate critical texts within their cultural and regional milieu. Through archaeological discoveries, scholars have gained new insights into ancient beliefs, a deeper appreciation of words, and a new impression of statutes in biblical narratives (Finkelstein 2022). It is one of the great uses of biblical archaeology that exegetists can get verifiable data to interpret scriptures with an open mind when they possess details the discipline supplies.

It Helps in the Reconstruction of Biblical Historical Context

Historical validation is of primary relevance to African cultures. Biblical archaeology has helped in this area by its painstaking process of gathering, interpreting, and organising credible evidence from the past to construct a reliable account of the past events associated with the Bible. In the African milieu and in traditional societies in general, the onerous task involves sourcing data from diverse sources because the past is not often clearly

annotated, evidence may be biased, available history may be nuanced or damaged; therefore, it is pertinent to derive relevant data from archaeology and its data in the form of artefacts, ecofacts, and ancient inscriptions on rocks and leathers, which are useful in reconstructing past events. This particular point was raised by Lim (2024) as relevant in reconstructing biblical times. Biblical archaeology, in reconstructing the historical past of Israel and its neighbours, unearths and furnishes us with details of buried histories, the reconstruction of history, and its periodisation. This has been achieved in a remarkable way with a minor margin of error hitherto when scholars have relied only on faith and inspiration. With data from biblical archaeology, individuals in the Bible are substantiated, cities are identified, and events are reconstructed with near accuracy.

It Provides a General Background to the Bible

Africans often cherish a general background of stories and events because knowledge is traditionally understood as something which is rooted in context rather than isolated facts. The communal nature of Africans also encourages deep appreciation for background information. In Africa, events are rarely seen as affecting only individuals; they are construed in relation to family, lineage, clans, and community, where ancestors and cultural values play a significant part. For Africans, understanding the historical, cultural, and geographical background of the Bible enhances translation and hermeneutics. To get a general background of the Bible, it is archaeology that is best suited to the task (Cline 2025; Rodston 2025). Though archaeology was not created to prove the Bible's truth, its capacity to generate unassailable concrete evidence has helped greatly in understanding the world in which biblical events occurred. Artefacts have helped us to decipher how people lived, construe their religious system, and reconstruct regional timelines. According to Gitin (2021) and Lim (2024) archaeology has provided immense relevant data on the palaeogeographical and sociocultural contexts of the ancient Near East and furnished us with the fact that biblical narratives like creation and flood stories were popular in the region, and not peculiar to the Jews. Indeed simulacra were found in a Babylonian-Sumerian document called *Enuma Elish* and Babylonian texts depicting primaeval chaos, the creation of the universe, the creation of man and woman, and longevity that tally with the biblical account.

It Has Apologetic Value

The apologetic value of biblical archaeology in Africa lies not in proving miracles or asserting biblical data but in demonstrating that the biblical message emerged from authentic historico-cultural settings. This reduces misinterpretation and encourages sound exegesis within African theology. One of the greatest uses of biblical archaeology is as a science-based tool that is at the service of faith, and it can be stated that preachers and dogmatists have their task made easy by tons of archaeological discoveries. *Apologetics* comes from the Greek word *apologia*, meaning a defence that gives *a* rational explanation and justification for believers of the Bible. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Bible was subjected to a tirade of criticism as some scholars claimed it was full of historical errors. However, archaeological discoveries have helped to defend the reliability of the Bible in an admirable way (Philip and Cherian 2013). Archaeology has achieved this in four principal ways: (1) providing historical evidence for events, people, and places, (2) confirming the accuracy of biblical records, (3) reconstructing and clarifying difficult and obscure texts concerning the sociocultural background of biblical narratives, and (4) refuting criticisms of the Bible as fictional or mythical texts. The scholars Holden and Enterline (2024) and Philip and Cherian (2013) argue that, with biblical archaeology, it is certain that the Bible cannot be considered a mere collection of myths and legends but a real document that documents the lived experiences of real persons and culture. By ascertaining the historical truthfulness of the Bible, biblical archaeology invariably becomes a veritable tool for apologetics. In line with Holden and Enterline (2024) and Philip and Cherian (2013), by providing external and extra-biblical data on the Bible, archaeology reinforces the credibility of the faith of all who hold the Bible as an article of faith or culture. While archaeology offers strong support to the Bible, it is to be said that it cannot prove spiritual truths, nor can it provide all the data, because many biblical events did not survive in the archaeological records, and some were hallowed myths.

It Sheds Linguistic Insights on the Ancient Near East

Among Africans, linguistic expressions are particularly important as means of dialogue, but also as vehicles of preserving identity, culture, history, and beliefs. Archaeological data continue to play an important role in illuminating the culture, history, and identity of ancient peoples through archaeolinguistic

comparative studies. Many languages were unknown until archaeologists rediscovered and deciphered their scripts. We can easily cite the cuneiform scripts from Nineveh and Ur, which were documented in clay tablets, which brought to light the ancient Akkadians and Sumerians. We can also see the Ugaritic tablets from Ras Shamra Suria, whose cuneiform alphabet gave insight into the language clusters of ancient Canaan, including Hebrew and Phoenician (Lim 2024; Picardo 2021).

Numerous scripts and manuscripts have been discovered in Israel and surrounding countries that give details of the dialectological and lexical structures of ancient languages of the ancient Near East. Biblical archaeology deepens our understanding of biblical languages by digging out ancient inscriptions on walls, pottery, manuscripts, stones, and wood. We can cite the Dead Sea sources, ostraca of Samaria, Ugaritic texts, the Rosetta stone, and Tel Dan inscriptions, among other things (Tubi 2025), whose remarkable data shed light on the language clusters of the ancient Near East. Through biblical archaeology, we have been able to verify the meanings of words and correct impressions and deconstruct idiomatic expressions, metaphors, and other figurative expressions in the Bible. Linguistically, through archaeology, we can decipher the evolution of languages and dialects in the Near East and engage in the comparative linguistic analysis of Semitic languages and their neighbours (Rodston 2025).

It Provides Evidence on Ancient Religious Rites in Israel and its Neighbours

The discipline complements African theological studies by engaging in comparative analyses of the religious traditions of the ancient Near East and those of African indigenous societies. In African cultures, sacrifices, sacred spaces, ritual purification, covenant-making, kinship structures, festivals, and ancestral rites are carefully maintained. Biblical archaeology fosters comparative and contextual reflections on convergences and divergences between ancient Israel and traditional Africans since it is best equipped to provide data on ancient sacred rites and religious practices, such as how ancient societies worshipped, performed sacrifices, conducted obsequies, and honoured their deities. Archaeological excavations have revealed the physical locations of worship and the nature of worship in ancient Israel. As observed

by Cline (2009) and Finkelstein (2022) modern interpretations of ancient Israelites' religious rites that continue from antiquity have been achieved through archaeology, and notably it extends our knowledge of how the ancient people of Israel conceptualised divinity, organised their religion, and gave recognition to the temporal and spiritual worlds and the afterlife.

Challenges Confronting Biblical Archaeology in West Africa and Suggested Solutions

A scholarly assessment of the challenges facing the introduction of biblical archaeology into Christian religious studies in West Africa reveals that the obstacles are institutional, methodological, financial, and theological. West Africa has very few trained experts in biblical archaeology as most biblical scholars specialise in biblical languages, ethics, church history, and dogma, while West African professional archaeologists concentrate on indigenous civilisations such as Nok, Igbo-Ukwu, Ile Ife, and Jenne amongst others rather than archaeology of the biblical world. Another challenge is that biblical archaeology is resource-intensive which demands access to excavation in biblical lands and specialised technologies. As most West African theologates operate under financial strictures they prioritise their needs, wherein archaeology comes far back. Importantly, curricula of theologates are operating under a heavy colonial legacy and as a result biblical archaeology remains on the periphery of biblical scholarship in the region. The region also suffers from a lack of ecclesial support in the form of funding, the formation of church archaeologists, and the establishment of museums. Addressing these challenges requires firm support in the form of appropriate funding, curriculum reform, investment in biblical education, digital access to archaeological data, and the production of indigenous experts.

Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendation

In summary, the study highlights the current absence of biblical archaeology in Christian theological study in West Africa. It asserts that archaeology, the scientific study of material things which illuminates the biblical world, is a tool for theological education. The study argues that it is an essential part of modern biblical scholarship which has not been well integrated in the region.

The study has demonstrated that biblical archaeology instils a spirit of critical inquiry and academic rigour into biblical study, offers scientific data for biblical narratives, strengthens faith, provides a recalibration of biblical chronological frameworks, and reveals sociocultural contexts of yore. The study identifies biblical archaeology as a requisite discipline.

The uniqueness of biblical archaeology to West African theological education lies in its capacity to generate historical evidence and integrate it with the theological reflections of scholars and the lived experiences of locals. Within the Afrocentric milieu, the works of Agboada (2023), Mensah (2023), Ukpong (2002), Oduyoye (2001), and others demonstrate that African theological discourses are enhanced when they are backed by unassailable data, which archaeology provides.

The study accepts that biblical archaeology is confronted with limitations. Overall, the study has helped to indicate the interconnectivity of history and culture that formed the foundation of the Bible. It shows the nexus between religion and cultural history in the Near East in general, which underlay the history and theology of ancient Israel. The study makes a meaningful contribution to the promotion of modern theological formation in West Africa by calling for the integration of biblical archaeology. By uncovering the ancient cultural dynamics of Israel and the early church, the study is best suited to help African scholars draw parallels with indigenous African societies in areas like human-deity relationships, the afterlife, communitarianism, the veneration of ancestors, ritualism, and the passage of life among other things. This study proves that the search for a formation of an authentic Afrocentric theology that is grounded in the Bible can be achieved.

In conclusion, integrating biblical archaeology into Christian religious studies in West Africa would provide a valuable interdisciplinary framework for deepening biblical interpretation, strengthening theological scholarship, and enriching faith. The study establishes biblical archaeology as a vital discipline that helps to cultivate the envisaged dialogue between faith and science, enabling the church to engage the modern world intelligently, dispel uncritical fundamentalism, and dispel superstition that sometimes clouds biblical reasoning. In general, biblical archaeology is an educational tool for scholars that throws light on the dynamics of sociocultural, political, historical, and

religious changes in various territories which are associated with the Bible. However, it is not every biblical narrative that has been proven, and it is certain that not all will be. And it is even significant that all archaeological statements are prone to fallibility, meaning therefore that it is always within archaeology to reject, modify, and expand its previous conclusions in the face of new data. To achieve the integration of biblical archaeology into Christian theological education in the region remains a critical task.

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