EVIDENCE FOR THE EXODUS AND CONQUEST

Compelling Articles from *Bible and Spade* Magazine by the Associates for Biblical Research

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INTRODUCTION

Were Moses and the children of Israel led from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the dramatic fashion described in the Bible? Did the Israelites really conquer Canaan when they entered the Promised Land? If so, when did this occur? These questions remain at the heart of arguably the most controversial issue in biblical archaeology: evidence for the Exodus and Conquest.

If the Bible is historically accurate when it describes the Israelite Exodus from Egypt, and subsequent conquest of Canaan 40 years later, we should expect to find some archaeological evidence to support this significant event. The question is, “What kind of evidence should we expect to find?”

Some suppose a detailed description of the destructive plagues in Egyptian literature should be uncovered. Others read the book of Joshua and get the impression that the Israelites launched a swift and massive invasion of the entire land of Canaan, pillaging and destroying cities wherever they went. Neither of these views is realistic, however. While ancient Pharaohs regularly exaggerated their victories, they rarely, if ever, described their defeats. Thus, we should hardly expect a detailed account of Yahweh’s “judgment on the gods of Egypt” (Ex. 12:12) in the writings of the Egyptians. Furthermore, a careful reading of both Joshua and Judges, reveals that the Israelites did not immediately take over the entire land, destroy all the cities, re-build their own cities and establish their own distinct, material culture. After all, God promised his people that they were going to live in cities they did not build (Josh. 24:13). Scripture also record the fact that the Israelites did not conquer all of Canaan; there were numerous groups they could not drive out (Josh. 17:12). Since the Bible describes a limited, prolonged conquest of Canaan, with the Israelites living amidst the local population, the distinct archaeological record of their presence would be limited.

But let’s return to our question, “What kind of evidence should we expect to find for the Exodus and Conquest?” We might hope to find some indication of a Semitic presence in the Egypt during the time the Bible describes to demonstrate the Israelites actually lived there. We might also see evidence of Egyptian decline and anomalies during the reign of a pharaoh who ruled at the time the Bible describes the Exodus. Scripture records that three cities in Canaan were destroyed by fire by the Israelites – Jericho (Josh. 6:24), Ai (Josh. 8:28), and Hazor (Josh. 11:11) – and we would expect to find evidence of such destruction at these sites. Finally, we could imagine finding indicators in the archaeological record of a transition to a new culture at sites in Canaan, indicating the Israelites had settled there. Given that they had been given detailed instructions regarding their worship, it might be possible to find evidence of their worship practices at Shiloh, where the tabernacle was set up when they entered the Promised Land.
These are precisely the sort of discoveries that have been made which present a picture that is in line with the biblical description of the Exodus and Conquest. For the past 50 years, the Associates for Biblical Research (ABR) has been at the forefront of archaeological investigation into this period of history. ABR was founded in 1969 by Dr. David Livingston to counter the claims of certain scholars that the evidence from the site identified as the biblical city of Ai (et-Tell) was at odds with Scripture. Throughout the years, the archaeologists and scholars with ABR have demonstrated through their research that both Bethel and Ai had been misidentified. For decades they have led excavations at Khirbet Nisya, Khrbet el-Maqatir, and Shiloh (currently). They have researched others sites, such as the Egyptian city of Avaris (known later as Rameses), and the cities of Jericho and Hazor. Through ground-breaking investigation, ABR has:

- Identified Khirbet el-Maqatir as the likely site of the fortress of Ai that Joshua conquered
- Re-examined the evidence at Jericho to show that it was indeed conquered at the time and in the manner described in Scripture
- Highlighted two distinct destruction layers at Hazor (one from the time of Joshua and one from the time of Barak)
- Unearthed evidence of Israelite occupation and worship at Shiloh
- Consistently demonstrated the historical reliability of the Bible by publicizing discoveries that affirm details in the biblical text.

Currently, ABR leads one of the largest and most technologically-advanced excavations in Israel each year at Shiloh. We also produce a weekly television show called Digging for Truth, available online through our YouTube channel. Archaeologists and scholars associated with ABR publish their research online at biblearchaeology.org and in our quarterly magazine, Bible and Spade.

This ebook contains articles from Bible and Spade that highlight evidence for the Israelite exodus from Egypt and the conquest of Canaan. Each author demonstrates that there are indeed details in the accounts recorded in Scripture that have been affirmed through archaeology. It is our prayer that your faith is encouraged and that you grow to trust the truth of God’s Word in a greater way as a result of these articles.

Bryan Windle, Editor
September 2019
CHAPTER ONE

Israel in Egypt

Gary Byers, MA

The main route between Canaan and Egypt was along the northern coast of Sinai. A number of Biblical figures no doubt traveled this road. Known to the Egyptians as “the Way of Horus,” and in the Bible as “the road through the Philistine country” (Ex 13:17), it ended in the eastern delta in the Goshen region. This is the part of Egypt where most Biblical characters lived and Biblical events took place.

Abraham

Abraham came to Egypt during the 21st century BC, at the end of the First Intermediate Period (Gn 12:10; 13:1). The 11th Dynasty based in Thebes was just gaining power in the south and would ultimately control all of Egypt. So the Pharaoh that Abraham met (Gn 12:15–20) may have been a northern leader who took the title, or an early king from the Theban dynasty. Presumably, their encounter took place in the delta area.
While in this region, Abraham probably saw the Giza pyramids on the Nile’s west bank. Giza is the northern-most and most famous of the Old Kingdom royal cemeteries in the delta region, including Meidum, Dahshur, Saqqara and Abusir. They were located near Memphis, the national capital at that time. While the most famous and largest pyramids are at Giza (Fourth Dynasty; 27th-26th century BC), the first was a four-sided stepped stone construction built by Pharaoh Djoser (Third Dynasty; 27th century BC) at Saqqara. Pharaoh Sneferu (Fourth Dynasty; 25th century BC) constructed the earliest smooth-sided pyramid in the form we know today at Dahshur.

Pyramid development. They started from a flattop rectangular mud-brick tomb, called a mastaba (Arabic for “bench”). The first pyramid (left) was a series of six increasingly smaller mastabas, one on top of the other. The famous builder Imhotep constructed the four-sided stone structure for Pharaoh Djoser (Third Dynasty; 27th century BC) at Saqqara. This stepped pyramid is the oldest freestanding stone structure in the world. From Djoser’s stepped pyramid came the first real pyramid with four smoothed flat sides, constructed by Pharaoh Sneferu (Fourth Dynasty; 27th century BC) at Dahshur (center). Unfortunately, his builders were forced to correct the slope half way up, and it is known today as the Bent Pyramid. A later Sneferu pyramid at Dahshur, known today as the Red Pyramid because of the reddish color of the local limestone that was used in its construction, was perfectly constructed and is generally recognized as the first true pyramid (right). Contrary to popular opinion, none of Egypt’s royal pyramids were constructed by Israelite slaves. Instead, known archaeological evidence suggests they were constructed by professional builders who lived in nearby villages and spent their lives working on the project.

Pyramid of 12th Dynasty Pharaoh Sesostris II at El-Lahun in Lower Egypt. This was possibly the Pharaoh under whom Joseph rose to the position of vizier in Egypt. Although a Middle Kingdom Pharaonic tomb, it was much smaller than the Old Kingdom pyramids at Giza. Sesostris II’s pyramid was constructed of a mud-brick core with a limestone casing. All that remains today is the mud-brick core, as the casing was stripped away long ago by locals for building material.
Joseph

The Midianites would have brought Joseph to Egypt by way of the Horus Road (Gn 37:28; 39:1). Once in Egypt, he was sold to Potiphar, a high Egyptian official, and apparently worked as a slave on Potiphar’s estate in the delta (Gn 39:1, 2). Interestingly, Egyptian history indicates that slavery first appeared at this very time period (Aling 2002: 35–37).

Egypt’s 12th Dynasty (ca. 1991–1786 BC) built a new capital city in Upper Egypt’s northern extremity, close to the delta. From here they could more effectively administrate and access their eastern frontier (Leprohon 1992: 345–46). Called itj-tawy, it was probably located near the capital’s royal necropolis at el-Lahun, at the entrance to the Faiyum, a large fertile area west of the Nile. The actual site is unknown today (Ray 2004: 40). Here was constructed the pyramid of 12th Dynasty Pharaoh Sesostris II (ca. 1897–1877 BC). Biblical dating suggests this was the Pharaoh under whom Joseph rose to the position of vizier in Egypt (Gn 45:8). As the most powerful man in the kingdom, Joseph would have visited and even had authority over construction of this pyramid. In fact, Joseph may have supervised Pharaoh’s burial here.

Joseph most likely served under Sesostris II’s son, Sesostris III (ca.1878–1843 BC), during the years of famine. Sesostris III’s own pyramid tomb at Dahshur (northern Upper Egypt) also would have been a major responsibility for Joseph. Since documents mention later viziers during Sesostris III’s reign, Joseph probably went into honorable retirement in the delta’s Goshen region shortly after the years of famine.

![Uraeus worn by Sesostris II. Discovered in Sesostris II’s pyramid by W.M. Flinders Petrie in 1920, it had been left behind by tomb robbers. The term uraeus is derived from the Greek transcription of Egyptian iaret, the cobra with its hood dilated ready to strike. An emblem of royalty, the reptile was applied to crowns to protect the king from evil with its poison. Sesostris II’s uraeus is made of solid gold, with a head of lapis lazuli, and its body contains lapis lazuli, feldspar and carnelian. It is on display at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.](image-url)

Recent excavations in the eastern Nile delta may have actually identified the location of Joseph’s residence in retirement, and even his tomb. At a site known as Tell el-Daba today, the Rameses of the Old Testament, extensive excavations have been carried out under the direction of Manfred Bietak of the Austrian Archaeological Institute, Cairo, since 1966. This site was strategically located at the eastern starting point to the Horus Road to Canaan and along the Nile’s easternmost branch, the Pelusiac. That may explain its name,
Rowaty (“the door of the two roads”) in the days of Joseph and Jacob. The site has evidence for Asiatics as early as the mid-12th Dynasty (mid-19th century BC), the general period when Jacob entered Egypt. It was an unfortified rural settlement, although numerous enclosure walls probably kept animals. Living quarters consisted of rectangular huts built of sand bricks (Wood 1997: 55).

Not all residents of Tell el-Daba’s first Asiatic settlement lived in huts. One, evidently an important official, lived in a small villa. While the Bible tells us that Joseph was given the title “Ruler of all Egypt” (Hebrew) or vizier, it does not mention where he lived while serving in the Egyptian bureaucracy. It seems logical that after he discharged his duties associated with the famine, he would have moved to Rowaty to be near his father and brothers. It is possible the villa in Rowaty and the surrounding semi-circle of poorer two-room houses are the homes of Joseph and his brothers (Wood 1997: 56).

The earliest remains of Asiatics at Tell el-Daba included houses and tombs (12th Dynasty, mid-19th century BC). Called Rowaty (“the door of the two roads”) at that time, this Asiatic settlement was probably Rameses (Gn 47:11, 27; a later name for the same site) where Jacob and his family settled in Goshen. One particular house and tomb excavated there may actually be Joseph’s. Directly above that was found a later and larger early Hyksos palace (13th Dynasty). It was probably the first Hyksos Pharaoh, “who did not know about Joseph” (Ex 1:8), that pressed the Israelites into slavery and had them build the store city of Rameses (Ex 1:11; a later name for this Hyksos city). (Based on Fig. 7 in Avaris: The Capital of the Hyksos, by Manfred Bietak [London: British Museum, 1996].)

A cemetery with artifacts that connected it to the houses was also excavated in the open space to the southwest. One of the tombs was monumental in construction and totally unique in finds. Inside were found stone fragments of a colossal statue of a man who was clearly Asiatic, based on the yellow painted skin, the red-painted mushroom-shaped hairstyle and a throwstick on his right shoulder (the hieroglyph for foreigner). The statue had been intentionally broken in antiquity.

While the other tombs nearby had intact skeletons, the only finds in the monumental tomb were fragments of an inscribed limestone sarcophagus and a few bone fragments. The body was gone! While it was common to plunder tombs in ancient Egypt, the bodies were usually not taken. Could this be the tomb of Joseph, from which he commanded his bones to be carried back to Canaan (Gn 50:25; Ex 13:19)? Without an
inscription, it cannot be proven; but this site suggests the first material evidence of Israelites in Egypt. It is the right culture in the right place at the right time (see Wood 1997: 56-58).

The other store city of Pharaoh built by the Israelites was Pithom (Ex 1:11). Scholars differ on the modern location of this ancient site, but the two leading candidates are Tell el-Maskhuta and Tell el- Retabah, about 9 mi apart in the Wadi Tumilat at the southern edge of Goshen. While the question is not settled yet, the best choice appears to be Retabah; Maskhuta may well have been Succoth (Ex 12:37; 13:20). (W.M Flinders Petrie, Hyksos and Israelite Cities [London: British School of Archaeology in Egypt, 1906], PL. 35.)

**Hyksos**

The town known as Rowaty, where Joseph and his family probably lived, had its name changed to Avaris toward the end of the 18th century BC. This was during Egypt’s 14th Dynasty and the new name meant “the (royal) foundation of the district.” Same site, different era, different name—Avaris would continue to be the site’s name even through the period of the Hyksos (Wood 2004: 45).

A royal palace complex from Moses’ time (18th Dynasty; 15th century BC) was excavated at Izbet Helmi, a few hundred yards west of where the early Asiatic settlement had been found (mid-19th century BC). It was built in close proximity to the Nile River (the Pelusiaca Branch), as the Bible indicates. Possibly called Peru-nefer during that period, it fits the time and place for the palace where Moses grew up and where he also later confronted Pharaoh to let his people go. (Reprinted by permission of the Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, from Manfred Bietak and Irene Forstner-Müeller, Ausgrabungen im Palastbezirk von Avaris: Vorbericht Tell el-Dab’a/Ezbet Helmi Spring 2003, Egypt and the Levant 13 [2003], P.39.)

The Hyksos, whose hieroglyphic name meant “foreign rulers,” came into the Nile delta from southern Canaan and established a center of power at Avaris. Their leaders took the title of Pharaoh and ruled northern Egypt for 108 years (ca.1664–1555 BC). They have come to be known as Egypt’s 15th Dynasty. Avaris was their capital and it became an important commercial center. The “Pharaoh that knew not Joseph” (Ex 1:8) was probably the first Hyksos Pharaoh, and it was probably Hyksos Pharaohs who forced the Israelites to build the store cities of Pithom and Rameses (Ex 1:8–12).
When the Egyptians, under the leadership of the 18th Dynasty’s founder Amosis, drove out the Hyksos in the mid-16th century BC, they most likely changed the name of the city of Avaris. The new name was probably Peru-nefer, which meant “happy journey” (Wood 2004: 45). That would have been the name of the city during Moses’ time.

Moses

The Bible records the events of Moses’ birth in Exodus 2, with the Israelites apparently still living in the delta’s Goshen area. When Pharaoh’s daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, she found baby Moses (Ex 2:5). This daughter of Pharaoh may well have been Hatshepsut, who later became a Pharaoh herself (Hansen 2003). So, the Bible suggests that the royal family had a residence in Goshen where the Israelites lived (Ex 2:2–10). While the national capital for the 18th Dynasty Pharaohs was in Memphis 13 mi south of Cairo, after the Hyksos experience a royal presence would always have been seen as necessary for national security in the Nile’s eastern delta.

Bietak’s excavation at Tell el-Daba uncovered a ten-acre royal citadel from the time of Moses at the village of Ezbet Helmi, just a few hundred yards west of the earlier Asiatic settlement. It was part of a new royal center established at the former Hyksos capital of Avaris. Located just south of where the Pelusiac branch of the Nile once flowed (the courses of the Nile branches, and the delta itself, have changed dramatically over the millennia), Bietak found two palaces that were in use during the time of Moses (early 18th Dynasty).

The palace closest to the river (Palace F) was the smaller and probably doubled as a watchtower of the river and citadel. Just 100 ft (30m) from the river, it was constructed on a platform with a ramp leading to the entrance. Nearby were a middle class settlement, workshops, storage rooms and possibly a ritual complex (Wood 2004: 47).

The main palace (Palace G), occupying over 3 acres, also had a ramp to the entrance, a bathing room at the entrance, a large open courtyard, a reception hall and private apartments for the royal family.

The site is in the right area and at the right time to be the royal palace where Moses was raised (Ex 2:10; Acts 7:20–21) and where he confronted Pharaoh 11 times during the time of the Ten Plagues (Ex 4–12). If this is correct, then the site of Jacob’s sojourn in Egypt (modern Tell el-Daba), the home and tomb of Joseph (modern Tell el-Daba) and the palace where Moses was raised and confronted Pharaoh before the Exodus (modern Ezbet Helmi) have all been excavated and are located within the same ancient complex.
Reconstruction of the sun temple at Heliopolis. The base of a model of the temple at Heliopolis from the reign of Seti I (ca. 1291–1279 BC) was found in Egypt and is now in the Brooklyn Museum of Art. From the model, the staff at the Brooklyn Museum of Art was able to reconstruct the Heliopolis sun temple as seen in the photo. All that remains of the temple today is one lone obelisk, dedicated to the 12th Dynasty Pharaoh Sesostris I (ca. 1971–1928 BC); thus it would have been standing in Joseph’s day. Other obelisks from Heliopolis have been sent to various cities as gifts, including New York, London and Rome. New York’s obelisk was erected behind the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It was originally commissioned by Tuthmosis III (ca. 1504–1450 BC), so was not at Heliopolis during Joseph’s time.

Rameses

The Bible mentions that Jacob and his family settled in “the land of Rameses” where they became property owners (Gn 47:11, 27). The Bible also mentions that the Israelites were used as slave labor to build the city of Rameses (Ex 1:11) and when they left Egypt after 430 years (Ex 12:40) they departed from Rameses (Ex 12:37). Apparently, most of the Israelites spent the years of the Egyptian Sojourn in and around Rameses.

While the location of ancient Rameses had been in dispute for years, excavations at Tell el-Daba and surrounding villages in the Nile’s eastern delta have demonstrated that the ancient city was located here. It sat on the Pelusiac branch of the Nile, giving access to the Mediterranean, and was the starting point of the Horus Road to the east. While its name changed throughout the centuries, the location along the Pelusiac and the Horus Road kept it a strategic site on Egypt’s eastern border.

The name Ramesses actually comes from a later period than the Israelite Sojourn. It was the name given by 19th Dynasty Pharaoh Rameses II (Rameses the Great, ca 1279–1212 BC) to the city he built a short distance northeast of ancient Rowaty/Avaris/Peru-nefer in the eastern Nile delta. Known as Pi-Rameses (“city of Rameses”) to the Egyptians, it is located at the modern village of Qantir. Much of the ancient capital has been located by means of a magnetometer survey. The 13th century BC city covered more than 4 square mi (10 square km). Excavations have uncovered a palace-like structure with pillared halls and associated stables from
the time of Ramesses II. Not excavated yet, but identified on the magnetometer survey, are an additional palace area, significant public buildings, and a vast residential quarter with avenues, channels, streets, villas, courtyards and gardens (Pusch 2001).

Thus, the city called Rameses was not built until after the Exodus. But it was built at the same site where Jacob, Joseph and Moses lived. While the Bible calls it Rameses when Jacob moved there (Gn 47:11) and when the Israelites built a new city at the site (Ex 1:11) under the “Pharaoh that knew not Joseph” (Ex 1:8), that name did not actually apply to the site until the 13th century BC. Later scribes updated the Biblical text with the name Rameses when the earlier names of the site went out of use.

**Egypt During the Period of the Kingdom of Judah**

During the period of the Babylonian empire, there are frequent mentions of Lower Egyptian sites by the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Numerous Jews fled to Egypt when Israel and Judah were invaded, first by the Assyrians and later by the Babylonians, and these two prophets addressed them and their cities of refuge. While Memphis was most famous as one of early Egypt’s first national capitals from the 3rd millennium BC, it was only mentioned in the Bible late. Called Noph (Jer 44:1) and Moph (Hebrew; Hos 9:6), both shortened forms of Memphis (hieroglyphic mn-nfr), it was mentioned for judgment by the prophets.

**Temple of Amun at Zoa.** Built in the 21st Dynasty by Psusennes I (ca. 1055–1004 BC) at the time of Saul, the temple occupies an area of 240 x 80 yd (220 x 72 m). In the foreground is Tomb 5 of Sheshonk III (ca. 819–767 BC). It contained a canopic jar (used to store the organs of the deceased) and a heart scarab of Biblical Shishak (Sheshonk I, ca. 931–910 BC), so he may have been buried here as well.
Heliopolis

Another important Old Kingdom city was Heliopolis (Greek for “sun city”). Called On (Hebrew from the hieroglyphic Iwnw “pillar town;” Gn 41:45, 50; 46:20), it was the home of Potiphera the priest and father of Asenath, Joseph’s wife. The city of Aven (Ez 30:17), a slightly different spelling of the same name, is also said to be under God’s judgment. Jeremiah’s reference to Beth Shemesh (Hebrew “city of the sun;” Jer 43:13) also refers to On as being under judgment. The ancient city is identified with modern Tell Hisn, north of Cairo. Mentioned as early as the Old Kingdom period, it was prominent during Egypt’s Saite period (664–525 BC), the days of Jeremiah and Ezekiel (Redford 1992a: 122–23).

Bubastis

Bubastis (Hebrew Pibeseth, Ez 30:17; from the hieroglyphic name meaning “house of Baster”—the cat goddess) was also located in the delta and was mentioned under God’s judgment. The ancient city is identified with modern Tell Basta in Zagazig, with remains dating as far back as the Old Kingdom. Bubastis became politically important as a capital city during the 22nd and 23rd Dynasties (10th-9th centuries BC).

Zoan

Zoan was the Hebrew name for a site better known to us as Tanis (Greek). Called San el Hagar today, it was first mentioned during the reign of Rameses XI (20th Dynasty; 12th century BC). Zoan became the official residence of the 21st Dynasty (ca. 1081–931 BC), replacing Rameses (Peru-nefer/Avaris/Rowaty). This was possibly due to the shifting of the Pelusiac branch of the Nile and loss of Rameses’ harbor. Interestingly, structures, statues and stele from Rameses were shipped down the Nile to Zoan. The residence of Shishak I (ca. 931–910 BC; 1 Kgs 14:25), Zoan was the site of the lost ark in Indiana Jones’ Raiders of the Lost Ark. Zoan was Egypt’s capital during part of the Judean monarchy (Is 19:11, 13; 30:4; Ez 30:14; see Redford 1992b: 1106).

Tahpanhes

Tahpanhes (Hebrew; Jer 2:16; 43:7–9; 44:1; 46:14; Ez 30:18) comes from the Egyptian name meaning “Fortress of Penhase.” Penhase (like Hebrew Phinehas) means “Nubian” and was the name of a powerful 11th century BC Theban general who suppressed a rebellion in the delta. This site, identified today with Tell ed-Defenna in the eastern delta, was probably settled during the time of the Judean Monarchy and became important into the Persian period. Tahpanhes became a safe haven for Jews, including Jeremiah, fleeing the Babylonian invasion of Judah. Here the prophet pronounced judgment on Egypt and Jews taking refuge from Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah’s prophesy included mention of Pharaoh Hophra being handed over “to his enemies who seek his life” (43:7–44:30).
Pelusium

Sin (Hebrew, from the hieroglyphic sin “mud;” Ez 30:15–16) was an important fortress on Egypt’s extreme northeastern border. Also called Pelusium (Greek) in antiquity, it is known as Tell el Farama today.

Migdol

Migdol (Hebrew meaning “tower” and a loan word into Egyptian, suggesting a northern location) was mentioned in the Exodus (Ex 14:2), and as a place where Jews resided in Egypt during the Babylonian period (Jer 44:1; 46:14) and a site of God’s judgment on Egypt (“tower” in Ez 29:10; 30:6). While a popular place name throughout the ancient near east, presumably all references relate to the same site in Egypt’s eastern delta. This city is identified with the modern Hebua I fortress, probably the famous Tjaru, a fortress on Egypt’s eastern border.

Conclusion

The key to understanding the history of Egypt, especially the delta region, is the Hyksos invasion from southern Canaan. Known in Egyptian history as the Second Intermediate Period, it led to permanent changes in Egyptian political thinking. From that period on, the delta was especially protected from the east. From the delta regular military campaigns were waged into Canaan. A Pharaonic presence in the eastern delta became a constant.

The Hyksos invasion of Egypt was also a seminal event in the history of Israel in Egypt. Arriving en masse with Jacob, most Israelites lived in the delta region. Under Joseph they lived reasonably well (Ex 1:7), but with the coming of the Hyksos and a new Pharaoh “who did not know about Joseph” (Ex 1:8) the fortunes of Israel changed. It was evidently the first Hyksos Pharaoh who began oppressing the Israelites and it was under the Hyksos that the Israelites built the store cities of Pithom and Rameses (Ex 1:11). After the Theban 18th Dynasty expelled the Hyksos and established Egypt’s New Kingdom, they too made the Israelites serve with hard labor. It was during this period that Moses was born and grew up in the royal house in the delta. From this very location, 80 years later, the Exodus would begin.

Late in the Old Testament story, Jeremiah and Ezekiel again mention numerous Egyptian sites, both north and south. It becomes clear from their message to their fellow countrymen living in Egypt that you can run, but you cannot hide from God. He knew where they were and He would bring judgment on them and their Egyptian hideouts.

The story of Israel in Egypt is bound up in the Egyptian history of the Nile delta.
PHARAOHS WHO RULED WHEN BIBLICAL PERSONAGES WERE IN EGYPT

ABRAHAM *
- First Intermediate Period (ca. 2190–2061 BC) ca. 2090 BC
  - Abraham entered Egypt to escape famine in Canaan and encounters a Pharaoh. This was during the First Intermediate Period, a time when rulers and their dates are not well known.

JOSEPH AND JACOB
- 12th Dynasty
  - AMENEMHET II, ca. 1929–1895 BC
  - ca. 1898 BC Joseph enters Egypt at age 17 and is sold to Potipher
  - SESOSTRIS II. ca. 1897–1877 BC
  - ca. 1885 BC Pharaoh makes Joseph Administrator of the Royal Estates
  - ca. 1876 BC Jacob and his family enter Egypt and Jacob appears before Pharaoh
  - SESOSTRIS III. ca. 1878–1843 BC
  - ca. 1859 BC Jacob dies and Joseph obtains permission from Pharaoh to take Jacob’s body to Canaan for burial in the family sepulcher at Hebron
  - AMENEMHET III. ca. 1843–1797 BC
  - ca. 1805 BC Joseph dies and is “placed in a coffin in Egypt”

MOSES
- 18th Dynasty
  - AMENHOTEP I. ca. 1551–1524 BC
  - ca. 1530 BC edict made by Pharaoh to kill all male Hebrew babies
  - ca. 1526 BC Moses born
  - TUTHMOSIS I. ca. 1524–1518 BC; Tuthmosis II. 1518–1504 BC;
  - HATSHEPSUT, ca. 1503–1483 BC: Tuthmosis III, ca. 1504–1450 BC
  - ca. 1526–1486 BC Moses educated and lived in the royal court as the adopted son of Pharaoh’s daughter
  - ca. 1486–1446 BC Moses flees to Midian to escape Pharaoh’s punishment for killing an Egyptian taskmaster
  - ca. 1483 BC Hatshepsut, or ca. 1450 BC Tuthmosis III, the Pharaoh who died while Moses was in Median
  - AMENHOTEP IIA. ca. 1450–1446 BC**
  - ca. 1446 BC Pharaoh of the Exodus who died in the Yam Suph

JEROBOAM
- 22nd Dynasty
  - SHESHONQ I. ca. 931–910 BC, Biblical Shishak
  - ca. 931 BC Jeroboam flees to Egypt to escape Solomon

JEREMIAH
- 26th Dynasty
  - HOPHRA (Greek Apries), ca. 589–570 BC
  - ca. 586 BC Jeremiah flees to Egypt in the aftermath of the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians

JESUS
- Roman Era
  - AUGUSTUS, 30 BC-AD 41
  - ca. 6–4 BC Joseph and Mary flee to Egypt with the infant Jesus to escape Herod’s Bethlehem death decree

* Dates for Abraham through Moses are based on an Exodus date of 1446 BC

** For the possibility of both an Amenhotep IIA and an Amenhotep IIB, see William H. Shea, Amenhotep II as the Pharaoh of the Exodus, Bible and Spade 16 (2003): 41-51.
CHAPTER TWO

Amenhotep II as Pharaoh of the Exodus

William Shea, PhD

The Biblical book of Exodus does not name the Pharaoh whom Moses encountered after his return from Sinai. This absence has provided the occasion for considerable controversy and speculation as to just who this Pharaoh was and when he ruled in Egypt.

The Exodus Problem

Three main views have been proposed: (1) that he belonged to the 18th Dynasty and ruled in the 15th century, (2) that he belonged to the 19th Dynasty and ruled in the 13th century, and (3) that there was no Exodus and thus no Pharaoh of the Exodus, but it was only a literary creation of later Israelites. The first view may be referred to as the early date for the Exodus, the second is the late date, and the third is the nonexistent Exodus.

Exodus Literature

Literature on the subject of the Exodus is extensive. In his Schweich Lectures for 1948, From Joseph to Joshua, literature from the 19th century to 1948 was covered by the excellent English bibliographer H. H. Rowley. He provided an exceptionally thorough list of studies in favor of dating the Exodus in the 13th century under the 19th Dynasty and in the 15th century under the 18th Dynasty. T. L. Thompson, in J. H. Hayes and J. M. Miller’s work Israelite and Judean History has updated this bibliography to 1977 (1977: 149–50, 167–68, 180–81). The bibliographies in these sections are of more value than the discussions in the text, which adopts a very negative view on the historicity of the Exodus. A strong picture has been made for the 19th Dynasty as the background for the Exodus in the work of K.A. Kitchen, Pharaoh Triumphant (1982). More recently, a theologically sensitive, but historically minimalist, commentary on Exodus has been contributed to The New Interpreter’s Bible, by W. Brueggemann (1994: 675–982).

The attitude of Old Testament theologians toward early Israelite history has varied. G. von Rad used the first major section of his Old Testament Theology to give a negative evaluation to the historicity of the Biblical account and that left him free to construct his theology unhampered by historical limitations (1962). G. Ernest Wright, on the other hand, held that theology must ultimately be rooted in history in his God Who Acts. Coming from the Albright school as he did, Wright firmly anchored his Exodus and Conquest in the 13th century. In his 13th century approach Wright was preceded by W. F. Albright in his The Archaeology of Palestine (1961: 108–109) and paralleled by J. Bright’s History of Israel (1983).
Three more specialized works on the Exodus and its Egyptian background have appeared quite recently. A conference on the subject was held at Brown University in 1992 and its proceedings were published as *Exodus: The Egyptian Evidence* (Frerichs and Lesko 1997). Unfortunately, most of the studies published in this work adopt a negative evaluation of the historicity of Exodus. Two of the contributors to this conference, Dever and Weinstein, attacked the editor of *Bible and Spade* for his date of the destruction of Jericho to the Biblical time of Joshua, even though they offered no critique of his excellent and detailed studies of the pottery of Jericho (ibid. 69, 93–94). More positive, but more general, is J. D. Currid’s *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* (1997). This work does not deal in detail with the event of the Exodus, but provides much useful information on the Egyptian cultural, religious, and linguistic background for the event. Along the same line is J. K. Hoffmeier’s *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (1997). This work includes primary archaeological evidence from surface survey work in the region of the northern lakes across the Isthmus of Suez.

A commentary on Exodus published very recently is that of W. H. Propp in the *Anchor Bible Series, Exodus 1–18* (1999). Unfortunately, any historicity of the Exodus is buried here beneath a welter of source criticism, anthropology, and mythology. The promise is made that the history involved will be treated in a second volume that will be published later. The most recently published commentary on Exodus available to me at this writing is that of Peter Enns, *Exodus, in the NIV Application Commentary* (2000). This work is literally conservative, theologically insightful, but historically inconclusive, as is expressed in the introductory summary statement:

One final matter concerning history is the fact that a good many historical issues remain hopelessly unresolved. In what century the Exodus took place will remain a point of debate for some time, even among evangelicals. We still do not know who the Pharaoh of the Exodus was. Curiously enough, we are not told (see Ex 1:8). To this day we do not know what route the Israelites took, what specific body of water they crossed, or where Mount Sinai is. These events form the very basic contours of Exodus and yet they continue to elude us. Can proper interpretation of the book proceed only after these basic questions are answered? No. In fact, the church has been deriving spiritual benefit from Exodus for a long time without such firm knowledge (25).

Enns is certainly right that one can derive spiritual and theological value from the book without knowing the precise historical setting. Nevertheless, to be able to connect the book more directly with ancient history can only enhance its theological meaning.

Interim reports on the excavations at Tell el-Dab’a, which contains the ruins of ancient Avaris and Ramesse, can be found in the two publications of lectures by the excavator, M. Bietak (1981 and 1996). These works provide archaeological evidence that bears on the setting of the Israelite Sojourn that led to the Exodus.
To summarize, older works on the question of the Exodus have concentrated upon deciding between dating it to the 13th century under the 19th Dynasty or the 15th century under the 18th Dynasty. That was the approach taken in my review of the subject in the revised edition of the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (1982). More recent works have gone in either one of two directions. On the negative side, more works are currently being published than previously that question the historicity of the Exodus. On the positive side, other works are coming out which have provided a closer attention to Egyptian archaeology and socio-cultural history, as findings from those fields present a background for the book of Exodus and the events that it describes.

The 13th Century Exodus

Dating the Exodus on the basis of Biblical evidence has involved either one of two approaches. The theory that dates the Exodus in the time of the 19th Dynasty in the 13th century BC utilizes the name of Ramesses for the store city that the Israelites built for Pharaoh (Ex 1:11). The long-lived Ramesses II was known as a great builder. The location of his delta capital is known and part of his palace there has been excavated.

The use of this evidence to date the Biblical Exodus is complicated, however, by the use of the same name of Ramesses for the land to which the Patriarchs came centuries earlier (Gn 47:11; cf. Gn 15:13; Ex 12:40). Since no ruler is known by the name of Ramesses that early in Egyptian history, both of these references to Ramesses look like an updating of an earlier place name. This phenomenon is also evident in Genesis 14:14 where the later name of Dan has been used for the contemporary name of Laish (Jgs 18:7–29). In some cases, the Bible gives the older name and later name together (Gn 23:2). Thus the mere use of the name of Ramesses is not a secure basis upon which to identify the Pharaoh of the Exodus and, through him, to date the Exodus.

The 15th Century Exodus

The other approach to dating the Exodus through Biblical evidence is the chronological approach. In this case the datum in 1 Kings 6:1 is utilized to date the Exodus and through this Biblical date the Pharaoh who ruled Egypt at the time can be determined and his person, character, and reign can be explored for potential Biblical connections. That is the approach taken here and it requires a detailed examination of chronology.

Biblical Chronology

The starting point for such a study of chronology is in the monarchy, for 1 Kings 6:1 dates the Exodus a particular time span back from a regnal year of Solomon. For this starting point we may utilize Edwin R. Thiele’s chronology developed in his Ph.D. thesis at the University of Chicago, later published under the title of The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings (1965). According to that chronology, Solomon died in 931 BC.
after a reign of 40 years. That means that he came to the throne in 971 BC. According to Thiele, dates that are given in the text that deal with the building of the Temple show that Solomon used a Tishri calendar to measure those regnal years (Thiele 1965: 29). The reign of Rehoboam who followed Solomon in Judah was calculated according to the accession year system which means that Year 1 started the year after Rehoboam, likewise Solomon, came to the throne. For Solomon this means that 971/970 BC was his accession year and 970/969 BC was his first full regnal year (Thiele 1965: 28–30). That makes 967/966 BC his fourth year. The Exodus occurred in the spring and Solomon’s Temple building began in the spring (the month after Passover), and thus the building began in the spring of 966 BC, between the two Tishri new years. This gives us the starting point from which to figure backwards, the spring of 966 BC.

The time period to add to this date is the 480 years that are given in 1 Kings 6:1. This goes back to the time when “the Israelites had come out of Egypt.” Adding those 480 years dates the Exodus to the spring of 1446.

There is evidence from 1 Kings 6:1 that a precise numbering was intended. The fourth year of Solomon is not a round year and the precise month when the building began, Ziv, is given according to the old calendar, not the one adopted during the Babylonian Exile. The same precision is encountered with the completion date for the Temple in the 11th year of Solomon, in the month of Bul. These two dates were compiled according to a very specific system, and there is no indication in the text that those who recorded these data thought any differently about the accuracy of the 480-year figure.

Instead of assuming that the 480 years is a certain number of generations, as some do, one could propose alternately that the successive Passovers were recorded at the central shrine, the tabernacle at Shiloh, throughout this period. When the tabernacle equipment was stored in the newly built Temple in Jerusalem, the records from Shiloh would have been brought there, and could have served as the basis for these calculations. At the very least, this date deserves continued consideration as a working hypothesis. From these data we have developed a date of the spring of 1446 as a working date for the Exodus. The question then is, how well does this date fit with Egyptian chronology and history?

**Egyptian Chronology**

Egyptian chronology is constructed from the king lists, from the highest regnal year dates attested for the various kings, from Manetho, and from Egyptian astronomical data. The Egyptian astronomical dates include the dates in the civil calendar for the observation of the heliacal rising of the star Sothis, and new moon dates. Neither of these two astronomical factors is completely secure. We do not know for certain whether the Sothic observations were made in the south or in the north and that makes a significant chronological
difference. New moon dates are useful but must be determined with precision. If a new moon date is off by one day, the date for it does not move by one year; it rather moves 11 years in one direction or 13 years in the other. Thus a precise chronology may call for a precision that is not yet available to us from these ancient texts.

These variations have given rise to the proposal of three different chronologies, which are known as the high, middle and low dates or schemes (Åström 1989). These have been calculated for the 12th Dynasty, the 18th Dynasty and the 19th Dynasty. We are concerned here especially with the 18th Dynasty because that was the royal house that ruled Egypt through the 15th century BC. Adopting the high dates for Thutmose III in that century does not necessarily mean that the high dates have to be adopted for the 19th Dynasty. Those dates could just as well be calculated according to the middle or low chronology; it would just mean that there was more time involved in the period of the late 18th Dynasty and the early 19th Dynasty.

For our purposes here the important dates to note are those for the reign of Thutmose III: high, 1504–1450 BC; middle, 1490–1436 BC; low, 1479–1425 BC. The current trend among Egyptologists, especially from Germany, has been in the direction of the low chronology. The middle chronology was that proposed by R. A. Parker (1957: 39–43; 1976: 177–89). The high chronology is the older chronology advocated by L. Borchardt (1935) and J. H. Breasted (1964: 170, 502). There still are modern advocates of the high chronology. In my earlier encyclopedia article on the date of the Exodus I utilized the high chronology both because it seemed to be the most accurate and it also provided the best fit with Biblical data about the Exodus (1982: 234).

**Egyptian History**

In my earlier article on the date of the Exodus, I selected Thutmose III as the Pharaoh of the Exodus for several reasons. First, he is the Pharaoh who died closest to the Biblical date of the Exodus and no Pharaoh died for a quarter of a century before him (Hatshepsut) and no Pharaoh died for another quarter of a century after him (Amenhotep II). Thus he appeared to be the Pharaoh whose death came closest to the Biblical date for the Exodus. Then also he died at the right time of the year, in the spring, March 17 to be exact according to correlations for the 13th day of the seventh Egyptian month (Biography of Amenemhab). In addition, the mummy that is labeled as that of Thutmose III does not fit well with his dates according to x-ray. According to his inscriptions, he should not have died until he was well over 60 years of age, but the mummy labeled Thutmose III shows bone features of a man 40–45 years of age (Harris and Weeks 1973: 138). Finally, Thutmose III was the Pharaoh who really set Egypt on the road to an Asiatic empire with his almost annual campaigns from Year 23 to Year 42. The outflow of equipment and the inflow of booty from these campaigns would have created a demand for the store cities that the Israelites are said to have built (Ex 1:11).
There was a weakness in this presentation, however, and it was chronological. The problem is that the Biblical date points to 1446 as the year of the Exodus, while the dates for Thutmose III indicate that he died in 1450. I attempted to compensate for this difference by mentioning the coregency between Thutmose III and his son Amenhotep II at the beginning of the 480-year period and the coregency between David and Solomon at the end of the period. However, these compensations do not successfully close the gap between 1450 and 1446.

During and after the writing of the encyclopedia article on the Exodus, I had a few discussions with Siegfried Horn about the issue. I pointed out to him that Thutmose III was the only Pharaoh of Egypt who died around the right time of the Biblical date. Since he had suggested Amenhotep II as Pharaoh of the Exodus in his dictionary article (Horn 1979: 350), there appeared to be a discrepancy here. His suggestion to resolve this problem was that perhaps Amenhotep II died at the time of the Exodus and a substitute was placed on his throne without making the transition evident to the populace generally. While the theory sounded interesting, there were no inscriptions or archaeological evidence to support the idea.

As it turns out, Siegfried may have been right. While no evidence for the death of one Amenhotep and the succession of another Amenhotep was forthcoming at that time, a reexamination of the Egyptian texts from this period provides that kind of evidence when they are correctly understood. The evidence was right there all the time, but we did not recognize it.

The reason why we did not recognize it at the time was because the Egyptians may have covered up the problem.

Relief of Amenhotep II in his chariot firing arrows at a copper ingot target, Temple of Amun, Thebes, Egypt. The king often boasted of his physical prowess. He recorded, “...he entered into his northern garden and found that there had been set up for him four targets of Asiatic copper of one palm in their thickness, with 20 cubits between one post and its fellow. Then his majesty appeared in a chariot like Montu [the god of war] in his power. He grasped his bow and gripped four arrows at the same time. So he rode northward, shooting at them like Montu in his regalia. His arrows had come out on the back thereof while he was attacking another post. It was really a deed which had never been done nor heard of by report: shooting at a target of copper an arrow which came out and dropped to the ground except for the king...” (ANET 244).
No Co-regency Between Thutmose III and Amenhotep II

The interpretation that there was a coregency between these two Pharaohs does not stem from any direct inscriptive evidence for it. Rather, it has been created because of some problem texts. There are no nice double-dated inscriptions for these two rulers like those of the 12th Dynasty. There are some occasional concurrences of their two cartouches together, but this is slender evidence indeed upon which to propose a coregency. Gardiner calls the juxtaposition of these cartouches in three locations “doubtful evidence” for a coregency and notes, “the student must be warned against this kind of evidence” (1964: 200).

What then are the problem texts that this proposed coregency is supposed to solve? The problem here comes from two pairs of texts from the reign of Amenhotep II in which they both referred to his “first victorious campaign,” but the campaigns are different and they occurred in different years. The second problem has to do with accession date(s) of Amenhotep II. He appears to have two, one for the time immediately following his father’s death and one for another time. The problem texts may be described as follows:


After a long and self-laudatory introduction, Amenhotep II tells of his inauguration of repairs and expansion of the temples for Khnum of Elephantine and Anukis of Amada in Nubia. This he carried out:

after the return of his Majesty from Upper Retjenu when he had overthrown all his opponents in order to broaden the boundaries of Egypt on the first campaign of victory (italics mine; Cumming 1982: 27).

The text goes on to tell how the king slew seven hostage chieftains that he had brought back to Egypt from Takhsi in Syria and then hung their heads or bodies and hands on his royal ship as it sailed south to Thebes. After arriving there he hung six of them on the wall of the city and he sent the seventh on by boat to be hung on the wall of Napata near the fourth cataract of the Nile in Nubia.

The same event, the slaying of the chieftains of Takhsi, is mentioned in the Biography of Amenemhab. There it follows directly after the recital of the death of Thutmose III.

He introduces the coronation of Amenhotep II by dating it, when the morning brightened.” At that time Amenhotep II “was established upon the throne of his father” (Breasted 1906: 319). As a part of that ceremony, Amenhotep then slaughtered the seven princes of Takhsi and suspended their heads from his royal boat as he sailed from Memphis to Thebes. It is clear that Amenemhab knew nothing of a coregency between Thutmose III and Amenhotep II for if there had been such an arrangement, there would not have been a need for this installation ceremony after his father died.
On the other hand, one may question Amenemhab’s dating of the death of the princes of Takhsi at the same time as Amenhotep’s inauguration. Amenhotep’s own inscription dates that event in Year 3 at the end of his military campaign then. Events are commonly telescoped in tomb biographies more than they are in the royal annals. Thus Amenemhab seems to have telescoped two events together that actually occurred three years apart.

Whether the slaying of the princes of Takhsi took place at the time of Amenhotep’s coronation or at the time of his return from a military campaign, it is a remarkably brutal act. Gardiner refers to it as “an act of barbarity which in the crude moral atmosphere of that warlike age could be regarded with special pride” (1964: 199). Amenhotep did have a precedent in this action in that of his great grandfather Thutmose I who, in sailing back from a military campaign in Nubia, hung the head or heads of his enemies on his royal boat. In my previous interpretation of the events surrounding the Exodus I interpreted this action by Amenhotep II as a demonstration of his frustration at having arrived back in Egypt only to find his father, Thutmose III, dead in the course of the events of the Exodus. Since our more closely detailed focus is upon Amenhotep II as the Pharaoh of the Exodus, the execution of the princes of Takhsi may simply be a manifestation of his own brutality apart from any connection with the Exodus. If this Pharaoh then fell victim to the Exodus events instead, it looks as if that judgment was well deserved.
The Memphis and Karnak Stelae of Years 7 and 9

The only dated inscription from the reign of Amenhotep II which dates between the military campaigns of Years 3 and 7 is an appendix to the campaign of Year 3 on the Elephantine Stela in which he gave instructions in Year 4 for the extension of the festival of Anukis of Nubia from three days to four days and additional provisions were to be made for the celebration of that festival. The day and month of these instructions is not given; they could have occurred quite early in the year. There is also one non-royal inscription from Year 4 and that comes from Minmosi, superintendent of the quarries at Turah, who was commissioned to open up new quarries to produce stone for the construction and repair of the Temples (Cumming 1984: pt. 2, 143–44). No other dated inscriptions from Year 4 are known and no dated inscriptions are known from Year 5 or Year 6.

The campaigns of Years 7 and 9 are recited on a pair of stelae, one from Memphis and the other from Karnak, the northern and southern capitals of the country. The introduction to this text is similar in content to that which introduces the stela from Year 3, but it is shorter. The campaign of Year 7 was aimed at Syria. Almost a dozen sites there are mentioned as having been captured. They appear to range geographically from northeastern Syria down to the southwest. A summary of the captives taken is recited with the final reference to his return to Memphis.

The serious problem here that this text creates stems from the fact that this campaign is referred to in the text as “his first campaign of victory” (italics mine; Cumming 1982: pt. 1, 30). Thus we have the problem of two first campaigns of victory on our hands for this Pharaoh. In speaking of this contradiction Gardiner observes, “Too much has possibly been made of this discrepancy…” and he goes on to suggest that the first campaign really belonged to Thutmose III, and Amenhotep was acting as leader of the troops for him (Gardiner 1964: 200). Another way to attempt to resolve this problem is to suggest that there was a coregency between Thutmose III and Amenhotep (Redford 1965: 108–22). In fact, these two pairs of stelae are probably the main reason why such a coregency has been suggested. The idea here is that the campaign of Year 3 occurred during the short coregency and the campaign of Year 7 occurred after Amenhotep II became sole ruler. But since Pharaohs who were coregents did not start the number of their regnal years over when they became sole ruler, there is no reason why they should start numbering their military campaigns over either. We know that the identification of the campaign of Year 7 is not a scribal error because the campaign of Year 9 is identified as “his second campaign of victory” in the same text (Cumming 1982: pt 1, 31).

This problem is accentuated by the fact that Takhisi from the campaign of Year 3 is never mentioned in the campaign of Year 7, even though the focus of that campaign was also upon Syria. Adding to this problem is that we have two different accession dates for Amenhotep II, one of them implied and the other stated directly.
The implied date for Amenhotep’s accession is the day after Thutmose III’s death. Since Thutmose III died on VII/30, Amenhotep should have been inaugurated on VIII/1. The anniversary of the coronation of Amenhotep is given in the account of the campaign of year 9, however, and the date given there falls at the end of the 11th month. (Cumming 1982: pt 1, 32).

Summary of These Problems

There are two major and direct conflicts between the stelae of Year 3 and those of Years 7 and 9. Both of the campaigns of Years 3 and 7 are identified as the king’s first victorious campaign. This problem is not resolved by proposing a coregency here and it is not resolved on the basis of a simple scribal error, since the report from Year 9 refers to that campaign as his second victorious campaign. The other problem is the different accession dates. From the death date of Thutmose III the accession date of Amenhotep II should have been VIII/1, but the report of the campaign of Year 9 indicates instead that his accession date was toward the end of the 11th month. So we have here a Pharaoh who had two first campaigns of victory and two different accession dates. These problems have not yet been resolved satisfactorily.

Potential Correlations With the Exodus

It is of interest to note that these complications in the texts of Amenhotep II occur right at the time when the Exodus of the Israelites occurred according to the Biblical date for that event (1 Kgs 6:1). Above, the date of 1446 was suggested as the Julian date for that event, using correlations with the chronology of the monarchy. For the dates of Amenhotep we have used the high chronology for the reign of Thutmose III, 1504–1450) as explained above. Now these two chronologies can be correlated. In order to do so it should also be noted that the Egyptians used the non-accession year method of reckoning, in which the first regnal year of the king began on the day of his accession. They did not wait until the next New Year to start that first year.

Chronologically this means that Year 1 of Amenhotep II fell in 1450 BC. That means that his third year, the year of the first victorious campaign of the Amada and Elephantine stelae, fell in 1448. It also means that the first victorious campaign of Year 7 on the Memphis and Karnak stelae occurred in 1444 BC and the campaign of Year 9, also on the Memphis and Karnak stelae, was conducted in 1442. According to the dates for these three campaigns, the Biblical date for the Exodus fell right between the campaigns of these two stelae, in 1446. These correlations can be diagrammed as shown below.

The chronological correlation here fits very well. The Biblical date for the Exodus falls right between the two first campaigns of victory for the king named Amenhotep II. If the king of the first campaign died at the time of the Exodus, then the king of the new first campaign and the second campaign should be a new king who also took the same nomen and prenomen of Amenhotep II. This could have resulted from an attempt to cover
up the disaster that had taken place. Instead of taking a new set of throne names, the king who came to the throne after the first Amenhotep took the same set of throne names. But the attempt to cover up the disaster was not complete or perfect. A hint of it was left behind by the king or the scribes who either forgot or intentionally did not take into account the first victorious campaign of the first king by that name. Hence the conflict arose, both in terms of numbering his campaigns and in terms of identifying his accession date.

This synthesis raises the question of whether the Pharaoh of the Exodus did die at the time of the Exodus. The account of Exodus 14–15 is not directly explicit upon this point, but it is the logical inference there. Yahweh says that He will get glory over Pharaoh. While some of that glory could be maintained by his loss of troops in the Sea of Reeds, if he escaped with his own life some of that glory could have been diminished. Depictions of the wartime Pharaoh show him in his larger-than-life chariot heading his troops into battle. In actual battles against armed troops of the enemy this probably was propaganda and Pharaoh probably directed the battle from the rear of his army. But against largely unarmed civilians like the fleeing Israelites, Pharaoh would have had no reason not to lead his troops into the dry bed of the Sea of Reeds and thus he would have been the lead candidate for death by drowning there. Thus the logic of Exodus 14–15 is that Pharaoh did die by drowning at the time of the Exodus. This point is confirmed by Psalm 136:15 which says that Yahweh “overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea” (cf. Ex 14:28; Ps 106:9–11).

**Chronological Correlations with Exodus**

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<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
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<tr>
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<td>1449</td>
<td>1448</td>
<td>1447</td>
<td>1446</td>
<td>1445</td>
<td>1444</td>
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**Events in Egypt After the Proposed Date for the Exodus**

If Amenhotep II was the Pharaoh of the Exodus according to the above correlations, and he died at that time, then we should identify him as Amenhotep IIA and connect him with the Elephantine and Amada stelae of Year 3. Then the Pharaoh of Egypt who came to the throne and took his name should be identified as Amenhotep IIB and connected with the Memphis and Karnak stelae. The question then is, is there any
additional information from the rest of the reign of Amenhotep II that would tend to confirm his identity as the Pharaoh after the Exodus?

The same points that I utilized in my earlier article on the date of the Exodus can be used here. The only difference is that the identity of the Pharaoh of the Exodus has been shifted from Thutmose III to Amenhotep IIA. That resolves the chronological discrepancy between the Biblical date for the Exodus in 1446 and the date of Thutmose III’s death in 1450, and in so doing it puts the Exodus directly in the middle of two sets of problematic texts and thus provides another potential explanation for them.

1. Regardless of the number of Israelites who left Egypt, their departure still would have deprived the Egyptians of a sizeable supply of slave labor. Thus the total of persons brought back to Egypt by Amenhotep IIB as reported at the end of the campaigns of Years 7 and 9 may not be inflated. The total given in the text is 89,600 men, whereas, the individual numbers themselves total 101,128 (ANET 247). While some have questioned the very high number given here, if one looks at the needs for state labor right after the Exodus, the number does not look so high after all.

2. From the end of Amenhotep IIB’s reign comes a text so unusual that some Egyptologists think that he may have been drunk while dictating it (Gardiner 1964: 199; Cumming pt. 1, 1928: 45–46). In this text Amenhotep expresses his hatred of the Semites. The inscription is dated 14 years after his last Asiatic campaign, that of Year 9, which shows that he still had Semites (Hebrews?) on his mind, even when he was down south in Nubia. The text conveys his counsel to the governor of Nubia. The Hebrews are not mentioned directly, but Takhsi is the location where Amenhotep IIA campaigned. If Amenhotep IIB held the Hebrews responsible for the death of his predecessor, that could have supplied fuel for his expression of hatred for the Semites. He also gives a warning against magicians. While the Nubians were noted for their practice of magic, there might also be an echo of the encounter with Moses the master magician here.

3. From after the end of the reign of Amenhotep IIB comes another document that could relate to the son of the Pharaoh after the Exodus. The text is the Dream Stela of Thutmose IV in which he tells about how, when he was out hunting he sat down to rest near the Great Sphinx and fell asleep. In his dream the sphinx told him that he would become Pharaoh even though he had not expected to become the ruler. He was not in line for it since he was not the crown prince at the time. In return for this reward he was to clear the sand away from around the sphinx. The stela with this text is located between the paws of the sphinx (ANET 449).

This text has been related to the Exodus account before (Horn 1979: 350), with Thutmose IV being the lesser son of the Pharaoh of the Exodus. In that case, his older brother died allowing him to come to the throne when he did not expect it. The same relation still holds true under the hypothesis described above, but the
relationship is more complex. According to the genealogy worked out above, Thutmose IV would have been the son of Amenhotep IIB. This still means that he probably had an older brother who died in the tenth plague, but his coming to the throne had more to do with the death of his uncle. Assuming that Amenhotep IIA and IIB were either full or half brothers, Amenhotep IIA who died at the time of the Exodus would have been the uncle of the future Thutmose IV. Thus he would have come to the throne both because his uncle died in the Sea of Reeds and because his older brother died in the tenth plague.

These factors continue to support the idea that Amenhotep IIB would fit well as the Pharaoh after the Exodus, while his predecessor Amenhotep IIA would fit better as the Pharaoh at the time of the Exodus. His son and successor, Thutmose IV, also fits well as the son of the Pharaoh after the Exodus.

The Great Sphinx at Giza, Egypt. An inscription between the paws, the “Dream Stela” or “Sphinx Stella,” tells how Thutmose IV was promised kingship by Harmakhis, god of the Sphinx, even though he was not the first-born son of Amehotep IIB. It is possible that Thutmoses IV’s older brother died in the plague of the first born.

A Mummy for the Pharaoh of the Exodus?

According to the Biblical indications discussed above, a Pharaoh died in the Sea of Reeds at the time of the Exodus event. What would have happened to his body? There are two possibilities here. One is that his body sank into the depths of the water and was never recovered. Another possibility is that his body washed ashore like the bodies of some of his soldiers (Ex 14:30). If his body washed ashore and was recovered by a search party sent out then it undoubtedly would have been taken back to Egypt for burial, but not the kind of
burial that was usually accorded dead Pharaohs. In this case the burial would have been more secretive because there was a new Amenhotep on the throne who had taken his place. We might expect, therefore, that little work had been done on his tomb thus far and that his interment was one with minimal preparation. The question is, is there a body among the royal mummies that could fit this specification?

First of all, there is a mummy of Amenhotep II that we would designate here as Amenhotep IIB, the Pharaoh who lived to the end of his 26 regnal years. It is a mummy of the right age and, contrary to many of the mummies of the kings, it was found in the right place in his own sarcophagus in his own tomb, No. 35 in the Valley of the Kings. X-rays of his mummy reveal him to have been about 45 years old when he died (Harris and Weeks 1973: 138). This fits well with the chronology of his reign. If he came to the throne at about age 18-20, and ruled to his 26th year, this mummy fits well with that which we have proposed for Amenhotep IIB.

Is there any evidence for another mummy that might be connected with Amenhotep IIA? There is a free floating royal mummy of the 18th Dynasty that has not yet been identified and this mummy is that of a king who was about the right age at death for what we have proposed for Amenhotep IIA. In his inaugural text, the Sphinx Stela, he indicated that he was 18 years of age when he came to the throne (Cumming, pt. 1, 1982: 20). Since he died about Year 5 of his reign, this would have meant that he was in his early 20s when he died in the Sea of Reeds. There is a mummy of this approximate age that has been misidentified as Thutmose I. There was no label on this mummy’s wrappings to identify him as such; it was only assumed that this was Thutmose I because he was found in the Deir el-Bahr mummy cache near a coffin that belonged to a Thutmose. The mummy of Thutmose I was a well-traveled mummy. Originally, he was undoubtedly buried in his own tomb. Then Hatshepsut later had her father moved into her own tomb. Still further, Thutmose III built another tomb for Thutmose I (No. 38). His body, however, was not found there, so when this unidentified body was found near one of the coffins of a Thutmose, Maspero, who made this discovery, assumed that it was Thutmose I.

Thutmose I was not related to the Pharaoh under whom he worked, Amenhotep I. Amenhotep I had no surviving male issue, so Thutmose I, formerly a general in the army, came to the throne. The length of his reign is disputed but he probably ruled for at least a decade. Thus he should have been a man of middle age when he died. The mummy that had previously been identified as that of Thutmose I has now been x-rayed and it shows instead that it belonged to a young man of about 18 years of age (Harris and Weeks 1973: 132). Thus this mummy cannot be that of Thutmose I. The question then is, to whom does this mummy of the 18th Dynasty belong? Could it be Amenhotep IIA?

The age would fit reasonably well with what we know of the early career of Amenhotep IIA. He should have been in his early 20s at the time of his one major military text, that of Year 3, and by the time of the Exodus in Year 5. Also there are some interesting features to this mummy. First, it is not desiccated like the
normal mummies that were either soaked in a solution of natron, a sodium salt, or packed in dry natron. This argues for a rapid burial of this body. Second, there was no resinous coating applied to this mummy, as commonly was done, which provides a second argument for a rapid burial. As a result, this has been called “one of the best preserved of all royal mummies” (Harris and Weeks 1973: 34). The irony of this may be that it is the best preserved because it was not preserved in the normal way. His head was shaved and there are abrasions on the tip of his nose and on his right cheek that look like they may be antemortem or intramortem injuries, not postmortem changes.

In discussing this mummy, J. Tyldesley speculates that since it is not Thutmose I it may be one of his sons (1996: 127). Perhaps he was not one of the sons of Thutmose I but rather one of the sons of Thutmose III, Amenhotep IIA, to be more specific. It is probable that we never will know the identity of this mummy but it does raise the tantalizing possibility that this body could be that of the Pharaoh of the Exodus.

Sarcophagus of Amenhotep II, in his tomb at Thebes.

Summary

The evidence presented above is only circumstantial. No Egyptian inscription exists which tells directly of the Exodus of the Israelites and we may expect that none will ever be found. The reason for this is the propagandistic nature of Egyptian royal inscriptions. The kind of problem was even more acute for the Egyptians than for the Assyrians and Babylonians. In those eastern countries the king was only a servant of the gods; kings were rarely deified. In Egypt all of the Kings were treated as gods, Horus incarnate. For an event like the Biblical Exodus to have occurred on the watch of the divine Horus would have struck directly at his nature as a god, thus that kind of event could not be admitted, even if it occurred.

That being the case, more indirect channels must be utilized in a search for the Pharaoh of the Exodus. Irregularities that could match with some aspects of the Biblical story must be sought. Discrepancies between Egyptian texts at the appropriate time chronologically may provide this kind of indirect evidence for the Exodus. That is as much as one can hope for from Egyptian texts relating to the Exodus.
Using the Biblical date for the Exodus when applied to the Julian calendar indicates that search should be made first for this kind of indirect evidence around the middle of the 15th century BC. Only one Pharaoh is clearly known to have died at that time and that was Thutmose III. For that reason I selected him as the best candidate for the Pharaoh of the Exodus in my earlier study on this subject.

Closer attention to Biblical chronology has led to discrepancies within Egyptian texts from early in the reign of Amenhotep II. Using the precise Biblical date for the Exodus locates that event early in the reign of that king, not at the end of his predecessor. There is a gap of about three years between his dated inscriptions, between Year 4 and Year 7, which provide a gap into which the events of the Exodus can be placed. That being the case, the available tensions between his texts from Year 3 and Year 7 become more significant. On that basis the proposal has been developed here that Amenhotep II was the Pharaoh of the Exodus. The Biblical evidence requires his death at that time, around Year 5 of his reign. The king that served out the balance of his reign should, therefore, be his successor. In this case, however, the successor took the same nomen and prenomen and other titles that were used by the preceding Pharaoh. For that reason we have identified these two kings as Amenhotep IIA and Amenhotep IIB. Amenhotep IIA is the King whom should have died at the time of the Exodus and Amenhotep IIB was the king who served out the rest of his term as if he were that same king.

There are some features that come from the reign of the king that we have identified as Amenhotep IIB, the Pharaoh after the Exodus, which fit well with his succession at that time. There was his need for a new supply of manpower for state building projects and this need was filled by the 90,000 or more captives that he brought back to Egypt from his campaigns of Years 7 and 9. There was his extraordinary hatred for Semites expressed, strangely, in Nubia toward the end of his reign. As part of that expression to the governor there he warned him against magicians, which could carry an echo of a memory of the function of Moses at the time of the Exodus. His son, Thutmose IV fits well as the son of the Pharaoh after the Exodus because of the irregular nature of his accession expressed in the text of his Dream Stela found between the paws of the Great Sphinx.

There is a possibility that the body of the Pharaoh of the Exodus was recovered from the Sea of Reeds and that body has been found among the royal mummies of the 18th Dynasty. The mummy misidentified as Thutmose I has now been redated by x-rays and found to be that of a young man half the age of Thutmose I. There are some unusual features of this mummy that could suggest a connection with the Exodus but, given the nature of mummy evidence, that link probably cannot be forged even if it is a correct connection.

The evidence is circumstantial but the circumstances point to Amenhotep IIA as the Pharaoh of the Exodus.
CHAPTER THREE

New Evidence from Egypt on the Location of the Exodus Sea Crossing: Part I

Gary Byers, MA

Introduction

It may come as a surprise to many students of the Bible that in the original Hebrew text the body of water the Israelites crossed when leaving Egypt is called yam suph, “Sea of Reeds,” not Red Sea (Ex 15:4, 22; Dt 11:4; Jos 2:10; 4:23; 24:6; Neh 9:9; Ps 106:7, 9, 33; 136:13, 15). Unfortunately, yam suph has been rendered “Red Sea” in nearly all of our translations, the Jerusalem Bible and the New Jewish Publication Society Hebrew Bible being notable exceptions.

The “Red Sea” phrase came into the account with the third century BC translation of the Old Testament into Greek. Called the Septuagint (abbreviated as LXX), its translators made yam suph (“Sea of Reeds”) into eruthrá thálassē (“Red Sea”). The Latin Vulgate followed their lead with mari Rubro (“Red Sea”) and most English versions continued that tradition.

Unfortunately, “Red Sea” was not a translation at all, and the LXX translators understood that. While we do not know their reasoning, they gave yam suph a historicized interpretation, based on their understanding of the region at the time (Kitchen 2003: 262; Hoffmeier 1996: 206; 2005: 81). When the Bible indicated the Israelites crossed a significant body of water on Egypt’s eastern border, the LXX translators connected it with the body of water they knew as the Red Sea. Instead of translating the Hebrew phrase literally, they offered this historical identification as their interpretation of the text.

I suggest this is an unfortunate translation that has confused the issue for centuries and has kept us from appreciating the real historical accuracy of the Exodus and sea crossing accounts. In the late 20th century, scholars began to reestablish the meaning of the Hebrew text to its Egyptian context in a fresh way and then connect it with recent archaeological evidence (see Hoffmeier 2005: 81–85).

The Red Sea

But, you ask, what about the Red Sea? The Red Sea includes two fingers of Indian Ocean salt water that extend northward into the Biblical world and help separate the two continents of Africa and Asia. The Red Sea’s eastern branch is known as the Gulf of Aqaba (Arabic) or Gulf of Elat (Hebrew), and the western branch is known as the Gulf of Suez (Arabic, and the origin of the name of the Suez Canal which connects this western branch to the Mediterranean Sea).
In classical Greek, the name Red Sea was used for both gulfs as well as the main body of the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean (Kitchen 2003: 262–63; Hoffmeier 1997: 200). Unfortunately, today we do not know why these bodies of water were originally called “Red Sea” (Hoffmeier 1997: 206).

One interesting suggestion has a Biblical basis. Maybe the Red Sea received its name from the Edomites, perennial Old Testament enemies of the Israelites. The Edomites, whose name means “red” in Hebrew, controlled the Gulf of Aqaba during much of the Old Testament period. It has been suggested that later Israelites had difficulty referring to this sea by the name of their enemy (that is, the Edomite Sea), so they used the meaning of Edom (“red,” Greek eruthrá) instead to identify it (Hoffmeier 1997: 206).

Another possibility is that the Gulf of Suez was already known as the Red Sea (for a presently unknown reason), and its application to the Gulf of Aqaba was a natural extension (Hoffmeier 1997: 206). Whatever the origin of the term, it was not the name of the body of water the Bible says the Israelites crossed in the Exodus.

To complicate matters more, the New Testament follows the LXX in referring to the location of the Exodus sea crossing as the “Red Sea.” While a full treatment of the New Testament references is beyond the scope of this article, I will suggest that our understanding of ancient Egypt’s eastern frontier and the terminologies describing it are still incomplete and that the present state of our research is like working a puzzle with a number of key pieces still missing.

Route of the Suez Canal. The famous Canal is one of the greatest engineering feats of modern times, providing a major shipping route between Europe and Asia. The pilot study estimated that a total of 2,613 million cubic feet of earth would have to be moved, including 600 million on land, and another 2,013 million dredged from water. The total original cost estimate was two hundred million francs. The canal stretches over 100 mi (160 km) from Port Said on the Mediterranean Sea to Suez on the Red Sea. The first efforts to build a modern canal came from the Egypt Expedition of Napoleon Bonaparte, who
hoped the project would give France a trade advantage over England. Though it was begun in 1799 by Charles Le Pere, a miscalculation estimated that there was a 33 ft (10 m) difference in level between the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea and work was suspended. When it was later determined that there was no difference between the two seas, the French consul to Egypt, Ferdinand de Lesseps, had the vision and perseverance to bring the project to completion. Work began in 1859 and, after a number of setbacks and delays, was completed a decade later, thus physically severing Africa from Asia. The Suez Canal emerged on the political scene in 1956, during the Suez crisis brought about when Egyptian president Nasser announced the nationalization of the Canal. His decision was in response to the British, French and American refusal for a loan to build the Aswan high dam. The revenue from the Canal, he argued, would help finance the High Dam project. The announcement triggered a swift reaction by England, France and Israel, who all invaded Egypt. Their action was condemned by the International community and the canal was turned over to Egypt. In 1967, the Canal was closed as a result of the Six-Day War, when Israel occupied the Sinai Peninsula. The canal was reopened in 1975 following the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. The Canal has been widened twice since the reopening. Called the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa, approximately 50 ships cross the canal daily, taking from 11 to 16 hours to make the journey. A little known fact about New York’s Statue of Liberty is that it was originally to have stood at the entrance to the Suez Canal in Port Said. Inspired by the colossal statues of Rameses II at Abu Simbel, French sculptor Frederic Auguste Bartholdi came up with the idea of a huge statue of a woman bearing a torch. She was to represent progress—“Egypt carrying the light of Asia,” according to Bartholdi. However, Egypt’s leader, khedive Ismail, decided the project was too expensive and replaced it with a more modest statue of Ferdinand de Lesseps. Bartholdi took his plans to the US and promoted the concept of a colossal female statue dedicated to “Liberty Enlightening the World” in New York harbor. He was commissioned to undertake the work and funds were raised on both sides of the Atlantic. In the end, the statue became a gift of international friendship from the people of France to the people of the United States. And so, “Canal Lady” became “Lady Liberty.”

There is general agreement among scholars today, both liberal and conservative, that yam suph means “Reed Sea.” The Hebrew suph definitely referred to a water plant of some sort (Kitchen 2003: 262), as indicated in Exodus 2:3–5 and Isaiah 19:6–7, where reeds in the Nile River are mentioned (Hoffmeier 2005: 81). In fact, it is probable that the Hebrew suph (“reed”) is an Egyptian loan word—from the hieroglyph for water plants (twf) (Huddlestun 1992: 636; Hoffmeier 1997: 204; 2005: 81–83).

Unfortunately, a more precise identification to a specific water plant for suph is not presently possible. Still, the Bible is clear that the sea the Israelites crossed was the “Reed Sea.” This suggests a large body of water on Egypt’s eastern border that is identified with reeds. But where was it located? In the Bible, the name yam suph is used in reference to the Gulf of Aqaba (Ex 23:31; Nm 21:4; Dt 1:40, 2:1; 1 Kgs 9:26) and apparently the Gulf of Suez (Nm 33:10–11). That makes both legitimate candidates for the sea crossing location.
While few scholars have posited the Reed Sea crossing point to be on the eastern Gulf of Aqaba, Robert Cornuke and Larry Williams have recently popularized that idea (Blum 1998). However, that location appears to be too far east of Goshen to fit the literal understanding of the Exodus itinerary (Hoffmeier 2005: 130–40; Franz 2000; Wood 2000).

On the other hand, the popular view among conservative scholars has been to locate the Exodus crossing somewhere along the northern tip of the western Gulf of Suez. Unfortunately, the place names in the Exodus account do not fit that region very well. Neither has modern archaeological research added any support to this location for the Exodus sea crossing.

Whether one chooses either gulf, the important issue is that the location was the yam suph. If the Gulf of Suez is chosen as the Exodus crossing site, the location must be based on Biblical and extra-Biblical data. The Gulf of Suez must not be chosen because it is called the Red Sea today, or even in antiquity. I propose that a literal and careful understanding of the Biblical text, in conjunction with the most recent research from the eastern Nile delta, suggests a location other than the Gulf of Suez.

Reeds in the vicinity of Tell Defenneh. While creation of the Suez Canal in the 19th century permanently changed the Isthmus of Suez, reeds still grow in some of the region’s marshy areas. This photo was taken in the area of the ancient Ballah Lake system, just a few miles west of the Suez Canal. The author suggests it was in this lake area that recent geological and archaeological research best demonstrates the place names mentioned in the Exodus sea crossing. Photo: Michael Luddeni

Suez Isthmus

The land area north of the Gulf of Suez, all the way to the Mediterranean coast, is known today as the Isthmus of Suez. It includes the eastern Nile delta (where Goshen was located, east of the Nile’s Pelusiac branch; see Kitchen 2003: 254, 261), the marshy lakes to the east, and the desert beyond. In antiquity there were five lakes in this narrow strip of land: Ballah Lake, Lake Timsah, Great Bitter Lake and Little Bitter Lake.
This entire area, from the northern limit of the Gulf of Suez to the Mediterranean coastline, is not at all as it was in antiquity. Evidence suggests that the Gulf of Suez extended further north in antiquity than it does today, although we do not presently know how far north (Hoffmeier 1997: 209). Also, the Mediterranean coastline during the second millennium BC was much further south than it is today (Scolnic 2004: 96–97; Hoffmeier 2005: 41–42), so the isthmus between the two was much narrower than today. What has remained consistent about the region throughout history is the fact that it has always been known for marshy freshwater lakes. Consequently, it should be of no surprise that the Suez Canal was cut directly through here in 1869.

Egyptian texts use the hieroglyph for “reed” (twf) in reference to this region, suggesting they were prominent there (Huddlestun 1992: 636–37) and that the name was associated with that area (Hoffmeier 2005: 81–83). In fact, Hoffmeier, in agreement with Manfred Bietak, excavator of Rameses (see Wood 2004), has concluded that the hieroglyphic term p3 twfy (p3 being the definite article “the”) referred specifically to a particular reedy lake on Egypt’s eastern border—Ballah Lake (2005: 88).

Noting Bietak’s important paleoenvironmental study of the region, Hoffmeier added that Tell Abu Sefeh, at modern Qantara East on the west side of the present Ballah Lake area, probably reflects the ancient Egyptian name for that lake (p3 twfy) and its Hebrew counterpart (yam suph) (2005: 88–89). Hoffmeier also points out that excavations at Tell Abu Sefeh have uncovered remains of an impressive harbor with quays that once handled multiple trading vessels (2005: 88). While archaeological evidence has identified remains later than the Exodus period, it is obvious that the Ballah Lake was once a substantial body of water on Egypt’s eastern border.

Kitchen suggested that the Reed Sea terminology might have been used by the ancients for all the bodies of water in the series of reedy lakes that ran the full north-south length of the isthmus (2003:262). By extension, it was also applied to the last of these bodies of water—the Gulf of Suez. This would also explain Numbers 33:10, where the Israelites again passed yam suph (so-called “yam suph II” [Kitchen 2003: 271]) later in the Exodus narrative, after the miraculous yam suph crossing earlier. Maybe at that time, or even later, the same term also came to be used for still another “connected” body of water—the Gulf of Aqaba.

Geological studies indicate that natural factors have produced great changes in both the Nile delta and Isthmus of Suez through the millennia. More recent human activity has changed the region most of all. Completion of both the old (1902) and new (1970) Nile River dams at Aswan have dramatically affected the river’s flow and greatly reduced its flooding. With the Nile flooding non-existent, the perennial flood safety valve—the Wadi Tumilat, running from the Nile to the Isthmus of Suez lakes—no longer served that need (Hoffmeier 1997: 207). An even greater impact on the isthmus lakes came from construction of the Suez Canal, completed in 1869. It drained much of the marshy area of the Ballah Lake (Hoffmeier 1997: 211; 2005: 43).
Beyond the combined impact on the isthmus of these modern construction projects, the water level of the Gulf of Suez is presently lower than in antiquity. Apparently due to natural causes unrelated to either the Nile River dam or the Suez Canal, the Gulf of Suez is lower today and does not extend as far north into the isthmus as it once did (Hoffmeier 1997: 207–208).

View of the Suez Canal looking south from Qantara. The Suez Canal extends 105 mi (170 km) from Port Said on the Mediterranean Sea to Suez City at the northern end of the Gulf of Suez. From here, ships have direct access to the Pacific Ocean. The Canal, originally 26 ft (8 m) deep, 177 ft (54 m) wide across the top and 72 ft (22 m) wide at the bottom, is much deeper and wider today to accommodate modern ships. Completion of the Canal in 1869 permanently altered the ancient lake region north of the Gulf of Suez. Amazingly, canals cut in the same region by ancient Egyptians were of similar dimensions as the original Suez Canal. The area seen in the photo is where the northern end of the ancient Ballah Lake was formerly located. This is the most likely local for the sea crossing according to recent research.

Eastern Frontier Canal

For millennia man has desired to impact the Suez Isthmus region, but with minimal success. Ancient Egyptian texts and modern geological surveys have identified ancient canal lines cut between the marshy lakes in antiquity, called the Eastern Frontier Canal by their discoverers (Hoffmeier 2005: 42). Long before the Suez Canal, both native and foreign rulers cut canals through the Isthmus for a variety of reasons. Ancient documents mention canal construction by Pharaohs Sesostri I or III (12th Dynasty), Necho II (610–595 BC) and the Persian king Darius (522–486 BC), as well as Ptolemy II (282–246 BC) (Hoffmeier 1997: 165, 169).

Thus it was not surprising that geologists found evidence of a man-made canal joining the lakes in the northern sector of the isthmus. Probably cut for defensive purposes as well as for irrigation and navigation, it created a formidable eastern border barrier. Known portions of this canal are consistently 230 ft (70 m) wide at the top, an estimated 66 ft (20 m) wide at the bottom and 6.5 to 10 ft (2–3 m) deep. This ancient canal was wider than the original Suez Canal, 177 ft (54 m) across the top and 72 ft (22 m) at the bottom.

While no one is suggesting that the Israelites crossed a canal, it was apparently an important feature in Egypt’s eastern border defense designed to make travel difficult. The adjacent embankments created by digging this canal would have added to the formidability of this border defensive system (Hoffmeier 1997: 170–71; Kitchen 2003: 260).
Thus, crossing the sea in this region represented a true departure from Egypt. West of the lake-and-canal border was the cultivated land of the delta, with Goshen located on the eastern side, but still very much part of Egypt. East of the lakes was the desert where the Israelites would no longer be within Egypt proper (Hoffmeier 2005: 37, 43). Anyone who has visited Egypt can’t help but be struck by the stark contrast of green, cultivated Nile delta and the brown barren desert, in places just yards apart.

Contrast between the desert and the sown. The cultivated Nile River valley (550 mi [900 km] from the southern border of Egypt to the delta) and the cultivated delta (stretching up to 150 mi [240 km] east to west along the Mediterranean coast) with the arid desert on both the east and west is striking. Throughout history Egyptians lived almost exclusively along the cultivated river valley and delta. Yet, anywhere irrigation is practiced in the desert, the soil is fertile. This photo was taken from the Middle Kingdom tombs at Bene Hasan, about 165 mi (265 km) south of Cairo.

Wadi Tumilat

During prehistoric times (before 3200 BC), the Nile’s easternmost branch once passed through the Wadi Tumilat. Stretching 31 mi (52 km) from just west of modern Zagazig (ancient Bubastis) to Ismailiya (on Lake Timsah), it created a portion of the eastern edge of the Nile delta. While the course of this delta branch disappeared in historic times, and the present eastern branch is significantly further to the west, both historical and archaeological evidence indicate that ancient canals were cut from the Nile River eastward through the Wadi Tumilat (Hoffmeier 1997: 165; 2005: 41).

This ancient watercourse apparently continued to flood periodically throughout history with the overflow of the Nile’s annual flooding (Hoffmeier 1997: 165; 2005: 43). Thus, the Wadi Tumilat may have been one of the reasons that the Isthmus of Suez became known for its marshy fresh water lakes and associated “reeds” (twf). The Wadi Tumilat was no doubt part of the Biblical Land of Goshen. It is within this very area of the Isthmus of Suez that topographical and archaeological research locates the initial sites mentioned in the Exodus itinerary.
The valley’s very name today even hints at its place in the Exodus. The Arabic term “Tumilat” actually preserves the name of the Egyptian god Atum (Hoffmeier 2005: 62, 64, 69), and it would appear he was well respected in this region during the time of the Exodus. The store city of Pithom (Ex 1:11) is the Hebrew name for a site that would have been known in Egypt as pr-itm (“house [or temple] of Atum”) and it was probably located in the ancient Wadi Tumilat (Hoffmeier 2005: 58–59). In addition, the Exodus itinerary site of Etham was no doubt named after the same Egyptian deity (Hoffmeier 2005: 69).

The region’s geography and the Exodus account fit together. The Israelites departed from Rameses to the north of Wadi Tumilat and headed south after the last plague (see Ex 13:17–14:3). They came to Succoth in the Wadi Tumilat then headed east to Etham in the vicinity of Lake Timsah. Turning north, they were overtaken by the pursuing Egyptians at Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea and before Baal Zephon (Ex 14:2).

This was all still the green, cultivated area of the Nile delta—still Egypt proper. The Israelites were facing an impregnable border between them and freedom in the Sinai—the freshwater lakes with their interconnecting canals and a series of strategically located forts. It appeared to them and to Pharaoh that they had no place to go (Ex 14:3, 11–12).

Agricultural fields in the eastern delta in the area of Qantir, ancient Rameses. The Nile delta has been created by the continuous flow over the millennium of the Nile River from Lake Victoria in the south to the Mediterranean Sea. Every few centuries the flows of various Nile delta branches migrate and create new paths to the sea, as well as additional cultivatable delta land at the edge of the Mediterranean. It was in the eastern delta where the Israelites lived in Goshen. Photo: Michael Luddeni

Horus Way

There were three ancient main roads that left the Nile delta going east. One was a mining road from the southern delta near Memphis to the northern tip of the Gulf of Suez. A second exited from the eastern end of the Wadi Tumilat toward the Negev and the third was the international coastal highway (Shea 1990: 103–107; Kitchen 2003: 266–268; Hoffmeier 1996:181, 187–188; see Scolnic 2004: 95, fig.1).

The Bible is very clear that the Israelites lived in Rameses from the beginning of the Sojourn (Gn 47:11) to the Exodus (Ex 12:37). It was also the starting point for Egypt’s direct road to Canaan, a northern route running along the ancient Mediterranean coastline. Also Egypt’s military highway to the east, there were 23
fortresses garrisoned with Egyptians troops at intervals along the way. The westernmost segment of the international highway, it was called the Horus Way by the Egyptians and “the road through the Philistine country” in the Bible (Ex 13:17). While the international highway is commonly known as the Via Maris (Latin, “Way of the Sea”), recent research has demonstrated this is a modern name, not an ancient one (Beitzel 1991).

Ancient canals in the eastern delta. From early antiquity there has been interest in a link between the Mediterranean and Red Seas. Most of the early efforts were directed towards a link from the Nile to the Red Sea. Strabo and Pliny record that the earliest effort was directed by Sesostris I or III (12th Dynasty). Under Necho II (610-595 BC) a canal was built between the Pelusiac branch of the Nile and the northern end of the Bitter Lakes at a reported cost of 100,000 lives. Over many years, the canal fell into disrepair, only to be extended, abandoned, and rebuilt again. After having been neglected, it was rebuilt by the Persian ruler Darius I (522–486 BC), whose canal can still be seen along the Wadi Tumilat. It was extended to the Red Sea by Ptolemy II Philadelphus (282–246 BC), abandoned during the early Roman rule, but rebuilt again by Trajan (AD 98–117). Over the next several centuries, it once again was abandoned and sometimes dredged by various rulers for various, but limited, purposes. Amr Ibn el-As rebuilt the canal after the Islamic takeover of Egypt creating a new supply line from Cairo, but in AD 767 the Abbasid caliph El-Mansur closed the canal a final time to cut off supplies to insurgents located in the delta. Image: der Suezkanal, by Albert Ungard edler von Õthalom, taf. I (Vienna: A. Hartleben’s, 1905)

The Horus Way is pictured in relief by Pharaoh Seti I at the Karnak Temple of Amun, with eleven forts and even a waterway. With the waterway depicted vertically through the relief and Pharaoh Seti moving horizontally along the Horus Way, it can be assumed that the waterway is running north-south as the international highway heads east to Canaan. The waterway is labeled ta-denit, which means “the dividing waters.” While that name does not clarify if it is a canal or marshy lake, the very title and its north-south orientation suggest it is the border between the Nile delta (Egypt proper) and the desert to the east. Depicted as lined with reeds, it appears to at least be associated with a marshy lake (Hoffmeier 1996: 166–167).

Sitting along the Horus Road and adjacent to the waterway is a site identified as Tjaru, a large town and important fortress on Egypt’s eastern border. While structures appear on both sides of the waterway, the name
is on the desert side, an appropriate location to secure Egypt’s border. From Seti’s Karnak relief and the Egyptian text Papyrus Anastasi I, Gardiner identified 23 fortifications along the Horus Road, beginning with the border fort at Tjaru and ending with a fortress at Raphia in southern Canaan (Hoffmeier 1996: 183; 2004: 61; 2005: 41). In recent years geological and archaeological research in the North Sinai region have begun to identify many of these sites, even aligning the correct ancient names to their corresponding archaeological sites (Hoffmeier 2004: 64–65; 2005: 41).

The key site along the Horus Way to identify is Tjaru, the road’s starting point on the Egyptian border. While Tjaru does not appear in the Exodus narrative, in at least one Egyptian source it is identified with the Exodus sea crossing location. A geographical listing of sites in The Onomasticon of Amenemope records the last two sites in Egypt’s northern frontier as Tjaru and p3 twfy (the Egyptian equivalent of the Hebrew yam suph). This association suggests that at least part of the yam suph was located nearby (Hoffmeier 2004: 65–66). Such identification can also be seen in Seti’s relief at Karnak, where Tjaru is located along the reedlined waterway.

Relief depicting the Horus Way at Tjaru. Egypt’s eastern border is depicted in a relief of Pharaoh Seti I (1291–1279 BC) on the exterior of the Hypostyle Hall’s north wall in the Karnak Temple of Amun in Luxor. Two registers of reliefs contain the only known ancient depiction of the westernmost segment of the famed international coastal highway between Egypt and Gaza. It was called the Horus Way in Egypt and “the road through the Philistine country” in the Bible (Ex 13:17). Pharaoh Seti I is depicted traveling horizontally across the relief in his war chariot. In three scenes the Pharaoh is receiving tribute
from dignitaries at Raphia (the final stop on the Horus Way in Canaan), defeating the nomadic Shasu with his bow and finally triumphantly returning from Canaan surrounded by Asiatic captives. Eleven of the 23 known forts on the Horus Way between Egypt and Canaan are depicted in the scenes. The major features along the Horus Way through the desert toward Canaan are forts and accompanying water sources. In the right-hand register seen here, the highway meets a waterway running vertically through the relief. Between monumental structures on the left of the waterway is the name “Tjaru.” This was a large town and important fortress on Egypt’s eastern border, and the staging point for Egyptian military campaigns into Asia. At Tjaru a bridge crosses the waterway and there are additional buildings to the right of the bridge. The vertical waterway is labeled “the dividing waters.” It indicates the Egyptian border as well as the dividing of the green cultivated Nile delta on the east from the brown barren desert to the west. Groups of loyal Egyptian subjects waiting on the other side of the waterway indicate this is Egypt. This suggests the relief should be understood with the Egyptian border running vertically with the waterway, Egypt on the right and the Sinai desert on the left. Treating it like a map, that would put north at the bottom and east to the left. The waterway is depicted with two major features: reeds lining both banks and the water full of crocodiles. At the bottom of the waterway (north) is depicted another larger body of water with fish only (a feature seen by earlier investigators but not visible today). While neither body of water has been identified with any certainty thus far, it does illustrate the reeds of the marshy lake region that gave the sea of the Exodus narrative its name.

Understanding the Horus Way in New Kingdom Egypt offers a tangible explanation for the Biblical statement that the Israelites did not take “the road through Philistine country” (the Horus Way) directly to Gaza on the coast. In taking Egypt’s military road and facing the Egyptian-garrisoned forts along the way, together with the Egyptian army pursuing from behind, it would have been very difficult to not “change their minds and return to Egypt” (Ex 13:17). But this was not God’s plan. Instead, after leaving Pi Hahiroth and crossing the “sea” (the Egyptian border), God told the Israelites to go “by the desert road” (Ex 13:18) toward yam Suph II (Gulf of Suez) rather than into Canaan (Hoffmeier 1996: 181, 187–188). East of the border, the Israelites entered the “Desert of Shur” (Ex 15:22; 1 Sa 15:7; 27:8). Meaning “wall” in Hebrew, “Shur” may have referred to the eastern frontier canal and its accompanying embankments, in conjunction with the line of forts along the border (Scolnic 2004: 102; Hoffmeier 1996: 188). Thus, this desert was immediately on the other side of Egypt’s bordering “wall” of canals, embankments and forts. As this was the desert the Israelites entered immediately after crossing the sea (Ex 15:22), clearly the “desert of Shur” was in the northern Sinai east of the isthmus.

Recent excavations have clearly identified Tjaru, the hieroglyphic name for the important city and military installation on Egypt’s eastern border. From this fort, the Pharaohs of the 18th and 19th Dynasties launched their military campaigns into Asia. Excavations have identified the 18th Dynasty (15th–13th century BC) remains of ancient Tjaru at modern Hebuia I, just a few miles northeast of the Ballah Lake (Hoffmeier 1996: 186–187; 2004: 63; 2005: 91–104; Kitchen 2003: 260; Scolnic 2004: 112). This identification has helped scholars begin to place all the other sites prior to the sea crossing in the Exodus itinerary.
CHAPTER FOUR

New Evidence from Egypt on the Location of the Exodus Sea Crossing: Part II

Gary Byers, MA

If the Reed Sea can be located somewhere along the marshy lake district of the Isthmus of Suez (Byers 2006), which separates the cultivated delta from the barren desert, then the place names in the Exodus account can be centralized to a specific area. Everything prior to the sea crossing would have taken place in the area from the easternmost branch of Nile delta (Goshen) to the marshy lakes. Everything after the crossing was in the desert immediately to the east.

While archaeological research in the delta is severely hampered by the region's high water table, during the last two decades it has received significant attention. These results have helped clarify a number of place names in the Exodus itinerary.

Rameses

Rameses (Ex 12:37; Nm 33:3) was the starting point of the Exodus. There is no reason to doubt that Biblical Rameses is the same as Pi-Rameses in Egyptian texts (Kitchen 2003: 255; Wood 2004; Hoffmeier 2005: 53, 55). The city, whose full hieroglyphic name was "House of Ramesses, Beloved of Amun, Great of Victories," was originally built on the eastern bank of the Pelusiac, the easternmost of the Nile's five ancient branches. As the final waterway in the eastern delta before the border, there was no other significant body of water for the Israelites to cross before the sea. Because of the shifting of the delta streams over the centuries, the Pelusiac branch is dry today, but its former presence is clear from geologic probes at the site.

The author reviewing excavation plans at Ezbet Helmi, site of the royal palaces at Rameses in the time of Moses. It was discovered in the eastern Nile Delta beneath the sites of modern villages and their agricultural fields. Ongoing excavations by Manfred Bietak at the modern villages of Tell el-Dab'a and Ezbet Helmi, and Edger Pusch at Qantir have uncovered a succession of ancient cities. The earliest city here, inhabited by Semites (Asiatics), was called Rowaty. The following city, called Avaris, was also settled by Semites during the period of the Hyksos rule. The next city, at the time of the Exodus, was probably known as Peru-nefer. The final city in this area was built by Rameses the Great (1279—1212 BC) and he named it after himself. Its full name was "House of Ramesses Beloved of Amun Great of Victories." Sometime before 1069 BC, the course of the Nile migrated away from the city and the site was abandoned. Photo: Michael Luddeni
At this location, ancient cities were built and rebuilt over many centuries. Spread over eight square miles beneath the modern villages of Tell el-Dab'a, Qantir and Ezbet Helmi today are the consecutive ancient Egyptian cities of Rowaty, Avaris, Peru-nefer and Rameses.

Following the Bible's own chronology, the site was probably called Rowaty when Jacob moved there (Gn 47:11), and later Peru-nefer when they rebuilt it (Ex 1:11) and departed it in the Exodus (Ex 12:37). It was only named Rameses after Pharaoh Rameses II rebuilt it again some 200 years after the Israelites exited Egypt. This is the name that stuck (Wood 2004; Byers 2005: 4-7; Kitchen 2003: 255).

**Succoth**

Succoth (Ex 12:37; Nm 33:5—6) was the first stop (the second place mentioned in the Exodus itinerary). The Hebrew name (meaning "temporary shelters, tents" or "booths") probably corresponds to the Egyptian name tkw (Tjeku), a site known in Egyptian texts and preserved in the modern Arabic name of the village located at the ancient site, Tell el-Maskhuta. Linguistically, the hieroglyphic name is probably borrowed from Hebrew (Hoffmeier 2005: 65). Both names probably reflect a site where, from early times, Semitic-speaking people, desert clans and merchant traders camped along the Wadi Tumilat. It may not have been a permanent city, but a site of camp-style dwellings—probably structures constructed from bundles of plant stalks and branches as can still be seen in the delta region today. Such a meaning makes sense, as the Israelites would not have wanted to have to deal with an occupied Egyptian town as they were departing the country (Shea 1990: 105—106; Kitchen 2003: 257-58; Hoffmeier 1997: 179).

The fact that Tjeku was regularly written with the hieroglyphic determinatives of a throw stick (meaning "foreign") and the foreign land sign, suggests that while still in the delta and Egypt proper, it was near the border and maybe an area where foreigners lived (Hoffmeier 1997: 179; 2005: 65). While Tjeku may well have referred to a region—that is, the Wadi Tumilat area—there was probably a specific site in the region known as Succoth/Tjeku (Hoffmeier 2005: 65—68). Such a site fits with the archaeology of modern Tell el-Maskhuta, found in the Wadi Tumilat about 15 mi (24 km) southeast of Rameses (Hoffmeier 2005: 65). Fittingly, excavations at the site have not identified a city here during the time of the Exodus (18th Dynasty; mid-15th century BC).

Thus the Israelites did not leave Rameses after the final plague and head east to Canaan by the most direct and fortified route—the Horus Road. Instead, they took a route southeast to Succoth in the Wadi Tumilat, a road that led toward the Sinai (Hoffmeier 1997: 187-88; 2005: 65-68).
Tell el-Maskhuta, ancient Succoth. The first stop in the Exodus itinerary was Succoth. This Hebrew name probably corresponded to the name of the ancient Egyptian site called Tjeku. Both ancient names are still reflected in the name of the modern Arabic village Tell el-Maskhuta. Maskhuta is located at the eastern end of the Wadi Tumilat of the Nile's eastern delta, the very area the Biblical text places Succoth. At the time of the Exodus, Succoth ("booths" in Hebrew) was probably not an actual Egyptian city, but a temporary campground for Semites (Asiatics) coming into the delta from the Levant.

Etham

Etham (Ex 13:20; Nm 33:6) was the next stop after Succoth. While the origin of the Hebrew term is obscure (Hoffmeier 2005: 69—70), there is good reason to suggest that the Hebrew name originated in the name of the Egyptian god Atum (Kitchen 2003: 259). The Exodus itinerary places Etham at the eastern end of the Wadi Tumilat, and the modern Arabic name "Tumilat" also preserves the name of the same deity (Hoffmeier 2005: 62, 64, 69).

Whether a fort or another type of settlement, its specific situation "on the edge of the wilderness" suggests a location so close to the border lakes that it could be identified with the desert on the other side. Hoffmeier proposes a site just outside (east) of the Wadi Tumilat proper (2005: 70), while Kitchen suggests a location near modern Ismailiya, at the northern end of Lake Timsah (2003: 259). Either way, at this point in the Exodus, Israel appears to be at or near Egypt's eastern border.

The next stop is the critical one for placing the actual location of the Reed Sea crossing. This third stop after leaving Rameses was identified by a major shift of direction for the Israelites. The Hebrew term clearly means they "turned," but does not indicate in which direction (Ex 14:2; Nm 33:7). Their next stop was a camp site identified by four named places: Pi Hahiroth, Migdol, the sea, and Baal Zephon (Ex 14:2; 33: 7). All four Hebrew toponyms (place names) have a counterpart in New Kingdom Egyptian hieroglyphics, and they are all located in the same region. In fact, three of the four place names of Exodus 14:2 are mentioned in the same New Kingdom text.
Hoffmeier (2005: 73) points out that turning north, and traveling 31 mi (50 km) from the Lake Timsah region to the northern end of Ballah Lake, would put the Israelites in the region of modern Qantara. That is where recent northern Sinai archaeological research suggests the toponyms of Exodus 14:2 were located.

The Biblical statements are extremely precise, providing a very specific set of reference points. Scolnic notes that there is nothing close to these types of reference points to identify Mount Sinai (2004: 98). It may also be indicating that these sites should be understood to be located in a precise narrow area, each even within sight of the Israelite encampment (Scolnic 2004: 98—99).

**Pi Hahiroth**

Pi Hahiroth (Hebrew, "the mouth of the canals") may actually come as a popular Semitic etymology from an Egyptian term (Hoffmeier 2005: 105—107). Noting a toponym from Papyrus Anastasi III 2.9, Hoffmeier suggests that the Hebrew came from the hieroglyph p3 hrw, meaning "the canal" (2005: 106—107). This Egyptian name was used for a canal in the northeastern edge of the delta and it is quite reasonable that the Exodus itinerary is referring to the very same location. In addition, this is the region of Egypt where ancient canal traces have been most widely identified (Byers 2006: 18). Their presence here would have facilitated trade and provided security on Egypt's eastern border.

**Migdol**

Migdol, literally "tower" in Hebrew, was regularly used for a fortification structure. But migdol is a known loanword into Egyptian (mktr), meaning "fort," "fortification" or "stronghold" (Hoffmeier 1997:189; Scolnic 2004: 101). Its mention in the Exodus itinerary immediately before the sea crossing indicates it was nearby.

As far back as Gardiner, scholars have associated the Migdol of the Exodus itinerary with the Egyptian frontier town Migdol in Jeremiah (44:1; 46:14) and Ezekiel (29:10; 30:6), as well as Magdolo of Greco-Roman times. Recent research, however, has suggested that these migdols were located at different sites in different periods (Hoffmeier 2005: 95—96).

It is reasonable to suggest, on the other hand, that the Migdol associated with the third stop on the Exodus itinerary is identified with the Migdol of Men-maat-re (Seti I), the third fort named along the ancient Horus Way (Kitchen 2003: 261; Hoffmeier 2004: 65; 2005: 103-105; Scolnic 2004: 104). As a Semitic loanword, "migdol" becomes a significant term. Not widely found in Egyptian texts in different periods
(Hoffmeier 2004: 61; 2005: 102—103; Scolnic 2004: 102—108), the few references that we do have point to a location in Egypt's northeastern frontier along the road to Canaan.

On the ground in the northeastern delta region, our present knowledge of the region suggests the best candidate for the Migdol of the Horus Way is found at a site known as T78 (Hoffmeier 2005: 102). While this identification is not yet fixed, the route of the Horus Way is certain and Migdol's precise location has been narrowed to within just a few kilometers at the southern tip of an ancient lagoon on the Mediterranean coastline (Hoffmeier 2004: 65-66; 2005: 102-104; Scolnic 2004: 119120).

Reference to a Migdol in the Exodus account in the same region and at the same time period suggests a correlation between the two sites. That would make it possible to fix the location of the Migdol of the Exodus in a precise area just to the northeast of the Ballah Lakes.

Migdol of Men-maat-re (Seti I), most likely the Migdol of Exodus 14:2. It was the third fortress along Egypt's Horus Way, depicted between the hind legs and tails of Seti I's chariot horses (E) in the Karnak relief of his campaign to Canaan (see Bible and Spade, winter 2006, page 21). The fort is shown with crenelated walls and an adjacent pool of water. Locating this fortress is critical to determining the Exodus sea crossing locale. Since the border fortress of Tjaru, the first fortress on the Seti I relief (B-C), has been identified as Hebua I by means of an inscription, the second fortress, "Dwelling of the Lion" (D), is most likely Tell el-Borg, and the third fortress, Migdol, is probably Site T-78, a New Kingdom site ca. 5 mi (8 km) northeast of Ballah Lake. If this location is correct, it would place the Exodus sea crossing at the northern end of the Ballah Lake.

Baal Zéphon

Baal Zéphon (Hebrew, "Baal of the North") is the deity from the pantheon of Ugarit and famous as one of the gods of Canaan in the Old Testament. Worship of this Semitic god was allowed in pantheistic Egypt, but never included in the pantheon of native Egyptian gods. Baal worship was known in the northeast delta where
Egypt is nearest to Canaan and where a large percentage of the population was probably Semite soldiers, sailors, merchants and travelers (Hoffmeier 1997: 190).

Although "north" could refer to the northeastern delta area, it may relate to the region where Baal worship originated—the mountainous region of the Levant. While Baal Zepphon may conjure up an image of worship in conjunction with a mountain, such an identification is not necessary.

While a sixth-fifth century BC Phoenician papyrus presented Baal Zepphon as the principal deity of Tahpanhes, Hoffmeier notes that Jeremiah (2:16; 43:7—9; 44:1; 46: 14) and Ezekiel (30:18) do not call the city Baal Zepphon, but Tahpanhes (2005: 107). The Arabic-named archaeological site Tell Defeneh (probably a corruption of Tahpanhes), in the Ballah Lake area today, has had very little excavation. To date, however, the archaeological evidence from the site does not support an identification with Baal Zepphon.

Map of the northeast delta. Based on the most recent research from Egypt, place names of the Exodus narrative prior to the sea crossing can now be placed on the map. Departing Rameses, the Israelites did not take the northern international highway (the Horus Way = 'the road through the Philistine country," Ex 13:17) toward Canaan. Instead they traveled south to the Wadi Tumilat and then east past Succoth to Etham. At God's direction, from here they "turned back" to the north and went up the west side of the ancient Ballah Lake. Somewhere at the northern end of the lake, not far from the ancient Mediterranean coastline, were the sites of Pi Hahiroth, Migdol and Baal Zepphon. Taking the Exodus narrative at face value, and utilizing the most recent archaeological research from Egypt along with place names from Egyptian texts during the same period, evidence suggests the Reed Sea crossing was in the area of Abu Sefeh, modern Qantara, at the northern end of the Ballah Lake.
Instead, Hoffmeier again points to the Papyrus Anastasi Ill 2.8, where a broken part of the text speaks of "the waters of Baal" (2005: 102—103). Like Pi-Hahiroth/p3 hrw, it is associated with water and located in the northeastern delta area. While the specific location and exact nature of Baal Zephon is unclear in both Exodus 14:2 and the Papyrus Anastasi Ill, they both put a "Baal" site in the same area at the same time.

Summary

The Exodus itinerary indicates the Israelites departed Rameses but did not take the Horus Road that began at Rameses and was the direct route to Canaan. Instead, they headed southeast through the delta to Succoth in the Wadi Tumilat. Following the route eastward toward the desert, they stopped again at Etham facing Egypt's border and the desert on the other side. At this point, the Bible says the Israelites turned, and the simplest understanding of the text suggests the direction was "back" (Hoffmeier (2005: 71—72). The specific direction is not indicated, but it is clarified by the place names at their next stop. While a turn to the south would put the Israelites at the Gulf of Suez, recent research from excavation and surveys in the region indicate they turned north (Shea 1990: 108; Scolnic 2004:97-99; Hoffmeier 2005:72-73). It was a choice made at God's direction and which, apparently, pleased Pharaoh (Ex 14:3).

After the critical "turn back" to the north of Exodus 14:2, the Israelites' next stop is identified by four toponyms: Pi Hahiroth, Migdol, the sea and Baal Zephon. All four Hebrew names have hieroglyphic counterparts for locations in the delta's northeast corner. Three (Pi Hahiroth, the sea and Baal Zephon) are found in the same text (Papyrus Anastasis Ill), and each relates to a body of water. As Hoffmeier notes, the convergence of all three terms, each relating to a body of water in the northeast delta region, is quite remarkable (2005: 106—108). Migdol is mentioned in several New Kingdom texts. The fact that these texts are from the same general period (New Kingdom Egypt) only heightens the connection. All the names point to the area between Ballah Lake and the ancient Mediterranean coastline for the location of events in the Exodus narrative.

At this point Pharaoh's army overtook the Israelites. Unable to go forward because of the sea and feeling trapped, the Israelites confronted Moses (Ex 14:11—12). There, in an area along Egypt's border in the delta's northeastern corner and facing the "Reed Sea" God performed a miracle and led them supernaturally across Egypt's border into the desert of Shur. Taking the Exodus account as historical, and utilizing all the recent research from excavations and hieroglyphic textual studies, it appears that the miracle took place in the northeastern corner of the Suez Isthmus. The Reed Sea that was crossed would most likely have been the ancient Ballah Lake, a large body of water that is no longer there, since it was drained during construction of the Suez Canal (Byers 2006: 15).
Conclusion

Many of the sites named in the Exodus itinerary have been connected to their counterpart Egyptian names as a result of recent textual and archaeological research. With the help of geological and topographical surveys we are now able locate them in the eastern delta region. For the first time, scholars are able to locate these sites on the map and trace out the Exodus route in the Nile's eastern delta.

Admittedly, our present archaeological, geological and textual knowledge is not sufficient to understand each name or pinpoint its location precisely on the ground. But research in that region is expanding rapidly. Literally every year we are getting new insights into that region's rich Egyptian history and its connection to the Bible. This research is consistently demonstrating a correlation with our understanding of the Old Testament in general, and with the Exodus narrative in particular.

If the Exodus itinerary is to be taken seriously as a historical document, then the location of these place names in the Wadi Tumilat and the northern Suez Isthmus makes it the most likely location for the yam suph crossing. At a critical juncture in the Exodus, apparently very near Egypt's eastern border, the Israelites turned north. Consequently, the "Reed Sea" would have been one of the large lakes sitting on Egypt's eastern border. With the presently available evidence, the ancient equivalent to the modern Ballah Lake seems most reasonable to this writer.

Naming of the sea crossed in the Exodus as the "Red Sea" was an unfortunate choice. Not a translation, but an historical interpretation, it has kept serious Bible students from looking in the correct location for solid evidence of the Exodus. But today, the most recent research from Egypt is providing a historical basis for one of the most important events in the Old Testament.
CHAPTER FIVE

The Rise and Fall of the 13th Century Exodus-Conquest Theory

_Bryant G. Wood, PhD_

The 13th century exodus-conquest theory was formulated by William F. Albright in the 1930s, based largely on Palestinian archaeological evidence, and promoted by him throughout his career. In the years following Albright’s death in 1971, however, evidence for the proposal dissipated and most Palestinian archaeologists abandoned the idea. In spite of the fact that the theory runs counter to Scripture, a number of evangelicals continue to hold to this view, prompting Carl G. Rasmussen to comment, “the Late-Date Exodus/Conquest Model has been abandoned by many scholars...it seems that currently the major adherents to the Late-Date Exodus/Conquest Model are some evangelicals!” A strong advocate of the theory is Kenneth A. Kitchen, who recently gave a detailed exposition of it in his On the Reliability of the Old Testament.

I. BASIS FOR THE 13TH CENTURY EXODUS-CONQUEST THEORY

Albright used three sites as evidence for a conquest in the late 13th century BC: Tell Beit Mirsim, which he identified as Debir, Beitin, identified as Bethel, and Lachish. All three were excavated in the 1930s and in each case a violent destruction layer was found which was dated to the end of the 13th century BC. At both Tell Beit Mirsim and Beitin the destruction of a relatively prosperous Late Bronze Age city was followed by a much poorer Iron Age I culture, which Albright identified as Israelite. At Lachish, on the other hand, the destruction was followed by a period of abandonment. Albright assigned a hieratic inscription dated to “regnal year four” found at Lachish to the fourth year of Merenptah and used it to date the conquest to ca. 1230 BC, based on the high Egyptian chronology in use at the time.

A fourth major site was added to the list when Yigael Yadin excavated Hazor in the 1950s. Again, a violent destruction occurred toward the end of the 13th century BC. This was followed by a period of abandonment, which, in turn, was followed by a poor Iron Age I settlement.

II. LOSS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

For the 13th century exodus-conquest theory to be valid, the Palestinian destructions would have to occur prior to the fourth year of Merenptah, ca. 1210 BC, as Israel was settled in Canaan by this time according to Merenptah’s famous stela. A detailed analysis of the pottery associated with the destruction levels of Tell Beit Mirsim and Beitin, however, reveals that these sites were destroyed in the early 12th century, probably at the hands of the Philistines, ca. 1177 BC. Inscriptional evidence found at Lachish in the 1970s indicates that it was destroyed even later, ca. 1160 BC. Recent excavations at Hazor, on the other hand, have sustained the ca.
1230 BC date for the demise of the Late Bronze Age city. But was that destruction at the hands of Joshua, or Deborah and Barak?

Only three cities are recorded as having been destroyed by fire by the Israelites: Jericho (Josh 6:24), Ai (Josh 8:28), and Hazor (Josh 11:11). All three pose problems for a late 13th century conquest. At Jericho and Ai, no evidence has been found for occupation in the late 13th century, let alone for a destruction at that time. Assigning the 1230 BC destruction at Hazor to Joshua results in a major conflict with the biblical narrative. Following the 1230 BC destruction, there was no urban center there until the time of Solomon in the 10th century BC (1 Kgs 9:15).

The defeat of Jabin, king of Hazor, by a coalition of Hebrew tribes under the leadership of Deborah and Barak is recorded in Judg 4–5. Judg 4:24 indicates that the Israelites destroyed Hazor at this time: “And the hand of the Israelites grew stronger and stronger against Jabin, the Canaanite king, until they destroyed him”. If Joshua destroyed Hazor in 1230 BC, then there would be no city for the Jabin of Judges 4 to rule.

Five other sites in Cisjordan were destroyed toward the end of the 13th century BC: Gezer, Aphek, Megiddo, Beth Shan, and Tell Abu Hawam. The ancient name of Tell Abu Hawam is unknown, so nothing can be said relative to its role in the conquest. The other four sites, however, are singled out in the biblical narrative as cities the Israelites could not conquer.

III. ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS WITH A 13TH-CENTURY EXODUS-CONQUEST

1. Biblical Chronology

The internal chronological data in the Hebrew Bible clearly supports a mid-15th century BC date for the exodus. The primary datum is 1 Kgs 6:1 which states, “In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites had come out of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, the second month, he began to build the temple of the Lord.” Working back from Solomon’s fourth year, ca. 966 BC, brings us to ca. 1446 BC for the date of the exodus. The Jubilees data support an exodus date of 1446 BC as well.

In addition, Judg 11:26 argues for a 15th century exodus-conquest. In this passage Jephthah stated in a letter to the king of Ammon, “for three hundred years Israel occupied Heshbon, Aroer, the surrounding settlements and all the towns along the Arnon.” Although it is not possible to calculate precise dates for Jephthah, various scholars have estimated the beginning of his judgeship between 1130 and 1073 BC, so the implication is that the tribe of Reuben had been occupying the disputed area from the Wadi Hesban to the Arnon River since ca. 1400 BC.
2. Egyptian History

Kitchen dates the conquest to 1220–1210 BC and consequently the exodus to 1260 BC, early in the reign of Rameses II (1279–1213 BC). One of the main arguments for an early 13th century date for the exodus is the mention of the name Rameses in Exod 1:11 (see below). If the Israelites built a store city named after Rameses II, then the exodus must have occurred during his reign. But if we look carefully at the chronology of the exodus events we see that this argument is flawed. Exod 1 presents a series of events: oppression (including the building of Pithom and Rameses, vs. 11), increase in Israelite population (vs. 12a), fear of the Israelites on the part of the Egyptians (vs. 12b), command to kill all newborn Israelite males (vs. 16). This series of events is then followed by the birth of Moses (Exod 2:1). Since Moses was 80 years of age at the time of the exodus (Exod 7:7), the building of Rameses would have taken place well before Moses’ birth in 1340 BC (according to the 13th century theory), long before Rameses came to the throne. In fact, since Rameses II was 25 years of age when he began his rule, the Israelites built the store city called “Rameses” before Rameses II was even born!

In addition, the Bible strongly implies that the Pharaoh of the exodus perished in the yam sūp. As the Egyptians were closing in on the Israelites at the yam sūp, the Lord said to Moses, “The Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen” (Exod 14:18). Then, after the Israelites had crossed the yam sūp, “The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea” (Exod 14:23). The water then covered “the entire army of Pharaoh,” such that “not one of them survived” (Exod 14:28). More explicit are Pss 106:11, “The waters covered their adversaries; not one of them survived” and 136:15, “[the Lord] swept Pharaoh and his army into the yam sūp.” Obviously, Rameses II did not drown in the yam sūp, as he died of natural causes some 47 years after the presumed exodus date of 1260 BC.

IV. KITCHEN’S DEFENSE OF THE 13TH CENTURY EXODUS-CONQUEST THEORY

1. Arguments for the Theory

Kitchen gives three reasons why the exodus and conquest occurred in the 13th century BC.

a. Mention of Rameses in Exodus 1:11

Since the Israelites were employed to build a city which is called “Rameses” in Exod 1:11, Kitchen and those who hold to a 13th century exodus presume it was the delta capital Pi-Ramesse built by Rameses II. As pointed out above, however, the Israelites were employed as slave laborers to construct the store cities prior to the reign of Rameses II. It is clear, then, that the name Rameses used in Exod 1:11 is an editorial updating of an earlier name that went out of use. There was a long history of occupation in the area of Pi-Ramesse, with
several names being given to the various cities there. The name Pi-Ramesse was in use from the time of Rameses II until ca. 1130 BC when the site was abandoned, possibly due to silting of the Pelusiac branch of the Nile. A new capital was then established at Tanis 12 mi. northeast.

Editorial updating of names that had gone out of use is not uncommon in the Hebrew Bible. Other examples are Bethel, named by Jacob in Gen 28:19, but used proleptically in Gen 12:8 and 13:3; Dan, named by the Danites in Judg 18:29 and used proleptically in Gen 14:14; and Samaria, named by Omri in 1 Kgs 16:24 and used proleptically in 1 Kgs 13:32. Kitchen allows for editorial updating of the name Rameses in Gen 47:11, and Dan in Gen 14:14, but not for Rameses in Exod 1:11.

b. Covenant Format

Based on the formats of ancient Near East treaties, laws, and covenants from the period 2500–650 BC, Kitchen has concluded that the Sinai covenant documents of Exod, Lev, Deut, and the renewal in Josh 24, most closely match late second millennium (ca. 1400–1200 BC) Hittite treaties (see Table 1). However, when one looks at the formats found in the biblical covenant texts, it is seen that they are highly fluid and change continually throughout. Exodus and Leviticus are largely stipulations and religious regulations, interspersed with narrative and elements of covenant terminology. Deuteronomy is a discourse by Moses, with stipulations, and interspersed with elements of covenant terminology. The focus of Josh 24 is a call to be faithful to Yahweh, couched in covenant terminology. The biblical covenant documents do not follow any set format, as seen in Tables 2–4.

Table 1: Second Millennium BC Covenant Formats in the Ancient Near East

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ca. 1800–1700 BC</th>
<th>ca. 1600–1400 BC</th>
<th>ca. 1400–1200 BC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mari/Leilan</td>
<td>North Syria</td>
<td>Hittites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witness/Oaths</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stipulations</td>
<td>Stipulations</td>
<td>Witnesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curses</td>
<td>Curses</td>
<td>Stipulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oath</td>
<td>Deposit/Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curses</td>
<td>Witnesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Curses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Blessings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2: Covenant Format of Exodus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1:1–19:3a Narrative</th>
<th>23:25–31 Blessings</th>
<th>34:10a Preamble</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19:3b Preamble</td>
<td>23:32–33 Stipulations</td>
<td>34:10b–11 Blessings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19:4 Historical Prologue</td>
<td>24:1–2 Narrative</td>
<td>34:12–23 Stipulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19:5–6 Blessing</td>
<td>24:3a Recitation (=Reading)</td>
<td>34:24 Blessings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19:7 Recitation (=Reading)</td>
<td>24:3b Oath</td>
<td>34:25–26 Stipulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19:8 Oath</td>
<td>24:4–6 Ceremony</td>
<td>34:27–28 Epilogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19:9–25 Narrative</td>
<td>24:7a Reading</td>
<td>34:29–31 Narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20:1 Preamble</td>
<td>24:7b Oath</td>
<td>34:32 Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20:2 Historical Prologue</td>
<td>24:8–11 Ceremony</td>
<td>34:33–35 Narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20:3–17 Stipulations</td>
<td>24:12–18 Narrative</td>
<td>35:1 Preamble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20:18–21 Narrative</td>
<td>25:1 Preamble</td>
<td>35:2–3 Stipulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20:22b Historical Prologue</td>
<td>25:16 Deposit</td>
<td>35:5–19 Religious Regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21:1 Preamble</td>
<td>25:21 Deposit</td>
<td>40:20 Deposit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23:20–23 Blessings</td>
<td>31:18 Epilogue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23:24 Stipulations</td>
<td>32:1–34:9 Narrative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3: Covenant Format of Leviticus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1:1–2a Preamble</th>
<th>13:59 Epilogue</th>
<th>22:33 Historical Epilogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:2b–3:17 Religious Regulations</td>
<td>14:1–2 Preamble</td>
<td>23:1–2a Preamble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:1–2a Sub Preamble 1</td>
<td>14:3–31 Stipulations</td>
<td>23:2b–22 Religious Regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:15–19 Religious Regulations</td>
<td>14:34–53 Stipulations</td>
<td>23:26 Preamble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:1</td>
<td>Sub Preamble 1</td>
<td>14:54–57 Epilogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:8</td>
<td>Sub Preamble 1</td>
<td>15:2b–31 Stipulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:19</td>
<td>Sub Preamble 1</td>
<td>16:1–2a Preamble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:24</td>
<td>Sub Preamble 1</td>
<td>16:34 Epilogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:1</td>
<td>Sub Preamble 2</td>
<td>17:3–16 Stipulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:2–10</td>
<td>Religious Regulations</td>
<td>18:1–2a Preamble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:11</td>
<td>Sub Preamble 2</td>
<td>18:2b–29 Stipulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:12–21</td>
<td>Religious Regulations</td>
<td>18:30 Epilogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:22</td>
<td>Sub Preamble 1</td>
<td>19:1–2a Preamble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:28</td>
<td>Sub Preamble 1</td>
<td>19:37 Epilogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:29–36</td>
<td>Religious Regulations</td>
<td>20:1–2a Preamble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8–10</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>21:1a Preamble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:2b–44</td>
<td>Stipulations</td>
<td>21:24 Recitation (=Reading)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:45</td>
<td>Historical Epilogue</td>
<td>22:1 Preamble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:1–2a</td>
<td>Preamble</td>
<td>22:17–18a Preamble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:7b–8</td>
<td>Epilogue</td>
<td>22:26 Preamble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:1</td>
<td>Preamble</td>
<td>22:27–30 Religious Regulations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Covenant Format of Deuteronomy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deuteronomy Verse Ranges</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Deuteronomy Verse Ranges</th>
<th>Format</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:1–2a</td>
<td>Preamble</td>
<td>13:59 Epilogue</td>
<td>22:33 Historical Epilogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:2b–3:17</td>
<td>Religious Regulations</td>
<td>14:1–2 Preamble</td>
<td>23:1–2a Preamble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:1–2a</td>
<td>Sub Preamble 1</td>
<td>14:3–31 Stipulations</td>
<td>23:2b–22 Religious Regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:15–19</td>
<td>Religious Regulations</td>
<td>14:34–53 Stipulations</td>
<td>23:26 Preamble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:1</td>
<td>Sub Preamble 1</td>
<td>14:54–57 Epilogue</td>
<td>23:27–32 Religious Regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:8</td>
<td>Sub Preamble 1</td>
<td>15:2b–31 Stipulations</td>
<td>23:34b–42 Religious Regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:19</td>
<td>Sub Preamble 1</td>
<td>16:1–2a Preamble</td>
<td>23:44 Recitation (=Reading)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:24</td>
<td>Sub Preamble 1</td>
<td>16:34 Epilogue</td>
<td>24:2–9 Religious Regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:1</td>
<td>Sub Preamble 2</td>
<td>17:3–16 Stipulations</td>
<td>25:1–2a Preamble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:2–10</td>
<td>Religious Regulations</td>
<td>18:1–2a Preamble</td>
<td>25:2b–17 Stipulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:11</td>
<td>Sub Preamble 2</td>
<td>18:2b–29 Stipulations</td>
<td>25:18–22 Blessings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:12–21</td>
<td>Religious Regulations</td>
<td>18:30 Epilogue</td>
<td>25:23–37 Stipulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:22</td>
<td>Sub Preamble 1</td>
<td>19:1–2a Preamble</td>
<td>25:38 Historical Interjection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:28</td>
<td>Sub Preamble 1</td>
<td>19:37 Epilogue</td>
<td>25:55 Historical Interjection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:29–36</td>
<td>Religious Regulations</td>
<td>20:1–2a Preamble</td>
<td>26:1–2 Stipulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8–10</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>21:1a Preamble</td>
<td>26:13 Historical Interjection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:2b–44</td>
<td>Stipulations</td>
<td>21:24 Recitation (=Reading)</td>
<td>26:40–44 Blessings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:45</td>
<td>Historical Epilogue</td>
<td>22:1 Preamble</td>
<td>26:45 Historical Epilogue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kitchen has selected portions from Exod–Lev, Deut, and Josh 24, and rearranged them to match the late second millennium Hittite treaty format, with the exception of the order of blessings and curses. An example of this methodology is presented in Table 5. The result is an artificial format that does not correspond to the reality of the biblical texts. Kitchen has merely manipulated the biblical data to support his preconceived conclusion as to when the exodus took place. The format of the biblical material is varied and complex and cannot be dated to a particular time period based on ANE treaty formats.

Table 5: Comparison of Kitchen’s Rearranged Covenant Format With the Actual Format of Joshua 24

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kitchen’s Rearranged Format</th>
<th>Actual Format</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2a Title/Preamble</td>
<td>2a Preamble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b–13 Historical Prologue</td>
<td>2b–13 Historical Prologue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14–15 Stipulations</td>
<td>14–15 Stipulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 Depositing Text</td>
<td>16–18 Oath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22, 27 Witness</td>
<td>19–20 Curses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20c Blessings (implied)</td>
<td>21 Oath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19–20b Curses</td>
<td>22 Witnesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23 Stipulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24 Oath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25–26a Depositing Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26b–27 Witness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 Early Second Millennium BC Law Code Formats in the Ancient Near East

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lipit-Ishtar (ca. 1926 BC) and Hammurabi (ca. 1760 BC)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preamble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prologue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Moreover, oaths, which are an important component of the biblical covenant (Exod 19:8; 24:3b, 7b; Josh 24:16–18, 21, 24), only are found in Hittite treaties from 1600–1400 BC, not in the 1400–1200 BC treaties Kitchen claims are the closest to the biblical format (see Table 1).

c. Lack of a Royal Residence in the Delta

It is clear from the narrative of Exod 2–14 that there was a royal residence in the eastern delta where the Israelites were residing at the time of the exodus. Moses was rescued from the Nile and later adopted by a royal princess (Exod 2:5–10); after returning from Midian, Moses confronted Pharaoh, both in his palace and on the banks of the Nile; and the Israelite foremen appeared before Pharaoh (Exod 5:15–21). Kitchen claims there was no royal center in the vicinity of Pi-Ramesse from the time of the expulsion of the Hyksos, ca. 1555 BC, until Horemhab began rebuilding, ca. 1320 BC. “Thus an exodus before 1320 would have no Delta capital to march from.”

This is not the case. Excavations at Ezbet Helmi, a little over a mile southwest of Pi-Ramesse, from ca. 1990 to the present, have revealed a large royal compound occupying some 10 acres. The compound was located just south of where the Pelusiac branch of the Nile flowed in antiquity, bearing out the biblical depiction of the royal palace being in close proximity to the Nile. It consisted of two palaces and other building complexes that were in use during the early 18th Dynasty. The northwestern palace, Palace F, originally built in the late Hyksos period, was constructed on a 230 x 150 ft. platform approximately 100 ft. from the riverbank. A ramp on the northeast side gave access to the palace. To the northeast of Palace F was a middle class settlement, including workshops. A series of royal scarabs were found there, covering the period of the early 18th Dynasty from its founder, Ahmosis (ca. 1570–1546 BC), to Amenhotep II (ca. 1453–1419 BC). Southwest of Palace F were storage rooms and possibly part of a ritual complex.
Figure 1. Royal citadel of Moses’ time at Ezbet Helmi. Excavations by the Austrian Archaeological Institute in Cairo under the direction of Manfred Bietak have uncovered a walled-in area of ca. 10 acres enclosing a complex of buildings made of mud brick, including two major palaces, workshops, military areas, and storage and cultic facilities. (Based on Bietak, Dorner and Jánosi “Ausgrabungen 1993–2000,” figs. 4, 33 and 34b.)
The main palace, Palace G, was located 255 ft. southeast of Palace F, with an open courtyard between the two. Palace G occupied an area 259 x 543 ft., or 3 ¼ acres. To the immediate southwest were workshops and further to the southwest were city-like buildings. Palace G was built on a platform 23 ft. high with entry via a ramp on the northeast side. The entrance led into a large open courtyard 150 ft. square with columns on three sides. Proceeding to the southwest, one passed through three rows of columns into a vestibule that had two rows of columns. This marked the beginning of the palace proper, which probably had one or more stories above. The vestibule led into a hypostyle hall to the northwest and a reception hall with four rows of columns to the southwest. It was undoubtedly here in this reception hall where Moses and Aaron met with Pharaoh. Beyond these rooms were the private apartments of the royal family. These would have included private reception rooms, banquet rooms, dressing rooms, bathrooms and sleeping quarters.

2. Treatment of the Biblical Chronological Data

a. 1 Kings 6:1

To explain the 480 years of 1 Kgs 6:1, Kitchen appeals to the oft-repeated explanation that the figure is not a total time span, but rather 12 generations made up of ideal (or “full” as Kitchen says) generations of 40 years each. There is no basis for such an interpretation, biblical or otherwise. Nowhere in the Bible is it hinted that a “full” or ideal generation was 40 years in length. Quite the contrary, in the Hebrew Bible 40 years is often stipulated as a standard period of elapsed time. Moreover, there were more than 12 generations between the exodus and Solomon. In 1 Chr 6:33–37, 18 generations are listed from Korah, who opposed Moses (Num 16; cf. Exod 6:16–21), to Heman, a Temple musician in the time of David (1 Chr 6:31; 15:16–17). Adding one generation to extend the genealogy to Solomon results in 19 generations from the exodus to Solomon, not 12. Using Kitchen’s estimated length of a generation of ca. 25 years yields a total estimated time span of 475 years, a figure that compares well with the 480 years of 1 Kgs 6:1.

Umberto Cassuto made a study of the use of numbers in the Hebrew Bible. He discovered that when a number is written in ascending order (e.g., twenty and one hundred), the number is intended to be a technically precise figure, “since the tendency to exactness in these instances causes the smaller numbers to be given precedence and prominence.” Conversely, numbers written in descending order (e.g., one hundred and twenty), are non-technical numbers found in narrative passages, poems, speeches, etc. The number in 1 Kgs 6:1 is written in ascending order, “in the eightieth year and four hundredth year,” and thus is to be understood as a precise number according to standard Hebrew usage, not as a schematic or symbolic number as some would have it.
b. Judges 11:26

Since there is no convenient way to dispose of the 300 year time period from the conquest to Jephthah in Judg 11:26, Kitchen resorts to an ad hominem argument; it was so much hyperbole from an “ignorant man”:

Brave fellow that he was, Jephthah was a roughneck, an outcast and not exactly the kind of man who would scruple first to take a Ph.D. in local chronology at some ancient university of the Yarmuk before making strident claims to the Ammonite ruler. What we have is nothing more than the report of a brave but ignorant man’s bold bluster in favor of his people, not a mathematically precise chronological datum.51 ...For blustering Jephthah’s propagandistic 300 years (Judg. 11:26)...it is fatuous to use this as a serious chronological datum.52

The fact of the matter is that Judg 11:26 comports well with the other chronological data in the Hebrew Bible, as well as external data, to support a 15th century exodus-conquest.

3. Treatment of the Palestinian Archaeological Data

a. Jericho

Kitchen attributes the lack of evidence for 13th century occupation at Jericho to erosion: “There may well have been a Jericho during 1275-1220, but above the tiny remains of that of 1400-1275, so to speak, and all of this has long, long since gone. We will never find ‘Joshua’s Jericho’ for that very simple reason.” 53 Jericho has been intensely excavated by four major expeditions over the last century and no evidence has been found, in tombs or on the tell, for occupation in the 13th century BC. Even in the case of erosion, pottery does not disappear; it is simply washed to the base of the tell where it can be recovered and dated by archaeologists. No 13th century BC pottery has been found at Jericho. A very good stratigraphic profile of the site was preserved on the southeast slope, referred to as “Spring Hill” since it is located above the copious spring at the base of the southeast side of the site. The sequence runs from the Early Bronze I period, ca. 3000 BC, to Iron Age II, ca. 600 BC, with a noticeable gap ca. 1320–1100 BC.54

b. Ai

With regard to the new discoveries at Kh. el-Maqatir,55 Kitchen comments, “The recently investigated Khirbet el-Maqatir does not (yet?) have the requisite archaeological profile to fit the other total data.” 56 The “requisite archaeological profile” for Kitchen is, of course, evidence for 13th century BC occupation. Similar to Jericho, there was a gap in occupation at Kh. el-Maqatir in the Late Bronze II period, ca. 1400–1177 BC.

c. Hazor

Kitchen attempts to deal with the problem pointed out above, namely, if Hazor was destroyed ca. 1230 BC, there would be no city for the Jabin of Judg 4 to rule and for Deborah and Barak to conquer, since Hazor was not rebuilt until the tenth century BC. His solution is that following the 1230 BC destruction, the ruling
dynasty of Hazor moved their capital elsewhere: “after Joshua’s destruction of Hazor [in 1230 BC], Jabin I’s successors had to reign from another site in Galilee but kept the style of king of the territory and kingdom of Hazor.” But where would this new capital be located? Kitchen does not suggest a candidate. Surveys in the region have determined that there was a gap in occupation in the area of Hazor and the Upper Galilee from ca. 1230 BC to ca. 1100 BC, ruling out Kitchen’s imaginative theory. The Bible clearly states that Deborah and Barak fought “Jabin, a king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor” (Judg 4:2), who is also referred to as “Jabin king of Hazor” (Judg 4:17). The simple (and biblical) solution is that Joshua destroyed an earlier city at Hazor (see below) in ca. 1400 BC, while Deborah and Barak administered the coup de grâce in ca. 1230 BC.

V. THE BIBLICAL MODEL FOR THE EXODUS-CONQUEST

If the biblical data are used as primary source material for constructing a model for the exodus-conquest-settlement phase of Israelite history, a satisfactory correlation is achieved between biblical history and external archaeological and historical evidence, as outlined below.

1. Date of the Exodus-Conquest

As reviewed above, the internal chronological data of the Hebrew Bible (1 Kgs 6:1; Judg 11:26, and 1 Chr 6:33–37) consistently support a date of 1446 BC for the exodus from Egypt and, consequently, a date of 1406–1400 BC for the conquest of Canaan. External supporting evidence for this dating comes from the Talmud. There, the last two Jubilees are recorded which allows one to back calculate to the first year of the first Jubilee cycle as 1406 BC.

2. Support from Palestinian Archaeology

Evidence from the three sites that were destroyed by the Israelites during the conquest, i.e., Jericho, Ai, and Hazor, correlates well with the biblical date and descriptions of those destructions. Moreover, evidence for Eglon’s palace at Jericho (Judg 3:12–30), dating to ca. 1300 BC, and the destruction of Hazor by Deborah and Barak ca. 1230 BC (Judg 4:24) during the Judges period also support a late 15th century BC date for the conquest.

3. Support from Egyptian Archaeology

a. Rameses

The area of Pi-Ramesse in the eastern delta has not only revealed evidence for a royal residence from the early 18th Dynasty, the time period of Moses according to biblical chronology, but also for a mid-19th century BC Asiatic settlement that could well be that of Jacob and his family shortly after their arrival in Egypt. This supports a 15th century exodus, as Jacob would have entered Egypt much later, in ca. 1700 BC, with a 13th century exodus.
b. Amarna Letters

The ‘apiru of the highlands of Canaan described in the Amarna Letters of the mid-14th century BC, conform to the biblical Israelites. The Canaanite kings remaining in the land wrote desperate messages to Pharaoh asking for help against the ‘apiru, who were “taking over” the lands of the king.\(^{64}\) Since the Israelites under Deborah and Barak were able to overthrow the largest city-state in Canaan in ca. 1230 BC\(^{65}\) and the Merenptah Stela indicates that Israel was the most powerful people group in Canaan in ca. 1210 BC,\(^{66}\) it stands to reason that the ‘apiru who were taking over the highlands in the previous century were none other than the Israelites.

c. Israel in Egyptian Inscriptions

The mention of Israel in the Merenptah stela demonstrates that the 12 tribes were firmly established in Canaan by 1210 BC. It now appears that there is an even earlier mention of Israel in an Egyptian inscription. A column base fragment in the Egyptian Museum in Berlin preserves three names from a longer name list. The first two names clearly can be read as Ashkelon and Canaan, with the orthography suggesting a date in the 18th Dynasty.\(^{67}\) Manfred Görg has translated the third, partially preserved, name as Israel.\(^{68}\) Due to the similarity of these names to the names on the Merenptah stela, Görg suggests the name list may derive from the time of Rameses II, but adopting an older name sequence from the 18th Dynasty. This evidence, if it holds up to further scrutiny, would also support a 15th century BC exodus-conquest rather than a 13th century BC timeframe.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

With new discoveries and additional analysis, the arguments for a 13th century exodus-conquest have steadily eroded since the death of its founder and main proponent William F. Albright in 1971. Although Kenneth A. Kitchen has made a determined effort to keep the theory alive, there is no valid evidence, biblical or extra-biblical, to sustain it. Biblical data clearly place the exodus-conquest in the 15th century BC and extra-biblical evidence strongly supports this dating. Since the 13th century exodus-conquest model is no longer tenable, evangelicals should abandon the theory.
CHAPTER SIX

The Walls of Jericho

Bryant G. Wood, PhD

Jericho was once thought to be a 'Bible problem' because of the seeming disagreement between archaeology and the Bible. When the archaeology is correctly interpreted, however, the opposite is the case. The archaeological evidence supports the historical accuracy of the Biblical account in every detail. Every aspect of the story that could possibly be verified by the findings of archaeology is, in fact, verified...

When one hears the name 'Jericho' one naturally thinks of Israelites marching, trumpets sounding and walls falling. It is a wonderful story of faith and victory that we enjoy reading and telling in Sunday School class, but did it really happen? The skeptic would say no, it is merely a folk tale to explain the ruins at Jericho. The reason for this negative outlook is the excavation carried out at the site in the 1950s under the direction of British archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon. She concluded,

It is a sad fact that of the town walls of the Late Bronze Age, within which period the attack by the Israelites must fall by any dating, not a trace remains….The excavation of Jericho, therefore, has thrown no light on the walls of Jericho of which the destruction is so vividly described in the Book of Joshua (Kenyon 1957: 261-62).

Thomas A. Holland, who was editor and co-author of Kenyon's excavation reports, summarized the apparent results as follows:

Kenyon concluded, with reference to the military conquest theory and the L[ate] B[ronze Age] walls, that there was no archaeological data to support the thesis that the town had been surrounded by a wall at the end of LB I (ca. 1400 BCE...) (Holland 1997: 223).

H.J. Franken, a member of the Jericho excavation staff, stated,

Miss Kenyon's work has presented scholars with the hard fact that if Joshua was active with the incoming Israelites either c. 1400 or c. 1200 B.C. he would not have been able to capture a great walled city of Jericho, because there was no city of Jericho in these periods…the huge ruins of the Hyksos city gave rise to the folktale attached to the hero Joshua (1965: 190, 200).

According to Kenyon's dating, there was no city for the Israelites to conquer at the end of the 15th century BC, the Biblical date for the event. The Jericho of Joshua's time could not be found—it was lost!

Through our research, however, we have found the lost city of Jericho, the Jericho attacked by the Israelites.
Aerial view of Jericho, looking south. The trenches and squares visible today are from Kathleen Kenyon's excavations in the 1950s and the more recent Italian-Palestinian excavation which began in 1997.

Fortifications of Jericho

Before the Israelites entered the promised land Moses told them, 'You are now about to cross the Jordan to go in and dispossess nations greater and stronger than you, with large cities that have walls up to the sky' (Dt 9:1). The meticulous work of Kenyon showed that Jericho was indeed heavily fortified and that it had been burned by fire. Unfortunately, she misdated her finds, resulting in what seemed to be a discrepancy between the discoveries of archaeology and the Bible. She concluded that the Bronze Age city of Jericho was destroyed about 1550 BC by the Egyptians. An in-depth analysis of the evidence, however, reveals that the destruction took place at the end of the 15th century BC (end of the Late Bronze I period), exactly when the Bible says the Conquest occurred (Wood 1990).
Pottery found at Jericho by John Garstang. This distinctive pottery, decorated with red and black geometric patterns, was in use only in the 15th century BC, the time of the Israelite Conquest according to Biblical chronology.

The mound, or 'tell,' of Jericho was surrounded by a great earthen rampart, or embankment, with a stone retaining wall at its base. The retaining wall was some 12-15 ft high. On top of that was a mudbrick wall 6 ft thick and about 20-26 ft high (Sellin and Watzinger 1973: 58). At the crest of the embankment was a similar mudbrick wall whose base was roughly 46 ft above the ground level outside the retaining wall. This is what loomed high above the Israelites as they marched around the city each day for seven days. Humanly speaking, it was impossible for the Israelites to penetrate the impregnable bastion of Jericho.

Plan of the ruins of Jericho. A-area excavated by John Garstang where he found evidence for the destruction of Jericho by the Israelites which he dated to ca. 1400 BC. B-Two 8x8 m squares excavated by Kathleen Kenyon where she found similar evidence for destruction but misdated it to 1550 BC and attributed it to the Egyptians.
Within the upper wall was an area of approximately 6 acres, while the total area of the upper city and fortification system together was half again as large, or about 9 acres. Based on the archaeologist's rule of thumb of 100 persons per acre, the population of the upper city would have been about 600. From excavations carried out by a German team in the first decade of this century, we know that people were also living on the embankment between the upper and lower city walls. In addition, those Canaanites living in surrounding villages would have fled to Jericho for safety. Thus, we can assume that there were several thousand people inside the walls when the Israelites came against the city.

![Schematic cross-section of the fortification system at Jericho.](image)

The Fallen Walls The citizens of Jericho were well prepared for a siege. A copious spring which provided water for ancient, as well as modern, Jericho lay inside the city walls. At the time of the attack, the harvest had just been taken in (Jos 3:15), so the citizens had an abundant supply of food. This has been borne out by many large jars full of grain found in the Canaanite homes by John Garstang in his excavation in the 1930s and also by Kenyon. With a plentiful food supply and ample water, the inhabitants of Jericho could have held out for several years. After the seventh trip around the city on the seventh day, Scripture tells us that the wall 'fell flat' (Jos 6:20). A more accurate rendering of the Hebrew word here would be 'fell beneath itself.' Is there evidence for such an event at Jericho? It turns out that there is ample evidence that the mudbrick city wall collapsed and was deposited at the base of the stone retaining wall at the time the city met its end.
Kenyon's work was the most detailed. On the west side of the tell, at the base of the retaining, or revetment, wall, she found,

fallen red bricks piling nearly to the top of the revetment. These probably came from the wall on the summit of the bank [and/or]…the brickwork above the revetment (Kenyon 1981: 110).

In other words, she found a heap of bricks from the fallen city walls! The renewed Italian-Palestinian excavations found exactly the same thing at the southern end of the mound in 1997.

Excavations at the outer (lower) fortification wall by the three major expeditions to Jericho. At the north end (numbers 1-5), a portion of the mud brick wall (red) atop the stone retaining wall survived, demonstrating that the city wall did not fall in this area. Nothing remains of the mud brick city wall at other points investigated, showing that it had collapsed everywhere else (numbers 6-13). Remnants of the collapsed city wall (red) were actually found still in place in three places at Jericho: number 11 (German excavation), number 12 (Kenyon's excavation), and the 1997 Italian-Palestinian excavation extending Kenyon's south trench at number 8.
According to the Bible, Rahab's house was incorporated into the fortification system (Jos 2:15). If the walls fell, how was her house spared? As you recall, the spies had instructed Rahab to bring her family into her house and they would be rescued. When the Israelites stormed the city, Rahab and her family were saved as promised (Jos 6:17, 22-23). At the north end of the tell of Jericho, archaeologists made some astounding discoveries that seem to relate to Rahab. The German excavation of 1907-1909 found that on the north a short stretch of the lower city wall did not fall as everywhere else. A portion of that mudbrick wall was still standing to a height of 8 ft (Sellin and Watzinger 1973: 58). What is more, there were houses built against the wall! It is quite possible that this is where Rahab's house was located. Since the city wall formed the back wall of the houses, the spies could have readily escaped. From this location on the north side of the city, it was only a short distance to the hills of the Judean wilderness where the spies hid for three days (Jos 2:16, 22). Real estate values must have been low here, since the houses were positioned on the embankment between the upper and lower city walls. Not the best place to live in time of war! This area was no doubt the overflow from the upper city and the poor part of town, perhaps even a slum district. After the city walls fell, how could the Israelites surmount the 12-15 foot high retaining wall at the base of the tell? Excavations have shown that the bricks from the collapsed walls fell in such a way as to form a ramp against the retaining wall. The Israelites could merely climb up over the pile of rubble, up the embankment, and enter the city. The Bible is very precise in its description of how the Israelites entered the city: 'The people went up into the city, every man straight before him' (Jos 6:20, KJV). The Israelites had to go up, and that is what archaeology has revealed. They had to go from ground level at the base of the tell to the top of the rampart in order to enter the city.

Dr. Wood points to collapsed mud bricks from the city wall that fell to the base of the retaining wall at Jericho. His left foot rests on part of the fallen wall. (Italian-Palestinian excavation, 1997, location 8.)
Destruction by Fire

The Israelites 'burned the whole city and everything in it' (Jos 6: 24). Once again, the discoveries of archaeology have verified the truth of this record. A portion of the city destroyed by the Israelites was excavated on the east side of the tell. Wherever the archaeologists reached this level they found a layer of burned ash and debris about 3 ft thick. Kenyon described the massive devastation:

The destruction was complete. Walls and floors were blackened or reddened by fire, and every room was filled with fallen bricks, timbers, and household utensils; in most rooms the fallen debris was heavily burnt, but the collapse of the walls of the eastern rooms seems to have taken place before they were affected by the fire (Kenyon 1981: 370).
Both Garstang and Kenyon found many storage jars full of grain that had been caught in the fiery destruction. This is a unique find in the annals of archaeology. Grain was valuable, not only as a source of food, but also as a commodity which could be bartered. Under normal circumstances, valuables such as grain would have been plundered by the conquerors. Why was the grain left to be burned at Jericho? The Bible provides the answer. Joshua commanded the Israelites:

The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the Lord. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent. But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the Lord and must go into His treasury (Jos 6:17-19).
Lessons of Jericho

Jericho was once thought to be a 'Bible problem' because of the seeming disagreement between archaeology and the Bible. When the archaeology is correctly interpreted, however, the opposite is the case. The archaeological evidence supports the historical accuracy of the Biblical account in every detail. Every aspect of the story that could possibly be verified by the findings of archaeology is, in fact, verified. There are a number of theories as to how the walls of Jericho came down. Both Garstang and Kenyon found evidence of earthquake activity at the time the city met its end. If God did use an earthquake to accomplish His purposes that day, it was still a miracle since it happened at precisely the right moment, and was manifested in such a way as to protect Rahab's house. No matter what agency God used, it was ultimately the faith of the Israelites that brought the walls down: 'By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days' (Heb 11:30). The example of Jericho is a wonderful spiritual lesson for God's people yet today. There are times when we find ourselves facing enormous 'walls' that are impossible to break down by human strength. If we put our faith in God and follow His commandments, even when they seem foolish to us, He will perform 'great and awesome deeds' (Dt 4:34) and give us the victory.
CHAPTER SEVEN

The Problem of Ai Solved After Nearly Forty Years of Excavations in the West Bank of Israel

Scott Stripling, DMin and Mark Hassler, PhD

After conquering Jericho, Joshua and the Israelites destroyed Ai, the second stronghold of the conquest (Jos 7–8). Everyone agrees on the location of Jericho, but the location of Ai continues to puzzle researchers. The issue garners attention because of its profound implications for biblical studies.

The debate over the location of Ai intertwines with the excavation of Jericho. Kathleen Kenyon excavated Jericho from 1952 to 1956. She concluded that the archaeological evidence at Jericho contradicts the biblical account. In 1961, Joseph Callaway studied with Kenyon in London and three years later, on behalf of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, began excavations at et-Tell, 10 mi (16 km) north of Jerusalem (the City of David). Et-Tell had long prevailed as the leading candidate for Ai because of the endorsement by W.F. Albright, the father of biblical archaeology and one of Callaway’s mentors. When Callaway ceased excavations in 1972, he concluded that et-Tell sat unoccupied at the time of the biblical conquest. Together, the interpretations of Kenyon, Callaway, and Albright eroded the evangelical belief in the inerrancy of Scripture.

In response to this erosion, David Livingston formed the Associates for Biblical Research (ABR) in order to investigate the “problem” of Ai. In a personal letter dated February 23, 1970, Albright assured Livingston that Ai belongs at et-Tell:

You can take it from me, and from Callaway and others, that there just isn’t any other possibility for Ai than et-Tell and that Bethel can only have been modern Beitin. Since 1921 we have examined and reexamined the whole countryside, and there just isn’t any archaeologically viable identification.1

Undeterred, Livingston began excavations at Khirbet Nisya, his candidate for the Ai of Joshua 7–8. He excavated there from 1979 to 2002, during which time he completed his doctor of philosophy degree at Andrews University. The findings at Khirbet Nisya illuminated the background of the Old and New Testaments, but a positive correlation with Ai proved elusive.
In 1994, ABR colleague Bryant Wood identified Khirbet el-Maqatir as another candidate for Ai, and the following year he launched excavations at the new site, 0.6 mi (1 km) west of et-Tell, and 10 mi (16 km) north of Jerusalem. Excavations continued at Khirbet el-Maqatir through 2016, with the final three years under the direction of Scott Stripling. Thus, from Livingston to Wood to Stripling, ABR has conducted excavations in search of Ai for nearly 40 years, 37 to be precise.

Various lines of reasoning allow for the possibility that the fortress of Ai in Joshua’s day stood at Khirbet el-Maqatir. For one, local tradition in the 1800s equated the sites. Moreover, a monastery from the Byzantine Age once graced the locale. The placement of the monastery seems deliberate, in that monasteries often memorialized biblical events. Unfortunately, the excavation did not yield any mosaics or other clues as to what the monastery may have memorialized. Regardless, the geographical and archaeological indicators in Joshua 7–8 correspond to the evidence unearthed at Khirbet el-Maqatir. This study summarizes the correspondences and proposes a viable solution to the “problem” of Ai.

Geographical Indicators for the Site

The book of Joshua provides specific geographical indicators for the location of Ai. The geographical indicators appear as follows.

Strategic Location

When Joshua entered Cisjordan, he set into motion a brilliant military strategy: divide and conquer. The decision of where to divide the land was not arbitrary. It appears that he divided the land at a logical and
strategic location—the Wadi el-Gāyeh, a west-east drainage, 10 mi (16 km) north of Jerusalem. The wadi formed a natural and political boundary between the southern territory governed by the city-state of Jerusalem and the central territory governed by the city-state of Shechem. Even after the conquest, the wadi functioned as the border between Benjamin and Ephraim (Jos 18:12–13). As Wood suggests, the military outpost there, visible from Jerusalem, guarded the northern border for the league of Amorites in the south (cf. 7:7; 10:1–6). On the north side of the wadi, just 1 mi (1.5 km) away, stood a fortress at Beitin, probably the southern border fortress for the Shechem league, says Wood. Khirbet el-Maqatir and et-Tell both sit near the southern embankment of the Wadi el-Gāyeh.

**Near Beth-Aven**

Joshua locates Ai “near [im] Beth-Aven” (Jos 7:2). The preposition ‘im designates general proximity, whereas the synonym ‘ēt (near) signals immediate proximity. The most suitable locale for Beth-Aven is Beitin, a site often identified as Bethel. Khirbet el-Maqatir sits 1 mi (1.5 km) southeast of Beitin. Scholars who place Bethel at Beitin and Ai at et-Tell have yet to propose a feasible location for Beth-Aven. A feasible location must yield evidence of habitation at the time of the conquest.

![Fig. 2. Location of Khirbet el-Maqatir. Image: Steven Rudd](image)

**Near and East of Bethel**

The list of conquered rulers in Joshua 12 places Ai “near Bethel” (v. 9). The men of Bethel aided the men of Ai in their pursuit of the Israelites, a fact that confirms the proximity of the sites (8:17). Livingston and others situate Bethel at el-Bireh rather than the usual site of Beitin. A distance of 2.2 mi (3.5 km) separates Khirbet el-Maqatir and el-Bireh.

The “Bethel equals Beitin” formula has its drawbacks, two of which shall receive brief mention. First, the equation of Bethel and Beitin contradicts the idea that the fortress at Bethel served the Shechem alliance. If
Bethel constituted el-Bireh, no contradiction exists because el-Bireh lies south of the Wadi el-Gāyeh, positioning it with the southern alliance. Second, the equation contradicts the work of Eusebius. As Rupert Chapman points out, “Eusebius’ statement that Gibeon was four miles west of Bethel is wholly incompatible with the currently accepted identification of Bethel with Beitin.”

The fortress of Ai stood “east of Bethel” (Jos 7:2). The leading candidates for Ai, Khirbet el-Maqatir and et-Tell, both lie east of the leading candidates for Bethel, el-Bireh and Beitin.

*Near and East of an Ambush Site*

Prior to the battle, Joshua positioned his troops at an ambush site “not…very far from the fortress” (Jos 8:4). In 2015, three members of the ABR excavation team ran from the rim of the Wadi Sheban to the fortress gate at Khirbet el-Maqatir in only five minutes, while carrying backpacks.

The ambush site rested “behind” or “west” (‘ahar) of the fortress (vv. 2, 4, 14), that is, “between Bethel and Ai, west of Ai” (vv. 9, 12). The Wadi Sheban runs between el-Bireh and Khirbet el-Maqatir. This deep ravine could easily conceal numerous troops from watchers at Khirbet el-Maqatir or el-Bireh. The photo to the left shows the geographical relationship of the sites, with el-Bireh positioned to the right of the photo. Et-Tell, however, lacks an ambush site on the west. Israelite troops could have hidden behind the hill to the northwest, but the allies of Ai at Bethel (Beitin in this model) could have spotted them easily and blown their cover.

**Fig. 3 - Wadi Shaban (⇧), el-Bireh (⊕), Khirbet el-Maqatir (⊙). Photo: Todd Bolen, BiblePlaces.com**
Joshua stationed soldiers “north of Ai” (Jos 8:11). And the very next statement explains, “There was a valley between him and Ai.” Khirbet el-Maqatir sits near the southern slope of a west-east valley, the Wadi el-Gāyeh. If the commander of Ai could see Joshua and his men in the valley, as verse 14 might imply, then the valley lacked depth. The bottom of Wadi el- Gāyeh is readily visible from Khirbet el-Maqatir.

The presence of a valley infers the existence of a ridge. Approximately 0.9 mi (1.4 km) north of Khirbet el-Maqatir, beyond the Wadi el-Gāyeh, stands Jebel Abu Ammar, the highest elevation in the area. It provides excellent visibility and a west-east ridgeline.

The geography and topography of Khirbet el-Maqatir thus meets the criteria revealed in Joshua 7–8. The discussion now shifts to the archaeological indicators.

Archaeological Indicators for the Site

Just as the book of Joshua reveals geographical indicators for the location of Ai, it also sets forth archaeological indicators. For a site such as Khirbet el-Maqatir to constitute Joshua’s Ai, it must have the following archaeological indicators.

Inhabited During the Conquest

When the Israelites ascended into the central hill country, they encountered the inhabitants of Ai (Jos 8:1). The encounter transpired in approximately 1406 BC, a date derived from the Bible itself (cf. 1 Kgs 6:1). This dating reflects the 15th-century exodus-conquest model (the “biblical” model) rather than the 13th-century model.

Artifacts establish the date of occupation at Khirbet el-Maqatir. The preeminent artifact, an Egyptian scarab (beetle), topped the list of discoveries in biblical archaeology for 2013 according to Christianity Today. Engraved on the base of the object is a falcon-headed sphinx and two heliographs: ankh (life) and neter (god). The scarab was found inside the fortress, near the gate, 0.8 in (2 cm) above bedrock, in a sealed locus, beneath a concentration of ash and an Early Roman fill, with four diagnostic and refired sherds from Late Bronze I (ca.
Refired pottery was initially fired in a kiln, then fired again (refired), say, in a destructive conflagration. The refire turns the pottery white and rock hard. The illustration on the facing page shows the sherds discovered in association with the scarab. In light of the preliminary research, the glyptic indicators help date the scarab to the Eighteenth Egyptian Dynasty, specifically the reign of Amenhotep II (ca. 1455–1418 BC).

Another scarab came to light in 2014. Its underside features Egyptian hieroglyphs surrounded by eight sets of concentric circles. The scarab was made locally in Canaan. It is typical of the time of the Hyksos (“foreign rulers” in Egypt) and the early Eighteenth Dynasty prior to the subjugation of Canaan by Thutmose III in ca. 1485 BC. This amulet likewise surfaced from within the fortress, near the gate. It came from a contaminated locus, disturbed by looters, and dates from about 1668 BC to 1485 BC.

Pottery from LB I populates the site. The pottery includes storage jars, small jars, jugs, cooking pots, and *pithoi* (large storage containers). LB I sherds lay around and beneath a flagstone pavement by the gate. Fourteen seasons of excavation have not yielded any pottery that relates to the fortress after LB IB (ca. 1445–1400 BC). By all indications, 250 years passed before the site was resettled.

An infant burial jar emerged in 2009. With it came the bones of a neonate and some Bronze Age offering vessels. The jar rested among a few dilapidated walls. It sat on bedrock beneath 15 in (37 cm) of earth. The mortuary custom of burying infants in jars prevailed in the Middle Bronze and LB I periods (ca. 1750–1400 BC). The pottery points to a date of about 1500 BC for the burial.
In 2014, a bronze figurine—a decapitated ram’s head—arose from an LB I context, within a few meters of the scarabs and at the same elevation. Decapitated figurines from the Late Bronze Age have also surfaced at Tell el-Qedah (Hazor), another site that the Israelites plundered and burned. The possibility exists that the Israelites severed the ram’s head during their conquest of Canaan.

Fig. 6. Left, Bronze ram’s head; right, sever mark on the neck from the decapitation. Photo: Michael Luddeni

In addition to the artifacts, the architecture contributes to the dating of the site. Megaliths (large stones) formed structures inside the fortress, both on the east and west sides of the gate. In 2016, workers began to uncover a cluster of fallen cyclopean stones—stones so enormous, the Greeks would say, that only Cyclops could have moved them. One of the stones measures a staggering 11.5 x 3.9 x 2.6 ft (3.5 x 1.2 x 0.8 m). The cluster lies at what appears to be the intersection of the southern and eastern walls of the fortress. The use of megaliths and cyclopean stones characterizes construction practices in MB III (ca. 1650–1485 BC).

On the whole, the artifacts and architecture mark the initial, medial, and terminal phases of the fortress at Khirbet el-Maqatir. Based on the finds, one can conclude that the fortress underwent construction toward the end of the Middle Bronze Age, and it fell in LB IB, the time of the Israelite conquest.

Protected by a Fortification System

Israel’s botched attempt to sack Ai resulted in casualties “from the gate as far as the shevarim” (Jos 7:5). When the Israelites finally prevailed, they threw the king’s corpse into “the fortress gate” (8:29). A gate presumes the existence of fortified walls.

Khirbet el-Maqatir possessed a fortification system. It had a gate, but only one chamber survived the ravages of time. The gate complex was robbed in antiquity; however, a flagstone pavement and huwwar surface remained intact next to the southwestern chamber. The chamber did not show signs of interior benches. In the gate passageway, workers found tiled vats, which are evidence of reuse for industrial purposes in the late Second Temple period. Originally, the gate probably had four chambers, based on the presence of six lower socket stones—two of which were discovered in 2016. The western wall of the fortress was an impressive 13 ft (4 m) in thickness. In the rear of the fortress, diggers began to uncover what looked like a circular tower, but in
1999, excavation in that area ceased because locals erected an agricultural enclosure which encompassed the southwestern portion of the fortress. In the southeast sector, cyclopean stones provided fortification, as mentioned.

![Fortress at Khirbet el-Maqtir. Image: Jerry Taylor](image)

Fortification systems protected contemporaneous towns in Canaan. Beitin had a small fortress in MB II (ca. 1750–1650 BC). The walls stood 11.4 ft (3.5 m) thick and contained multiple gates. The northwestern gate chamber used paving stones repaired with *huwwar* surface. In MB III, Gezer possessed a southern gate, a large tower, and fortification walls 13 ft (4 m) thick. At Shiloh, the MB III city wall covered 4.2 acres (1.7 ha) and stood 9.8–18 ft (3.0–5.5 m) thick. In the MB III period, Jerusalem benefited from the rectangular-shaped Spring Tower (56 x 52 ft; 17 x 16 m) and city walls 6.6–8.2 ft (2.0–2.5 m) thick.
Accessed by a Northern Gate

In anticipation of the battle, the Israelite warriors arrived “opposite [neged] the fortress, and camped north of Ai” (Jos 8:11). The preposition neged can mean “in front of.” The front side of the fortress, the side with a gate, probably faced north. The gate at Khirbet el-Maqatir faced north.

Dwarfed by Gibeon

Joshua portrays Gibeon as larger than Ai: “Gibeon was a metropolis, like one of the royal cities…it was larger than Ai” (10:2). Gibeon epitomized the “metropolis” of Canaan that Moses had warned about (Dt 9:1). Ai, on the other hand, lacked size and notoriety. The size of Ai failed to impress Joshua’s scouts: “Do not make all the people ascend. Only two or three elephs of men need to ascend in order to attack Ai. Do not make all the people toil there, because they are few” (v. 3). Further, when the writer of the book of Joshua first mentions Ai, he includes multiple locators to help orient the readers (“Ai, which is near Beth-Aven, east of Bethel,” Jos 7:2).

The exact size of Gibeon in LB I remains unknown because the perimeter wall has not been traced. The later Iron Age wall enclosed an area of approximately 15 acres (6 ha). The little fortress of Khirbet el-Maqatir covered only about 2.5 acres (1 ha). By contrast, et-Tell encompassed a full 27.5 acres (11 ha) in approximately 2400 BC. It tripled the size of Jericho, which covered only 9 acres (3.6 ha) including the embankment.

Joshua depicts Ai as small, whereas Moses styles Ai as a well-known landmark (Gn 12:8; 13:3). In light of the disparity, a short distance may have separated Abraham’s Ai (et-Tell?) and Joshua’s Ai (Khirbet el-Maqatir?). Site names could migrate short distances over time—a well-documented phenomenon.
Consumed by Fire

Israel’s ambush squad “set the fortress on fire” (Jos 8:19). Indeed, “Joshua burned Ai” (v. 28). Excavation of the fortress revealed numerous ash pockets, burned stones, calcined bedrock, and re-fired sherds.

Ruined for a Long Time

The Israelites demolished the fortress of Ai, and it remained demolished, at least until the narrator recorded the book of Joshua. The account reads, “Joshua burned Ai and made it a ruin for a long duration [‘lm], a desolation, as it remains today” (Jos 8:28). In the victory, Joshua buried the ruler of Ai under “a large pile of stones, which remains there today” (v. 29).

At Khirbet el-Maqatir, no one rebuilt the fortress after its demise. In Iron Age I and into Iron Age II, a mere 50 to 70 Israelites inhabited the site, it seems. They used the tumble from the earlier structures to build residences and installations. During the Late Hellenistic and Early Roman periods, a walled town partially overlapped the footprint of the Bronze Age fortress. From the town’s northern wall protruded a massive fortification tower, the largest known tower in Israel outside of Jerusalem in the first century (90 x 52 ft; 27.5 x 16 m). The town fell in AD 69, as the pottery and coins attest. It appears that the Romans demolished it as they advanced south toward Jerusalem. In the Byzantine period, a monastery stood on the crest of the hill, approximately 656 ft (200 m) from the old fortress. As of 2018, modern development is overtaking the ancient ruins and threatens their preservation.

Ever since the Bronze Age fortress fell, subsequent builders have obscured its ruins by scavenging the stones for their own construction projects. On the other hand, their work protected the foundations of the fortress from additional damage.

Khirbet el-Maqatir satisfies the archaeological indicators listed above. The archaeological record shows that a small but stout fortress existed at the site from MB III to LB IB. Occupancy ceased because of a conflagration.

Conclusion

The geography and archaeology of Khirbet el-Maqatir accord with the descriptions of Ai in Joshua 7–8. The identification of Khirbet el-Maqatir as the Ai of Joshua’s time resolves the problems of chronology and location that ensued from Callaway’s excavation at et-Tell. Nearly forty years of excavation in the West Bank of Israel by ABR archaeologists has resulted in a viable solution. The solution squares with the biblical data concerning the exodus and conquest.
CHAPTER EIGHT

The Israelite Tabernacle at Shiloh

Scott Stripling, DMin

Two twentieth-century excavations revealed clear evidence of cultic activity at Shiloh. Advocates for a 13th century B.C. exodus and conquest are interested in evidence for an Israelite cultic center at Shiloh from Iron Age IA to Iron Age IB; whereas, proponents for a 15th century B.C. exodus and conquest seek evidence at Shiloh from LB IIB to IA IB. According to Joshua 18:1, the tabernacle was erected at Shiloh, in the tribal territory of Ephraim, immediately following the conquest. While the tabernacle served social and political purposes, its primary purpose was amphictyonic.¹

In 2017, the Associates for Biblical Research (ABR), under the direction of the author, will open a new excavation on the north side of the site (Field H1) that portends insight into the critical issue of the location of the famed cultic shrine.² Four possible options exist at Shiloh for the placement of the Israelite tabernacle. Although three of these have been previously posited, here, I will introduce a fourth possibility. Before discussing these proposed temenos locations, it is important to set forth a brief history of the site and the evidence for cultic activity that has been uncovered.

Fig. 1. Grid of the ABR excavation at Shiloh. Courtesy of Jerry Taylor.
History of Shiloh

The MB II period (c. 1668–1560 B.C.) witnessed the establishment of a village without walls. According to the Hebrew Bible, the Amorites controlled the Shiloh region at the time of the conquest (Num 13:29 [Highlands]; Josh 7:7 [Ai]; 2 Sam 21:2 [Gibeon]), and this likely extended back to MB III (c. 1560–1485 B.C.). During this period they constructed a massive fortification system that enclosed 17 dunams (4.25 acres). The MB III city suffered destruction but was quickly rebuilt, or at least resettled as a cultic center in the Late Bronze Age (c. 1485–1173 B.C.). Pit deposits of bones, cultic vessels, and an abundance of pottery establish this fact. If the early date for the conquest is correct, this faunal deposit is best assigned to an Israelite cleanup of the remnant of the Amorite sacrifices on the summit. A late date for the conquest would likewise require an Amorite attribution for these early remains.

A second and even more devastating destruction, probably at the hands of the Philistines (1 Sam 4), occurred around 1050 B.C., during the IA IB (c. 1075–980 B.C.). IA II (c. 980–587 B.C.) witnessed only a small settlement at Shiloh (1 Kgs 11:29 and 12:15; Jer 41:5). The Early Hellenistic Period (c. 332–167 B.C.) saw the beginning of resettlement at the site after the Babylonian captivity, and this pattern accelerated in the Late Hellenistic (c. 167–63 B.C.) and Early Roman (c. 63 B.C.–A.D. 136) periods. Byzantine era (c. A.D. 325–636) builders expanded the site further, and it continued through the Early Islamic Age (c. A.D. 636–1099) and on into the Middle Ages when apparently the Black Death or some other pestilence finally brought an end to life at ancient Shiloh.

In the fourth century, Eusebius and Jerome (Onomasticon 156: 28–31; Eusebius and Jerome 2012; Freeman-Greenville and Taylor 2003) demonstrated awareness of Shiloh’s location as did the cartographer of Madaba in the sixth century (Donner 1992, 47).

Fig. 2. The Madaba Map Showing Shiloh. Graphic by Steven Rudd.
Apart from the notations of several Byzantine and Medieval writers concerning Shiloh, the great American orientalist Edward Robinson became the first person in modern times (1838) to correctly identify Khirbet Seilun as Shiloh. Later in the century, Wilson and Guérin documented what they observed at the site in the 1860s and 1870s respectively (Wilson, 1873, 38; Guérin, 1875, 21–23). In the 1880s, Conder and Kitchner did the same in their Survey of Western Palestine (1882, 368). In 1922, Danish archaeologist Aage Schmidt executed several soundings, and with the help of Albright correctly identified the basic ceramic sequence at Shiloh (Albright, 1923, 10). Between 1926 and 1932, a Danish team conducted three seasons of excavation at Shiloh, under the capable leadership of Hans Kjaer. Tragically, Kjaer died in the middle of the 1932 season. The reins of the excavation were handed to Nelson Glueck who promptly closed the dig. Three decades later, in 1963, the Danish, under Svend Holm-Nielsen, returned to execute a series of soundings before publishing the long-awaited final excavation report in 1969. From 1981 to 1984, Israeli archaeologist Israel Finkelstein, then of Bar Ilan University, excavated at Shiloh and published his final report in 1993. Shortly after Finkelstein concluded his work, Ze’ev Yeivin, on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority, conducted limited excavations on the scarp just north of the tel followed by work in a few other areas. In the last decade, under the guidance of Hananya Hizmi, Staff officer of the Civil Administration of Judea and Samaria, further excavations have been conducted on the summit, the aforementioned scarp, and the churches along the southern approach to the site.

Adding to this rich history of archaeological work, the first phase of the ABR excavation will expose and conserve the northern fortification system and all associated structures. The fortification system may have served as a massive retaining wall for the sacred precinct. Based on previous excavations, there will likely be storerooms for the sanctuary and pillared courtyard dwellings (sacerdotal?) from the biblical periods.

Fig. 3. The Pillared Courtyard Houses in Area C (Stratum 5). Graphic by Leen Ritmeyer.
Cultic Activity

In 1322, Rabbi Ish Tori Happarchi claimed that there was a domed shrine at Shiloh referred to as the “Dome of the Shekinah” (Kaufman, 1988, 48–49). Nine-hundred years earlier, Jerome claimed to have seen the remains of the sacred altar at Shiloh (Roberts, 1994). Unfortunately, neither the Rabbi nor the author of the Vulgate likely knew the difference between altar and shrine types from various time periods. In any event, they failed to specify where on the site that they had seen the sacred remains.

An Iron Age four-horned altar, found in 2013 in secondary use in a Byzantine wall, attests to an ancient sacrificial practice at Shiloh. Jerome may have documented this very altar. Just 1.5 km west of the tel, Yoel Elitzur identified another four-horned altar in the winter of 2002 at the edge of the Giv’at Har’el settlement (Elitzur, 2003, 30–36). Of the seven such altars found in Iron Age Israel, two were in or very near Shiloh; this is not without significance. None have been found in Judah where the earthen altar was preferred (Exod 20:24–26 and Deut 27:1–8).
Anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines, along with incense stands and votive bowls from the MB to IA offer further evidence of cultic activity at Shiloh. For example, a shattered incense stand from Area C, likely dated to IA I, depicts a horse, a lioness, and a deer being overcome by a leopard (Finkelstein, 1993, 27).

Four Possible Locations

Fig. 6. Possible Locations for the Tabernacle at Shiloh. Photo by Barry Kramer and graphics by Jerry Taylor.
Option One

In 1866, Major Charles Wilson of the Palestine Exploration Fund surveyed Shiloh and introduced the idea that the tabernacle was located on a worked bedrock scarp 146 m. north of the tel (Wilson, 1873, 38). Conder and Kitchner (1881–1883) echoed this hypothesis, and it continues to resonate among many researchers. Wilson’s reasons were simple, but compelling. The dimensions of the platform closely parallel the dimensions of the tabernacle and its enclosure as given in Exodus 26–27. The author can attest to Wilson’s meticulous measurements. He sketched the church at Khirbet el-Maqtir in the same year that he surveyed Shiloh. I excavated this church from 2010–2016 and confirmed Wilson’s plans to the inch.

Further, Wilson observed that the platform had been intentionally flattened and squared in antiquity and argued that there were no flat areas on the tel proper that could have housed a structure the size of the tabernacle. Although one of the expressed goals of the Danish excavation was to fix the location of the tabernacle, they chose not to excavate Wilson’s platform. Finkelstein likewise ignored the northern location in his excavations in the early 1980s. He states the following:

Wilson’s proposal still finds some supporters today. However, recent excavations in this area undertaken by Ze’ev Yeivin of the Israel Department of Antiquities turned up no remains whatsoever of the Iron I period. (Finkelstein, 1986, 41)

Yeivin, however, only excavated a small area of the platform, and recent excavations have, in fact, yielded likely Iron I remains; therefore, it appears that Finkelstein was premature in his dismissal (Ben-Arie, 2014, 113–30).  

Another factor favoring the northern scarp is its east-west alignment which was a requirement of Exodus 26:22 and Numbers 3:23. The Jerusalem temples maintained this east-west alignment, so it would be reasonable to assume that the tabernacle at Shiloh had the same orientation.

The defensibility of the platform, due to the steep slopes on all but the south, further bolsters the inductive argument for the northern location.

Logically, the Israelites would have taken the safety of their sacred shrine into consideration when choosing its placement.

Finally, a literary argument can be set forth in favor of Wilson’s location. In 1 Samuel 4:12–16, the messenger who brings Eli bad news from the Battle of Ebenezer (Izbet Sarteh?), where the Philistines defeated the Israelites, appears to cross through the Shiloh population center before reaching the tabernacle. Although the main gate has not been uncovered, it is generally thought to be on the south, primarily because of the site’s
topography. If the gate was indeed on the south of the tel, and the inhabitants were living on the tel, which has been established, then the straightforward reading of the text leads the reader to the conclusion that the tabernacle sat on the north of the tel. This literary analysis, however, is not without problems. These problems will be addressed below.

Option Two

A second possible location for the tabernacle is on the summit of the tel, a common spot for a temenos in antiquity. This view, favored by Finkelstein and the Danish expedition, is not without support. There are countless parallels of sacrosanct precincts located on the acropolis of sites in the Levant during the Bronze and Iron Ages. Examples can be found at Gibeon (Pritchard, 1993, 511–14), Hazor (de Vaux, 1997, 285), Megiddo (de Vaux, 1997, 284–285), and Malhah (de Vaux, 1997, 285). Jerusalem provides the quintessential example.

The primary objection to the summit hypothesis is that there is not enough flat space for the enclosure. There is, however, no requirement that the area be level, especially for a tent enclosure. The Holy of Holies within the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem certainly was not level, as evidenced by the massive sacred bedrock inside The Dome of the Rock (Ritmeyer, 2006, 242–50). Naturally, some areas on the Shiloh summit are badly eroded and damaged by later building activity. A large structure, however, possibly from the Crusader period, may in fact, preserve Bronze and Iron Age remains underneath it. The walls of the structure create perfect boundaries for excavation squares. Perhaps in future seasons the ABR excavation will expand into this area, which Fig. 6 demonstrates is more than adequate for the placement of the tabernacle.

Fig. 7. The Large Structure on the Summit. Photo by Michael Luddeni.
In Area C, west of the tel, both Kjaer and Finkelstein excavated pillared courtyard buildings constructed against the outside of the Bronze Age wall (See Fig. 3). These structures yielded two-dozen collared rim jars, the typical Iron I pithos type in the highlands. Finkelstein suggests, and I agree, that the MB storerooms in Areas F-H served a central shrine (Finkelstein, 1986, 41). I believe that the same is true of the IA pillared courtyard buildings in Area C. In Area D, northwest of the tel, Finkelstein uncovered a massive bone deposit and abundant LB ceramics, including cultic vessels. The faunal remains were from animals that comprised the biblical sacrificial system (sheep, goats, and a smaller amount of cattle). Pig bones comprised 3.5% of the MB II bones at Shiloh, less than 2% of the LB assemblage, and less than 1% in IA I (Finkelstein, 1993, 319). The percentage of pig bones reduced by more than 50% once the site moved from Amorite control to Israelite control. The LB bone deposit likely indicates cultic activity on the summit. Taken together, the pillared courtyard buildings and the bone deposit favor a tabernacle located at the top of the tel. Logically, the storerooms and bone deposit would be in close proximity to the actual sacred precinct, yet Area C (storerooms?) and Area D (bone deposit) are far-removed from the other candidate locations.

In a response to Finkelstein’s 1986 BAR article where he expressed support for the tabernacle being located on the summit, Kaufman cites two literary arguments against the tabernacle being located at the apex of the tel (Kaufman, 1988, 46–52). First, he claims that Deuteronomy 12:2–4 disqualifies the summit as an acceptable location. The passage reads as follows:

Destroy completely all the places on the high mountains, on the hills and under every spreading tree, where the nations you are dispossessing worship their gods. Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and burn their Asherah poles in the fire; cut down the idols of their gods and wipe out their names from those places. You must not worship the LORD your God in their way.

In this iconoclastic passage, God commands Israel to destroy the native bamot. God admonishes them not to worship in the manner of the people they would dispossess, but importantly, he refers to practice, not location. The next verse reinforces this point: “But you are to seek the place the Lord your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling” (Deut 12:5). High places were not to be automatically chosen because of their elevation, nor were they prohibited based on height (cf. Isa 2:2; Mic 4:1).

Next, Kaufman examines the Jerusalem Talmud (Megillah, chapter 1, Halakhah 12) in an effort to undermine the summit theory (Hersh, 1990). These passages refer to separate locations for the city of Shiloh and the tabernacle at Shiloh. Kaufman writes, “Although this text is nearly 1,500 years later than the event, it may well preserve an accurate historical memory that the tabernacle was located apart from the settlement.” Because this text is, in fact, more than 1,500 years removed from the event, it could easily be anachronistic.
Option Three

Michael Avi-Yonah and Yosi Garfinkel have suggested a third possible location for the tabernacle to the south of the tel. The southern approach forms a large, flat plateau that could easily accommodate the sacred tent. The Byzantine builders clearly favored this location, as witnessed by the four churches built on the southern approach. No other area of the site saw ecclesiastical construction, and these Christian inhabitants knew that they were building at biblical Shiloh, as demonstrated by a mosaic inscription in the church excavated in 2006 that reads as follows:

“Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on Seilun [Shiloh] and its inhabitants, Amen.”

Gibson, writing in Encyclopedia Judaica, expresses qualified support for the southern location:

The area south of the mound, with its ancient road leading to Turmus Aiya, the sanctuaries of Wali Yetim and Wali Sittìn, was seen by some scholars to be a much more likely spot for an open-air sanctuary around a tabernacle; a pre-Christian sanctuary can be assumed to have been located in a valley in which there are now a number of Muslim holy places and which, in Byzantine times, contained several churches. Nonetheless, it is quite possible that the sanctuary stood inside the city proper. (478)

Furthermore, Mizrachi refers to Christian tradition, which identifies the exact location of the tabernacle with one of the Byzantine churches on the site (2014, 11).

Importantly, Halpern presents a rationale to place the primary gate, or at least a postern gate on the north of the city (1992, 1214). If true, this weakens the literary case made earlier for the northern location since the messenger could have arrived on the north and passed through the city before finally arriving to Eli on the south. Similarly, Richardson argues for a gate on the west (1925, 163).

Option Four

Having considered these three possible locations for the tabernacle, I still see a fourth possibility for its placement. My “composite view” holds that the tabernacle may have been erected at multiple locations at Shiloh throughout its history there. In this scenario, the original tent structure probably sat at the apex of the mound. With time, it was replaced by a more permanent building; hence, the mention in 1 Samuel 3:15 that Samuel, “Opened the doors of the house of the LORD.” The Hebrew word bayit is used here for house and indicates a permanent building. This point is reinforced by the fact that the structure is said to have doors, rather than curtains. The Hebrew word delet, used here for door, appears 86 times in the Hebrew Bible, and all but once it refers to a door in a permanent structure.
This “tabernacle edifice” was then likely built on the more level areas of the northern scarp or the southern plateau. Concomitant with moving the national shrine from a tent to a house, the Israelite inhabitants of Shiloh built the first public buildings at the site since MB III. The fortifications and storerooms in Areas F–H demonstrate the skill of the early builders. Clearly, Stratum 5 in Area C revealed two pillared courtyard houses from IA I, apparently a forerunner of the IA II so called “four-room house.” Thinking sociologically and anthropologically, perhaps the priests at Shiloh did not want to live in houses while Yahweh dwelled in a tent.

A variation of this fourth theory is that the tabernacle may have been erected at multiple locations at Shiloh. After all, the tabernacle was erected at a variety of locations during the wilderness and conquest narratives. Since a tent is highly unlikely to leave an imprint in the archaeological record, it may be impossible to definitively settle the question of its early location, even though there is a strong verisimilitude between the literary descriptions in the Bible and the topography and material remains at Shiloh. However, if a permanent structure was indeed erected, as most scholars believe, it likely ceased to be transitory from that time forward.

Conclusion

Strong arguments can be made for several locations for the tabernacle. At this point it is still impossible to establish with certainty the location of the tabernacle at ancient Shiloh. There may have even been multiple locations for Israel’s sacred shrine. The new ABR excavations at Shiloh aim to shed light on this perplexing issue by re-examining previous findings and exposing new features. As more of the MB fortification wall is exposed, it may be possible to pinpoint the ancient gates that are important to this discussion. Excavations on the summit would also yield critical data.
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CHAPTER FIVE FOOTNOTES

2. Instead of considering the biblical model of a 15th century exodus-conquest, however, the majority of Palestinian archaeologists rejected the concept of an exodus-conquest altogether, in favor of other hypotheses for the origin of Israel. The most popular theory today is that Israel did not originate outside of Canaan, but rather arose from the indigenous population in the 12th century BC. For a recent discussion of this view, see William G. Dever, *Who Were the Israelites and Where Did They Come From?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). For a critique, see John J. Bimson, “Merenptah’s Israel and Recent Theories of Israelite Origins,” *JSOT* 49 (1991): 3–29. Some scholars allow for a small “Egypt exodus group” which became the nucleus for 12th century Israel [Pekka Pitkänen, “Ethnicity, Assimilation and the Israelite Settlement,” *TynBul* 55.2 (2004) 165].


5. Later excavations at Kh. Rabud have shown that this is the more likely candidate for Debir (Moshe Kochavi, “Rabud, Khirbet,” *OEANE* 4.401.


17. All Scripture quotations in this paper are from the NIV.


19. Gezer--Josh 16:10 and Judg 1:29; Aphek--Judg 1:31; Megiddo and Beth Shan--Josh 17:11–12 and Judg 1:27.


33. David A. Dorsey sees an overall similarity to ancient Near East vassal treaties in that Gen 1:11–Exod 19:2 represents a historical introduction to the treaty, Exod 19:3–Num 10:10 is the treaty itself, and Num 10:11–Josh 24 is the historical conclusion to the treaty, but he does not push the evidence beyond that general observation (*The Literary Structure of the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999]) 47–48, 97–98.

34. *Reliability*, 284 Table 21. Blessings always follow curses in the late second millennium Hittite treaties, whereas the opposite is the case in the biblical texts. This alone shows that the biblical writers were not slavishly following a late second millennium covenant format.


44. *Reliability*, 307. As far as I can determine, this concept originated with William F. Albright in “A Revision of Early Hebrew Chronology,” JPOS 1 (1921) 64 n. 1.

45. During the flood it rained for 40 days and nights (Gen 7:4, 12, 17); 40 days after the ark landed Noah sent out a raven (Gen 8:6); Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah (Gen 25:20), as was Esau when he married Judith (Gen 26:34); the embalming of Jacob took 40 days (Gen 50:3); the spies spent 40 days in Canaan (Num 13:25; 14:34); Joshua was 40 when he went with the spies to Canaan (Josh 14:7); Israel spent 40 years in the wilderness (Exod 16:35; Num 14:33, 34; 32:13; Deut 2:7; 8:2, 4; 29:5; Josh 5:6; Neh 9:21; Ps 95:10; Amos 2:10; 5:25); Moses was on Mt. Sinai 40 days and nights the first time he received the law (Exod 24:18; Deut 9:9, 11), as he was the second time (Exod 34:28; Deut 10:10); Moses fasted 40 days and nights for the sin of the golden calf (Deut 9:18, 25); there were 40 years of peace during the judgeships of Othniel (Judg 3:11), Deborah (Judg 5:31), and Gideon (Judg 8:28); the Israelites were oppressed by the Philistines 40 years (Judg 13:1); Eli judged Israel 40 years (1 Sam 4:18); Ish-Bosheth was 40 when he took the throne following Saul’s death (2 Sam 2:10); David reigned for 40 years (2 Sam 5:4; 1 Kgs 2:11; 1 Chr 29:27), as did Solomon (1 Kgs 11:42; 2 Chr 9:30), and Joash (2 Kgs 12:1; 2 Chr 24:1); Elijah traveled 40 days and nights from the desert of Beersheba to Mt. Horeb (1 Kgs 19:8); Ezekiel lay on his right side for 40 days for the 40 years of the sins of Judah (Ezek 4:6); Ezekiel predicted that Egypt would be uninhabited for 40 years (Ezek 29:11–13); and Jonah preached that Nineveh would be overturned in 40 days (Jon 3:4).


48. My thanks to Peter Gentry of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for calling this study to my attention.


52. *Reliability*, 308.


55. For references, see note 15 above.

56. Reliability, 189.

57. Reliability, 213.


59. For an overview of the evidence, see Wood, “From Ramesses,” 256–82.


69. Kitchen, Reliability, 287 Table 25; 288 Table 26.

70. Kitchen, Reliability, 284 Table 21.

71. Kitchen, Reliability, 287 Table 24.

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11 Israel Finkelstein, “The History and Archaeology of Shiloh from the Middle Bronze Age II to Iron Age II,” in Shiloh: The Archaeology of a Biblical Site, ed. Israel Finkelstein, with contributions by Baruch Brandl et al., SMNIA 10 (Tel Aviv: Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University, 1993), 374.


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1 Use of this term does not imply support for Martin Noth’s views on the emergence of early Israel. Rather, it denotes a confederation of ancient tribes for military conquest or protection and worship of a common deity.

2 Like all excavations in the West Bank, this project will be conducted in cooperation with, and under the auspices of, the Staff Officer of the Civil Administration of Judea and Samaria.

4 MB III witnessed a proliferation of fortification systems at numerous Levantine sites. Examples include Khirbet el-Maqatir, 9.5 miles south of Shiloh, Jericho, and Tall el-Hammam, directly across the southern Jordan Valley from Jericho.

5 Robinson mentions a confused Crusader tradition that located Shiloh at Nebi Samwil and notes that in 1657, Troilo stated that Shiloh’s identification was still a mystery (Robinson and Smith, 1841, 306-308).

6 The cause of his death remains uncertain. Glueck gives it as exhaustion from the excavation (Glueck, 1933, 66), while others attribute it to dysentery (Anonymous, *BAR*, 3).

7 Evgeny Aharonovic led the excavation of the churches, and Reut Ben-Arie supervised the work on the summit and the northern scarp.

8 Jerome’s Latin statement reads as follows: “Quid narrem Silo, in qua altare dirutum hodieque monstratur?”

9 The altar, first identified by Shimon Gibson, has not yet been published.


11 Garfinkel stated this view at the 23rd Judea and Samaria Studies Conference on June 13, 2013.

12 The church, excavated by Evgeny Aharonovic on behalf of the Staff Officer of the Civil Administration of Judea and Samaria, has not been published.

13 Personal communication with Leen Ritmeyer on July 17, 2016. Ritmeyer further notes the IA domestic development as beginning with the primitive dwellings at Khirbet el-Maqatir, progressing to the Shiloh houses/storerooms, and culminating with the four-room house in IA II.