

**THE ANCIENT ISRAELITES AND THE EXODUS: A CRITICAL
EXAMINATION OF THE HISTORICAL EVIDENCE FOR AN
EGYPTIAN ORIGIN IN THE LATE BRONZE AGE.**

By

Adrienne Cooke

Student Number: 2115198

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANE: Ancient Near East

ANET: *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*

BCE: Before the Common Era

BDB: *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*

c.: circa

CAT: *Canaanite and Aramaic Texts*

Chr.: Book(s) of Chronicles

CIA: Central Intelligence Agency (associated with CORONA imagery)

CORONA: Corona Satellite Program

D: Deuteronomic source; utilised in the Documentary Hypothesis

DH: Documentary Hypothesis

EA: El Amarna

E: Elohistic source; utilised in the Documentary Hypothesis

ESV: *English Standard Version*

Ezek.: Book of Ezekiel

Exod.: Book of Exodus

fem.: feminine

Fig.: Figure

Frag.: Fragment

Gen.: Book of Genesis

Heb.: Book of Hebrews

Isa.: Book of Isaiah

J: Yahwistic source; utilised in the Documentary Hypothesis

Jon.: Book of Jonah

Josh.: Book of Joshua

Judg.: Book of Judges

LBA: Late Bronze Age

lit.: literally

LXX: *Septuagint*

Masc.: Masculine

Mic.: Book of Micah

MS: Manuscript

MT: *Masoretic Text*

NIV: *New International Version*

Num.: Book of Numbers

P: Priestly source; utilised in the Documentary Hypothesis

pl.: plate

Prov.: Book of Proverbs

Sam.: Book of Samuel

Strong's: *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*

Zech.: Book of Zechariah

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the ongoing debate between minimalist and maximalist scholars regarding the historical accuracy of the Pentateuchal account of ancient Israelite origin from Egypt during the Late Bronze Age (LBA). Due to the absence of extra-biblical evidence for a large-scale Israelite Exodus from Egypt, this has led many to the conclusion that the account is fictitious. However, a growing body of research identifying Egyptian cultural and linguistic influence within the text challenges the proposition that the account is a later construction. This study examines the debate in the light of the most recent research, as well as developments in critical analysis, such as source criticism and dating hypotheses that affect foundational presuppositional frameworks. It synthesizes many crucial components including textual criticism, comparative methodology, and multidisciplinary considerations to offer a comprehensive analysis. This paper argues for the historicity of the details examined, supporting origins from Egypt that align with the late dating theory (thirteenth century BCE). To analyse historical validity, this paper first compares the Exodus account within its historical context to ancient Egyptian textual and archaeological evidence. Secondly, it analyses the text for evidence of Israelite-Egyptian contact during the LBA, revealed in language, themes, and parallels in priestly rituals and ceremonial furniture. Findings reveal strong plausibility for many details regarding the account. This study demonstrates numerous textual and cultural components with strong connections to LBA Egypt, indicating origins from this area and time, such as vivid parallels in themes of the texts, ritual furniture, and religious vestments. The text incorporates a level of detail that is unlikely to have been achieved by scribes writing in a different location or much later time period, such as Iron Age Israel or Babylon, as alternatively proposed. This study contributes to the ongoing debate by providing data demonstrating a reliable historical tradition.

Introduction

The Exodus¹ from Egypt is regarded as one of the most significant, foundational traditions that defined the ancient Israelites.² The Exodus narrative is not only important for the study of three major religions,³ described by Hawkins (2016, p. 294) as of ‘inestimable’ importance to Judaism, Islam and Christianity,⁴ but it is also significant in understanding the development of Western thought and continues to inspire art, film, politics and cultural expression today.⁵

The theme of the Exodus is ubiquitous throughout the Old and New Testament,⁶ referenced in all biblical literature from historiography and law to poetry and prophecy.⁷ As the Old Testament texts are explored, the patent centrality of the narrative cannot be overlooked. A synchronic-systematic review of the biblical texts (Genesis–Malachi), reveals over 120 references to the Exodus, highlighting it as a foundational event that shaped identity and religious development,⁸ underpinned by the themes of liberation⁹ and covenant.¹⁰

The debate regarding the historical accuracy of the Pentateuchal account of ancient Israelite origin is ongoing. While maximalist scholars generally affirm its historicity,¹¹ minimalist scholars, such as Finkelstein and Silberman (2002) argue that the Exodus is simply a ‘product

¹ Encompassing the Hebrew’s slavery, liberation, practice of religious covenant and journey across the Sinai (Exod. 1–15).

² Falk, 2018a, p. 194; Sarna, 1986, pp. 1–2. This dissertation defines ‘Israelite’ as the ancient nation emerging in the Canaan highlands c. 1200 BCE, evidenced by Iron I settlement patterns. Preceding this, they were semi-nomadic, described in Exodus as a ‘mixed multitude’ from Egypt (Exod. 12:38). See, Finkelstein (1988, pp. 30–33); Bright (2000, p. 47); Hess (2007, p. 18).

³ See Pew Research Center, 2012, The Global Religious Landscape.

⁴ Hawkins, 2016, p. 294.

⁵ Hawkins, 2021, pp. 230–255; Friedman, 2017, p. 8. For recent examples of media inspired by the Exodus see *Sinai, The Promised Land Series* (2025) [TV series]; Ben Uri Gallery & Museum (n.d.) *Exodus and Exile* [Exhibition].

⁶ Janzen, 2021, p. 14. Throughout this paper, Old Testament refers to the first division of the Christian biblical canon, based primarily upon the 24 books of the Tanakh, which includes the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. New Testament refers to the second division of the Christian biblical canon, consisting of 27 books which includes the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the epistles, and the book of Revelation. Ackroyd and Evans, 2008 pp. 135, 283–4.

⁷ Na’aman, 2011a, p. 39. See also Daube, 1963 for a detailed survey of the Exodus motif and connections throughout other biblical texts.

⁸ Hoffman, 1989, p. 170.

⁹ Redford, 1992, p. 408.

¹⁰ Bright, 2000, pp. 150–162. Hendel, 2005, pp. 57–8.

¹¹ Zevit, 2002; Janzen, 2021, p. 14.

of imagination' (p. 1), often propounded as a literary invention of the Second Temple Period.¹² Coote (1990) asserts that '[t]he writers of ancient Israel knew little or nothing about the origin of Israel' and that the Exodus period was fabricated by later authors.¹³ This aligns with Hayes and Miller (1986), who believe the escape from Egypt and sojourn were artificial and theologically influenced literary constructs.¹⁴ In 2011, Moore and Kelle summarised that '(m)ost histories of ancient Israel no longer consider information about the Egyptian sojourn, the Exodus, and the wilderness wanderings recoverable or even relevant to Israel's emergence' (p. 81).¹⁵

However, growing Egyptological scholarship highlights numerous elements of Egyptian cultural and linguistic influence within the Exodus text, strongly supporting a thirteenth-century BCE tradition rooted in Late Bronze Age (LBA) Egypt, thereby directly challenging the minimalist position.

This paper argues for the historicity of the Exodus account, aligning with the late dating theory (thirteenth century BCE), which this study identifies as the most credible timeframe. While the historicity of the Exodus narrative may seem an exhaustively debated subject, new discoveries, technological advancements, and ongoing research offer further data for analysis and assimilation into existing scholarship. This paper examines this question through the lens of recent research regarding historicity and developments in critical analysis. To achieve this, a multidisciplinary approach is employed, focusing on two main areas: the historical validity of the Exodus text within its ancient Egyptian context, and internal textual evidence of Israelite-Egyptian contact during the LBA. In order to prevent confirmation bias, this study adopts a framework of open inquiry, rigorously examining multiple hypotheses and engaging with counterarguments.

Outline of the Minimalist-Maximalist Debate

One of the main factors contributing to a minimalist perspective is the belief that the account is a story constructed centuries after the purported events, which have caused historians to

¹² Davies, 1992, pp. 20, 91.

¹³ Coote, 1990, pp. 2–3.

¹⁴ Hayes and Miller, 1986, p. 78.

¹⁵ Moore and Kelle, 2011, p. 81.

conclude that the text cannot be correlated to known history.¹⁶ Additionally, many scholars highlight the lack of extra biblical evidence.¹⁷

One of the most prominent arguments against the historicity of the Exodus account is the lack of direct archaeological evidence for the sojourn.¹⁸ A *prima facie* reading of the text indicates that six hundred thousand men left Egypt.¹⁹ Including women and children, this is estimated to correspond to over two million people.²⁰ Many have argued that such a significant number of people traversing the Sinai, should result in at least some artefacts being discovered. Yet, to date, there has been not one piece of archaeological evidence unearthed that can be clearly assigned to the Israelites.²¹

Scholars additionally argue that such a multitude of people raises many questions regarding logistics and economics.²² Not only would the Sinai be unable to support this many people,²³ but one would expect to see a large economic and societal impact on Egypt from losing such a large servile population, which is not reflected in the history at this time.²⁴ The implausibility of a group of this size leaving Egypt is especially patent considering the entire population of Egypt in Ramesside times was around 4.5 million people.²⁵

However, in comparison to Near Eastern parallels, it has been suggested by Davies (1995) that the text is utilising exaggerated numbers, as seen in the ancient Sumerian kings-lists or Assyrian annals reporting on Hittite and Judahite captives, which aim to elevate the importance of their rule, or for rhetoric effect.²⁶ Rendsburg (2001) suggests a better parallel is the *Ugaritic Keret-text*, which is more similar in genre and uses equivalently large numbers, such as an army of around three million men.²⁷

¹⁶ *Ibid.*; Batto, 1992, p. 102.

¹⁷ Moore and Kelle, 2011, p. 81.

¹⁸ Dever, 1997, p. 72; 2001, p. 99; Finkelstein and Silberman, 2002, pp. 62–3.

¹⁹ Exod. 12:37; Num. 1:46–47; 2:32.

²⁰ Waite, 2010, p. 487; Friedman, 2017, pp. 15, 26.

²¹ Friedman, 2017, p. 24.

²² Bright, 2000, p. 134.

²³ Clark, 1955, p. 86; Davies, 1995, p. 450.

²⁴ Redford, 1992, p. 408.

²⁵ Baer, 1962, p. 44.

²⁶ Davies, 1995, p. 467.

²⁷ *l̄lt mat rbt* ‘three hundred myriads’ CAT 1.14 II 36, IV 16 (Dietrich and Loretz, 1996 p. 37, 38); Rendsburg, 2001, p. 393; Gordon and Rendsburg, 1997, p. 147; Sawyer and Strange, 1964, p. 96.

While exaggeration seems a reasonable literary device, a critical analysis of the original Hebrew reveals a significant consideration regarding interpretation. Several scholars have suggested that the Hebrew word for ‘thousand’ (*’elef*)²⁸ can be interpreted in two different ways. Petrie (1906) has noted that *’elef* can also mean a ‘group’, ‘family’ or ‘tent’.²⁹ Mendenhall (1958) further makes the case that a more fitting translation is a ‘subsection of a tribe’ that later came to be applied to a ‘military unit’ or ‘contingent of troops’.³⁰ This is additionally supported by Humphrey (1998) who demonstrates clear internal, mathematical inconsistencies when *’elef* is used in other biblical contexts, such as the Number Census Lists, which do not allow a straightforward reading as a ‘thousand’.³¹ Although contrary to Friedman (2017), who states that the word *’elef* in over 250 occurrences in the Hebrew Bible is not regularly translated as ‘clan’,³² scholars have shown that it is a realistic interpretation with an etymology based in early nomadic society,³³ which is also reflected in ancient Assyrian that attests to the same two meanings for the equivalent word.³⁴ There are also a number of verses using the word altered only by a possessive or prepositional suffix, which although is not the construct form, evidence semantic scope for such interpretation.³⁵ With this taken into account, it is suggested that a more reliable figure is between 6,000 and 20,000 people,³⁶ challenging the criticism that the text is fictitious based on implausibility.

Additionally, archaeology associated with ancient nomadic people presents many challenges. Firstly, the transient, peripatetic lifestyle inherent in nomadism³⁷ often results in a lack of traceability.³⁸ The nature of continual migration necessitates minimal possessions,³⁹ and with limited resources, belongings are highly valuable and less likely to be discarded.

²⁸ אֶלֶף; All Hebrew words are transliterated using the SBL system.

²⁹ Petrie, 1906, p. 211; Petrie, 1911, pp. 40–45.

³⁰ Mendenhall, 1958, p. 60–61, 66.

³¹ Humphreys, 1998, pp. 205–6.

³² Friedman, 2017, p. 20.

³³ Malamat, 1967, pp. 129–138.

³⁴ Humphreys, 2004, p. 106.

³⁵ See Josh. 22:14, 21, 30; 1 Sam. 10:19, 23:23; Isa. 60:22; Mic. 5:2; Num. 1:16, 10:4 where the word is translated as both thousand and clan; Steele, 1908, pp. 139–40.

³⁶ For variations on Petrie’s theory providing alternative estimates see Wenham, 1967, p. 31 (72,000 people) and Clark, 1955 p. 90 (140,000 people). Cf. Humphreys, 1998, pp. 210–11, suggesting 20,000.

³⁷ Smith, 2008, p. 267.

³⁸ Barnard, 2012a, p. 6.

³⁹ Finkelstein and Perevolotsky, 1990, p. 68.

Despite recognising the possibility of lower estimates regarding the population of the Exodus, Finkelstein (2001) insists that some traces should still be evident due to the length of sojourn, recorded as forty years, and emphasises that archaeological surveys have repeatedly been conducted in the Sinai to no avail.⁴⁰ However, this appears to contradict his previous work, where he states that even though the archaeological finds are not continuous within the Sinai, there is ‘no possibility of periods of human “void”’ due to the natural resources that can be exploited (Finkelstein and Perevolotsky, 1990, p. 67). This highlights that despite the thorough investigation of the Sinai, gaps in the record do not imply a lack of presence.⁴¹ As noted by Halpern (2015), ancient armies are known to have traversed Sinai terrain, yet remain undetected in the archaeological record.⁴² Sparks (2015), further notes that even taking a maximal group size of two million people multiplied by forty years, this would generate comparable debris to that produced by 20,000 Bedouins or caravaners over four thousand years. Yet, Bedouin activity in the Sinai throughout ancient times is not debated, despite a lack of material evidence, including human remains.⁴³

This is not to say that finding archaeological remains connected to nomadic presence is impossible. The archaeological record demonstrates that even minimal remains can be discovered,⁴⁴ such as raised or levelled floors and stone lined hearths or storage platforms.⁴⁵ Evidence has also been uncovered for sites earlier than the Bronze Age in the Sinai, but as expressed by Ben-Yosef (2016) unless a nomadic society was engaged in a highly visible archaeological activity, such as mining, it is more likely to go undetected.⁴⁶ Similarly, many remains are easily visible for agricultural pastoralists, where evidence for agricultural terracing or irrigation systems are found, but these are related to systematic farming, which is not characteristic of the ancient Israelites.⁴⁷ With reference to the Israelites depicted in the

⁴⁰ Finkelstein and Silberman, 2001, pp. 62–3.

⁴¹ Sparks, 2015, p. 275.

⁴² Halpern, 2015, p. 295.

⁴³ Both 2 million people x 40 years and 20,000 people x 4,000 years = 80 million people. Sparks, 2015, p. 275.

⁴⁴ Rosen, 1993, p. 450.

⁴⁵ Cribb, 1991, p. 66.

⁴⁶ Ben-Yosef, 2016, pp. 169, 195.

⁴⁷ Szuchman, 2009, p. 58.

biblical texts,⁴⁸ there is no mention of utilising ceramics⁴⁹ and no permanent structures described. They lived in tents, and even the tabernacle, their place of worship, had a tent design detailed with portable features, such as fastened rings and poles to carry the Ark.⁵⁰

Szuchman (2009) highlights that even tents can leave an archaeological signature, however, all of the references he cites are later archaeology, including either ethnoarchaeological research or data from the Roman and Early Islamic periods.⁵¹ As emphasised by Davis (2016), even though pottery has been found in LBA sites in the Sinai, ceramic vessels are not characteristic of nomadic groups during this time period, but rather waterskins, which are a perishable material.⁵² This raises a key point of discussion, as most materials associated with nomadic migration are likely to be perishable and is an important consideration in adjusting expectations regarding the archaeological record within this context. Davis (2016) further details environmental conditions within the Sinai that can affect preservation, such as watercourses that deposit large amounts of silt after a storm and wind-generated deflation that can destroy diachronic data. Finally, the difficulty remains, that even when material culture is discovered, it can be difficult to assign ethnic identification.⁵³

Ultimately, a lack of findings within the context discussed can never be used to make an affirmative case. As detailed by Fischer (1970), negative evidence is a contradiction of terms as it provides no evidence at all.⁵⁴ This theory was addressed by Wallach (2019), who analysed the aphorism ‘absence of evidence is not evidence of absence’.⁵⁵ While recognising this is true for scientific investigation, this is not the case for archaeology which can indeed use negative results to infer conclusions, nevertheless, he states that there are particular cases where this cannot be asserted, listing the study of nomadism as a clear example.⁵⁶

⁴⁸ Davis, 2016, pp. 223–4.

⁴⁹ Only mention of longing for pots of meat (Exod. 16:3) and use of birthing stool (Exod. 1:16). These may have been made of ceramics, but unlikely to be discarded due to being valuable.

⁵⁰ Exod. 25:12–16 (Ark); Exod. 25:26–29, 25–27 (table); Exod. 35, 11–18, 35–40 (place of worship); Exod. 26:1–36, Num. 9:17–20 (tabernacle); Exod. 35:10–19 (carry poles, pegs and cords); Num. 10:17.

⁵¹ Szuchman, 2009, p. 60; Rosen and Avni, 1993, p. 192.

⁵² Davis, 2016, p. 225.

⁵³ Sparks, 2015, p. 275; Ahlström, 1993, p. 22; Jones, 1998, p. 123.

⁵⁴ Fischer, 1970, pp. 47–8, 62.

⁵⁵ Popularised by Carl Sagan; see Sagan, 1997, p. 200; Wallach, 2019, p. 2.

⁵⁶ Wallach, 2019, pp. 7–8.

A second challenge regarding the account's historicity is the lack of additional ancient textual material as no extra-biblical accounts have been discovered that reference the ancient Israelites.⁵⁷ Again, this argument needs to be weighed against realistic expectations.⁵⁸ Exodus locates the early Israelites in the Nile Delta,⁵⁹ which is known to have poor conditions for archaeological preservation and where documents are unlikely to survive,⁶⁰ owed to the wet conditions and the salinity of the water.⁶¹ A recent study by Hagage et al. (2025), utilising hydrochemical investigations and InSAR techniques, found that 80.7 % of Delta groundwater samples exhibited a chemical composition consistent with seawater. These conditions pose an ongoing threat to archaeological sites within the Nile Delta, due to the heightened risk of limescale accumulation and corrosive conditions caused by salt water intrusion.⁶² Papyri will only survive under exceptional circumstances due to being an organic material which is degradable.⁶³ This is exemplified by the excavation of the Scriptorium at ancient Avaris, where, despite the discovery of numerous artifacts, there was not one surviving papyrus.⁶⁴ Archaeological remains are often those composed of durable material, such as stone tombs or pillars commemorating a pharaoh's reign, which were intended to last for eternity.⁶⁵ Given the purpose of such literary inscriptions, which were often propagandistic in nature or aimed at bringing glorification to the gods,⁶⁶ it is unrealistic to expect to find details articulating any type of defeat or embarrassment. Kitchen (2006) comments upon the public and visible nature of these structures, stating their purpose was to proclaim victories, not defeats, which are connected to divine disapproval.⁶⁷

Although we do not have a direct account of an Exodus in Egyptian sources, there are many texts with parallel themes incorporating Exodus type imagery and content. This was first

⁵⁷ Friedman, 2017, p. 26.

⁵⁸ See Carmichael (2020, p. 8) for challenges facing the survival of ancient literature.

⁵⁹ Gen. 47:27; See Exod. 8:22; 9:26, also referencing the land of Goshen. See Alexander (2016, p. 375), who connects Goshen with the eastern Nile Delta.

⁶⁰ Falk, 2018a, p. 194; Kitchen, 2006, p. 246.

⁶¹ Hughes and Hughes, 1992, p.139; Sidebotham, Hense, and Nouwens, 2008, p. 19; Taha and Zeidan, p. 182.

⁶² Hagage et al. 2025 pp. 2, 13.

⁶³ Wallach, 2019, pp. 7–8.

⁶⁴ Reali, 2012, pp. 67–72.

⁶⁵ Peck, 2013, p. 6; Hsu, 2012, p. 269.

⁶⁶ Hsu, 2012, p. 269; Shupak, 2018, p. 106.

⁶⁷ Kitchen, 2006, p. 311.

studied in an in-depth literature review by McCown in 1925.⁶⁸ More recently it has been examined by Sparks (2015), who reveals even more parallels than previously supposed⁶⁹ with at least ninety Egyptian texts or artefacts with such themes, dating between the New Kingdom and Greco-Roman era,⁷⁰ including texts such as *The Admonitions of Ipuwer*, *The Destruction of Mankind*, *The Tale of Two Brothers*, and the Speos Artemidos inscription of Hatshepsut.

Source Criticism: The Documentary Hypothesis

A pivotal aspect of the minimalist-maximalist debate revolves around polarised views regarding when the Exodus account was composed, which is integral for establishing whether the Exodus text can provide historically reliable information. This debate significantly relates to source criticism. For addressing this in reference to the Exodus, considerations are subsumed into the wider scholarship of the Pentateuch as a whole, and as such is an expansive subject.⁷¹ There are many relevant issues to be discussed, but it would not be adequate to address this topic without discussing the Documentary Hypothesis (DH). Gaining prominence in the mid-nineteenth century through the works of Wellhausen (1885),⁷² it has long been the basis of the standard explanation of Pentateuchal composition.⁷³

For reasons of brevity, the full complexity of the DH, with over a century of scholarly discussion and review, cannot be fully addressed within the scope of this paper. For the purposes of this study the most relevant aspects will be considered, focusing specifically on their implications for the later dating of the biblical sources. While the DH offers valuable insights into the complexities of Pentateuchal composition, its inference that many parts were composed at a much later date than the text describes is unsubstantiated. Instead, compelling evidence supports an earlier, historically reliable source tradition, which will be discussed in subsequent sections.

⁶⁸ McCown, 1925, pp. 357–411.

⁶⁹ Sparks, 2015, p. 261.

⁷⁰ Sparks, 2015, p. 259.

⁷¹ Meyers, 2005, p. 16.

⁷² Römer, 2013, p. 411.

⁷³ Schwartz, 2021, p. 165.

The traditional view of Mosaic authorship has been questioned at times throughout the centuries, but particularly since the Talmud was written, which acknowledged in tractate Bava Batra 14b⁷⁴ that certain verses certainly could not designate Mosaic authorship, such as the mention of Moses' death.⁷⁵ This was elaborated on by mediaeval commentators,⁷⁶ such as Hobbes (1651),⁷⁷ who challenged additional verses.⁷⁸ Simon (1685), building on the critiques of scholars such as La Peyrère (1655) and Spinoza (1670),⁷⁹ continued to challenge Mosaic authorship in the wake of the Enlightenment and the rise of historical and literary-critical approaches, constituting higher criticism.⁸⁰ Further research was undertaken by Witter (1711), Astruc (1753) and Eichhorn (1823), who sought to identify and distinguish potential sources of the biblical text.⁸¹ This was later refined by Wellhausen, who popularised the hypothetical framework used today, which references the four hypothetical sources 'J' (Yahwist), 'E' (Elohist), 'P' (Priestly), and 'D' (Deuteronomic).⁸²

Within this theory, it was proposed that the Pentateuch was written between the 10th and 5th centuries, with the main part of D being composed during King Josiah's reign c. 640–609 BCE, believed to have had a political role in the redaction of the texts.⁸³ Wellhausen (1885), articulating his concern that the law seemed to be 'beginning with the roof instead of the foundation' (p. 3) is indicative of the type of concerns that subsequent scholars proceeded to investigate. Alongside the works of Reuss (1879), Graf (1866) and Vatke (1835), a foundational premise emerged that the Pentateuch was composed at a later date than traditionally held regarding Mosaic authorship and had been shaped by religious and political agendas.⁸⁴

⁷⁴ Babylonian Talmud, *Bava Batra* 14b:12.

⁷⁵ Deut. 34:5–12.

⁷⁶ Baden, 2012, p. 13; Freedman, 1992, p. 618.

⁷⁷ Hobbes, 1885, p. 173.

⁷⁸ Baden, 2012, pp. 13–14.

⁷⁹ Simon, 1685, p. 32; La Peyrère, 1655, pp. 204–5; Spinoza, 1670, pp. 109–12.

⁸⁰ Popkin, 2023, p. 214; Sæbø, 2013, pp. 17–25.

⁸¹ Witter, 1711, cited in Freedman, 1992, p. 618; Astruc, 1753; Eichhorn, 1823; See Carr (1996, p. 411).

⁸² Wellhausen, 1885, pp. 7–12; 1904.

⁸³ De Wette, 1850, p. 189; Waaler, 2002 p. 30.

⁸⁴ Reuss (1879) cited in Wellhausen, 1885, p. 4; Graf, 1866, pp. 6–7; Vatke, 1835 pp. 551–77; Wellhausen, 1885, p. 4–13.

Proponents of the DH, credit it as the most adequate framework for reconciling the literary challenges present within the text. As summarised by Friedman (2017), the problematic elements include contradictions, repeated doublets, disruptions in narrative flow, variations in Hebrew language and Epanalepsis, while also displaying consistent characteristics and terminology that can be attributed to each hypothesised source.⁸⁵

Although the DH presents an accumulative case and has been foundational in Pentateuchal studies for many years,⁸⁶ it is important to recognise that it has not been met without criticism or dissent. Bergsma and Morrow (2023) highlight the vast amount of concurrent scholarship, across many disciplines that has challenged the DH since its inception, stating ‘it is often forgotten that challenges to various aspects of the Documentary Hypothesis came immediately, and have continued fairly unabated, for more than a century.’⁸⁷

Above all, as a hypothesis, it cannot be regarded as conclusive due to the absence of empirical evidence.⁸⁸ As such, it has been constructed without any original source material to verify the divisions proposed.⁸⁹ The Ketef Hinnom silver strips, containing the earliest known biblical text,⁹⁰ preserve quotations from the Priestly Benediction,⁹¹ which are considered to be a part of P.⁹² This source is dated by many scholars to the postexilic period starting c. 539 BCE,⁹³ yet these scrolls, based on archaeological, orthographic and palaeographic evidence, are considered to originate from a pre-exilic context. Initially dated between the late seventh and early sixth century BCE,⁹⁴ this assessment was reaffirmed by a multidisciplinary team in collaboration with the West Semitic Research Project, who utilised advanced imaging technology.⁹⁵ High-resolution imagery enabled researchers to discern previously undetected details, even the order of strokes.⁹⁶ Challenging this, Na’aman (2011) argued for an early

⁸⁵ Friedman, 2017, p. 172; Freedman, 1992, pp. 609–619; See also Schwartz, 2021, p. 165.

⁸⁶ Bergsma and Morrow, 2023, p. xi; Carmy, 2005, p. 181.

⁸⁷ Bergsma and Morrow, 2023, p. 3.

⁸⁸ Carmy, 2005, pp. 183–4; Tigay, 1975, p. 239.

⁸⁹ Hess, 2007, p. 49; Kitchen, 1966, p. 23.

⁹⁰ Barkay et al., 2004, p.163; Na’aman, 2011b, p. 192; Barkay, et al., 2003, p. 163.

⁹¹ Num. 6:24–26.

⁹² Friedman, 2009.

⁹³ Hess, 2007, p. 49.

⁹⁴ Barkay et al., 2004, p. 42, 68.

⁹⁵ Barkay et al., 2003, p. 164.

⁹⁶ Barkay et al., 2004, p. 41; Barkay et al., 2003, pp. 164–166, 168.

Second Temple period dating.⁹⁷ However, his conclusion was unsubstantiated, based on conjectures around a missing section of text, and as highlighted by Aḥituv (2012), Na'aman's theory that 'the Redeemer' represents the temple instead of Yahweh is incongruent with the biblical texts, which never contain such phraseology.⁹⁸

Scholars continue to debate whether the text on the amulets reflects a tradition that predates P or aligns with it.⁹⁹ However, as Barkay (1992) emphasizes, 'the complete and consolidated structure of the Masoretic Priestly Benediction indicates that it is the earlier one' (p. 177).¹⁰⁰ This is supported by the fact that the amulets contain the identical text, yet were clearly inscribed by different engravers, indicating a standardised tradition.¹⁰¹

Certainly, the discovery of Ketef Hinnom scrolls does not provide evidence for the entire Priestly source, but it is salient that the only surviving text that references this source is considered pre-exilic. This directly challenges the assumption of the DH that P dates to the post-exilic period.¹⁰²

Additionally, many of the points summarised by Friedman (2017) supporting the DH,¹⁰³ have been offered alternative explanations.¹⁰⁴ For instance, linguistic and philological advancements have identified the concurrent use of both colloquial and literary Hebrew in coexistence, resulting in different vocabulary for the same meaning of a word, rather than indicating different authorship or time periods.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁷ Na'aman, 2011b, pp. 184–92.

⁹⁸ Aḥituv, 2012, pp. 228–230.

⁹⁹ Hess, 2007, p. 49; Berlejung, 2008, pp. 57–58.

¹⁰⁰ Barkay, 1992, p. 177.

¹⁰¹ Waaler, 2002, pp. 43–44. See Barkay, 1992, pp. 169–174 for further palaeographic analysis associating the letter forms with seventh century BCE inscriptions. Cf. Yardeni (1991, pp. 180–182) who proposes an earlier sixth century BCE date. Both conclusions exclude a Second Temple period origin (p. 180).

¹⁰² Hess, 2007, p. 50.

¹⁰³ Freedman, 1992, p. 605–21; Friedman, 2017, p. 190.

¹⁰⁴ See Cassuto, 1961.

¹⁰⁵ Carmy, 2005, p. 187.

Furthermore, numerous scholars have offered comprehensive evaluations that highlight many of the DH's limitations.¹⁰⁶ For example, it has been noted that the hypothesis is inclined to circular reasoning,¹⁰⁷ whereby the criteria of source division are formulated and re-shaped to support a predetermined conclusion.¹⁰⁸ As a result, attempts to challenge its proponents often prove futile, as the hypothesis is continually reformed in response to criticism. The multitude of variations and revised versions, along with the ongoing reordering of chronology and the addition, combination, or omission of sources,¹⁰⁹ underscores the lack of consensus and the challenges the hypothesis faces.¹¹⁰ As it evolves to resolve one problem, no sooner does another arise.¹¹¹ With agreement still elusive, it is an area that requires ongoing research to provide an alternative that is met with less fraction.

In addition, there are no comparative examples in ancient literature to support a similar mode of composition.¹¹² While some texts, such as the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, show evidence of editorial development,¹¹³ and others indicate textual conflation, such as the Qumran scrolls¹¹⁴ and *Tatian's Diatessaron*,¹¹⁵ there are no known examples of distinct literary genres being integrated and woven together in the manner found in the Pentateuch.¹¹⁶

While the DH faces significant criticism, this does not imply that no form of redaction or editing occurred during the composition of the text. Such editorial activity is well evidenced.¹¹⁷ What the DH does offer is the consideration that any redaction may have been influenced by the social, political, or religious context of the editor, which is a valid point for consideration. However, for the purposes of this study it is not necessary to reach a conclusion on number of sources, authors or redactors involved, only to establish whether

¹⁰⁶ Such as Cassuto, 1961; Kitchen, 1966, pp. 112–130; Rendtorff, 1990; Bergsma and Morrow, 2023; Armgardt, Kilchör and Zehnder, 2019, pp. 79–90; Berman, 2020, pp. 7–25.

¹⁰⁷ Armgardt, Kilchör and Zehnder, 2019, p. viii.

¹⁰⁸ Finn, 1917, p. 333.

¹⁰⁹ For different variations see Hess, 2007, pp. 46–59; Friedman, 2017, p. 39; Römer, 2013, p. 411.

¹¹⁰ Meyers, 2005, p. 17; Friedman, 2017, p. 38.

¹¹¹ Mead, 1891, p. 46.

¹¹² Hess, 2007, p. 50.

¹¹³ Foster, 2021, pp. xiv–xv; Tigay, 1985, pp. 35–52.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 83–95 (Qumran Scrolls) and pp. 61–83 (Samaritan Pentateuch).

¹¹⁵ Hogg, 1912, p. 35; Moore, 1890, pp. 201–213.

¹¹⁶ Hess, 2007, p. 50.

¹¹⁷ Rendtorff, 1990; Müller et al., 2014; Ska, 2006, pp. 76–95. See Berman (2017, pp. 6, 81–106), who discusses later editing without erasure of previous material.

there is evidence of an early source tradition that can be considered reliable and accurate.¹¹⁸ Although this stands against the proposition of the DH, there is much evidence to support this position.

Numerous scholars have highlighted elements that demonstrate the antiquity of the Pentateuchal narrative. For example, Kaufmann (1960) contends that the Torah does not reflect any recognition of the significant historical conditions of the Babylonian exile, which would be expected if it had been written after these events. He emphasises that the theme of trauma and suffering associated with the idea of exile is not evident in later prophetic literature during the time that it was experienced. Many who had been exiled had become so settled that they did not wish to return, while to the contrary, it was those who remained in Jerusalem who are depicted as experiencing great misery.¹¹⁹ Kaufman summarises

[t]he descriptions of the exile in the Torah are, indeed, the most eloquent advocates of their antiquity, for they show clearly that their authors had no idea of the actual condition of Israel's historical exile (Kaufmann, 1960, p. 204).

Additionally, Exodus does not give great significance to Jerusalem, which is unlikely, given the importance placed on it as the capital for worship in postexilic times and the political factors involved in its centralisation.¹²⁰

It has been recognised that much work examining source criticism has been conducted utilising internal textual analysis, whilst not utilising available external evidence of archaeological or ancient Near East (ANE) studies.¹²¹ This is evident in the work of Wellhausen who was criticised by his contemporaries for his reluctance to engage with Babylonian or Assyrian studies.¹²² While acknowledging that certain evidence of the ANE was not available to Wellhausen, even with later developments many biblical scholars have worked in isolation from other disciplines, which are essential to create a clearer picture.

Recently, Schniedewind (2019; 2024) has published works that describe the processes of ancient scribes and identifies the need to detach perspectives on composition from modern

¹¹⁸ Tigay, 1985, p. 25.

¹¹⁹ Kaufmann, 1960, pp. 204–5.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

¹²¹ Kitchen, 1966, pp. 112, 114–5.

¹²² Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, 1928, pp. 189–90.

Western assumptions. Recognising that the DH has waned in pre-eminence, Schniedewind proposes an apprenticeship model, which focuses on processes rather than sources.¹²³

¹²³ Schniedewind, 2024, pp. 1–4.

Literature Review

The paradigm of archaeological investigation in the early twentieth century, shaped by scholars such as Albright,¹²⁴ generally took for granted the historicity of the biblical texts.¹²⁵ Albright, well known for his extensive scholarly contributions, spanning over a thousand publications, drew on a mastery of many disciplines,¹²⁶ and on the basis of his findings regarding archaeology and topography, concluded that hypercriticism towards early historical traditions of Israel was untenable.¹²⁷ Successive scholarly works addressing Israel's origin came to similar conclusions. Bright (2000) described the biblical narrative as 'unquestionably based in history' and that there is 'no reason . . . to doubt that Hebrew slaves had escaped in a remarkable way from Egypt.' (p.150). Prominent Israeli archaeologist Yadin (1975) expressed a similar perspective, describing his approach to excavations as one in which he worked 'with the Bible in one hand and a spade in the other',¹²⁸ demonstrating the value he placed on the biblical texts as able to provide a valuable framework for exegesis. While Albright and others persisted in research examining the biblical texts within their Near Eastern context and applying new archaeological findings,¹²⁹ other scholars such as Noth and Alt, became interested in the formative development of the Hebrew Bible using a methodology primarily in internal analysis of biblical texts and applying comparative sociological models.¹³⁰ This led to the development of a theory that proposed a gradual social process in which nomads peacefully infiltrated and integrated into the land of Canaan.¹³¹ Utilising a similar methodology, Gottwald (1975) also rejected the biblical depictions of a conquest, but proposed that Israel emerged from a peasant's revolt within Canaan. Applying a socio-economic model, he theorised that the early Israelites were lower-class members of the coastal plain, who helped establish a new, egalitarian society in the central hill country.¹³² Although this theory has been generally dismissed, Gottwald's emphasis on the application of sociological study to illuminate the biblical text started to take root.

¹²⁴ William F. Albright (1891–1971); see Levy and Freedman (2009, p. 5, 12).

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹²⁶ Levy and Freedman, 2009, pp. 4–5.

¹²⁷ Albright, 1940, p. 194; 1964, p. 309.

¹²⁸ Yadin, 1975, p. 187.

¹²⁹ Levy and Freedman, 2009, p.11.

¹³⁰ Martin Noth (1902–1968), Albrecht Alt (1883–1956); Van Seters, 2006, pp. 386, 256.

¹³¹ Moore and Kelle, 2011, p. 16.

¹³² Gottwald, 1979, p. 20; Grabbe, 2017, p. 36.

Archaeology began to pivot from a historical explanation of data utilising biblical interpretations to an emphasis on political-economic and social-anthropological models.¹³³ Beginning with challenges to the historicity of the patriarchal narratives in Genesis, advanced by Thompson (1974) and Van Seters (1975),¹³⁴ a re-examination of the Exodus account soon followed. By the 1990s, a growing number of scholars were voicing concerns that the biblical text was too problematic to inform direct history and was inadequate for analysing Israel's origins.¹³⁵ As a result, scholars increasingly regarded the text as valuable only for understanding history related to the Persian and Hellenistic periods, during which the text was now assumed to have been composed.¹³⁶

The minimalist-maximalist debate has primarily been argued within the field of archaeology,¹³⁷ fomented by a few key scholars who were reaching concurrent conclusions that questioned the extent to which the biblical texts can be used for historical data.¹³⁸ This was followed by two successive publications by Thompson (1992) and Davies (1992),¹³⁹ which established the basis for the debate that has continued into recent times. Although minimalists may believe that some historical information could be present, it is deemed too difficult to ascertain due to the layers of redaction and revision.

Over the next few decades biblical studies shifted towards literary studies, which developed further in light of scholarship that investigated the implications of the Documentary Hypothesis.¹⁴⁰ For many years, the literary aspects of the Exodus have been a dominant focus for scholars. Thompson (1999), for example, emphasizes this by advocating for a pursuit of literary elements such as historicity, metaphor and evocation, summarising that the text does not 'deal with what happened in the past. It deals with what was thought, written, and transmitted within an interacting intellectual tradition' (p. 34).¹⁴¹

¹³³ Zevit, 2002, p. 9.

¹³⁴ *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham* (Thompson, 2002); *Abraham in History and Tradition* (Van Seters, 1975).

¹³⁵ Moore and Kelle, 2011, pp. 33, 35.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹³⁷ Cook, 2005, p. 181.

¹³⁸ Lemche, 1985; Garbini, 1988, pp. 1–20, 125–6, 132, 154–169; Davies, 1992; Thompson, 2002; Whitelam, 2003.

¹³⁹ Thompson, 1992; Davies, 1992.

¹⁴⁰ Levy and Freedman, 2009, p. 10.

¹⁴¹ Thompson, 1999, p. 34; Dever, 1997, pp. 69–70.

However, despite the minimalist viewpoint becoming the consensus,¹⁴² the maximalist position continues to be maintained. As recognised by Grabbe (2017), all historical work is completed within a theoretical framework and although it may be promoted that the minimalists apply most methodology rigour, this is not the case.¹⁴³ Most significantly, a number of notable scholars and researchers who persisted to contend for maximalism were experts within Egyptology,¹⁴⁴ a discipline often overlooked in the biblical and archaeological debates.¹⁴⁵ Its essential relevance to the study of ancient Israelite origin cannot be understated.¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless, it is a topic which has largely been ignored by Egyptologists over the years.¹⁴⁷

The reluctance of Egyptologists to engage with a biblical topic such as this, has been articulated by Hoffmeier (2015), noting that, despite many Egyptologists accepting the historicity of the Exodus narratives, they either ‘have no interest in investigating it using their discipline, or feel that it is a subject to be investigated by people with a religious agenda’ (p. 206). However, if the text is reliable, evidence of contact with Egypt should be apparent in many aspects of the biblical narrative, therefore Egyptology is essential in examining this subject.

As Williams (1975) highlights, the specialist expertise required in analysing Egyptological data can make it inaccessible to many scholars.¹⁴⁸ It is therefore vital to give this discipline due prominence, applying careful discernment and critical analysis to ensure that research is informed by scholars who are experts in this field.

It is also essential to consider data from multiple perspectives, drawing on findings from various disciplines. As Friedman (2017) recognises, there is a need for greater cohesion between fields, particularly between biblical studies and archaeology. He emphasises that,

¹⁴² Grabbe 2017, p. 36.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁴⁴ Naville, 1888, 1887, 1922; Clédat, 1919, pp. 213–224, 1920; Kitchen, 1966, 1977, 2006; Hoffmeier, 1996, 2005, 2016, 2021; Falk, 2018a, 2020b.

¹⁴⁵ Pace, 2005, pp. 117–18; Hoffmeier, 2015, p. 206.

¹⁴⁶ Williams, 1975, pp. 231–252.

¹⁴⁷ Hoffmeier, 2015, p. 203.

¹⁴⁸ Williams, 1975, p. 231.

[f]or too long our field was made up of Bible scholars who were not trained in archaeology or historical method. And then for too long we leaned on archaeologists who were not trained in biblical texts, their history, language, and authorship. (Friedman, 2017, p. 23).¹⁴⁹

Over time, a greater divide has emerged, reflected in the discussions contending for a change in terms, from ‘biblical archaeology’ to ‘Syro-Palestinian archaeology’.¹⁵⁰ However, it is important that the two disciplines continue to inform one another. As seen in how archaeological findings have changed scholarly perspectives on the Hyksos, overreliance on literary evidence can produce an incomplete picture.¹⁵¹ It is important that conclusions are informed by broad data interpreted through a multidisciplinary lens.

¹⁴⁹ Friedman, 2017, p. 23.

¹⁵⁰ Forwarded by Dever 1980; Zevit, 2002. p. 2, 15; Mazar, 1990, p. 32. For full discussion see Zevit (2004, pp. 3–19).

¹⁵¹ Säve-Söderbergh, 1951, pp. 55–7.

Methodology

To some extent it is understandable that Egyptology has been neglected, given the dominant presupposition that the text was constructed in Babylon or Israel, at a later date. As a result, scholars have focused more heavily on literary analysis and assigning portions of the text to hypothetical sources in pursuit of more refined source criticism.¹⁵² Others have devoted their efforts to theorising potential political or religious agendas that could be assigned to later writers.¹⁵³ However, if it is granted that there may be reliable historical information within the text, it is only reasonable to examine Egyptological data, considering that Egypt is presented as the ancient Israelites country of origin.

Similar to the balanced view of Mazar (1990),¹⁵⁴ this paper challenges the strong assertions of biblical minimalism, while maintaining a critical and evidence-based approach. Unlike some maximalists who take the Bible only at face value, the approach of this study is one of neutral inquiry attending to data from alternative perspectives, while regarding the Exodus account in the same category as other ancient source to be critically examined and utilised.

As discussed, the lack of direct evidence, such as archaeological findings, does not provide conclusive data to discredit the reliability of the text, but many have not recognised the significance of indirect data regarding internal evidence. The methodology of this study is to examine the literature of researchers in the field of Egyptology to investigate evidence for Egyptian contact. To conduct a deeper analysis this discussion will focus on three main areas of internal analysis including aetiology of vocabulary, motifs of Egyptian origin and Egyptian parallels in ritual and religious furniture.

Secondly, although there is no archaeological evidence for the presence of ancient Israelites in the Sinai, there is a wealth of data within the Nile Delta that can be explored to investigate their origins. The presupposition that the account is a later fiction, has often discouraged researchers from considering archaeological evidence in Egypt, however such data can provide important insights. This study aims not to limit or restrict the broader applications of research from relevant archaeological sites.

¹⁵² Friedman, 1997.

¹⁵³ Cross, 2009.

¹⁵⁴ Mazar, 1990, p. 32.

An important preliminary measure is to assess the plausibility of the Exodus account by examining it in light of its historical background. It is necessary to recognise that even if an account is congruent to the time period it describes and has a high level of verisimilitude, it can still be a work of fiction¹⁵⁵ such as the *Tales of Sinuhe*¹⁵⁶ and the *Report of Wenamun*.¹⁵⁷ That said, although most scholars agree that the *Account of Wenamun* is a work of fiction, some scholars contend that it is a non-literary documentary text,¹⁵⁸ highlighting the complex and difficult task often involved in determining genre correctly.¹⁵⁹ Nonetheless, an account that includes a number of historical inaccuracies raises questions concerning its reliability. It is possible that an historical account may detail misinformation due to subjective perspective and biases, but if the majority of background details do not align with the time or place it is set in, it evidently points towards fictional composition. Therefore, it is a significant and necessary initial step in investigating authenticity.

In evaluating the accuracy of the Exodus text against its historical background, some studies exhibit a weakness by focusing solely on data that supports their theory, while ignoring or minimising the parts that do not. This is evident in arguments for the early date of the Exodus, where proponents present archaeological data purported to align with the date, while dismissing conflicting research, such as Exodus 1.11 that details the city of Ramesses, which is unknown in the archaeological record of the 18th Dynasty. This has been explained as an intentional anachronism edited by later scribes,¹⁶⁰ however this is speculation with no manuscript evidence.¹⁶¹ Another error is the conflation of inference with evidence, where historical data is framed dependent upon certain presuppositions of the text, rather than being examined through alternative frameworks. For example, it has been suggested that Amenhotep II was the Pharaoh of the Exodus, and that certain historical data, such as financial loss serve as evidence.¹⁶² However, other explanations are equally valid or even more reasonable. Inference is a necessary analytical tool, but it is a fallacy of proof to present

¹⁵⁵ Hendel, 2021, p. 125.

¹⁵⁶ Parkinson, 2009, p. 21.

¹⁵⁷ Boyes, 2021, p. 273; Winand, 2011, pp. 542, 552, 541–543.

¹⁵⁸ Winand, 2011, pp. 541–559; Sass, 2002, pp. 247–8.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 541–559.

¹⁶⁰ Stripling, 2021, p. 51.

¹⁶¹ Hoffmeier, 2021, p.129.

¹⁶² Petrovich, 2006, pp. 83, 93, 99, 101–4, 107–10.

a hypothesis as concrete.¹⁶³ This can be a form of tendency explanation bias, implying ‘greater certainty in causal analyses than the evidence justifies.’ (Mukharji and Zeckhauser, 2019, p. 5).¹⁶⁴ In order to avoid the fallacy of *Petitio Principii*, where research is directed around a preconceived conclusion,¹⁶⁵ this study adopts a framework of open inquiry and will rigorously examine multiple hypotheses. Engaging in counterarguments and research that presents opposing views, also aims to prevent confirmation bias.

To achieve this, a key methodology of this paper is to apply a multi-disciplinary approach. As discussed, for many years, various disciplines have worked in isolation in relation to the study of the Exodus account. However, in 2013 the Qualcomm Institute¹⁶⁶ took a step in closing the divide by hosting a conference that brought together scholars from a range of fields, such as archaeologists, Biblical scholars, Egyptologists, and geo-scientists, to share their diverse perspectives related to analysing the text.¹⁶⁷ It is in this vein, by drawing on a broad range of disciplines, that this study aims to build upon, with a primary focus upon Egyptological data.

As part of an interdisciplinary perspective, this paper will also apply a comparative methodology, including anthropological studies, to understand patterns and types of cultural assimilation expected of a Semitic people interacting with Egyptian culture and influence. It is reasonable to expect that Egypt would ‘leave imprints’ due to being a ‘venerable and highly advanced civilization’ (Williams, 1975, p. 233).

Additionally, comparative studies are valuable for illuminating nomadic behaviour. The benefits of such an approach has been highlighted by Bailey (2018), who examined Bedouin lifestyle to provide insight into the nomadic tradition of the Israelite people,¹⁶⁸ and Malamat (1998) who conducted a comparative study of Mari.¹⁶⁹ However, caution must always be applied in drawing firm conclusions from more modern cultures to those of the past and

¹⁶³ Hamblin, 1970, p. 33.

¹⁶⁴ Mukharji and Zeckhauser, 2019, p. 5.

¹⁶⁵ Woods and Walton, 1975, p. 107.

¹⁶⁶ Based at the University California, San Diego.

¹⁶⁷ A division of Calit2. Conference titled *Out of Egypt: Israel's Exodus Between Text and Memory, History and Imagination*. See Levy, Schneider, and Propp, 2015.

¹⁶⁸ Bailey, 2018.

¹⁶⁹ Malamat, 1998, pp. 2–3.

particularly across ethnic groups, which can differ in many ways.¹⁷⁰ This study will therefore draw inferences supported by additional data, whilst being careful to avoid generalisations.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Barnard, 2012a, p.6; Malamat, 1998, pp. 2–3. See Sidebotham, Hense, and Nouwens (2008, p. 281); de Vaux (1997, p.3).

¹⁷¹ Malamat, 1998, pp. 2–3.

Dating

Analysing the text's congruence to historical context is contingent on establishing a correct time frame for when the text refers to. Determining the date of the Exodus is a complex task and is a subject that has been debated vehemently for decades.¹⁷² For reasons of brevity, the two most prominent theories will be discussed.¹⁷³

It is agreed by most scholars that the majority of Biblical Hebrew literature dates between the thirteenth and fourth centuries BCE.¹⁷⁴ Aided by the discovery of the Qumran Scrolls and material uncovered at Ras Shamra, as well as modern day advances, there is significant evidence to validate this period.¹⁷⁵ The earliest mention of the Israelite people is found on the Merneptah Stele,¹⁷⁶ providing the earliest textual reference to Israel¹⁷⁷ and only mention of Israel in Egyptian texts.¹⁷⁸ It is also significant that the determinative likely denotes a people group, rather than a city,¹⁷⁹ which may support the biblical account as it indicates that they were a tribal group, not yet permanently settled.¹⁸⁰ Despite the statement that Israel has been 'laid waste' and that their 'seed', indicating posterity, is no more,¹⁸¹ this is understood retrospectively as military hyperbole,¹⁸² and ultimately indicates that an Israelite presence was known in Canaan by the 5th regnal year of Merneptah c. 1208 BCE.¹⁸³ As Lichtheim (1976) notes, caution should be applied in determining the details of the Merneptah Stele as historically accurate, given the genre as triumphal poetry.¹⁸⁴ However, none of the other

¹⁷² Smith, 1926, p. 438; Hoffmeier, 2007, p. 225.

¹⁷³ For research on the other theories, such as the twelfth century dating, see Geraty, 2015; Janzen and Gundry, 2021.

¹⁷⁴ Albright, 1964, p. 85.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁷⁶ KRI IV 19.7.

¹⁷⁷ *ysryʾl*, see Hasel (1994) for authentication of translation as Israel (pp. 45–54).

¹⁷⁸ Lichtheim, 1976, p. 73; Redford, 2001, p. 181.

¹⁷⁹ Dever, 2001, p. 118. See Ahlström (1986, p. 40), Whitelam (2003, pp. 209–10), who argue that the determinative does not denote an ethnic people group. Cf. Hoffmeier (1996, pp. 53, 80–81), Kitchen (2006, p. 451), Hasel (2004) who challenge this.

¹⁸⁰ Williams, 1961, p. 141; Redmount, 1998, p. 72.

¹⁸¹ Pritchard, 1992, p. 378. 'Israel is laid waste, his seed is not' (ANET).

¹⁸² Leuchter, 2010, pp. 265–6.

¹⁸³ Falk, 2020b, p. 11; Kitchen, 2006, p. 164.

¹⁸⁴ Lichtheim, 1976, p. 73; Pritchard, 1992, p. 376.

toponyms or socioethnic entities in the same final hymnic-poetic unit are fictional,¹⁸⁵ and it is regarded as significant evidence attesting to an Israelite presence.¹⁸⁶

The most prominent and widely accepted theories regarding the dating of the Exodus is the fifteenth-century BCE (c. 1446 BCE), known as the ‘early date’ and the thirteenth-century BCE known as the ‘late date’ (1279–1213 BCE).¹⁸⁷ The pivotal point of the discussion hinges on whether dating references elsewhere within the Old Testament are to be interpreted as literal or figurative.

The primary biblical datum for the Exodus event is 1 Kings 6:1, which in the Masoretic Text,¹⁸⁸ states that the Exodus occurred 480 years¹⁸⁹ prior to the building of Solomon’s temple, conventionally accepted as c. 966 BCE.¹⁹⁰ Taken literally this would indicate a dating of 1446/7 BCE. Yet it is important to note that prose in the Old Testament employs more figurative use than Western literature.¹⁹¹ The Old Testament utilises many figures of speech, as detailed by Bullinger (2011), who lists over 200 types, such as synecdoche, catachresis, and antonomasia.¹⁹² Proponents of the early date make a case that the date of the Exodus can be calculated based upon internal biblical chronology, however not all of the data aligns cohesively. For example, the sum total of the monarchic period and ruling period of the different judges does not support the early date theory.¹⁹³

In such discussions about dating, archaeological evidence is often proposed as a means of supporting each position. Stripling (2021) suggests that Sinai 375a, discovered at Serabit el-Khadim, evidences proto-Sinaitic script which can support the presence of early Israelite activity. This conclusion is based on an interpretation forwarded by Petrovich (2017), who proposes that the inscription should be translated as ‘*The overseer of minerals, Ahisamach . .*

¹⁸⁵ Hasel, 2004, pp. 80–1; Simons, 1937, p. 146 (XVI a.1); Abbas, 2017, p. 329; Na’aman, 1977, p. 168–174 (Yenoam); Na’aman, 2005, p. 4 (Hurru); Wilson, 1935, p. 74; Kraeling, 1960, p. 109 (Tehenu); Singer, 1988, p. 3 (Ashkelon and Gezer); Blackwell, 2021, p. 192. (Hatti).

¹⁸⁶ Kitchen, 2006, p. 451; 2014, p. 272.

¹⁸⁷ Janzen, 2021, pp. 21–2.

¹⁸⁸ LXX states 440 years ‘τεσσαρακοστῶ καὶ τετρακοσιοστῶ ἔτει’. Being a later MS, scholars generally assess the MT as more reliable. See Hoffmeier (2007, p. 226); Bimson (1981, pp. 74–5).

¹⁸⁹ Refers to Julian years.

¹⁹⁰ Bimson, 1981, p. 74.

¹⁹¹ Berkhof, 1952, p. 85.

¹⁹² Bullinger, 2011, pp. 613–656, 674–7, 682–4.

¹⁹³ Hoffmeier, 2007, pp. 227–8.

.’ (p. 175), which is considered to support Exodus 31:2–7 as it mentions this name. However, several scholars have resolutely rejected Petrovic’s thesis.¹⁹⁴ A closer examination reveals significant methodological issues in the study. Letters have been connected across different lines in an unconventional manner¹⁹⁵ and high-resolution scans were not utilised.¹⁹⁶ When compared to a more reliable reproduction by Hamilton (2006), it is evident that extra letters have been inferred that are not present,¹⁹⁷ indicating an eisegetical, rather than objective approach. Additional research cited by Stripling reveals an overall uncritical acceptance of data that appears to support an early date, without sufficient inquiry into source reliability. Stripling (2021) refers to Josephus’ citation of Manetho to support the early date,¹⁹⁸ which indicates that the Pharaoh of the Exodus was Amenhotep II. However, alternative versions of Manetho’s work, each mention a different pharaoh.¹⁹⁹ Nonetheless, the original composition of Manetho is a third century BCE text,²⁰⁰ occurring far after the event it is reporting and considering the discrepancies, it lacks reliability to make an affirmative case.

Alternatively, considering a figurative approach, scholars recognise that in many biblical texts, such as monarchic reigns, numbers are not to be interpreted as literal, but rather apply to a chronological scheme.²⁰¹ Jeon (2011) notes that the numbers related to the Exodus dating are likely a literary device where the year is significant in linking Solomon to the Exodus motif.²⁰² Feinman (2019) further discusses the symbolic connotations of the number four, connecting it to basic foundational concepts, such as the cardinal directions on a compass or the idea of the four quarters of the universe evident in Mesopotamia culture and language.²⁰³ This is detailed in phrases by Akkadian rulers, such as ‘king of four corners of the universe’, or similarly in Sumerian, ‘heaven’s four corners’, which may symbolise the notion of totality.²⁰⁴ This is also seen in inscriptions of later Assyrian Kings, such as the address to

¹⁹⁴ Wilson-Wright, 2020, pp. 705–14; Schneider, 2016; Holmstedt, 2019, pp. 307–336.

¹⁹⁵ Hendel, 2021, pp. 73–74.

¹⁹⁶ Falk, 2018b, p. 2.

¹⁹⁷ Petrovich, 2016, p. 175. Cf. Hamilton (2006, p. 374), where clearly the $\aleph$ and $\beth$ are absent.

¹⁹⁸ Stripling, 2021, pp. 32–33.

¹⁹⁹ *Chronographiae*, Frag. 34, section 80; see Adler (2007, pp. 80–81). For example, Africanus’s account, preserved by Synkellos, states Ahmose I as king, whereas Eusebius’s version records Akhenaten, and Theophilus’s version names Pharaoh Thutmose IV. See Zeev (1993, p. 227).

²⁰⁰ Shaw, 2002, p. 1; Bimson, 1981, p. 131.

²⁰¹ Zerafa, 1988, p. 112.

²⁰² Jeon, 2011, pp. 29–33.

²⁰³ Feinman, 2019, pp. 136–7.

²⁰⁴ Michalowski, 2010, p. 153.

Ishtar on the lion at Calah ‘(I) Assur-nâsir-pal . . . the king without a rival, the king of all four regions of the world.’²⁰⁵ Four is also symbolic in biblical texts.²⁰⁶ In particular when multiplied by a factor of ten, the number forty, is a common motif, often symbolising testing or trial.²⁰⁷ For example, raining for forty days and forty nights in the Genesis flood, the forty year sojourn and Ezekiel prophesying Egypt will suffer forty years of desolation.²⁰⁸ It is also a significant number when further multiplied by ten, as seen in texts mentioning four hundred or four thousand, which appear in multiple texts.²⁰⁹

With regard to dating, it has been identified that the number 480 could be connected to the multiplication of 12 and 40, which are not only significant biblical numbers, but that 40 may equate to a generation. However, scholars disagree over the length of a generation, which Bright (1972) suggests is more likely 25 years.²¹⁰

A more proficient way to determine the application and function of numeric figures of time within this passage, is to consider such use in parallel texts within the same genre. As recognised by Falk (2020b), 1 Kings 6:1 is a temple dedication, and correlates with ANE formula in similar texts, which use numbers symbolically.²¹¹ For example, the Assyrian King Tukulti-Ninurta I states that there were 720 years between the construction of the Ishtar Temple and its first construction by predecessor King Ilu-shumma.²¹² As stated by Read (2001), it is unlikely that Tukulti-Ninurta I knew the date within Ilu-shumma’s reign that the work was completed or that he reigned that long, and therefore simply suggests an approximation to the distant past.²¹³ It is likely that the numbers relate to the multiplication of

²⁰⁵ Luckenbill, 1926, p. 190.

²⁰⁶ Bullinger, 1894, p. 123–134; Longman, 1999, p. 190.

²⁰⁷ Hoenig, 1978, p. 193; Davis, 1968, pp. 121–2.

²⁰⁸ Gen. 7:4; Exod. 16:35; Ezek. 29:11–13; see also Jon. 3:4, where Jonah prophesies the destruction of Nineveh in forty days.

²⁰⁹ E.g., Abraham burial plot purchased for 400 shekels (Gen. 23:15–16); 400 prophets in a confrontation with Elijah (1 Kings 18:19, 22); David accompanied by 400 military men (1 Sam. 22:2; 25:13; 1 Sam. 30:10, 17). 4000 Israelites killed in battle by the Philistines (1 Sam. 4:2); Solomon has 4000 stalls for his chariot force (2 Chr. 9:25).

²¹⁰ Bright, 2000, p. 123.

²¹¹ Falk, 2020b, pp. 16–17.

²¹² Grayson, 1987, p. 254.

²¹³ Reade, 2001, p. 2.

sixty by twelve, which are significant numbers within Assyrian mathematics that relies upon a sexagesimal numeric system,²¹⁴ with Kings 6:1 likely employing the same principle.

In opposition to this theory, Kennedy (2024) conducted a detailed study into ANE temple dedications, arguing against the idiomatic interpretation of numbers in such texts. Instead, Kennedy proposes that the numbers recorded in these types of temple dedications align close enough to be rendered literal in intention. Although Kennedy's study is comprehensive and demonstrates thorough handling of texts, it over-relies upon the use of Middle-Assyrian Chronology, which is not accepted by the majority of modern Assyriologists.²¹⁵ Read (2001) laments that the middle chronology has been trusted by scholars 'who have not realized the provisional nature of the convention . . . but it is no longer tenable. By now, having won uncritical acceptance, it is doing more harm than good' (p. 2).

One argument against the late date is that the text of Judges 11:26, does not appear to support thirteenth century dating. Within this text, Jephthah states in a letter to the king of Ammon, that Israel occupied Heshbon, Aroer, and the cities surrounding the Arnon for 300 years. As scholars date Jephthah's judgeship between 1130 and 1073 BCE, this would indicate that the conquest would have happened around 1400 BCE, synchronising more accurately with the early date proposition.²¹⁶ However, in considering the context of the text, Jephthah is not regarded as a credible witness.²¹⁷ For example, he makes a number of false claims that the audience likely would have been receptive of, such as stating that Chemosh was the patron deity of the Ammonites, rather than Milcom.²¹⁸

An objection to the figurative approach is that this type of interpretation could result in a haphazard assessment, where a researcher can assert any number as an idiom to fit a certain conclusion, however this can be avoided by ensuring an objective criteria is applied, as detailed by Berkhof (1952), who discusses a number of important principles that can be utilised to avoid relying on presuppositions.²¹⁹ One aspect Berkhof discusses is to consider

²¹⁴ Ifrah, 2000, p. 91–2; Falk, 2020b, p. 17.

²¹⁵ Read, 2001, p. 1–2.

²¹⁶ Wood, 2005, pp. 477–8. See Kitchen (2006, p. 207).

²¹⁷ Kitchen, 2006, p. 209.

²¹⁸ 1 Kings 11:33; 1 Kings 11:5–5; 2 Kings 23:13.

²¹⁹ Berkhof, 1952, pp. 78–85.

the thoughts of the speaker.²²⁰ With regard to Jephthah, his speech is recognised as rhetorical and persuasive, rather than precise, intended to win a territorial dispute. Just as the letter relayed from Sennacherib in 2 Kings is best understood as propagandistic in nature,²²¹ rather than providing accurate or objective information, reported speech in biblical narrative can contain inaccurate information and must be weighed by its literary context.²²²

While further critique of alternative theories could be detailed,²²³ it is necessary to discuss the reasons that the late date thesis is considered most compelling and how a specific date can be established within the context of a figurative approach. Although the Pharaoh of the Exodus is not named, there is a reference that makes it possible to construct a date, through the mention of the city, Pithom, where the Israelites slaves are reported to have built store houses.²²⁴ Pithom has been identified with Tell el-Retaba, where excavations have uncovered brick structures dating to the reign of Rameses II, with no indication of construction in the preceding dynasty.²²⁵ Exodus 1:11 also names the city of Rameses, which is generally understood by Egyptologists to correspond to Pi-Ramesses (‘House/Domain of Ramesses’),²²⁶ a new city built in the northeastern Delta during the reign of Ramesses II.²²⁷ Based on archaeological evidence such as the discovery of the royal palace, Pi-Ramesses is now identified with the site of Qantir.²²⁸ First occupied by Seti I as a royal residence, caesium magnetometry surveys revealed no remains beneath the foundations of the Ramesside city, which is a further challenge to the early date.²²⁹ Additionally, Pithom is found in sources of the 19th Dynasty, but not prior to the thirteenth century.²³⁰

With regard to synchronisation, there are chronological challenges relating to Egyptian dating, such as debates over co-regency of kings, movement of the civil year which rarely aligned with the solar year and uncertainty concerning locations with regard to astronomical

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

²²¹ 2 Kings 18:19–35.

²²² Kitchen, 2006, p. 209.

²²³ See Janzen et al., 2021.

²²⁴ Exod. 1:11.

²²⁵ Harrison, 1969, p. 115.

²²⁶ Gardiner, 1918b, p. 266.

²²⁷ Hoffmeier, 2007, p. 231.

²²⁸ Bietak, 1986, p. 230.

²²⁹ Forstner, Pusch and Höflmayer, 2008, p. 87–106.

²³⁰ Hoffmeier, 2005, pp. 58–65.

dating.²³¹ However chronological data for the Ramesside period is particularly abundant,²³² allowing for a fair degree of accuracy.²³³

Overall, this paper argues that the late dating theory, which places the Exodus in the thirteenth century BCE during the LBA, is the most credible interpretation. When viewed through this lens, the Exodus account presents a historically plausible narrative that challenges prevailing minimalist proposals.

²³¹ For a further discussion of the challenges see Shaw (2002, pp. 11–12).

²³² Hornung, 2006, p. 197.

²³³ Kitchen, 1990, p. 239.

Discussion

Geographical Details

With a date range established, it becomes possible to compare details of the text with the surrounding geography. Rainey (2014), one of the lead historical geographers in the Levant, highlights the considerable amount of geographic information within the text that is proved to be accurate.²³⁴ Building on earlier studies, such as Gardiner (1918, 1924), comprehensive research has been conducted by Hoffmeier (1996, 2005),²³⁵ which has revealed that certain toponyms within the text display Egyptian etymology.²³⁶ Additionally, with access to declassified CIA satellite images,²³⁷ Hoffmeier (2019) was able to utilise a 1960s CORONA image that identified changes in the Mediterranean coastline not detectable on modern day maps.²³⁸ In conjunction with archaeological excavation and geological analysis of data, the discovery of a previously unknown branch of the Nile was uncovered, that once flowed alongside Tell el Borg.²³⁹

²³⁴ Rainey and Notley, 2014, p.118.

²³⁵ Hoffmeier, 1996, 2005.

²³⁶ Hoffmeier, 1996, pp. 116–21, 176–98; 2005, pp. 53–6.

²³⁷ Central Intelligence Agency (2025) *CORONA Declassified*. Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/stories/story/corona-declassified/> (Accessed: 1 June 2025).

²³⁸ Image: Hoffmeier, 2019, p. 438.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 424–5.

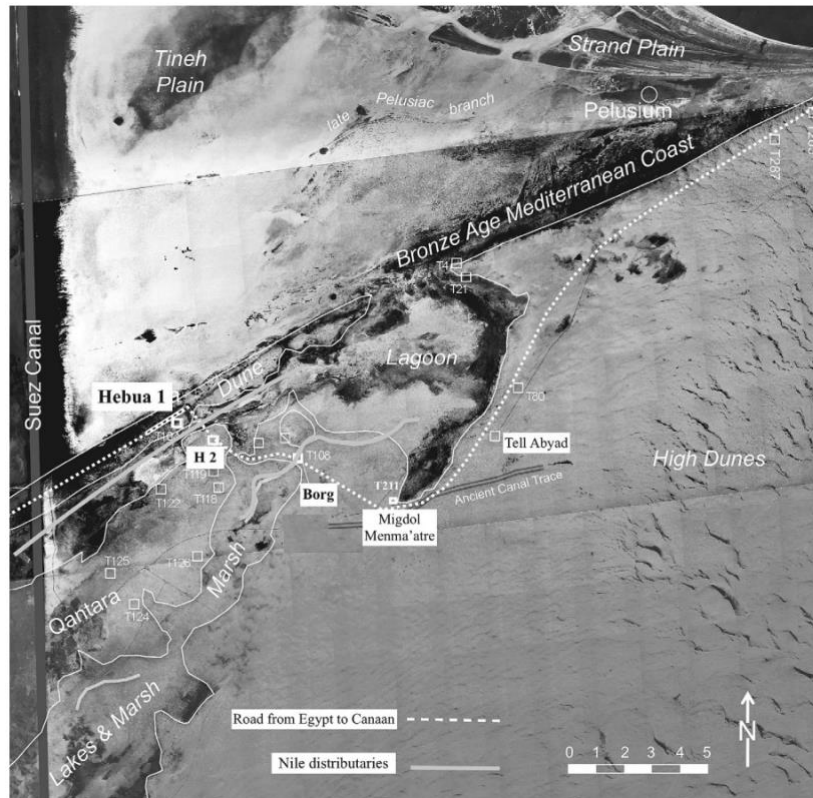


*Fig. 1: CORONA image (1967), overlaid with geological and archaeological data of northwestern Sinai.*²⁴⁰

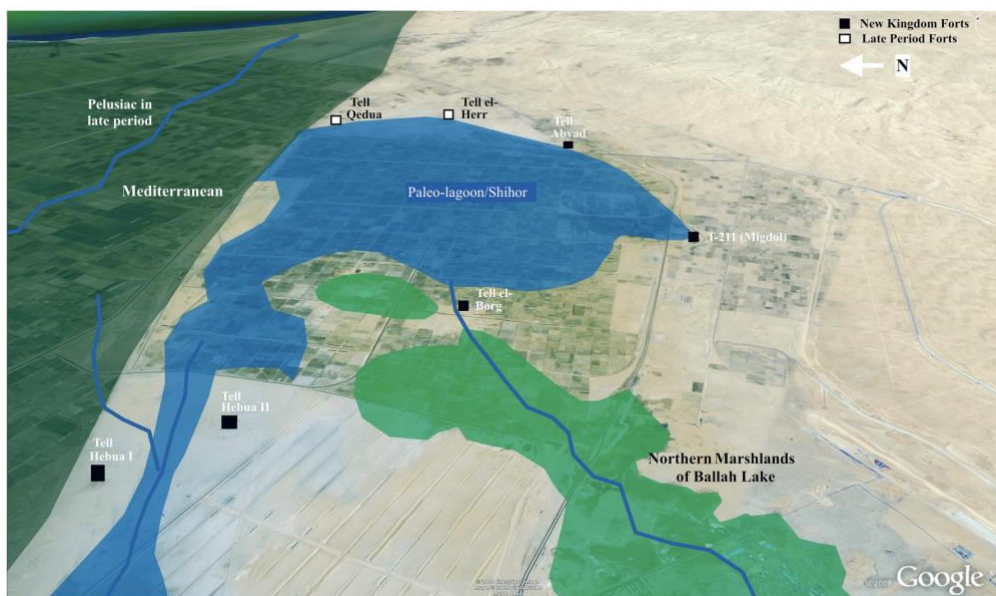


*Fig. 2: Google Earth image (2008), overlaid with geological and archaeological data of northwestern Sinai.*²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ Image: Hoffmeier, 2019, p. 438.

²⁴¹ Image: Hoffmeier, 2019, p. 427.

Due to the earlier identification of fortress Tjaru with Tell Hebwa I, it was possible to identify the other fortresses along the Ways of Horus, correlating with the relief of Seti I on the wall of the hypostyle hall at Karnak Temple.²⁴² This research provides valuable information about ancient travel routes out of Egypt that align with the Exodus text, as well as providing explanation for why this route was considered inviable, due to the level of fortification.²⁴³

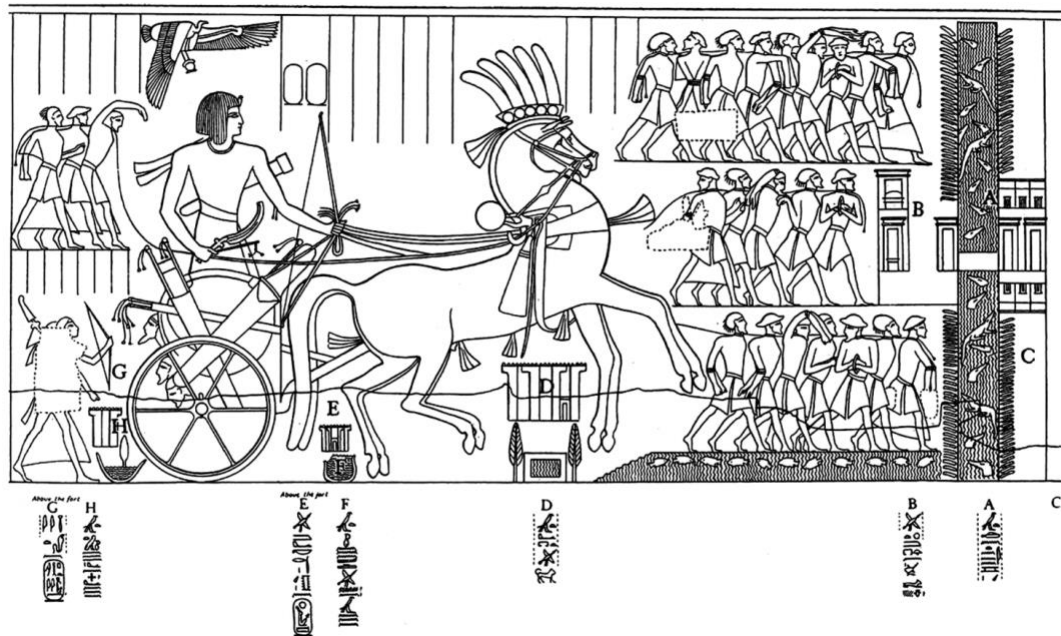


*Fig. 3: Seti I, Karnak relief.*²⁴⁴

It is widely accepted that Western Asiatic people lived in Egypt,²⁴⁵ which lends credibility to the account detailing place of origin. In particular, ancient Avaris (Tell el-Dab'a), located in the eastern Nile delta, which was the capital city of the Semitic Hyksos 15th Dynasty, shows an Asiatic presence dating as early as Middle Bronze Age I (c. 2000–1800 BCE).²⁴⁶

The archaeological findings of Avaris by Bietak (1996), also reveal the effect of cultural assimilation. Although the inhabitants are identified as of Canaanite origin, clear signs of Egyptian influence are apparent within the material culture.²⁴⁷ This process of assimilation is

²⁴² Bietak, 2024, p. 393.

²⁴³ Exod. 13:17. N.B: Land of the Philistines refers to the Way of Horus, see Hoffmeier (2006, p. 1).

²⁴⁴ Image: Gardiner, 1920, pp. 100–1, plate 11. For full form see Hoffmeier (2009, p. 6).

²⁴⁵ Bietak, 1986, p. 225; Friedman, 2017, pp. 24, 26; Janzen, 2021, pp. 19–20.

²⁴⁶ Burke, 2019, p. 67.

²⁴⁷ Bietak, 1996, p. 48.

not only evidenced within the historical record, well known between cultures such as Babylon and Assyria,²⁴⁸ and the Romans and Greeks,²⁴⁹ but it is also confirmed by modern sociological studies.²⁵⁰

In discussing immigrants to America, Kurien (1998) articulates how religion is one of the most powerful foundations to group formation and the most legitimate form of ethnic expression.²⁵¹ Kurien also describes direct and indirect mechanisms that maintain groups with similar backgrounds, revealing a strong emphasis to protect inner values and cultural integrity.²⁵² Therefore, although adaptation occurs,²⁵³ some aspects are reinforced and maintained. Yang's (1999) study reveals similar findings, when analysing Chinese immigrants in America. Even when a person converts to a different religion, a blend between assimilation and preservation is seen, such as continuing to celebrate Chinese festivals, and preserving Chinese customs and values.²⁵⁴

This provides validation for the methodology of this paper which investigates evidence of Egyptian influence within the text to support the likelihood of historic contact. Just as archaeological findings reveal elements of assimilation, if interactions have occurred it is expected that other aspects, such as language and cultural conceptions will also reveal similar influence, even though some aspects will likely be maintained.

The Hyksos are known as 'rulers of foreign lands' (*ḥkꜣw-ḥꜣswt*), the first foreign dynasty which ruled Egypt.²⁵⁵ It has been suggested that the change in power after their expulsion by Ahmose I, which restored Egyptian sovereignty, could provide an explanation for the change in circumstance that precipitated the oppression of the Israelites²⁵⁶ described in Exodus 1.²⁵⁷ Certainly this cannot be substantiated, but it is not unreasonable to imagine that after more

²⁴⁸ Machinist, 1984, p. 362; 1976, pp. 455–82.

²⁴⁹ Assmann, 2011, p. 131.

²⁵⁰ Kurien, 1998, pp. 37, 59–60; Yang, 1999, pp. 16, 142–144; Drouhot, 2024, pp. 1974–2011. Hoffmeier, 2016, pp. 5–6.

²⁵¹ Kurien, 1998, p. 59.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 59–60.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

²⁵⁴ Yang, 1999, pp. 16, 142–144.

²⁵⁵ Bietak, 2011, p. 19.

²⁵⁶ Hoffmeier, 2021, p. 87.

²⁵⁷ Exod. 1:8–11.

than a century of foreign rule, Egyptian rulers may have developed prejudice towards foreign Semitic people, who may have been associated with the Hyksos who were also from Asiatic origin.²⁵⁸ Avaris was captured by Ahmose I c. 1539 BCE,²⁵⁹ when it was partly abandoned, however Canaanite-style artifacts indicate that a large proportion of the Semitic population remained after its subsequent Egyptian reconquest.²⁶⁰

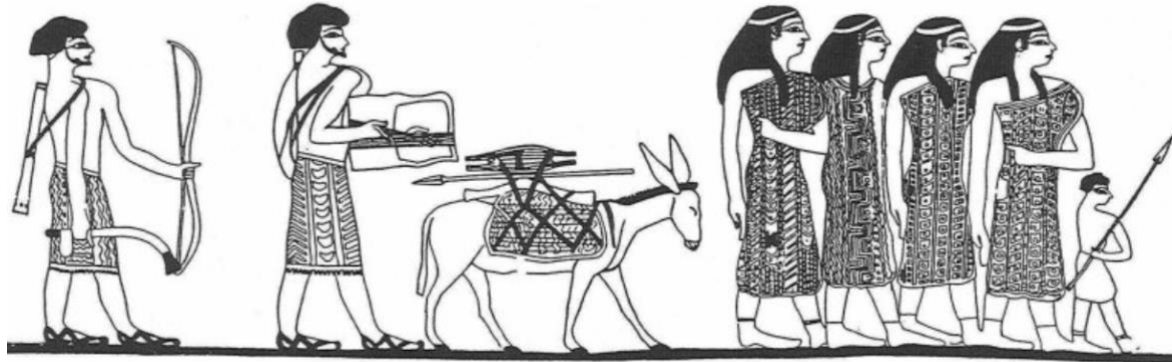


Fig. 4: Representations of Asiatic mercenaries/Bedouin on Tomb 3, Beni Hasan,²⁶¹ one shown carrying what is likely a duck-bill axe, a weapon of Western Asiatic Middle Bronze Age typology.²⁶²

Along with many important archaeological findings, it is particularly significant that archaeological excavations have revealed that the urban district of Avaris was abandoned during the Early 19th Dynasty.²⁶³ This supports the Exodus account, as it provides evidence of a significant population size leaving the area. Although this has been attributed by some scholars to the shifting of the Pelusiac branch of the Nile, Falk (2020) highlights that topographic changes are typically gradual and therefore does not provide adequate explanation for a rapid depopulation.²⁶⁴ Petrovich (2013) has argued that this abandonment occurred earlier, during the 18th dynasty.²⁶⁵ However, Petrovich appears to conflate the

²⁵⁸ Bietak, 1986, p. 225.

²⁵⁹ Dever, 1992, p. 47; Bietak, 2011, p. 19.

²⁶⁰ Bietak, 2011, pp. 19–35.

²⁶¹ Image: Newbery, 1893, pl. 31, cited from Bietak, 1996, pp. 16–17, Fig. 12, C.

²⁶² Bietak, 2018, p. 84.

²⁶³ Bietak et al., 2012, p. 45.

²⁶⁴ Falk, 2020b, p. 16.

²⁶⁵ Petrovich, 2013, p. 22.

abandonment of the palatial precinct with the entire site.²⁶⁶ Yet excavation reports reveal unbroken occupation within the urban district until the 19th dynasty.²⁶⁷

Forced Labour

In the Old Kingdom of Egypt, there is little evidence of foreign labour being utilised for construction projects.²⁶⁸ However, in the Middle Kingdom, Semites were brought into Egypt from Canaan as prisoners of war, slave tribute, purchase by merchants, or immigration, though their role was mainly domestic or cultic.²⁶⁹ It is not until the New Kingdom period that this begins to change, due to ongoing campaigns in Canaan and Syria, which saw large numbers of prisoners being taken as slaves and used to assist many building projects.²⁷⁰ An example of this type of work is seen on the tomb of Rekhmire in Thebes c. 1450 BCE, depicting the forced labour of Semites and Nubians ‘whom the king had brought away as living captives’ to make bricks for the workshops of Amun at the Karnak Temple.²⁷¹ The visuals of mixing mud and water, labouring under the eye of Egyptian overseers, each bearing a rod, provide clear parallels to the Exodus account, which draw striking resemblance.²⁷²

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁶⁷ Bietak et al., 2012, p. 45.

²⁶⁸ Kitchen, 2006, p. 247.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁷¹ Davies, 1943, p. 47.

²⁷² Exod. 1: 11–14.

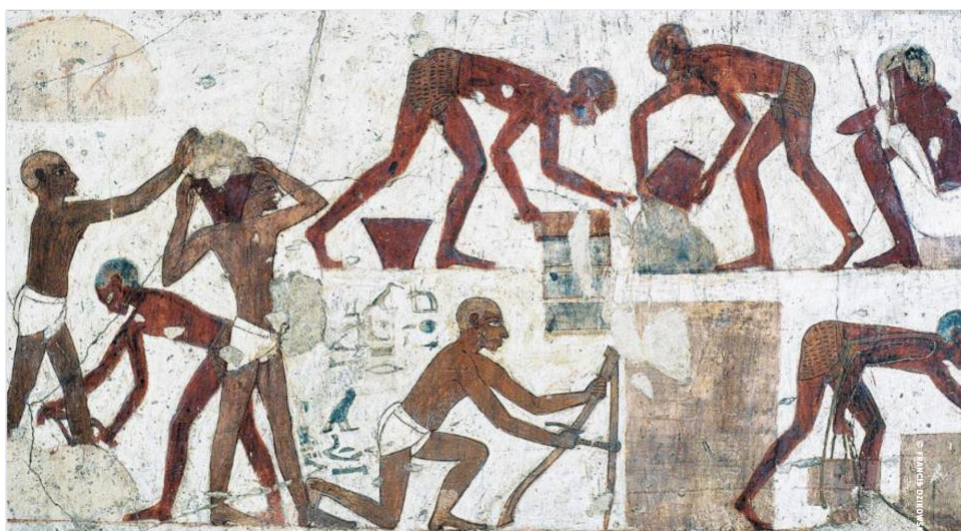


Fig. 5: Nubian and Semitic slaves manufacturing bricks depicted on the tomb of Rekhmire, Thebes.²⁷³

Such parallels are also supported by contemporary Egyptian texts, which indicate that slaves were expected to continually fulfil a daily requirement, as conveyed in the Exodus text.²⁷⁴ *Papyrus Anastasi III*, composed under the reign of Rameses II,²⁷⁵ attests to brickmakers being set daily quotas: ‘Likewise, people are . . . making their quota of bricks daily’ (3.1–2).²⁷⁶ Additionally, as described in Exodus 5,²⁷⁷ *Papyrus Anastasi IV*,²⁷⁸ similarly mentions a concern regarding lack of straw, expressed by an Egyptian soldier who states: ‘I am residing at Qenqen-en-ta, without provision, and neither men to make bricks nor straw are in the region’ (12.5–6).²⁷⁹

Archaeological science further supports these textual parallels. Mudbricks in Egypt were made from Nile alluvium, a conglomerate of clay and sand, which in varying proportions affect its properties. If it is too rich in clay, the bricks dry slower and have the propensity to

²⁷³ Image: Cited in Littman, Silverstein and Lorenzon (2014, p. 61). © Francis Dzikowski.

²⁷⁴ Exod. 5: 13–14, 18.

²⁷⁵ Gardiner, 1918a, pp. 184–5. British Museum (n.d.) *Object EA10246.6*. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-Share-Alike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence. Available at: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA10246-6 (Accessed: 3 June 2025). © The Trustees of the British Museum.

²⁷⁶ Falk, 2020a, p. 56.

²⁷⁷ Exod. 5:10–19. The Exodus account records Pharaoh denying the Hebrew slaves עֲבֹדָה (translated ‘straw’ or ‘chaff’); see Strong’s 8401 and BDB 1061–2.

²⁷⁸ Written during the reign of Seti II; Gardiner, 1918a, p. 187; 1937, pp. 20–32 (*Papyrus Anastasi III*); pp. 34–56 (*Papyrus Anastasi IV*).

²⁷⁹ Falk, 2020a, p. 55.

shrink and crack.²⁸⁰ This is evidenced in an experimental study by Littman, Silverstein and Lorenzon (2014) aimed at assessing the properties of the brick in relation to the addition of straw.²⁸¹ After analysing the chemistry and particle morphology of ancient Nile Delta bricks from Tell Timai, they recreated mudbricks with the closest match of materials.²⁸² The results revealed that the bricks without straw were more fragile and easily broken, concluding that addition of organic material, such as straw, enabled the bricks to dry more evenly, which reduces shrinkage and deformation.²⁸³

Vocabulary

Having presented evidence for the plausibility of the account within its historical background, the next part of the paper will discuss the analysis of internal evidence within the text, to determine if Egyptian influence can be identified.

Although there is much research within this area that could be presented, the most pertinent aspects will be discussed, which includes etymology of vocabulary, details of content, motifs of Egyptian origin and Egyptian parallels in ritual and religious furniture.

This study first examines Egyptian influence within the vocabulary of the text. Analysing the text for non-Semitic vocabulary can provide intratextual evidence for contact with particular ethnic groups. A similar principle could be applied in a critical analysis of a text, such as the *Canterbury Tales* by Chaucer, which reveals the influence of the Normans upon Saxon culture and language, including even social customs and ideas.²⁸⁴ In the same way that French loanwords entering the English language in the eleventh century correlate with French contact due to the Norman conquest in 1066,²⁸⁵ a high presence of Egyptian loanwords²⁸⁶ within the text is a significant indicator of contact with Egypt. Similarly, the large number of Latin ecclesiastical terms in Anglo-Saxon literature indicates the influence of the Romans

²⁸⁰ Lucas, 1945, p. 62.

²⁸¹ Littman, Silverstein and Lorenzon, 2014, p. 60.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

²⁸⁴ Wilson, 1928, p. 179.

²⁸⁵ Coleman, 1995, pp. 100–3, 119, 122.

²⁸⁶ Defined as a word adopted from a donor language, incorporated into the recipient language; see Noonan (2016, p. 49).

with regard to the formation of religion,²⁸⁷ and further highlights how the study of etymology can provide useful data, not only about origin but also how certain aspects of culture and society are influenced.

There are in fact, several studies that have identified significant data regarding this topic, which have been developed over the years with advancements in the study of Egyptian and Biblical Hebrew.²⁸⁸ In 2016, Noonan conducted a detailed analysis of the non-Semitic loanwords within the Hebrew, drawing on linguistic, geographical, and anthropological factors to identify the origin of each lexeme.²⁸⁹ The presence of Egyptian loanwords was then analysed and compared to other biblical texts, as well as Northwest Semitic texts of other Semitic ethnic groups known to have had contact with Egypt, as well as those that have not.

This comparative approach revealed that the Exodus and wilderness narratives²⁹⁰ contained a similar ratio of Egyptian loanwords to total lexemes as Imperial Aramaic texts, which is known to be influenced by the Egyptian language due to sustained contact.²⁹¹ In contrast, all other Northwest Semitic texts demonstrated negligible Egyptian terminology, highlighting the Exodus text as atypical.

The data was further compared to the prevalence of Old Iranian loanwords in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther; texts widely recognized as reflecting the Babylonian and Persian historical context of their composition.²⁹² This revealed that the Exodus account not only had a comparable ratio and relative frequency of loanwords, but was in fact significantly higher. As stated by Noonan (2016), '[i]f we acknowledge Old Iranian linguistic influence on the books of Esther and Ezra–Nehemiah and the implications it has for these books' dates of composition, we should similarly acknowledge Egyptian linguistic influence on the exodus and wilderness traditions . . .' (p. 56). Excluding the other wilderness narratives, Leviticus and Numbers, the relative number of Egyptian loanwords were also significantly higher than

²⁸⁷ Wilson, 1928, p. 179.

²⁸⁸ Yahuda, 1947; Lambdin, 1953; Noonan, 2016, p. 48.

²⁸⁹ Noonan, 2016, pp. 49–68.

²⁹⁰ I.e., Lev. and Num.

²⁹¹ Noonan, 2016, pp. 60–1.

²⁹² Moore, 1975, pp. 78–79; Gehman, 1924, p. 321.

in any other biblical text in the Hebrew Bible, clearly exhibiting a higher level of Egyptian influence compared to the other texts.²⁹³

An additional significant finding was the notably low number of Old Iranian within Exodus, contrary to the expectations of the Documentary Hypothesis (DH), which present further challenges to the theory.²⁹⁴

Text	Number of Loanwords	Total Occurrences	Ratio of loanwords to total lexemes	Relative Frequency
Egyptian loanwords in Exodus	26	333	1.864%	1.391%
Egyptian loanwords in Imperial Aramaic texts	44	483	2.230%	2.203%
Old Iranian loanwords in Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther	26	82	1.455%	0.448%
Egyptian loanwords in other texts of the Hebrew Bible ²⁹⁵	51	421	0.635%	0.115%

Table 1: Summary of data from 'Egyptian loanwords as evidence for the authenticity of the Exodus and wilderness traditions' (Noonan, 2016, pp. 51–61).

Analysis of phonological and morphological indicators of the loanwords reveal that they could have been borrowed any time from the beginning of the New Kingdom, however some linguistic features enable a *terminus ante quem* in the latter part of the second millennium BCE. In Egyptian, the final *t* in feminine nouns were gradually lost in the Middle Kingdom²⁹⁶ and finally dropped entirely in Late Egyptian. By the Amarna period (c. 1300 BCE), the final *t* shifted to an *a*, eventually transitioning to an *i* by 700 BCE. Due to these morphological developments, analysis of the noun endings enables approximate dating for the borrowing of

²⁹³ Excluding Lev. and Num. *Ibid.*, pp. 53–56.

²⁹⁴ For a summary of the data, see Table 1.

²⁹⁵ Excluding the Exodus and wilderness narratives (Exod.–Num.).

²⁹⁶ Junge, 2005, p. 35.

certain words.²⁹⁷ For example, the presence of the final *t*, preserved as a ת in Hebrew (as seen in טַבַּעַת and תַּבְרָת), indicate they were borrowed sometime between the Middle Kingdom and Ramesside Period. Those that end with a final ה (e.g., אֶפְסָה, תַּבָּהּ, אֶחָלָמָה, אֵיפָה) suggest borrowing from a later stage in the second millennium BCE.

It is possible that additional loanwords were borrowed during this period, but do not have morphological indicators to enable a precise dating. However, based on the data available, at least 4 words show good evidence of borrowing during the Late Bronze Age (LBA).²⁹⁸ Significantly, none of the feminine nouns contain an *i* ending, which would be expected if borrowing had occurred in the first millennium BCE, as minimalists have suggested.

Of additional utility is to consider the onomastic congruence within Exodus.

Many scholars have suggested that the name Moses (מֹשֶׁה) has an Egyptian origin,²⁹⁹ yet its etymology remains debated.³⁰⁰ One challenge arises from the transliteration of the sibilant,³⁰¹ as if the origin was Egyptian, one would expect the name to be rendered with a sin (שׁ - *Mōseh*), rather than a shin (שׁ - *Mōšeh*). More recently, Schneider (2023) has argued that an Egyptian origin cannot be maintained. He contends that rendering the Egyptian stative form *m'šī* into the Hebrew requires too many improbable alterations, including not only changes in vowel quality and quantity, but also repositioning the stress, which seems unlikely for such an important, central figure.³⁰²

Alternatively, Kitchen (2006) suggests a Hebrew etymology, proposing that the name could have originally been rendered *Mašû* (*Mashu*), relating to the passive participle in Hebrew (*mšh*), which may have been reinterpreted in the active voice.³⁰³

While many of the well-known names in the Exodus account remain a subject of debate, a detailed onomastic study conducted by Hess (2016) produced important findings regarding

²⁹⁷ Noonan, 2016, p. 63; Allen, 2013, p. 49; Loprieno, 2004, p. 38.

²⁹⁸ Noonan, 2016, pp. 63–4.

²⁹⁹ Robinson, 1932, p. 81; Towers, 1935, pp. 407–9; Griffiths, 1953, p. 231; Albright, 1973, p. 55.

³⁰⁰ For an overview see Propp (1999, pp. 152–3).

³⁰¹ Kitchen, 2006 p. 297; Towers, 1935, p. 407.

³⁰² Schneider, 2023, p. 1054.

³⁰³ Kitchen, 2006, p. 297.

the lesser-known names.³⁰⁴ He found that apart from the name *Nepheg*, which is ambiguous, all of the personal names in the narrative have roots attested in West Semitic or Egyptian from the second and first millennia BCE. This significantly reduces the likelihood that the names were fictional inventions, as it demonstrates consistency with the historical context that text describes. Notably, two of the names only occur in the second millennium BCE, while none can be attested exclusively in the first millennium BCE.

To conclude, analysis of the presence of Egyptian loanwords and onomastic congruence not only reveals vocabulary demonstrating Egyptian influence, but to a degree that would suggest historical contact. Despite limited phonological and morphological indicators available for precise dating, the data that can be ascertained reveal a correlation to the LBA or earlier, aligning with what would be expected from an authentic historical account.

Content

Analysing the content of vocabulary can also contribute to determining the date and authenticity of the Exodus account, offering additional insight. In particular, the mention of turquoise is significant, as it provides an indicator of Egyptian contact that is specifically associated with the LBA.

The exact identification and translation for gemstones in biblical texts has long been recognised as challenging,³⁰⁵ aptly summarised by Propp (2006), who cites Ibn Ezra: ‘we all grope at the wall, as if blind’ (p. 439).³⁰⁶ Nevertheless, a thorough and detailed study by Harrell, Hoffmeier and Williams (2017) has brought clarity to many of the terms, through applying a multidisciplinary approach.³⁰⁷ By combining linguistic analysis of the Hebrew text with archaeological data from the ancient Near East (ANE), as well as geological evidence from mineralogical and petrological studies,³⁰⁸ a number of significant findings were made.

³⁰⁴ Hess, 2016, pp. 37–48.

³⁰⁵ Durham, 1987, p. 387.

³⁰⁶ Propp, 2006, p. 439.

³⁰⁷ Harrell, Hoffmeier and Williams, 2017, p. 3.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

Firstly, it is notable that *turquoise*, *red jasper*, and *braided agate* found in the Hebrew text,³⁰⁹ correlate with Egyptian terms attested in New Kingdom texts. The presence of the term for turquoise (תְּרִיז, *nōpēk*) is especially significant, as Serabit el-Khadim in the Sinai is the only known source of this gemstone in the ANE.³¹⁰ Egyptian mining operations there are well documented, however they ceased c. 1140–1130 BCE, at which point turquoise became virtually absent from the archaeological record.³¹¹ It is therefore highly unlikely that a writer from the Iron II period or later would have known of this gemstone to include it in the description of the priestly breastplate.

Furthermore, the term *nōpēk* lacks any identifiable Semitic cognates or plausible internal derivation. The most viable etymology is a borrowing from ancient Egyptian, most likely from the word, *mfkʕt*.³¹² Additionally, the absence of the Egyptian feminine suffix and lack of a corresponding phonetic value for ⟨ʕ⟩ support a date of borrowing during the early New Kingdom Period.³¹³

Thematic Motifs

The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart

The following section will analyse a few examples of motifs or themes within the Exodus narrative to consider if they may have originated from Egypt contexts.

Exodus 4:14 has caused much difficulty for theologians and biblical scholars,³¹⁴ due to the deterministic implications that arises from a *prima facie* reading of the text, wherein Yahweh appears to punish Pharaoh for the hardening of his heart, even though Yahweh is also presented as the causal agent of this act.³¹⁵ Many scholars have explored

³⁰⁹ Turquoise (תְּרִיז, *nōpēk*), red jasper (אֶחְלָמָא, *’ahlāmā*) and braided agate (לֶשֶׁם, *lešem*); see Hoffmeier (2021, p. 93).

³¹⁰ Hoffmeier, 2021, p. 93; Ayil, 2024, p. 64.

³¹¹ Hoffmeier, 2021, pp.132–3; Exod. 28:18; 39:11.

³¹² Ayil, 2024, p. 61.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 61–62, 71. See pp. 61–62 for details of phonological and etymological changes indicating date of borrowing.

³¹⁴ Kuyper, 1974, pp. 463–5; Heinegg, 2017, p. 730.

³¹⁵ Wilson, 1979, p. 18; Heinegg, 2017, p. 730.

theological and literary explanations, including didactic purposes,³¹⁶ and appeals to the DH.³¹⁷

Despite many proposed theories, it has been recognised that this issue may be better resolved when the account is considered within an Egyptian context.³¹⁸ In the Hebrew text, three different verbs are used in connection to hardening that are often translated the same in English, however the differences are important in providing more semantic scope. These words are *חָזַק* (*ḥāzaq*)³¹⁹ meaning ‘to be/grow strong, firm, strengthen’, *קָשָׁה* (*qāšāh*)³²⁰ meaning ‘to be hard, severe, fierce’ and *כָּבֵד* (*kāḇad*)³²¹ meaning ‘to be heavy, weighty, burdensome, honoured’.³²² These are all used in relation to Pharaoh’s refusal to obey Yahweh’s command to release the Israelites from slavery, at which point the text states that Yahweh hardens the Pharaoh’s heart.³²³

The concept of the ‘heart’ (*לֵב*, *lēb*, or *לֵבָב*, *lēḇāḇ*) in the Hebrew Bible may be associated with personality, character, or inner life. It can denote volitional aspects, but also intellectual and emotional activities.³²⁴ It is further linked to moral behaviour, where aspects of the heart, such as pride or deceit, can play a role in failing to meet moral standards.³²⁵ Similarly, in Egyptian thought, ‘heart’ (*ib*) may also denote ‘mind, understanding, intelligence, will, desire or mood.’³²⁶

Brunner (1988), further highlights that in both cultures the heart can also be the seat of one’s destiny and assigned lot.³²⁷ This concept finds vivid expression in the Egyptian ritual of the

³¹⁶ Grossman, 2014, pp. 604–5.

³¹⁷ Wilson, 1979, p. 35.

³¹⁸ Yahuda, 1933, pp. 68–9; Hermann, 1962, pp. 77–107; Reuben, 1984, pp. 112–113; Currid, 1997, pp. 96–103; Shupak, 2004.

³¹⁹ Strong’s 2388, BDB 304; Exod. 4:21; 9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17 (piel); Exod. 7:13, 22; 8:19; 9:35 (qal).

³²⁰ Strong’s 7185, BDB 904; Exod. 7:3; 13:15 (hiphil).

³²¹ Strong’s 3513, BDB 457; Exod. 7:14 (adj.); Strong’s 3515, BDB 458; Exod. 8:15, 32; 9:34; 10:1 (hiphil); 9:7 (qal).

³²² BDB 457.

³²³ The text also states at different points that Pharaoh hardens his own heart.

³²⁴ Robinson, 1925, pp. 362–3; Johnson, 1949, pp. 77–88.

³²⁵ Johnson, 1949, pp. 86–7.

³²⁶ *ib* Faulkner, 2017, p. 18. Likewise, *ḥṯy*, also meaning ‘heart’, may refer figuratively to thoughts, see Faulkner (2017, p 201).

³²⁷ Brunner, 1988, p. 6.

Weighing of the Heart, as described in the *Book of the Dead*, in the Hall of Two Truths, where the deceased undergo a type of post-mortem trial in which the heart is weighed against a feather.³²⁸ If the heart is determined to be the same weight or lighter than the feather, the individual is granted access to the afterlife, entering the domain of Osiris.³²⁹ If heavier, the consequence is annihilation.³³⁰



Fig. 6: *Book of the Dead of Hunefer*, depicting episodes in Hunefer's judgement, frame 3 (19th Dynasty).³³¹

The paramount importance of the heart³³² is exemplified by the type of spells recorded in the *Book of the Dead*, indicating concern that the heart may be stolen or corrupted during this ritual, and as such many spells aimed to avert this threat.³³³ For instance, spell 27, commands the heart not to betray him in the realm of the dead:³³⁴

Obey me, my heart I am your lord, you are in my body, you do not oppose me, I command you to obey me in the god's domain (Taylor, 2010, p. 160).

³²⁸ Or a goddess weathering the feather on her head, see Taylor (2010, p. 209).

³²⁹ Silverman, 1997, p. 137.

³³⁰ Assmann, 2005, p. 75.

³³¹ Image: British Museum (n.d.) *Object EA9901.3*. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-Share-Alike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence. Available at: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA9901-3 (Accessed: 4 June 2025). © The Trustees of the British Museum.

³³² Taylor, 2010, p. 17.

³³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 160–1.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

Spells 26 through to 30, which collectively focus on protection of the heart, were particularly prominent in the New Kingdom period as attested in many manuscripts.³³⁵

The feather in the ritual, personifying Maat,³³⁶ was a complex concept. Not only did the goddess encapsulate the concept of order and balance that informed the creation of the universe,³³⁷ but she also embodied the moral and ethical principles that all Egyptians were expected to uphold.³³⁸ This understanding parallels the biblical concept of Wisdom (*hokmāh*), identified by Broadie and Macdonald (1978), who highlight the strong similarities, for instance, being divinely created at the beginning of time, taking on a feminine form and acting as a guiding principle.³³⁹

Wisdom cries aloud in the street,
in the markets she raises her voice;
at the head of the noisy streets she cries out;
at the entrance of the city gates she speaks: (Prov. 1:20–21, ESV).

Proverbs 8:15–16 further parallels this guiding role of Wisdom, particularly for those in authority: ‘By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just; by me princes rule, and nobles, all who govern justly’ (ESV).³⁴⁰ The book of Proverbs also includes the concept of weighing the heart: ‘Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the heart.’ (21:2, ESV).³⁴¹

In considering the ancient comprehension of heart and wisdom within both cultures, and the semantic scope of the term *kābad* (‘to be heavy’), the Weighing of the Heart provides a compelling parallel.

Propp (1999) dismisses this connection,³⁴² citing Wilson (1972) who argues that in Biblical Hebrew, when the root of heavy (*kbd*) is used in relation to an organ, it refers to a malfunction, or particularly insensitivity to outside stimuli.³⁴³ For example, in Exodus 4:10,

³³⁵ Faulkner, 1994, pp. 52–53, 103.

³³⁶ Taylor, 2010, p. 209.

³³⁷ Silverman, 1997, p. 18.

³³⁸ Martin, 2008, p. 951; Assmann, 2005, pp. 67, 379–382.

³³⁹ See Prov. 1:20–21; Murphy, 1986, p. 456; Wright, 2004, p. 242.

³⁴⁰ See Prov. 8:12 for context.

³⁴¹ See also Prov. 24:12.

³⁴² Propp, 1999, p. 323.

³⁴³ Wilson, 1979, p. 22.

Moses is described as having a ‘heavy tongue’, which is believed to indicate a stammer or stutter.³⁴⁴ Additionally, Genesis 48:10 describes eyes that are heavy with age and therefore cannot see.³⁴⁵ Zechariah 7:11, shows a similar example, but with regard to hearing.³⁴⁶ However, it could be maintained that there is a double wordplay, where the heart, relating to mental faculty, is not receiving Yahweh’s command (an outside stimulus), which symbolically becomes heavy, just as Assmann (2005) articulates, ‘[w]ith every lie, the pan in which his heart lay would have sunk . . .’ (p. 75) indicating the physical effect of moral actions. Ultimately, as the evidence shows a likely borrowing of concept, it is necessary to consider how the term is perceived in an Egyptian context, rather than Hebrew. Ben Reuben (1984) states that the Egyptian idiom ‘heaviness of heart’ referred to an evil heart in Egyptian concept,³⁴⁷ conveying a moral rather than physical meaning. Although this term was not common in older periods,³⁴⁸ it was later used within a comparable time period.³⁴⁹

This not only contributes to resolving theological and literary debates previously discussed, but also highlights a polemical device that further compounds and clarifies the narrative. The use of *kābaḏ*, meaning ‘to make heavy’ or ‘weighty’, would therefore indicate a reference to judgement more than stubbornness, which is particularly apparent when considered alongside the narrative of the text, which has a strong overarching theme, aiming to portray Yahweh as supreme above all other gods.³⁵⁰ This is reflected in Exodus 18:11: ‘Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods . . .’ (ESV). The fact that Yahweh intends to exact judgment is also made explicit in Exodus 12:12: ‘. . .and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord.’ (ESV).

³⁴⁴ Exod. 4:10: כִּי כִבֶּד-פִּי וְכִבֶּד לְשׁוֹן, translated ‘. . . but I am slow of speech and of tongue’ (ESV); lit. ‘Because the mouth is heavy and the tongue is heavy.’ Some suggest this refers to a stutter; see Tigay (1978, p. 62).

³⁴⁵ Genesis 48:10; וְעֵינֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּבְדוּ מִזֶּקֶן, לֹא יוּכַל לִרְאוֹת, translated ‘Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, so that he could not see . . .’ (ESV); lit. ‘And the eyes of Israel are heavy with age, so that they cannot see.’

³⁴⁶ Zech. 7:11: וְאַזְנוֹתֵיהֶם, הִכְבִּידוּ מִשְׁמוֹעַ, translated ‘. . . and stopped their ears that they might not hear’ (ESV); lit. ‘And their ears were heavy with hearing.’

³⁴⁷ Ben Reuben, 1984, p. 113.

³⁴⁸ *Firm at heart* (*rd-ib*) or *strong at heart* (*nht-ib*) being preferred terms. See Hermann (1962, p. 103).

³⁴⁹ Ben Reuben, 1984, p. 113; Hermann, 1962, p. 103.

³⁵⁰ Propp, 1999, pp. 675, 761–2, 2006; Brueggemann, 2007, pp. 54–8.

Within the narrative, the notion of Yahweh's ultimate supremacy is directed not only towards other Egyptian deities, but aims to include Pharaoh himself, who was seen as divine in Egyptian conception. The Egyptian pharaoh during the New Kingdom period was regarded as divine in Egyptian culture, imbued by the living royal *ka*, a divine manifestation of the god Amun-Re.³⁵¹ It has also been discussed by many scholars that the ten plagues of Exodus are focused on undermining a particular part of Egyptian power. Friedman (2015) proposes that the plagues are to be regarded as judgements against the pantheon of gods, utilising Sekhmet as the representative of all gods.³⁵²

A challenge to this theory is the question of why different terms have been chosen, and how an association could be made with the other two terms. Some scholars have utilised source criticism to resolve this variation, dividing the terms into meeting the different perspectives of a particular source.³⁵³ However, it is important to note the lexical relationship ḥḏzq (*ḥōzeq*) and ḥḏzq (*ḥāzaq*),³⁵⁴ which in the latter form recollects the association of Yahweh's strong arm. Shupak (2004) recognising this morphological relationship suggests that there is likely a play on words within the narrative based on the Hebrew roots 'heavy' (*kbd*) and 'strong' (*ḥzq*),³⁵⁵ which act as a literary device to heighten the theme of undermining Pharaoh's divine status.³⁵⁶

Pharaoh's "heavy (*kabēd*) heart" only serves to bring "honor" (*kābōd*) to God (Exod 14:4), while his "strength (*ḥōzeq*) of heart" allows God to demonstrate his "strong hand" (*yād ḥāzāqāh* . . .) (Shupak, 2004, p. 399).

In examining the narrative, it is also relevant to consider the role of the pharaoh. As discussed, *maat* was an important Egyptian concept, and was seen as part of the role of an Egyptian ruler to maintain it.³⁵⁷ Pharaoh was expected to prevent violence and chaos, which included conquering in battle and reigning over Egypt's enemies. This meaning extended into

³⁵¹ Collins, 2014, p. 841.

³⁵² Friedman, 2015, pp. 8–18.

³⁵³ Driver, 1911, pp. 55–7.

³⁵⁴ Masc. noun ḥḏzq (*ḥōzeq*; Strong's H2392) derived from primitive verb root ḥḏzq (*ḥāzaq*; Strong's H2388); BDB lists ḥḏzq under the root ḥḏzq , indicating morphological relationship.

³⁵⁵ I.e., *kbd* for 'heavy' and *ḥzq* for 'strong'.

³⁵⁶ Shupak, 2004, p. 399.

³⁵⁷ Assmann and Livingstone, 2006, p. 34.

the iconography depicting the pharaoh as victorious and particularly encapsulated in the smiting motif. Interestingly, this is a further theme within the Exodus text that has a connection to Egypt.

The Arm of God

One of the most prominent and enduring images within Egyptian iconography is the smiting motif of the pharaoh or king with a raised arm, often wielding a weapon about to smite his enemy in the presence of a deity(ies).³⁵⁸ This image and variations very similar to it, are found in depictions as early as Predynastic times, and are prevalent in the New Kingdom period.³⁵⁹



*Fig. 7: Plaster cast of the Narmer Palette, commemorating the victories of King Narmer. Discovered in Hierakonpolis (1st Dynasty, c. 3150 BCE).*³⁶⁰

³⁵⁸ Purcell, 2020, p. 288; Śliwa. 1974, p. 98.

³⁵⁹ Cox, 2017, p. 377.

³⁶⁰ British Museum (n.d.) *Object EA35714*. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-Share-Alike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence. Available at:



Fig. 8: Oblong plaque depicting Ramesses II smiting enemies (New Kingdom, 19th Dynasty, c. 1279–1213 BCE).³⁶¹



Fig. 9: Ramesses II smiting a Nubian, depicted in the Temple of Beit el-Wali (New Kingdom, 19th Dynasty, c. 1279–1213 BCE).

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA35714 [Accessed 4 June 2025]. See Robins (1997, p. 32).

³⁶¹ Image: The Metropolitan Museum of Art (n.d.) *Plaque of Ramesses II smiting enemies* (Accession No. 15.6.1). In: *The Met Collection Online*. Available at: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/549244> (Accessed: 6 June 2025).

The Hebrew expression which takes two forms ‘mighty hand’ (יָד הַחֲזָקָה, *yad ḥăzāqâ*)³⁶² and outstretched arm (זְרוֹעַ נְטוּיָה, *zərôa n’ṭûyâ*)³⁶³ has been identified as being connected to this Egyptian motif.³⁶⁴ The word יָד (*yad*), which in a literal sense means ‘hand’,³⁶⁵ can also figuratively refer to ‘strength or power’.³⁶⁶ In other texts of the Hebrew Bible, it is used in a way that recalls the Egyptian image referring to an arm stretched out in order to punish or smite³⁶⁷ and is also used in a military context.³⁶⁸ זְרוֹעַ (*zərôa*) is additionally utilised in reference to a warrior figure.³⁶⁹ This is particularly fitting for the imagery associated with Yahweh, often presented in biblical texts as a divine warrior.³⁷⁰ Due to the prevalence of this concept within these texts, this type of phrase could be expected. However, Miller (2018) highlights that Exodus 15, incorporating this type of imagery, is considered the earliest text from which the warrior theme has been adapted and expanded from, forming part of the earliest conception of Israelite faith.³⁷¹ Miller further recognises the interaction of other cultures of the Near East in shaping Israel’s conception of deity, such as Near Eastern and Canaanite mythology that portrayed the gods as fighting wars with various objectives, such as maintaining order and their position in the divine world.³⁷² However, the specific language used within Exodus that utilises terms relating to a mighty arm can be specifically connected to Egyptian terminology. While military terminology is likely within the context, certain factors tie the language specifically to LBA Egypt.

The image of the smiting motif is also expressed in the Egyptian language, such as epithets and personal names and inscriptions in cartouches. In a detailed analysis, Hoffmeier (1986) lists many instances throughout Egyptian history,³⁷³ dating as far back as Dynasties 5 and 6, but most common in the New Kingdom period.³⁷⁴ These inscriptions aim to glorify the ruler

³⁶² Exod. 3:19; 13:3, 14, 16; 32:11; Deut. 6:21; 9:26.

³⁶³ Exod. 6:6; Deut. 9:29.

³⁶⁴ Hoffmeier, 1986, p. 378.

³⁶⁵ BDB 3027.

³⁶⁶ BDB 3027. Deut. 7:8; Josh. 4:24.

³⁶⁷ E.g., Exod. 9:15; 1 Sam. 6:92; Sam. 24:16; Job 19:21.

³⁶⁸ E.g., Exod. 6:1; Ezek. 30:22; Judg. 3:8, 6:1–2; 1 Sam. 12:9.

³⁶⁹ E.g., Gen. 49:24; 2 Sam. 1:10; 2 Sam. 22:35; Judg. 15:14; Ezek. 30:21.

³⁷⁰ Rozelaar, 1952, p. 222; Miller, 1973, pp. 24–34, 64–123; Keel, 1997, pp. 219–220; Barmash, 2017, pp. 145–72.

³⁷¹ Trimm, 2014, pp. 223, 225–233.

³⁷² Miller, 1973, p. 64.

³⁷³ Hoffmeier, 1986, pp. 379–384.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 384.

and display divine power and authority, a political and propagandistic role in art of the New Kingdom period.³⁷⁵ Many examples are also evident in the 25th and 26th Dynasties, however, it is noted that these references most likely reflect the archaizing and borrowing of earlier art forms and literature,³⁷⁶ characteristic of the Third Intermediate and Saite periods, which are described by Gardiner (1961) as emanating from a nostalgic longing for a previous time of grandeur when there was less impact from the influx of foreigners that followed.³⁷⁷

Examples of language that correlate to the time period of the Exodus are further reflected in the use of the word *ḥpš* meaning ‘strong arm’ or figuratively associated with strength,³⁷⁸ which is used in many royal titles of the Thutmosid and Ramesside kings of the 18th and 19th Dynasties.³⁷⁹ Similarly, the epithet as used by Ramesses II, *nb ḥpš* (‘possessor of mighty arm’) is prevalent during this period,³⁸⁰ as well as the phrase *wsr ḥpš* ‘mighty of arm’.³⁸¹ It is also seen in theophoric names of some of Ramesses II’s sons.³⁸²

Most notable is the use of the phrase the ‘strong arm of the king’, mentioned in three of the Amarna letters³⁸³ that use the word *zu-ru-uḥ*,³⁸⁴ which is cognate with זָרוּחַ (*zərôaʿ*).³⁸⁵ *KAL.GA* translated as ‘strong’ can also mean ‘mighty’ similar to the use of מְזִקָּה in Hebrew.³⁸⁶ Most significantly, *zu-ru-uḥ* is not attested in any other Mesopotamian cuneiform texts except the Amarna letters.³⁸⁷ This evidence suggests that the imagery and expressions within Egyptian culture were likely known at the time the Exodus tradition was recorded and were appropriated into the text.³⁸⁸ As Hoffmeier (1986) suggests, it is likely that these

³⁷⁵ Śliwa. 1974, p. 97.

³⁷⁶ Hoffmeier, 1986, p. 384.

³⁷⁷ Gardiner, 1964, p. 355.

³⁷⁸ Faulkner, 2017, p. 233.

³⁷⁹ Hoffmeier, 1986, p. 380.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 382.

³⁸¹ Berman, 2016, p. 95.

³⁸² Hoffmeier, 1986, p. 383.

³⁸³ EA 286:12 (Moran, 1992, p. 326); EA 287:27 (Moran, 1992, p. 328); EA 288:14 (Moran, 1992, p. 331).

³⁸⁴ EA 286:12 ʾzu¹-ru-uḥ LUGAL^{ri} KAL.GA; EA 287:27 ʾna¹-ad-na-an-ni : (GE₂₃) ŠU : (GE₂₃) zu-ru-uḥ [LUGAL^{ri} KAL].GA; EA 288:14 ʾmunus¹um-mi-ia ʾzu¹-ru-uḥ LUGAL^{ri} KAL.GA; see Moran, 1992, p. 327.

³⁸⁵ BDB 2220.

³⁸⁶ Fem. form of זָקָה, BDB 2389; ‘strong’, ‘stout’ or ‘mighty’.

³⁸⁷ Hoffmeier, 1986, p. 385.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Hebrew terms were appropriated by the writer(s), serving a literary role of legitimising Yahweh as supreme, similar to how Abdu-Heba claimed his legitimacy as king came from the arm of Pharaoh.³⁸⁹ Additionally, it could serve as a useful polemical device in contrasting the power of Yahweh against the power of Egypt³⁹⁰ and association to the supremacy of Amun-Re, which again would fit the narrative.³⁹¹ Although the terms in Hebrew and Egyptian are not cognate, the evidence alludes to a semantic borrowing, as demonstrated in the Amarna letters, where the text demonstrates a similar concept with non-cognate terms in relation to Egyptian.³⁹²

Additional expressions have also been identified as originating from Egypt, including the ‘finger of God’ as seen as a parallel in texts, such as Amenhotep,³⁹³ as well as the use of the word ‘bone’ or ‘limb’ to metonymically denote ‘self’.³⁹⁴

Parallels in Ritual and Religious Furniture

This paper will now move from literary parallels to those that are descriptive, enabling comparison to archaeological and textual data regarding ritual and religious furniture.

Understanding religious rituals from a different culture is a difficult task. Even in modern times, the concept and definition of religion itself is widely debated.³⁹⁵ As recognised by Willard (2018) diverse variation exists between cultures,³⁹⁶ which means extrapolation from one to another can be challenging, particularly when dealing with the distant past that is far removed from modern Western concepts.³⁹⁷ As it is not possible to directly observe or investigate religious phenomena from the past, it is important to be conscious of any potential bias or differences in perspectives that can be inherent in how a researcher approaches analysis. However, this can be minimised through awareness, as well as thoughtful and considered application of a depth of research.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 348–5.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 387.

³⁹¹ Rosenblatt, 1941, p. 184; Redford, 2001, pp. 82–4; King, 2009, p. 70.

³⁹² Hoffmeier, 1986, p. 386.

³⁹³ Yahuda, 1933, pp. 66–7.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 70–1.

³⁹⁵ Oppy, 2021, p. 519; Bergunder, 2014, pp. 246–247.

³⁹⁶ Willard, 2018, p. 150.

³⁹⁷ Bergunder, 2014, p. 257.

Since the works of Wellhausen and Graf, towards the end of the nineteenth century, it has been proposed that the concept of the tabernacle was fabricated either during or after the Babylonian exile and does not hold historical validity.³⁹⁸ Based on these assumptions, it has been suggested that the tabernacle reflects postexilic concerns surrounding worship, and was formulated as an idealised representation for centralised worship,³⁹⁹ contributing to the motivations of the Priestly source. This was described by Cross (1947) as a ‘utopian constitution drawn up by a downtrodden religious community to serve as a substitute for a political state’ (p. 47). Wellhausenism resolutely contends that the details of the tabernacle described in Exodus are simply a pious construction by later priests utilising the Jerusalem Temple, imagined in a nomadic form.⁴⁰⁰ However, Cross identifies many similarities to other ancient societies, such as Phoenicia, Ugarit, and Mesopotamia, and, after reviewing extensive research of ancient parallels, asserts that there is no reason to conclude that the elements of the tabernacle were a later construction of fiction.⁴⁰¹

There are many parallels that can be drawn from ancient literature regarding the tabernacle, particularly the concept of divine domicile. In Ugarit, during the LBA, the Canaanite god, El is described as living in a tent, as evidenced in the *Ugaritic Baal Myth*.⁴⁰² Additionally, the *Epic of Kirta* describes the gods going ‘to their tents’ (*l’ahlhm*) at the close of a divine assembly.⁴⁰³ This was a type of shrine or a tabernacle (*mškn*), which are terms cognate with the Hebrew אֹהֶל (*ōhel*) and מִשְׁכָּן (*miškān*), and just as Yahweh’s abode is described as a tabernacle, this is also true for El.⁴⁰⁴ Furthermore, identical terms are used for the word ‘tent frame(s)’ (*qrš* in Ugaritic, *qereš* in Hebrew).⁴⁰⁵ This term is also present in Mesopotamian literature, revealed in various Mari texts, such as Mari text M.6873, in Akkadian,⁴⁰⁶ which

³⁹⁸ Wellhausen, 1885, pp. 63–64; Bentzen, 1948, p. 34.

³⁹⁹ Cross, 1947, p. 46.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁴⁰² Homan, 2002, p. 94. A distinction has been made that El’s abode is described as a tent in mythological texts, but rather a house in ritual texts, see Smith (1994, p. 339).

⁴⁰³ Ginsberg, 1946, p. 23. These gods include El, Baal, Yarhu, Kothar wa-Hasis, Rahmay and Reshep, see Smith and Pitard (1994, p. 286).

⁴⁰⁴ Homan, 2002, p. 94.

⁴⁰⁵ CAT 1.15 III:19, see Smith and Pitard (1994, pp. 188–9); Smith (1994, p. 338).

⁴⁰⁶ Mari text M.6873; Fleming, 2000, p. 486.

also utilises the cognate term *qrš*.⁴⁰⁷ This indicates a strong connection not just linguistically, but in both form and function, which may reflect similar construction practices.⁴⁰⁸

In line with Wellhausen's proposal that the tabernacle was a fictitious retrojection based upon a version of the Jerusalem Temple,⁴⁰⁹ the scaled dimensions of the tabernacle have been cited as compelling evidence. However, as Friedman (1980) notes, this theory is unsubstantiated: while the Temple's length and width are double that of the tabernacle, its height is three times greater.⁴¹⁰ Friedman instead proposes that the tabernacle was modelled upon the Holy of Holies.⁴¹¹ Regardless of such corresponding calculations, it is not conclusive that the tabernacle was a later retrojection, as it is equally possible that the Temple could have been constructed using the tabernacle as a template.

As Fleming (2000) highlights, the theory that the tabernacle is an imagined version of the temple in Jerusalem in a preliminary form is untenable considering the cognate term, *qrš*, which reflects similar construction material and practices known in ancient Syria that are in no way present in the later descriptions of the Jerusalem Temple.⁴¹²

Some scholars have drawn upon nomadic parallels, such as tent-shrines which are extant in modern times. For instance, the *utfah* is a class of tribal palladia utilised by the *Markab* of the *Ruwala* tribe in military contact and involved in leading migration. It is based on a wooden frame, decorated with ostrich feathers that resembles a tent and often connected to a tribal deity(ies). Blood from a sacrificed white camel is sprinkled on its corners,⁴¹³ which parallels Leviticus 16:15, where it is commanded that blood is placed upon the Mercy Seat on top of the Ark on the Day of Atonement, as well as the tabernacle.

⁴⁰⁷ Fleming, 2000, p. 489.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 490.

⁴⁰⁹ Wellhausen, 1885, p. 36.

⁴¹⁰ Tabernacle (in cubits) = 30L x 10W x 10H (Exod. 26:15–30), as discussed by Friedman, 1980, p. 241. First Temple (in cubits) = 60L x 20W x 30H, see 1 Kings 6:2. Cf. Friedman (1980, p. 241), who interprets the calculation of the tabernacle as 20L x 8W x 10H (cubits).

⁴¹¹ Friedman, 1980, pp. 241–8.

⁴¹² Fleming, 2000, p. 486.

⁴¹³ Morgenstern, 1942, p. 158.

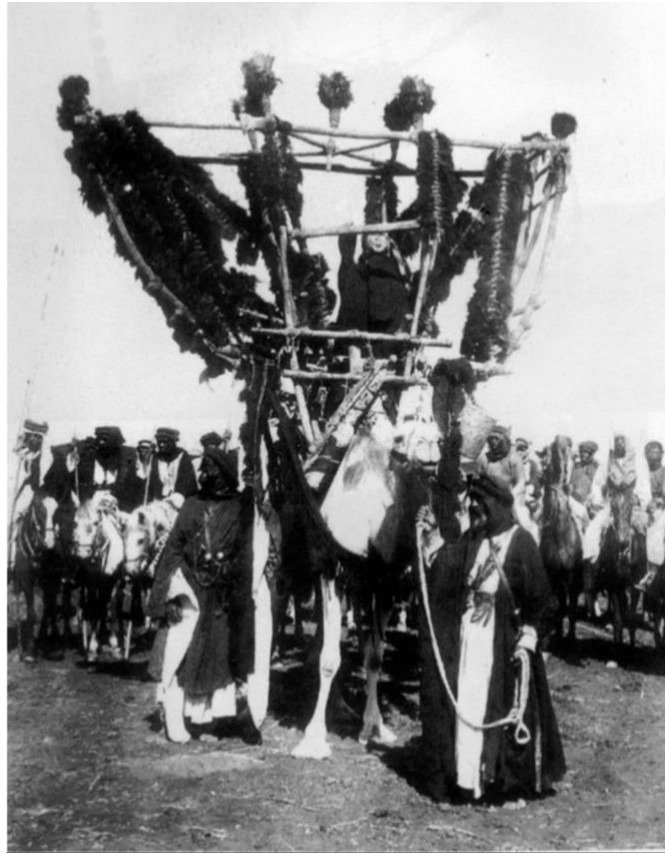


Fig. 10: A raiding party of a Ruwala clan, at the front of which is the markab Abū Duhūr (1927 CE).⁴¹⁴

Further examples exist including the *maḥmal*, a tent-like structure also mounted on a camel, which is believed to guide the animal through the desert by supernatural power. This has also been identified with a pre-Islamic version called the *qubbah*, which had a similar domed top, but was made of red leather, reminiscent of the red dyed ram's skin used in the tabernacle.⁴¹⁵ Interestingly, the same word is used for the tabernacle in Numbers 25:8 (קִבְבָּה, *qubbāh*). However, the fact that nomadic tribes utilise tent structures in processions and battles that are portable in design is not surprising given the environment and need for migration, which could contribute to some similarity.

Ultimately it is necessary to state that correlation does not indicate causality, and as Homan (2002) asserts, the differences also cannot be underestimated, particularly with regard to size and form of transportation.⁴¹⁶ The tabernacle remained stationary until broken into

⁴¹⁴ Image: Alshamarri, 2023, p. 250.

⁴¹⁵ Exod. 26:14.

⁴¹⁶ Homan, 2002, p. 92.

components to be transported either by Levite priests or carts, and was of a size much larger than the *utfah*, described as requiring six wagons and twelve oxen to transport it.⁴¹⁷

Although these parallels are interesting and suggest that these various near Eastern cultures could have affected one another, the strongest parallel is again, evident from LBA Egypt. As meticulously detailed by Homan, the similarities are far greater and difficult to conclude as coincidence. While it is possible that temples could have been constructed for Egyptian deities of perishable material that have not survived in the archaeological record, the evidence available suggests that the most likely construction utilised a tent design, particularly for private cults.⁴¹⁸ Although it is recognised that major royal pyramids contain stone mortuary temples, it is likely that smaller pyramids may have had tabernacles that protected ritual furniture. It has been suggested that the Seila Pyramid dating to the reign of Sneferu, c. 2613–2498 BCE, may show evidence of such tents, particularly due to the four post holes discovered adjacent to the temple that form a square.⁴¹⁹

However, the most striking parallel, first identified by Gressman (1913), is revealed in a comparison to the war encampment of Ramesses II,⁴²⁰ depicted on the walls of Luxor Temple in Abu Simbel, which date to 1250 BCE. The camp was rectangular in plan, protected by a wall of leather covered Egyptian shields. It included the pharaoh's tent, which was oriented eastward and surrounded by a distinct rectangular enclosure.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*; Num. 7:3.

⁴¹⁸ Falk, 2020b, p. 75.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁴²⁰ Gressmann, 1913, p. 241.

⁴²¹ Yadin, 1963, pp. 236–7.

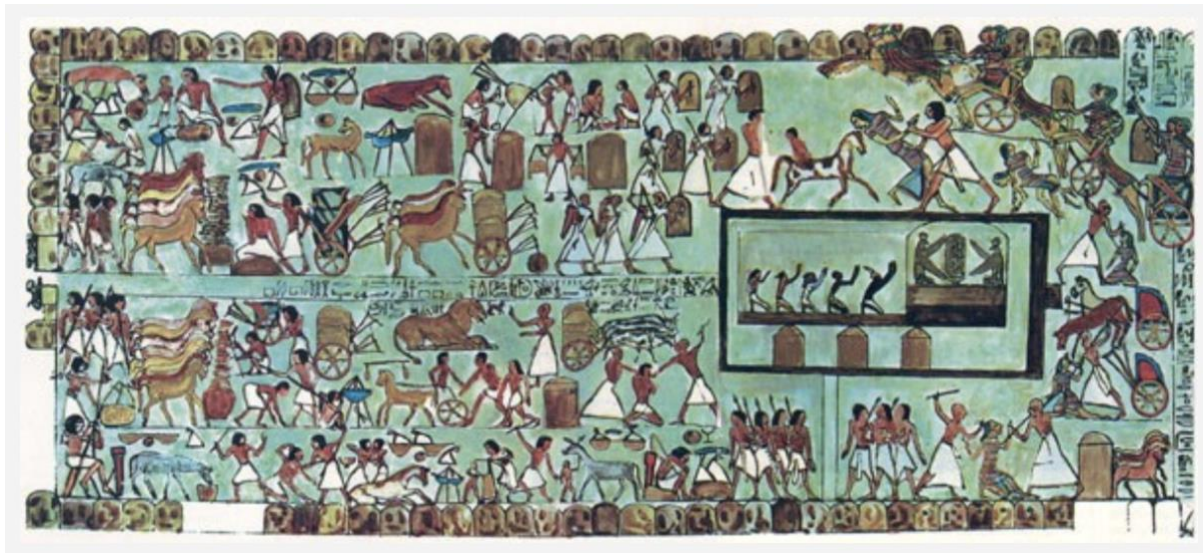


Fig. 11: Illustration based on thirteenth century reliefs of Rameses II's camp at the battle of Kadesh, Abu Simbel.⁴²²

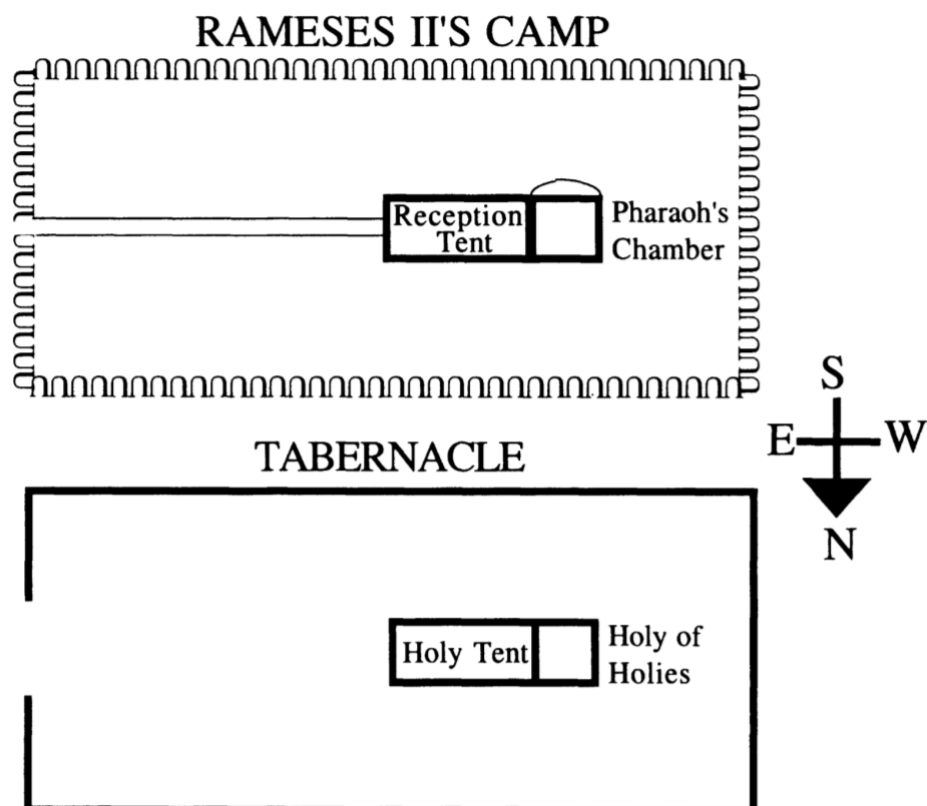


Fig. 12: Comparison of Rameses II's military tent from Abu Simbel with the Tabernacle.⁴²³

⁴²² Image: Yadin, 1963, pp. 236–237.

⁴²³ Image: Yadin, 1963, pp. 236–237.

Gressman (1913) contextualises this connection, suggesting the war encampment served as a reasonable design template for the tabernacle, given the need to guard such a valuable, holy, and sacred structure against enemy attack.⁴²⁴ Therefore, to model it upon a war tent is logical, in order that the sanctuary may be protected.

Additionally, a similarity can be drawn to the depiction of the winged Horus falcons that flank the cartouche within the pharaoh's sanctuary, which closely resemble the Ark of the Covenant, topped by two winged cherubim. Due to the omission of details within the Hebrew text, it is assumed that the cherubim were creatures of typical form that must have been familiar to the reader.⁴²⁵ A study by Albright (1938), examining the many representations of winged animals and hybrid creatures within ANE iconography, concluded based on prevalence, that the cherubim most likely refer to either a winged sphinx or winged lion with a human head.⁴²⁶ Mettinger (1999), further suggested that due to the similarities in function,⁴²⁷ the closest connection correlates to the sphinx found in Egypt during the 19th Dynasty, which was later adopted by the Syrians.⁴²⁸



*Fig. 13: Egyptian naoi depicting winged creatures.*⁴²⁹

⁴²⁴ Gressmann, 1913, p. 241.

⁴²⁵ Eichler, 2015, p. 37.

⁴²⁶ Albright, 1938, p. 2.

⁴²⁷ Mettinger, 1999, pp. 189–192.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁴²⁹ Image: Noegel, 2015, p. 230, Fig. 17.6.

Several additional similarities have been identified in detailed research by Falk (2020b) who highlights several strong associations.⁴³⁰

As mentioned in the methodology, ancient religious phenomena can be difficult to grasp through a modern lens. This is particularly significant when reviewing the multifaceted aspects of ancient Egyptian ritualistic furniture. However, deeper insight reveals an even more profound connection between ancient Israelite and Egyptian perspectives regarding ritualistic practice, in particular, the concept of sacred time and space.

Shrines in ancient Egypt were vessels of sacred space, protecting and sheltering deities from profane contamination.⁴³¹ This echoes the Israelite conception of the tabernacle, evidenced by the fact that Israelite law only permitted the priest to enter the Holy of Holies, once a year, on the Day of Atonement,⁴³² indicating a clear boundary and recognition of sacred space. Egyptian iconography equally portrays a pairing of similar components, as seen with the Ark, which is placed within the tabernacle, where shrines are depicted covered by a tent or canopy, comprising one distinct unit.⁴³³

One clear example illustrating the principle of sacred space and its complexity is revealed in the cosmographic design elements of the Egyptian tomb and designation of separate space.⁴³⁴ The tomb was constructed in layers starting with the antechambers that were open to the public, which often contained biographical depictions or images of nature, with the sacred burial chamber situated in the inner section, decorated with motifs that reflect the divine, such as a night sky.⁴³⁵

This particular design, incorporating an outer court designated for public space that leads to an inner court which was only accessible to priests after specific purification rituals,⁴³⁶ also has strong resemblance to the form and plan of the tabernacle. Even the incorporation of a

⁴³⁰ Falk, 2020b.

⁴³¹ Falk, 2020b, p. 94.

⁴³² Lev. 16:2.

⁴³³ Falk, 2020, p. 94.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 36, 47–48; Baines, 1976, p. 10.

⁴³⁵ Falk, 2020b, p. 36–7.

⁴³⁶ Assmann, 2003, p. 52.

most holy space within the inner court, known as the ‘Great Throne’ (*s.t wr.t*), recalls the Holy of Holies, which housed the Ark, similar to how an Egyptian shrine was enclosed.



*Fig. 14: Depiction of two priests carrying a kar shrine on poles at the Abydos Temple of Ramesses II.*⁴³⁷



*Fig. 15: Reconstruction of the Ark of the Covenant by Falk (2020b).*⁴³⁸

⁴³⁷ Images: Falk, 2020b, p. 89. © Falk.

⁴³⁸ Image: Falk, 2020b, p. 2. © Falk.

The Ark is described as containing certain holy objects, such as the tablets of the law,⁴³⁹ possibly a jar of manna⁴⁴⁰ and the rod of Aaron,⁴⁴¹ which likely served the purpose of protection and separation. The Israelite concept of holiness is also reflected in the term for ‘holy’ or ‘sacred’ (קָדוֹשׁ, *qādôš*), which carries the idea of being ‘separate’ or ‘apart’.⁴⁴²

Research by Noegel (2015) discusses the many similarities between Egyptian barques and the Ark, which share great commonality in both form and function. Noegel emphasises, not that the Israelites saw the Ark as a barque, but that it likely acted as a model for one.⁴⁴³ An additional aspect that strengthens such chthonic association, is the fact that the Hebrew word אֲרוֹן (*ārôn*), translated as ‘ark’ in English, is synonymous with ‘coffin’. This is exemplified in Genesis, detailing the death and funerary aspects of the patriarchs Jacob and Joseph, such as being embalmed in accordance with Egyptian practice and placed in an ‘*ārôn*’.⁴⁴⁴

As discussed by Taylor (2001b), coffins within ancient Egyptian thought were also endowed with symbolic significance, which could also function as an eternal house for the spirit or act as a type of substitute body.⁴⁴⁵ This further strengthens the similarities in connection with the Ark, as its primary function was to serve as a dwelling place for Yahweh’s presence among the Israelites.⁴⁴⁶

The multiple layers of function regarding the Egyptian coffin also affected both its form and decoration.⁴⁴⁷ A common colour utilised in Egyptian coffins was yellow or gold, which was associated with deifying the deceased.⁴⁴⁸ It was particularly recognised as representing divinity, as seen in descriptions in the *Destruction of Mankind*, where Re is depicted as having golden skin; ‘his bones being silver, his flesh gold, his hair true lapis lazuli’

⁴³⁹ Deut. 10:2.

⁴⁴⁰ Exod. 16:33–34.

⁴⁴¹ Num. 17:10.

⁴⁴² Strong’s 6918, BDB 872.

⁴⁴³ Noegel, 2015, p. 229.

⁴⁴⁴ Gen. 50:1–14 and 50:26. Gen. 50:26: וַיִּשָּׂם בְּאֲרוֹן בְּמִצְרַיִם, translated ‘So Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt’ (ESV).

⁴⁴⁵ Taylor, 2001, p. 164.

⁴⁴⁶ Exod. 25:21–22.

⁴⁴⁷ Taylor, 2001, p. 164.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

(Lichtheim, 1976, p. 198).⁴⁴⁹ This concept was to be understood as a poetic metaphor related to reflecting sunlight as articulated in the *Book of the Dead*, spell 172, ‘Re shines on your face so that it is clothed in gold . . .’ (Assmann, 2005, p. 37). This again draws association to the Ark which is described as being made of acacia wood, overlaid with gold on both sides with a lid of solid gold (כֶּפֶרֶת, *kappōret*).⁴⁵⁰ Additionally, Isaacs and Hemmings (2023) suggest that *kappōret* may be a loanword from Egyptian, which based on textual attestations, is likely to have been loaned during the LBA, with a *terminus ante quem* between the end of Seti I’s reign and the close of the 20th Dynasty (c. 1279–1077 BCE). This proposal, provides a further point of challenge to the theory that the text was a postexilic invention, as it is difficult to explain how a later writer could be aware of such a term.⁴⁵¹

Furthermore, both the use of the term ‘acacia’, and the practice of overlaying gold have been shown to originate in Egypt.⁴⁵² The Hebrew word for ‘acacia’ (*šittā*) has been shown to derive from *šndt*, the equivalent term in Egyptian.⁴⁵³ Falk (2020b) describes the construction method as ‘distinctly Egyptian’ (p. 146). This was recognised by Meyers (1976) with regard to the menorah, concluding that ‘[o]n every level, the details of its fabricature and form point to it as a manifestation of a material culture that can be located in time at the end of the LBA’ (p. 182),⁴⁵⁴ who additionally recognises elements of Egyptian influence.⁴⁵⁵ While noting elements of Syrian influence, which can be said of the menorah, evidence from Levantine cultures regarding altars cannot be equally concluded, as they were often constructed from stone. In contrast, the most common form of altars parallel the depictions within Exodus, consisting of wood, frequently overlaid with gold.⁴⁵⁶

With regard to religious and ritual clothing, many aspects have also been identified with Egyptian style and customs. Several scholars note the parallels between Egyptian pectorals and the priestly breastpiece (חֹשֶׁן, *hōšēn*), which served as a part of the ritual garments detailed in Exodus 28:15–29. Although Egyptian pectorals did not have an explicitly

⁴⁴⁹ Lichtheim, 1976, p. 198.

⁴⁵⁰ Exod. 25:10–11.

⁴⁵¹ Isaacs and Hemmings, 2023, pp. 17–18.

⁴⁵² Hoffmeier, 2021, p. 91.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*; Falk, 2020b, p. 146.

⁴⁵⁴ Meyers, 1976, p. 182.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 68, 109–10.

⁴⁵⁶ Falk, 2020b, pp. 145–6.

religious or cultic function, being used primarily for personal adornment,⁴⁵⁷ they often included religious motifs or depictions of deities. They also include many visual features that bear striking similarities, such as the square shape, suspended by a chain or cord, designed to be worn over the chest and often decorated with ornate gemstones.⁴⁵⁸ Additionally, Hoffmeier (2021) connects various items of the Israelite priestly regalia, such as the sash and linen undergarments, as well as the particular stitch work around the head opening of the robe, to examples discovered in Egypt.⁴⁵⁹

Overall, the numerous examples of ancient Israelite and Egyptian religious furniture and vestments demonstrate strong similarities in both form and function during the LBA. This provides compelling evidence for historical contact between the two cultures, facilitating the exchange of religious concepts and ideas during this time.



Fig. 16: Djed-column pectoral of Tutankhamun, inlaid with gemstones, depicting Isis and Nephthys, Thebes (18th Dynasty).⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁷ Harrell, Hoffmeier and Williams, 2017, p. 6.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁹ Hoffmeier, 2021, pp. 92–3.

⁴⁶⁰ Image: Aldred, 1978, p. 85.



Fig. 17: Pectoral of Queen Mereret, from Dahshur (12th Dynasty).⁴⁶¹

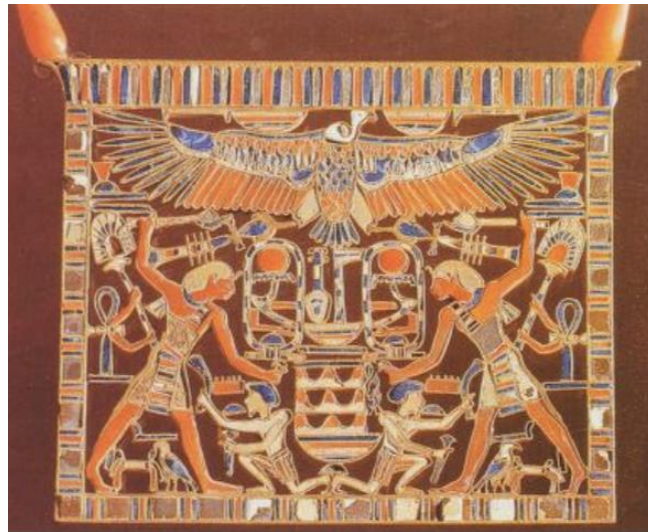


Fig. 18: Gold pectoral inlaid with carnelian and lapis lazuli, depicting the king about to smite an Asiatic enemy, reign of Amenemhat III (12th Dynasty).⁴⁶²

⁴⁶¹ Image: *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁴⁶² Image: Andrews, 1997, p. 59.

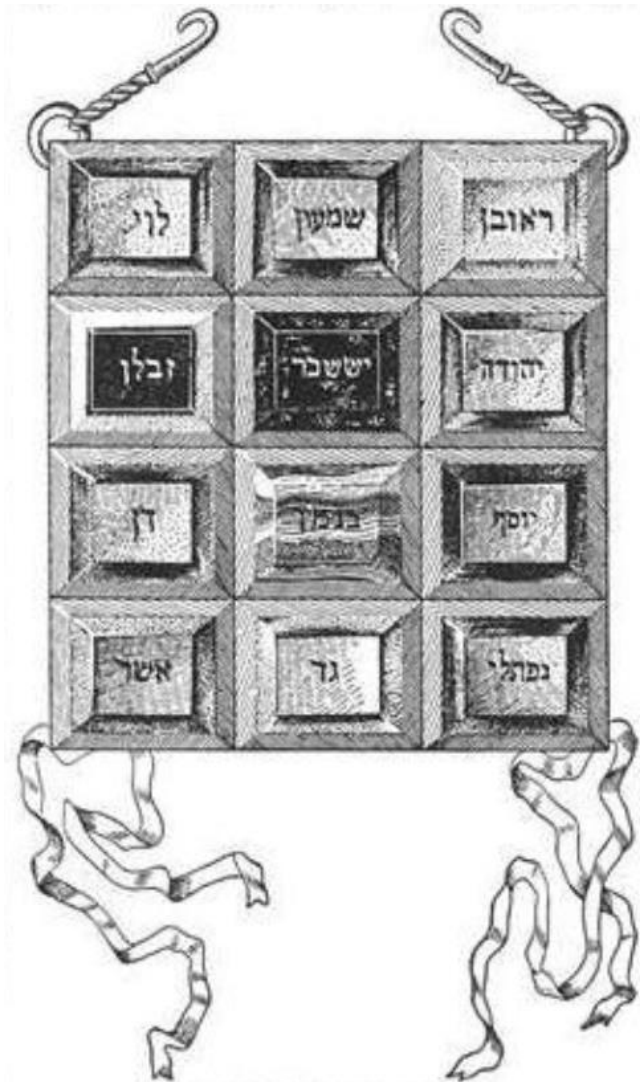


Fig. 19: Representation of the priestly breastpiece described in Exod. 28.⁴⁶³

⁴⁶³ Image: Singer and Adler, 1903, p. 366.

Conclusion

This study has revealed strong plausibility for many details within the Exodus account, regarding the historical background of Israelite origin. This includes attestation within the historical record to a known Semitic population present at a number of northeastern Delta sites.⁴⁶⁴ In particular, the extensive excavations conducted by Bietak (1996) at Tell el-Dab'a not only provide clear archaeological data of Levantine people living in the area, evidenced by pottery, weapons, and burial types,⁴⁶⁵ but also reveals abandonment of the urban district during the 19th Dynasty, which supports the narrative of a large Exodus of people during this time.⁴⁶⁶

Additional details are also supported by Egyptian textual and iconographic data, such as the prevalence of forced labour utilising foreign workers, slave activity involving brick construction, requirement for straw as integral to the brick's composition, and references to daily quotas. All of these aspects are not only attested in the Egyptian historical record, but specifically correlate to the time period of the Late Bronze Age (LBA), which supports the dating established from the text.

As discussed, it is recognised that a high level of verisimilitude should not be conflated with substantiated evidence of authenticity.⁴⁶⁷ However, as a preliminary measure, it has revealed the plausibility of key aspects related to Israelite origin, warranting further investigation of the text.

Examination of the content of Exodus not only reveals themes that correlate to LBA Egypt, but also identifies several vivid parallels, such as ritual furniture and religious vestments. It could be argued that later writers depended on ancient texts, as suggested by Cross (1947).⁴⁶⁸ It is possible that descriptions or depictions of certain parallels, such as the war encampment of Ramesses II, could have been emulated in Babylon or other places, but have not survived the archaeological record. This would mean that there would be information available to later

⁴⁶⁴ Such as Tell el-Yahudiya, Tell el-Kebir and Tell Farasha, as well as sites within the Wadi Tumilat, see Mourad (2015, pp. 19–204); Hoffmeier (2021, pp. 86–87).

⁴⁶⁵ Bietak, 1996, p. 81–7.

⁴⁶⁶ Bietak et al., 2012, p. 45.

⁴⁶⁷ Hendel, 2021, pp. 125–7; Frei, 1974, pp. 1–16.

⁴⁶⁸ Cross, 1947, pp. 57–8.

writers to utilise in creating a fictional narrative. Due to Egypt's extensive cultural influence and military impact, the influence of the Egyptian empire is likely to have been far-reaching and to have disseminated ideas to other countries, as recognised in contact between Babylonian and Egypt.⁴⁶⁹ Some elements of the Exodus account have been established in surrounding cultures, such as the concept of a river turning into blood and plagues of flies, which are attested in textual evidence from Mesopotamia.⁴⁷⁰ Furthermore, Schipper (2012) highlights a clear opportunity for the exchange of ideas and concepts between Egypt and Israel, particularly during cultural contact in the 25th and 26th Dynasties, when older texts may have been more popular, due to the trend of Late Period archaism that idealised earlier periods.⁴⁷¹ This provides support for the dominant theory presented by minimalists that the texts were likely constructed around the time of the Babylonian exile.

However, analysis of the vocabulary reveals Egyptian loanwords at a prevalence comparable to that found in Imperial Aramaic texts, reflecting contact established through political and administrative relations under the Persian Empire.⁴⁷² From the perspective of contact linguistics, this lends strong evidence to a specific and significant historical circumstance underlying the Exodus tradition; one that correlates with LBA Egypt.

It could be considered that later writers aimed to incorporate Egyptian aspects into the text to create a realistic narrative. However, even if it was a possibility, it is questionable whether ancient writers would have had access to the specific resources required for the extensive research necessary to compose a text of this genre with such detail.⁴⁷³ While modern authors can craft highly detailed, realistic fiction with the aid of the internet and vast online libraries, it is improbable that ancient Israelites would be able to achieve the same level of intricate verisimilitude. Nonetheless, it is difficult to establish what would motivate a writer to invest so much time and effort for an audience that likely would not have been able to recognise the difference.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁶⁹ Schipper, 2012, p.

⁴⁷⁰ Kramer, 1991, p. 162 (plague of blood); Atrahasis III.v.35, 46 (plague of flies), see Lambert and Millard (1999, p. 99).

⁴⁷¹ Assmann, 2011, p. 77; Der Manuelian, 1994.

⁴⁷² Noonan, 2016, pp. 60–1.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁴⁷⁴ Hoffmeier, 2005, pp. 248–9.

Ultimately, even though some areas of this research could be regarded as knowledge accessible to later writers, the level of detail throughout the Exodus account challenges this hypothesis, such as the inclusion of peripheral details and vocabulary that have an Egyptian origin or connection. As identified by this study, there are specific elements within the text that are particularly difficult to have been known about in later times, such as the mention of the city of Rameses, which would have been abandoned centuries before,⁴⁷⁵ or the mention of turquoise which became virtually non-existent after the Ramesside period (c. 1140–1130 BCE).⁴⁷⁶ As recognised by Currid (1997), the writer of Exodus not only displays an understanding of Egyptian religious and cultural background, but to a level that enables the ability to create polemic devices that utilise linguistic parallels.⁴⁷⁷

Additionally, several findings in this study specifically challenge the view of later composition. Firstly, the notably low number of Old Iranian loanwords within the book of Exodus, as well as the fact that none of the Egyptian loanwords contained an *i* ending on the feminine nouns, which would correlate with the first millennium BCE. Secondly, the analysis of onomastic congruence reveals two names that exclusively occur in the second millennium BCE, while none are attested solely in the first millennium BCE. It seems highly unlikely that later scribes would be able to invent names that align with the second millennium, while omitting any that reflect their own historical context.⁴⁷⁸ This poses significant challenges to the dominant critical view of authorship and composition that rejects historicity of the Exodus tradition and therefore requires reconsideration.

Some scholars, recognising the many undeniable connections to Egypt during the LBA, acknowledge an Egyptian origin for elements of the narrative, but propose alternative theories that diverge from the traditional Exodus account in other ways. For example, Friedman (2017) and Feinman (2021) forward a theory that only a smaller core group of Levites came from Egypt and brought information with them.⁴⁷⁹ This theory aims to overcome the implausibility of a large number traversing the Sinai. However, as discussed, this issue is mitigated if an alternative interpretation of *'elef* is applied to the biblical text,

⁴⁷⁵ Hoffmeier, 2005 p. 248.

⁴⁷⁶ Hoffmeier, 2021, pp. 132–3.

⁴⁷⁷ Currid, 1997, p. 103.

⁴⁷⁸ Hess, 2016, p. 47.

⁴⁷⁹ Reviving a theory presented by Meek (1936, pp. 31–3, 116–47).

such as ‘military unit’. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine how the Levites would have gained such prominence in the Exodus narrative if they left Egypt without a community to serve.⁴⁸⁰ It is also challenging to ascertain why a people group would invent a story that includes such an inglorious detail as a 400-year enslavement. Through application of the Criterion of Embarrassment,⁴⁸¹ this is quite improbable as a typical invention.

This study does not seek to provide evidence that the entire story is authentically accurate, and that no redaction has occurred. It is well known that biblical texts incorporate literary and theological devices which require careful unravelling.⁴⁸² However, the key textual and archaeological areas examined reveal strong historical reliability. This paper clearly demonstrates that the specific textual and cultural components discussed have strong connections to LBA Egypt, indicating origins from this area and time, incorporating a level of detail and nuance that is unlikely to have been achieved by scribes writing in a different location in a much later time period.

⁴⁸⁰ Hoffmeier, 2021, p. 170.

⁴⁸¹ Meier, 1991, p. 12.

⁴⁸² Frei, 1974, p. 16.

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