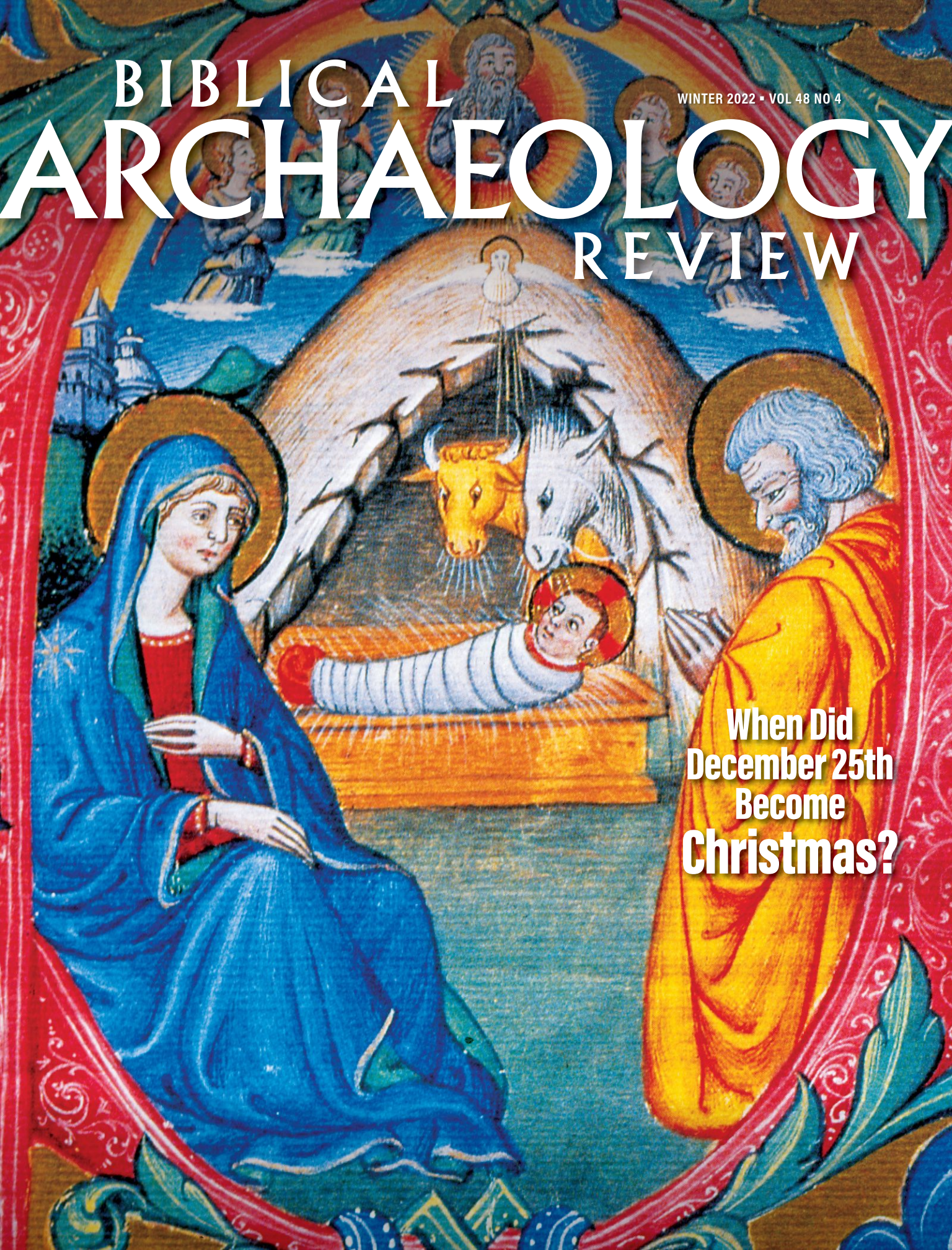


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WINTER 2022 • VOL 48 NO 4



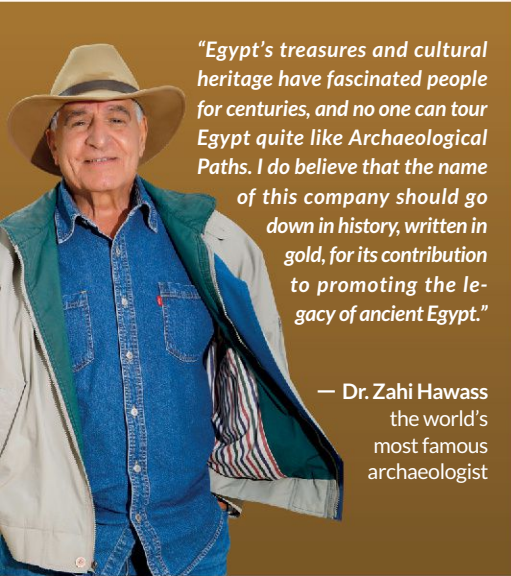
When Did
December 25th
Become
Christmas?



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EGYPT'S HIDDEN TREASURES

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For years, *Archaeological Paths'* exclusive historical tours of Egypt have attracted travelers drawn to the country's ancient past. For many, cruising down the Nile, visiting the ancient tombs of the pharaohs, exploring the Pyramids of Giza, or marveling at the Great Sphinx are bucket-list items. But the challenge of fulfilling a much-longed-for dream is that the experience must match – or better, exceed – expectations.

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The Great Sphinx Enclosure



The Presidential Abdeen Palace

Now it's time to take a closer look at what makes these experiences extraordinary. From Founder and CEO of *Archaeological Paths*, Grzegorz Popławski:



At *Archaeological Paths*, our approach to luxury travel differs from other companies. We have changed the way the travel industry operates by offering unforgettable, unsurpassed, and unique experiences. Combined with our passion for history and exploration, this is one of the things that makes us distinct among tour companies.

Our guests have exclusive access to exceptional sites. Imagine Luxor Temple, the Valley of the Kings, or the entire Giza Plateau open just for you. For most visitors, a distant viewing platform is as close to the Great Sphinx as they'll get. With us, you can touch the Sphinx and stand between its paws as you watch the sunrise, a time when no one else is allowed at the site.

You can enjoy a VIP tour of the Grand Egyptian Museum or private entry to the Great Pyramid of Khufu, including a visit to the Queen's and Subterranean Chambers – both closed to the public. You'll have special access to 19th-century palaces that are official residences of the Egyptian president.



Archaeological Paths' guests are introduced to the latest discoveries at the Karnak Temple Complex

Another feature of our tours – not offered by any other company – is that we invite our guests to meet with individuals who shape history. Hearing from these knowledgeable experts is an experience like no other. These figures include the world’s most famous archaeologist, **Dr. Zahi Hawass**, and Egypt’s Secretary - General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, **Dr. Mostafa Waziri**, presently responsible for all antiquities and archaeological sites in Egypt. There is no one better equipped to tell you about the most recent discoveries.

With us, you’ll visit active excavation sites such as **Taposiris Magna**, the possible resting place of Cleopatra, the last queen of Egypt, or **the Tombs of the Pyramid Builders at Giza**. This site entirely changed the established understanding of how the pyramids were built. Imagine visiting this place in the company of the very person who discovered it, giving you unrivaled insight into Egypt’s ancient past.

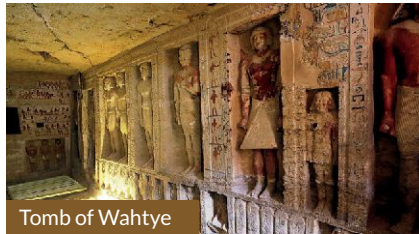
In addition to special access to some of the most iconic archaeological sites in Egypt already included in our tours’ itineraries, there are always some surprises in store for our guests.



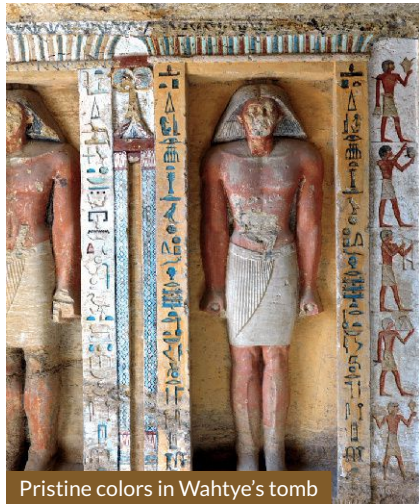
Dr. Mostafa Waziri shows the temple of Khonsu, which is off-limits to the public



Taposiris Magna Temple



Tomb of Wahtye



Pristine colors in Wahtye’s tomb

For example, in 2021, one of the best years for Egypt in terms of new archaeological discoveries, Dr. Hawass found the “**Lost Golden City**” in Luxor. This is now regarded as the second most important Egyptian archaeological discovery after Tutankhamun’s tomb. Our guests were there before the discovery was even announced. Later that year, Egypt reopened **the Southern Tomb of King Djoser at Saqqara** after a 15-year renovation. *Archaeological Paths’* guests were in for a real treat as they enjoyed exclusive access to the site before its official opening.

And in December 2018, the **4,400-year-old tomb of Wahtye**, a high-ranking priest, was discovered at Saqqara. The vibrant colors in the tomb were almost pristine, which even archaeologists found surprising. The moment we learned that a new tomb had been found, we knew our guests had to witness it. That very day, our guests, along with Dr. Waziri and Dr. Hawass, explored this tomb. Since then, *Archaeological Paths* is one of the only companies allowed to lead its guests there. Imagine being one of the very few people in the world who have had the opportunity to enter this ancient burial chamber.

We may take you to a tomb that was discovered literally a few days earlier or a temple that will remain closed to tourists for years to come.


Don’t be surprised, then, when you are a part of a similar experience during your tour. With us, you can expect the unexpected!

Opportunities like this make our itineraries the most exclusive and luxurious you can find. I always say that you might visit Egypt only once in your life, so you should have the richest experience possible and see things in the most intimate way. We want to create a trip filled with memories that will last a lifetime.

Whenever you hear about a new discovery in Egypt, we are there, together with our guests, providing the best access not only to ancient sites but also to all of **Egypt’s hidden treasures.**



Now you can be a part of *Archaeological Paths’* exclusive experiences! Book your tour today.

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FEATURES

34 **Mesha's Stele and the House of David**

André Lemaire and Jean-Philippe Delorme

The Mesha Stele details the victories of King Mesha of Moab over the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. It was found at Dibon, Moab's capital, and dated to the ninth century B.C.E. The stone contains a possible reference to the "House of David" as Judah's rulers, which seems to support King David as a historical figure. Thanks to recent photographic evidence, our authors argue that this reading can now be confirmed.

50 **Calculating Christmas: Hippolytus and December 25th**

T.C. Schmidt

When did December 25 become the date for Christmas? An inscribed statue and several patristic manuscripts show an early association of Jesus's birth with December 25. Investigate the early church fathers' calendrical calculations that resulted in this date.

55 **Enduring Impressions: The Stamped Jars of Judah**

Oded Lipschits

In ancient Judah, seal impressions stamped onto storage jars supported a centuries-long administrative system designed to collect and store agricultural products to pay the kingdom's annual tribute to its foreign overlords. Examine the different impressions, attested from the eighth to second centuries B.C.E., that evidence this long-lived, centrally organized system.

42 **The Genesis of Judaism**

Yonatan Adler

Throughout much of history, Jewish life and culture have been characterized by strict adherence to the practices and prohibitions given in the Torah. The origins of that observance, however, have remained a mystery. Consider the archaeological discoveries and ancient texts that reveal when and why ordinary Judeans first adopted the Torah as their authoritative law.



ON THE COVER: This 15th-century illuminated page shows the Nativity scene with Jesus at the center. Mary and Joseph appear on his left and right. An ox, donkey, angelic host, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove appear above. The page is part of a Latin manuscript by Friedrich Zollner of Langenzenn, Germany.

PHOTO: ALFREDO DAGLI ORTI / ART RESOURCE, NY



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WEB EXCLUSIVE

Looking to the Future

biblicalarchaeology.org/ies

BAR sat down with Rona Avissar Lewis, the new director of the Israel Exploration Society, to discuss the organization's storied past and bright future. We discussed the opportunities and challenges facing biblical archaeology in Israel today and the importance of public outreach. Watch the interview today!



RONA AVISSAR LEWIS

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Celebrate Discovery



THIS YEAR MARKED THE ANNIVERSARIES of some of the most important archaeological discoveries from the world of the Bible. We celebrated 200 years since Egyptian hieroglyphs were first deciphered, the centennial of the discovery of King Tut's tomb, and perhaps most significantly for biblical archaeology, the 75th anniversary of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

These remarkable discoveries, which opened up entirely new areas of study and rewrote our histories of the ancient and biblical past, remind us why archaeology continues to captivate so many. A single swing of the pick or swipe of the trowel can completely transform our view of the past, revealing new, exciting, and often unexpected insights into peoples, events, and even everyday lives about which we previously knew little.

Just in time for the holidays, our Winter 2022 issue celebrates the latest discoveries—from the monumental to the mundane—that continue to shape our understanding of the biblical world. In “Mesha’s Stele and the House of David,” André Lemaire and Jean-Philippe Delorme take a detailed look at the famous monumental inscription of the Moabite king, Mesha, and the new photographic evidence that they believe confirms its long-suspected reference to the kingdom of David. Similarly, in “The Genesis of Judaism,” Yonatan Adler systematically examines the archaeological and historical evidence to determine when early Jews first began to observe the laws of the Torah—and reaches a surprising conclusion.

In his article “Enduring Impressions,” archaeologist Oded Lipschits highlights Judah’s long tradition of stamped jar handles, which reveals an innovative and remarkably durable administrative system that persisted across more than six centuries of local and imperial rule. And for those who have always wondered how Christmas came to be celebrated on December 25, T.C. Schmidt’s article “Calculating Christmas” examines an early Christian inscription that indicates the date was determined not by the appropriation of a pagan holiday but by the calculations concerning Jesus’s conception.

In addition to news, tributes, and our always enjoyable quizzes, Strata highlights the latest in Dead Sea Scrolls research, with an article by Christy Chapman and Brent Seales on the incredible technology that allows scholars to digitally unwrap and read the interiors of rolled-up and previously undocumented scrolls. We also interview Joe Uziel, head of Israel’s Dead Sea Scrolls Unit, whose team works to document, conserve, and make accessible the more than 25,000 scroll fragments recovered from the Judean Desert since 1947. And for the collector and travel enthusiast in all of us, Katharine Scherff examines a fantastic Byzantine reliquary that reveals Christianity’s long fascination with Holy Land keepsakes.

Epistles explores a broad range of biblical and textual stories and themes. David Fiensy looks at the early Jewish laws, customs, and traditions that governed Joseph and Mary’s engagement and wedding in first-century Galilee, while Jonathan Yogev profiles the mysterious Rephaim, mythical characters of a bygone age often associated with death and the underworld in the Bible. Aaron Koller then examines how ancient scribes understood the written word and the very different function that writing served in antiquity.

As we gather with family, friends, and colleagues this holiday season, we hope our latest issue provides not just hours of enjoyable reading and conversation, but also an opportunity to celebrate the many remarkable discoveries that continue to make biblical archaeology such a fascinating and thought-provoking field.

—GLENN J. CORBETT

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PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NO. 40915523.

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EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS OFFICE:
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Biblical Archaeology Review (ISSN-0098-9444), copyright © 2022 by the Biblical Archaeology Society, is published quarterly by the Biblical Archaeology Society. All Offices at: 5614 Connecticut Ave NW #343, Washington, DC 20015-2604. Call (800) 678-5555 to subscribe. Periodicals postage is paid at PO Box 37828, Boone, IA 50037-0828.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Biblical Archaeology Review* and PO Box 37828, Boone, IA 50037-0828.



The Samaritans

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We have all heard of the Samaritans, but who are they?

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The exhibit is open through January 1 and is included with a general admission ticket.

Learn more at motb.me/samaritans



Thank you for sharing your thoughts and comments about our Summer 2022 issue. We appreciate your feedback. Here are a few of the letters we received. Find more online at biblicalarchaeology.org/letters.

Pretty Fun

I JUST FINISHED reading practically every word of the Summer 2022 issue. I noted in “Digging In” that Glenn Corbett is finishing his first year as Editor, a position that he says has been pretty fun. The past year of *BAR* definitely demonstrates this fun. I have enjoyed the selection of articles, the clarity of the language, the well-annotated subjects, the explanations of Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic words, as well as the photography, the layouts, and the general format of the magazine. I am a retired Lutheran pastor looking forward to my second trip to Israel and Jordan this fall. *BAR* keeps me up to date and current about “Holy Land” things shoved way back in my memory. Thank you!

SCOTT MCKINNEY
ROCHESTER HILLS, MICHIGAN

The Wrath of Merneptah

I READ WITH APPRECIATION Steven Ortiz and Samuel Wollf’s article “Pharaoh’s Fury” (Summer 2022). In fact, I read it twice! I have a question, however, about the events recorded on the Merneptah Stele. The authors mention that some scholars attribute the destruction at Aphek during the latter years of Ramesses II to the Canaanite

king of Gezer. Is it possible the king’s attack could have been orchestrated by the Hittites? As we know, the Hittites and Egyptians never got along. Maybe the Hittite ruler decided to nibble away at Egyptian territory, but using a proxy instead of his own army?

ANDREW CARUTHERS
WENATCHEE, WASHINGTON

STEVEN ORTIZ AND SAMUEL WOLFF RESPOND:

Any scenario is possible, since the conquerors did not leave their calling card. We have no historical sources mentioning a Hittite campaign to the southern Levant at this point in time, using either the king’s own army or an unnamed proxy. We concur with Yuval Gadot (“The Late Bronze Egyptian Estate at Aphek,” Tel Aviv 37 [2010], p. 62) that Aphek was destroyed by a rebellious Canaanite city-state, perhaps by the king of Gezer himself.

Biblical Cyclops?

AS A LONG-TIME SUBSCRIBER, I was surprised to see the article on Greek mythology (Classical Corner: “The Cyclops,” Summer 2022). Although it may relate in some remote way to biblical archaeology, I prefer information relating to scripture and the people and places mentioned in the Bible. I could find no relationship in the cyclops article.

EVA BEST
RICHARDSON, TEXAS

*At *BAR*, we take a broad view of the biblical world. Our Classical Corner department offers perspectives on the peoples of the ancient Mediterranean, as their myths, traditions, and values were*

often well known to the biblical writers. In some cases, like the story of the Cyclops, we even find remarkable similarities to biblical traditions about primordial giants, including the Rephaim (see p. 68), who were thought to have inhabited the land of Canaan before Israel.—ED.

Ezra in the Dead Sea Scrolls?

IN HER INTERESTING ARTICLE “Ezra and the Dead Sea Scrolls,” Charlotte Hempel wonders why Ezra is not found anywhere in the scrolls (Summer 2022). I suspect he may be there, as the enigmatic “Interpreter of the Law.” There is no scholarly consensus about who he is, but his title (*doresh ha-torah*) may well be derived from Ezra 7:10, where the phrase describes Ezra himself. Like Ezra, the Interpreter is a reforming figure from the past, but he is also a figure who in the future will accompany the royal messiah. In these eschatological passages, the Interpreter bears a striking resemblance to Ezra in *4 Ezra*, who, after being taken up like Enoch and Elijah, now lives with the “son” (the messiah) and will appear with him when he is manifested in Zion. Because he accompanies the Davidic messiah, many scholars suspect that the Interpreter of the Law is the Qumranic priestly messiah. Ezra, of course, was a priest!

DANIEL C. OLSON
FELTON, CALIFORNIA

CHARLOTTE HEMPEL RESPONDS:

The enigmatic ciphers given for individuals referenced in the Dead Sea Scrolls are open to a variety of interpretations, so your suggestion is not impossible. In fact, this suggestion was previously made by scholar Isaac Rabinowitz, while T.H. Gaster identified the Teacher of Righteousness with Ezra.

MIGHT I SUGGEST an alternate reason for Ezra’s absence from the Dead Sea Scrolls? Ezra was from the line

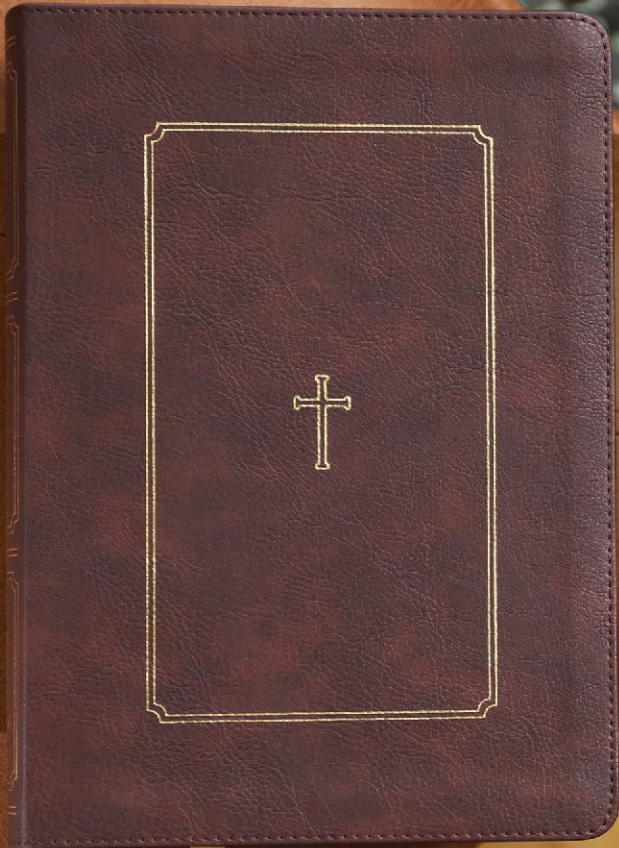
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of Aaron, and there were many who held that the high priest could only come from the line of Zadok. Although Zadok was also descended from Aaron, it was only his descendants who were thought to be suitable for the high priesthood. Ezra's exclusion would have been justified by some who rejected all descendants of Aaron who were not also descendants of Zadok.

PETE SISK
FORT MYERS, FLORIDA

CHARLOTTE HEMPEL RESPONDS:

In my book The Qumran Rule Texts in Context (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), I examined all the references to the sons of Aaron and the sons of Zadok in the non-biblical Dead Sea Scrolls. Although your question rightly notes the prominent position advocated for the sons of Zadok in a small number of texts, references to the sons of Aaron far outnumber those to the sons of Zadok. The small number of references to the sons of Zadok have, however, been extremely effective in convincing us of the superiority of this group by representing them

as the pinnacle of the historical development of the movement. In short, the elevated claims made on behalf of the sons of Zadok have successfully obscured the localized profile of references to this group that are outnumbered by a much larger number of references to the sons of Aaron largely getting on with the priestly day job of performing cultic duties.

35,000 Sites in Israel?!

IN THE SUMMER 2022 ISSUE, Gideon Avni, the head of the Israel Antiquities Authority's archaeology division, said there are 35,000 archaeological sites spread over 4,000 square miles in Israel. That's nearly nine sites per square mile, which seems impossible. Could you please clarify?

ANDY COOK
FORT VALLEY, GEORGIA

GIDEON AVNI RESPONDS:

It is the policy of the IAA that an archaeological site is any "area which contains antiquities," where antiquities are defined as any object made by humans before 1700 C.E. or considered to be of historical

value. An archaeological site, therefore, would be any place in which even a small quantity of antiquities is found—even a few fragments of pottery uncovered during a construction project. Every site is then classified according to its archaeological, historical, and cultural values, using the UNESCO guidelines.

Memories of Ghazi Bisheh

I APPRECIATE THE OBITUARY you published for Ghazi Bisheh, former Director-General of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan (DOAJ). It was a sensitive and excellent tribute. Ghazi was a dear friend, and if it were not for Ghazi, I would never have been permitted to work in Jordan. When I was first introduced to Ghazi at the DOAJ offices in 1996, I said, "Ghazi, I worked in Israel for 20 years. Will that be a problem?" Ghazi looked straight at me and said, "Mafi Mushkila [Arabic for "No Problem"]. Welcome to Jordan."

THOMAS E. LEVY
PROFESSOR OF ANTHROPOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

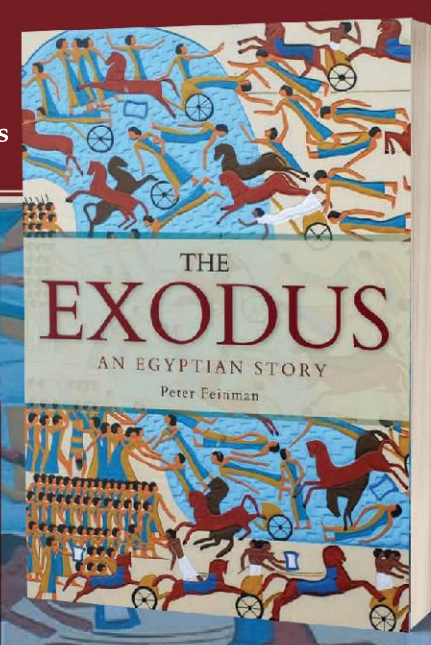
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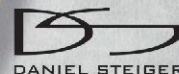
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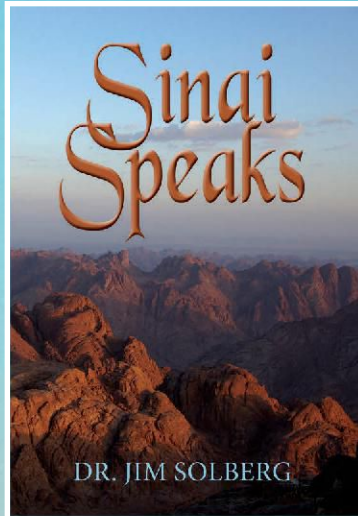
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Photo by: Gracies Winger

THE FIFTH GOSPEL

“**T**hree hundred years after Jesus, a man known as **St. Jerome** in church history, described the **Land of Israel** as the “**Fifth Gospel**”. This was because the Land is central to the Bible’s Story. God promised the Land to Abraham’s descendants, and it was the LORD who proclaimed that He had placed His Name in the Land. The importance of the Land is also evident by the fact that most Biblical events occurred within the boundaries of today’s modern State of Israel. Even events that took place in other regions, such as Babylon, Nineveh or Rome, all featured Jewish men from the Land of Israel (i.e. Daniel, Jonah, Paul). The Land of Israel is central to God’s plan. It is the Land of the patriarchs, kings, and prophets. It’s the land of Jesus, the disciples and apostles. It was the Land of the Kingdom of David and Solomon and the birth of the early church. It is the Land God promised to regather the Jewish people back to, which is being prophetically fulfilled before our eyes. Finally, it is the Land where Messiah will rule from. I warmly invite you to visit the Land of Israel with Bridges for Peace. ”

—*Rev. Peter Fast (National Director, Bridges for Peace Canada)*

THE SIXTH GOSPEL

“**H**ave you ever wished you could have been one of the **Disciples**—to have traveled with Jesus, had meals with Him, and maybe even seen Him at work in the **Carpenter shop**? Living life with Jesus would certainly give us insight into His teachings and stories beyond what we can gather by reading alone; but those days are past and Jesus no longer walks the Land of Israel. However, His family still lives. Although much has changed over the centuries, a surprising amount remains similar. Joining a Jewish family for a Friday night Shabbat meal, hearing the prayers and blessings, transports us back to Jesus Shabbat meals with His friends and family. Attending a synagogue service, particularly in a small synagogue, transports us to imagine Jesus as a guest Rabbi being asked to speak. It also helps us understand how upsetting it might have been to some to see the service interrupted by a healing. Visiting a bakery in Efrat near Bethlehem and seeing a baker making sourdough bread makes Bethlehem, the House of Bread, come alive. And a friendship, discussion, and even arguments with Jewish friends gives us a glimpse into the interaction of those first Disciples. Truly, experiencing the people of Israel becomes a sixth Gospel, highlighting and amplifying the first four. ”

—*Rev. Jim Solberg (National Director, Bridges for Peace United States)*



COURTESY NATHAN STEINMEYER

Lod Mosaic Center Opens

FOLLOWING THEIR WHIRLWIND TOUR of major museums around the world, the ancient Lod mosaics have returned home to Israel. The mosaics—which date to the late third or early fourth century C.E.—are some of the most exquisite and best-preserved mosaics ever discovered in Israel. Now housed in the Lod Mosaic Archaeological Center on the same site where they were first discovered, these beautiful mosaics are Israel’s new must-see attraction.

Crafted toward the end of the Roman period, the mosaics originally paved the entry hall to an elite residence in a wealthy neighborhood of Lydda (Lod’s ancient name). The main mosaic floor (above) measures 56 by 30 feet and depicts wild animals, birds, fish, plants, fruits, and even

sailing vessels. However, unlike other mosaics from the Roman era, there are no depictions of people within the scenes.

Little is known about the wealthy individual who commissioned the mosaic. As the mosaics lack anthropomorphic imagery, some think that the owner could have been Christian or Jewish, although much of the region’s Jewish population had been expelled following the Bar-Kokhba Revolt in the early second century. The diverse imagery and nautical scenes raise the possibility that the owner may have been a merchant with a close connection to the sea. 📖

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WHO DID IT?

Who discovered the Dead Sea Scrolls?

ANSWER ON P. 28

Tutankhamun: Excavating the Archive

THROUGH FEBRUARY 5, 2023

The Weston Library
University of Oxford, England
visit.bodleian.ox.ac.uk

THE UNEARTHING of Tutankhamun's tomb—100 years ago, in 1922—is one of the world's most famous archaeological discoveries. It remains the only known intact royal burial from ancient Egypt. During the ten years it took to excavate the tomb, the team around archaeologist Howard Carter—including the expedition's photographer, Harry Burton—generated an immense amount of documentation.*

Marking the centenary of the discovery, this historic material is currently the object of an exhibition, *Tutankhamun: Excavating the Archive*, at the Weston Library, a division of the Bodleian Libraries at the University of Oxford. Through stunning images and

* The entire archive is freely available online: griffith.ox.ac.uk/discoveringTut.



Annotated photographic print of Tutankhamun's throne.

© GRIFFITH INSTITUTE, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

original records, which include maps, plans, drawings, diaries, object cards, conservation records, and letters, the exhibit offers a fresh look at the complexities of both the ancient burial and the excavation.

This exhibit is the most comprehensive presentation of the material

to date, offering a vivid first-hand account of the excavation and of the meticulous work that went into documenting and conserving the artifacts. On display is also this photographic print of Tutankhamun's throne annotated by Carter with notes on colors and materials. 📖

WHAT IS IT?

- 1 Sandal strap
- 2 Placemat
- 3 Belt buckle
- 4 Mask
- 5 Scroll fastener



ANSWER ON P. 26

New Chapter for the Albright

JUNE 2022 MARKED THE BEGINNING of a new chapter for the W.F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research in Jerusalem: Dr. Katharina Schmidt became its 52nd director. Founded in 1900, the institute is an American research center focused on the study of the ancient Near East. Some of the most notable archaeologists of the past century have served as its director, including William F. Albright, Nelson Glueck, John Trevor, Paul Lapp, William Dever, Seymour Gitin, and most recently Matthew Adams. Schmidt will undoubtedly build on their legacy while also steering the institute in new, innovative directions. She brings a unique perspective to the role, not only as a woman (the first to ever hold



Katharina Schmidt

COURTESY KATHARINA SCHMIDT

the position) and a non-American (hailing from Germany), but also as someone who has worked primarily outside of Israel. We congratulate Schmidt on the appointment—and look forward to her leadership. 📖

COURTESY ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY / PHOTO BY CLARA AMIT

Deborah and Barak at Huqoq

EXCAVATIONS AT THE SITE OF HUQOQ in northern Israel continue to amaze with the discovery of the earliest known depiction of Deborah the Judge. Uncovered by a team led by archaeologists from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, a section of the expansive Huqoq synagogue mosaic depicts the victory of the Israelites over the Canaanite general Sisera (Judges 4), in which the Kenite woman Jael kills Sisera by driving a tent peg through his head.

The Huqoq mosaics, which cover the entire floor of an ancient Galilean synagogue, date to the late fourth or early fifth century C.E. Since their discovery, these mosaics have revealed many firsts in the history of ancient Jewish art, including the earliest nonbiblical scene in synagogue art. The newly discovered scenes, however, have provided archaeologists with the only known depiction of Deborah as well as Jael, the story's Kenite hero. Although women were occasionally depicted in synagogue mosaics, depictions of biblical stories with female heroes like Deborah and Jael are rare.

The scenes consist of three horizontal registers, which make up the narrative of Judges 4. The upper register depicts Deborah under a palm tree, gazing at the Israelite commander Barak, who is equipped with a shield. The middle register



JIM HABERMAN

The Israelite commander Barak depicted in the Huqoq synagogue mosaic.

shows Sisera, the Canaanite general. The final register depicts Sisera lying on the ground, bleeding from his head, as Jael hammers a tent peg through his temple. ☞

Linear Elamite Deciphered!

LINEAR ELAMITE has puzzled scholars since it was first discovered in excavations at the city of Susa (biblical Shushan) in 1903. The undeciphered script was used in southern Iran from 2300 until 1880 B.C.E., when it was replaced by Mesopotamian cuneiform.

Many ancient scripts have been deciphered by artifacts that feature both the unknown script and at least one known script that record the same message. This was the case for Egyptian hieroglyphs, which were unlocked by the famous Rosetta Stone that contained the same text written in hieroglyphs, Demotic, and Greek. The decipherment of Linear Elamite, however, was a more complex process. Although some artifacts contain both Linear Elamite and cuneiform, the two scripts never seem to translate each other. Such

occurrences allowed only a handful of signs to be deciphered.

Recognizing these limitations, a team of scholars decided to take a different path.¹ They recognized that a group of silver beakers with Linear Elamite script texts were recording similar titles and prayers as royal Elamite inscriptions written in cuneiform. Although the texts were not identical, they were able to identify numerous personal, geographic, and divine names. From there, they succeeded in slowly unlocking the script sign by sign.

The team identified and deciphered 72 different signs—more than 95 percent of attested signs in Linear Elamite inscriptions. As further excavations in Iran are carried out, additional Linear Elamite inscriptions might surface that can unlock the remaining signs. ☞

¹ François Desset, Kambiz Tabibzadeh, Matthieu Kervran, Gian Pietro Basello, and Gian Pietro Marchesi, "The Decipherment of Linear Elamite Writing," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* 112.1 (2022), pp. 11–60. <https://doi.org/10.1515/za-2022-0003>.

Silver vessel with Linear Elamite inscription.



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—WALTER BRUEGGEMANN,
Columbia Theological Seminary



TERRY M. WILDMAN (Ojibwe and Yaqui) is the lead translator, general editor, and project manager of the First Nations Version.

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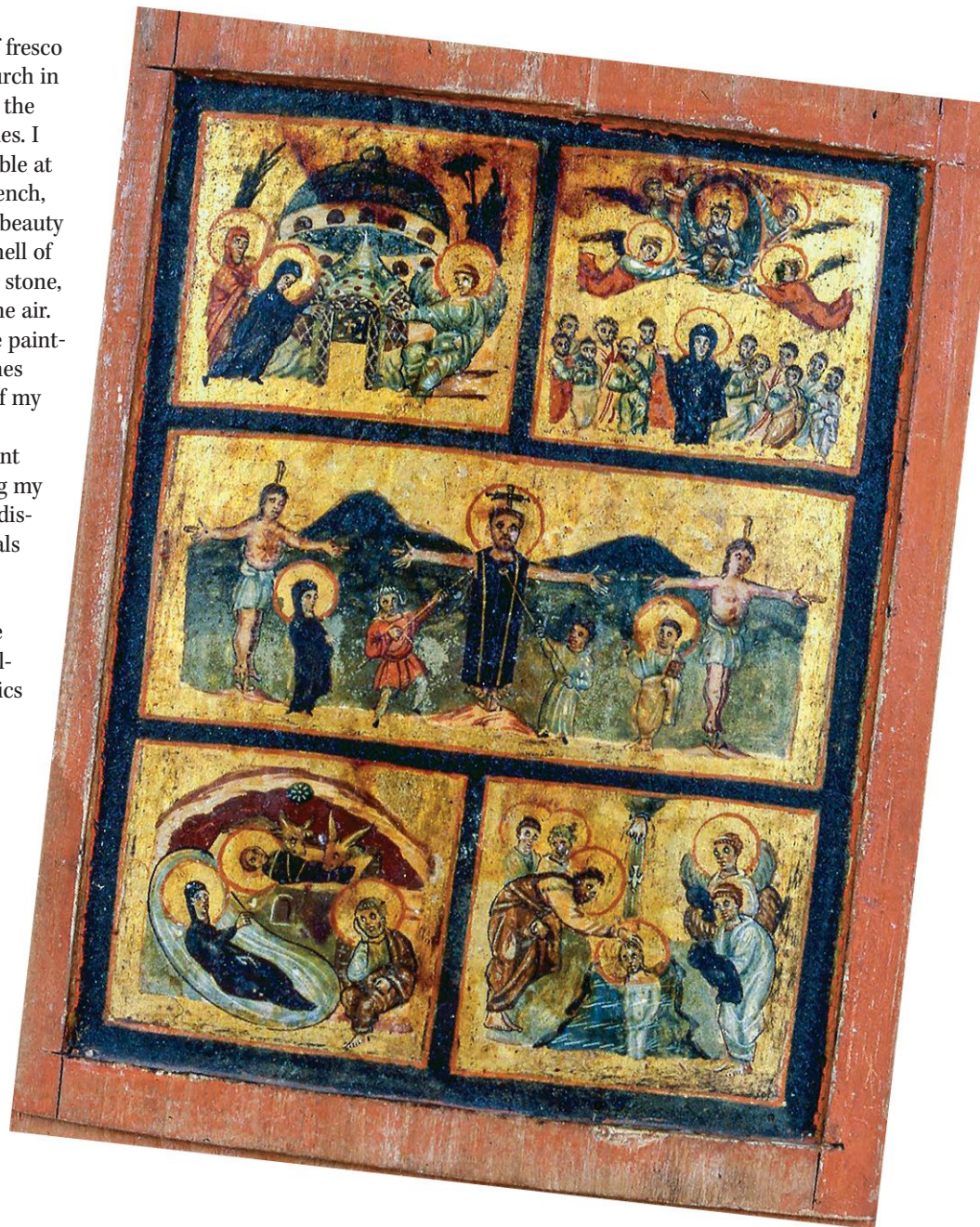
KATHARINE D. SCHERFF

I OWN A SMALL FRAGMENT of fresco from a small Romanesque church in Lleida, Spain, which is among the oldest Catalonian municipalities. I picked it up from a pile of rubble at my feet as I sat on a church bench, enchanted by the melancholy beauty of the place and the musky smell of the warm summer air, plaster, stone, and incense that lingered in the air. Apparently dislodged from the painted ceiling, it is not even 2 inches long but always reminds me of my trip.

Acting as a relic, my innocent pilfering aids in reconstructing my journey, the churches visited, discussions with people, and meals shared.

The collection of similar tokens, however, is not unique to my experience. Christian pilgrims have been collecting relics since the fourth century with the first pilgrim, St. Helena (d. 330), the dowager empress and mother of Emperor Constantine I (d. 377). Whereas Helena discovered the True Cross and enshrined it in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, less auspicious pilgrims collected a variety of mementos

WOODEN RELIQUARY BOX with scenes from the life of Christ painted on the lid (right) and stones from various pilgrimage sites in the Holy Land pasted inside (opposite).



during their visits to the Holy Land and later the shrines and churches along the pilgrimage routes in Western Europe that prominently included Rome, Santiago de Compostela, and Galicia. The fourth-century pilgrim to the Holy Land, Egeria thus reports of pilgrims taking twigs from a sycamore tree that they believed was instilled with healing powers. In his 1137 guide to the Holy Land (*Liber de locis sanctis*), the Benedictine monk Petrus Diaconus mentions that pilgrims would take stones from the altar near the Sea of Galilee that was the presumed site of the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 (Mark 6:33–44).

In general, penitents would embark on an arduous journey, procuring blessings, indulgences, commonplace objects, and handmade relics. By the sixth century, these handmade relics, called *brandea*, had become somewhat standardized. The stones in the sixth-century box reliquary (pictured) from the papal Sancta Sanctorum collection are an example of the earliest forms of relic collecting.

This wooden reliquary, originally from Syria or Palestine, contains several stones and a wood fragment from the Holy Land, or *loca sancta*. Three of the stone fragments bear Greek inscriptions: “From [Mount] Zion,” “From the Place of Resurrection,” and “From the Mount of Olives”; the wooden sliver reads “From Bethlehem.” The sliding lid is painted on the exterior (not shown here) with the Golgotha Cross with the monogram of Christ inside a *mandorla*. Inside the lid are four isolated scenes arranged around a central scene. Each scene, painted on a field of gold, corresponds to the identifying sites from which these stones were presumably collected. The central scene is twice as big as the other four and illustrates Christ’s crucifixion.



Below the central scene, from left to right, are the Nativity and Baptism; along the top register, from left to right, are the Women Arriving to the Tomb and the Ascension.

Each element of this reliquary was carefully constructed. For instance, the sliding door of the reliquary, when shut, covers the stones as if each narrative scene were being reenacted over the actual landscape from where the stone was collected. The rocks housed within the box are examples of *brandea* relics, collected from those important Christian locations inscribed on the stones.

Although the more commonly known type of relics represents body parts (the entire body or a piece of the body of a saint), the *brandea* relics were typically ordinary objects, such as pieces of a tomb, dirt, rock, water, or oil. They were made holy by their contact with the *loca sancta* and were common in the early centuries of Christendom. The advantage for pilgrims was that they could make their own *brandea* by rubbing a piece of cloth against a holy tomb or by filling a small flask with holy water or

oil. These were popular substances, as water drew parallels with Christ’s baptism and oil with the anointment of his feet. Through affective communication, the flasks with these precious fluids often reflected the sacred events or places of origin, specifically the Passion and Life of Christ.

The Sancta Sanctorum relics and reliquary had an interdependent relationship. Without its relics, the reliquary is but a piece of manmade art, unable to fulfill its sacred purpose. Without the reliquary, the relics would then be but “indistinct matter.” The two objects function cooperatively in a state of symbiosis where the reliquary acts as a frame—not only to hold and

protect the topographical or bodily relic but also to give context and continuity to it. By themselves, the stones of the Sancta Sanctorum reliquary box have little meaning. However, in tandem with text, image, and the reliquary box, this ensemble is embedded within a larger religious framework. With the identifying text inscribed onto the stone’s surface, a viewer could perceive it through visual validation as having gained holiness through contact with other holy matter. These objects did not come from holy sites merely to remind a collector of a pilgrimage. They operated as a bridge between the viewer and the object’s place of origin. Although the stones were directly extracted from holy sites and isolated into a decorative box, they maintained a meaningful relationship with the holy sites, mutually tethered and connected by a space of metaphoric significance.¹ The ancient relic, like my Romanesque fresco fragment, does not act only as a reminder of the site but also as a point in space connecting the object and its owner to its distant, special place of origin. ☩

¹ Alexander Nagel, *Medieval Modern: Art Out of Time* (New York, 2012), p. 121.

Joseph Aviram (1915–2022)

Joseph Aviram, long-time Director and President of the Israel Exploration Society (IES), passed away in Jerusalem on July 27. He was 107 years old.

Born in Poland in 1915, Aviram immigrated to Mandatory Palestine in 1936. In 1940, he became Secretary of the IES (then the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society), an organization dedicated to supporting archaeological work in the land of Israel. He was appointed IES Director in 1983 and then served as the organization's President from 2009 until his death.

Both as IES Director and as co-founder of the Hebrew University's Institute of Archaeology, Aviram initiated numerous archaeological projects throughout Israel, including excavations at the sites of Hazor and Masada. His efforts earned the IES the prestigious Israel Prize in 1989.

Aviram was also a cherished friend and colleague of BAR's late founder and editor, Hershel Shanks. During Hershel's annual trips to Israel, his first meeting was always with Aviram to hear about the latest archaeological discoveries and debates. Together, the two organized international congresses on biblical archaeology, published academic volumes, and produced popular reports on major excavations.

Aviram was critical to biblical archaeology becoming the discipline it is today. His support for BAR never wavered, and he was always one of the society's closest and most trusted friends.



Norman Gottwald (1926–2022)

Norman Gottwald, Professor Emeritus of Biblical Studies, passed away on March 11, at the age of 95. Gottwald was a Hebrew Bible scholar who pioneered the use of social theory in biblical studies. He was perhaps best known for his seminal work, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250–1050 B.C.E.* (1979).

Gottwald received his doctorate in biblical literature from Columbia University and taught at several renowned institutions across a career that spanned more than four decades, including Columbia, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley School of Theology, and New York Theological Seminary. He also served as President of the Society of Biblical Literature.



In *The Tribes of Yahweh*, Gottwald put forth a revolutionary theory that would become one of the leading models for ancient Israel's origins. Archaeologists and biblical scholars had long debated whether Israel entered the land of Canaan through conquest (as described in the Book of Joshua) or by peaceful infiltration (as described in the Book of Judges). Gottwald, building off the earlier work of George Mendenhall, developed a third view: Israel emerged as a result of a "peasant's revolt" by a Canaanite underclass. Although most scholars now believe that Israel's emergence was a complex and multifaceted process, aspects of Gottwald's theory have remained essential to most scholarly interpretations.

Claus-Hunno Hunzinger (1929–2021)

The final member of the original Dead Sea Scrolls publication team, Claus-Hunno Hunzinger, passed away on January 6, 2021. Although he was on the team only for a short period, in the 1950s, he left his mark.



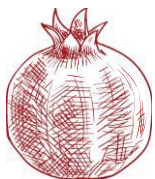
In 1954, Hunzinger earned his doctorate from the University of Göttingen at age 24. His thesis was on the *Community Scroll* from Qumran Cave 1. That same year, he was appointed to the international Dead Sea Scrolls publication team, which analyzed the scrolls in Jerusalem's Rockefeller Archaeological Museum (then known as the Palestine Archaeological Museum). He was the first German to join the team and received the nickname the "Baron of Qumran."

While in Jerusalem, he found two loves: the scrolls and his future wife, Elisabeth, daughter of the former German Lutheran provost of Jerusalem. Notably, Hunzinger reconstructed the *War Scroll* fragments, a text about a battle between the "sons of light" and the "sons of darkness," and the Morning and Evening prayers, both from Cave 4. During the Suez crisis of 1956, the scroll team was evacuated and the scroll fragments taken by the Jordanian government to Amman for safekeeping. But Hunzinger came back to Jerusalem after only two weeks and helped facilitate the return of the fragments.

Hunzinger left the team in September 1957 to teach in Germany and then the United States. In 1962, he was appointed as Professor for New Testament at the University of Hamburg, where he taught until his retirement in 1992. His wife Elisabeth died in 2018. They are survived by three daughters, Petra, Renate, and Christa.



For extended tributes, visit biblicalarchaeology.org/milestones.

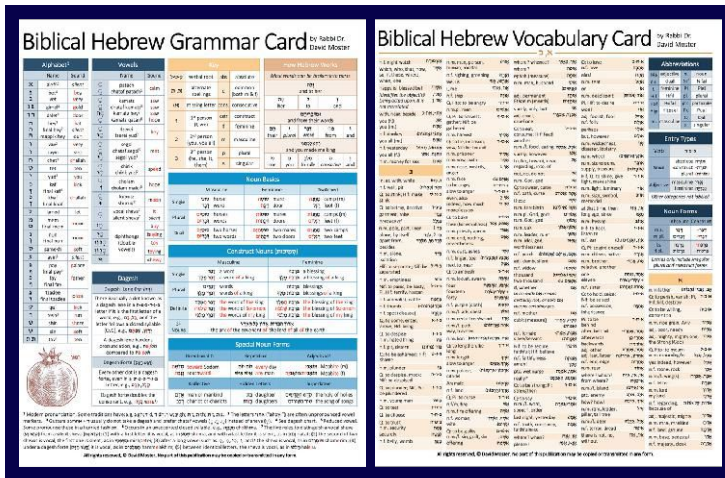


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JOHN GREGORY DEJUMANO

Roman “French” Toast

PEOPLE LOVE SWEETS, especially at this time of year when many are thinking of pumpkin pies, holiday cookies, and jelly doughnuts. This ancient Roman dish is good to make on a cold night, as the baking bread will fill your house with warmth and comforting aromas.

As much as the Romans loved sweets, our friend Apicius’s fourth-century text *De Re Coquinaria (On the Subject of Cooking)* does not contain an abundance of what we would term sweet dishes or dessert recipes. A few survived, to be sure, including this “French” toast recipe, which is an odd mix of sweet and savory, but it is possible many more were lost to the ravages of time.

Unlike today’s French toast, this Roman version does not contain egg and requires a specially baked loaf of bread. The bread is simple; if possible, it is important to weigh the flour, as it ensures the right consistency (baking is a science after all). If you do not want to make the bread, you could buy a loaf (perhaps an Italian or French loaf), but baking it yourself does add a bit of authenticity to the recipe. The additions of pepper and cumin are a bit odd to our modern palates; I suggest liberality with the honey.

We hope you enjoy this Roman “French” toast with your family and friends.—J.D.

Roman “French” Toast

Ancient Recipe

“Another sweet dish: Cut the crust from the best African mustaceum bread and soak it in milk. When it is saturated, bake it in oven, but not for too long to avoid drying it out. Remove the bread when it is hot, and pour honey over it. Prick holes in it so that it absorbs the honey. Sprinkle with pepper and serve.”¹

BAR’s Variation

Bread Ingredients:

2¼ tsp (one packet) yeast
 1 tbsp honey
 ¼ cup water
 500g (about 4 cups) flour
 2 tsp anise seed, ground
 2 tsp cumin, ground
 1½ cup white wine or white grape juice

Instructions: Mix the honey into warm water (110–115° F), then dissolve the yeast in the honey-water and allow it to sit for about 10 minutes. Add flour, anise seed, and cumin and gently mix until the mixture forms a sticky consistency. Use white wine or white grape juice to moisten the dough, adding about a half cup at a time (I used 1½ cups). Knead the dough then leave it to rest for 2–3 hours. After resting, preheat the oven to 350° F and bake for 30 minutes. (The crust should not be too firm when you take it out.)

“French” Toast Ingredients:

Milk (about 2 cups, enough for the bread to soak)
 Pepper (to taste)
 Honey (to taste)

Instructions: Once the bread has cooled, remove the crust and cut the loaf into slices or cubes. Soak the cubes in milk until soft. Remove from milk and bake at 350° F until brown (about 20 minutes)—be careful they don’t dry out. When done, remove from oven, drench with honey, and sprinkle with pepper. Bon appétit!

¹ Apicius’s recipe and its modern adaption were sourced from Patrick Faas, *Around the Roman Table: Food and Feasting in Ancient Rome* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 194–195.



For step-by-step directions and photos, please visit biblicalarchaeology.org/toast.

SACRED STONE OF THE SOUTHWEST IS ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION



Centuries ago, Persians, Tibetans and Mayans considered turquoise a gemstone of the heavens, believing the striking blue stones were sacred pieces of sky. Today, the rarest and most valuable turquoise is found in the American Southwest— but the future of the blue beauty is unclear.

On a recent trip to Tucson, we spoke with fourth generation turquoise traders who explained that less than five percent of turquoise mined worldwide can be set into jewelry and only about twenty mines in the Southwest supply gem-quality turquoise. Once a thriving industry, many Southwest mines have run dry and are now closed.

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Tabira Gate at Assur



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Iraq's Capital Catastrophe

ASSUR, THE FIRST CAPITAL and spiritual heart of the Assyrians—the great Mesopotamian empire that, in the first millennium B.C.E., subjugated much of the Near East, including the biblical kingdoms of Israel and Judah—is fighting for its survival. The ancient capital, with its extensive remains of palaces, temples, and monumental walls that date back some 5,000 years, may soon be flooded by a lake created by a dam that is being constructed along the nearby Tigris River.

Perched on a high, rocky outcrop on the west bank of the Tigris, about 70 miles south of Mosul in modern Iraq, Assur was the capital city of the Assyrians for more than a thousand years. The city reached its zenith during the second millennium B.C.E. as generations of Assyrian rulers built impressive palaces, thick fortifications, and towering monuments in honor of Assyria's patron god, Assur. Still visible today are the crumbling ruins of the city's massive stepped

temple (ziggurat) and the three towering arches of an enormous gateway (known as the Tabira Gate), the ceremonial entrance to the city's sacred precinct. Although subsequent kings relocated Assyria's capital several times during the first millennium B.C.E. when Assyria was the Near East's dominant imperial power, Assur remained Assyria's cultural, spiritual, and geographic center until it was destroyed by the Babylonians in 614 B.C.E.

Much of this ancient history will be drowned, however, with the building of the Makhoul Dam about 25 miles south of Assur. First proposed by Saddam Hussein's government two decades ago but delayed because of years of warfare and upheaval, the dam's construction has taken on new urgency in the face of the increasingly severe and prolonged droughts that have plagued Iraq in recent years. Archaeologists and activists argue, however, that the dam will destroy not only Assur, but also more than

200 other archaeological sites in the region. More significantly, as many as a quarter of a million people from surrounding villages will be displaced by the dam's construction.

But the Makhoul Dam is only the latest and most serious threat to face the ancient Assyrian capital. In 2015, the Islamic State attempted to destroy many of Assur's major monuments, including the Tabira Gate, which recently underwent emergency restoration to prevent its imminent collapse. Other sites, such as Assur's ziggurat, which once stood more than 10 stories high, and luxurious palaces, were constructed almost entirely of mud-brick, which is now degrading much more rapidly as Iraq's climate worsens. And despite Assur's importance to the nearby town of Sherqat, which just celebrated the reopening of the site to visitors in April, the site remains largely unprotected and unmonitored, making it an ideal target for potential looters and antiquities traffickers. ❧

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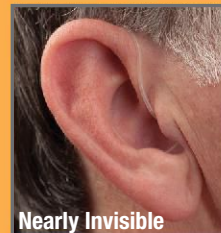
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Preserving the Dead Sea Scrolls

Joe Uziel, who heads the Dead Sea Scrolls Unit at the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), spent many years excavating the City of David and the Western Wall Tunnels. **BAR** Assistant Editor Nathan Steinmeyer recently sat down with Uziel to discuss the IAA's critical role in the conservation, curation, documentation, and research of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The conversation has been edited and modified for clarity and readability.



1 2 3 4 5

When did conservation of the Dead Sea Scrolls become a priority?

UZIEL: In 1947, the first scrolls were discovered in Qumran. Today, we have some 1,000 manuscripts made up of about 25,000 fragments. Over the last 70 years numerous treatments were carried out on the scrolls, always with the best intentions, to unroll them, improve legibility, and piece them together. The most noteworthy treatments were the extensive use of pressure sensitive tape by the first scholars, in the 1950s, to join fragments and the occasional use of castor oil and other surface treatments to conserve the scrolls. These practices, together with the employment of glass plates to encase the fragments, proved detrimental to the scrolls. Additionally, the use of British Museum Leather Dressing in the early 1960s and acrylic glue in the 1970s caused further damage to the fragments.

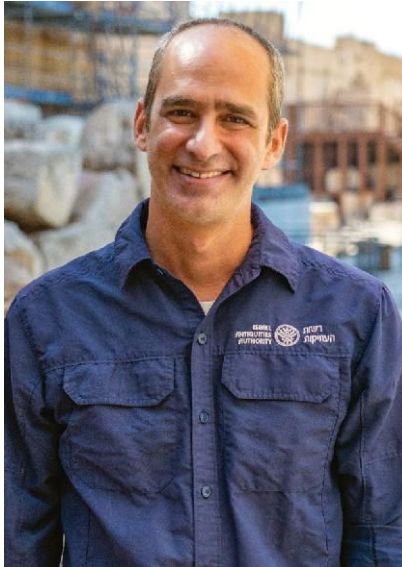
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How did the IAA get involved?

UZIEL: The preservation of the scrolls was one of the main concerns by the time the IAA was established in 1991. That led to the establishment of a designated conservation laboratory to treat and maintain the scrolls, attempting to prevent further deterioration. Work protocols were drawn up, and a climate-controlled environment was built to house and care for the scrolls and ensure stable temperature and humidity levels and minimal light exposure. In 2010, the Dead Sea Scrolls Unit was established, expanding the IAA's approach to the scrolls, including conservation, curation, documentation, research, and outreach.

1 2 3 4 5

What methods does the IAA use to ensure the preservation of the scrolls?



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UZIEL: After consultations with experts, we established a unique monitoring system based on multispectral imaging technology. The system, developed by MegaVision Ltd., uses different wavelengths and exposures to provide objective and sound documentation of each and every fragment. For the system to monitor any changes in the physical state of the scrolls, we need to create standard parameters that do not change. In this manner, periodically imaging a fragment under the same conditions and comparing those images through advanced computational analysis allow us to detect any change. The use of different spectral bands and angles of light emphasize different features. Some are very good at bringing out the carbon ink used to write the scrolls. They bring out the writing in areas that have been blackened due to the deterioration of the scrolls. Others give you the topography of the scroll, because a scroll isn't nice and flat. It has waviness. These are important bits of information that can monitor changes in the physical state of the scroll.

1 2 3 4 5

How does your team approach a new scroll?

UZIEL: When a fragment is brought to the unit, it is immediately registered in our database, followed by an assessment of its condition. We then make decisions about conservation methods and procedures to make the scroll readable. Our primary concern is conservation. When possible, crumpled fragments may be slowly unfolded and separated, while documenting the entire process. This is a tedious process that can last for months. The fragments are imaged in the multispectral system both before and after they have undergone conservation and have been placed in their estimated position. At the same time, our researchers work on the decipherment of the text. They prepare the transcription, analyze the paleography, language, and content, and study the finds in their historical and literary context. The final product is the scientific publication, which presents the results of our research.

1 2 3 4 5

What happens after a scroll has been conserved and published?

UZIEL: We then store the document under strict climatic conditions, periodically monitoring its condition both through visual inspection and imaging technology. The images are also made available to both scholars and the public through the Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library (www.deadseascrolls.org.il). The library enables access to the images, which are often more useful to study than the actual fragments themselves. This also helps with the conservation of the scrolls, since they are removed from storage far less often. The continued development of digital tools will certainly contribute to future research on the Dead Sea Scrolls. 📖

Reading “Invisible” Dead Sea Scrolls

CHRISTY CHAPMAN AND W. BRENT SEALES

TECHNOLOGY IN THE HANDS OF SCHOLARS, conservators, and archaeologists alike has long been central to the successful preservation and analysis of the Dead Sea Scrolls. While early technologies involved sticky tape for rejoining fragments and analog photography for their documentation, the advanced tools of today allow fragile scrolls to be read without even unwrapping them.

The breathtaking range of the scrolls spans everything from major texts, such as the *Temple Scroll*, to unopened phylactery cases with slips of hidden writing, to a small number of completely unopened scrolls. Although the glory of the collection is represented by the substantially complete and amazingly preserved copy of the Book of Isaiah on display at

the Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem, its remarkable condition is the exception rather than the rule. According to the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), the scroll archive contains more than 25,000 fragments, many no larger than a postage stamp. Practically all of them consist of many layers, portions of a single scroll stuck together due to damage and decay.

The painstaking work of conservators has stabilized these fragments against further decay and provided a superb effort at physical restoration (see 5 Questions, opposite). In many cases, however, not much can be done, leaving thousands of fragments unstudied because of the difficulty and risk associated with invasive efforts to separate the multiple

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE LEON LEVY DEAD SEA SCROLLS DIGITAL LIBRARY; IAA / SHAI HALEVI



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- 1 Photograph of fragment 1032a.
- 2 Five of the 13 virtually unwrapped layers (Layers 5, 8, 9, 10, and 11) of fragment 1032a.
- 3 The virtually unwrapped layers with the color-trained convolutional neural network (CNN) applied.



layers that stubbornly cling to each other.

Fortunately, researchers have developed non-invasive, digital restoration techniques, including “virtual unwrapping” that reveals the interior writings on rolled-up surfaces and multilayer fragments. Virtual unwrapping uses penetrating X-ray images to create a 3D model of an object. The 3D model data then passes through a series of steps that comprise the virtual unwrapping pipeline.

First, each individual layer on which writing may sit—each wrap of a scroll, for example—is identified and modeled. Every point on these segmented surfaces is then textured or assigned a brightness/intensity value corresponding to the density of that particular spot in the 3D model. Materials that are denser, such as certain kinds of ink, show up brighter than less dense materials, such as the animal skin often used as a writing surface. The software exploits this variation in density and brightness to make the text visible.

Because the model of the writing surface reflects the actual curvature of the scroll, it is then necessary to digitally flatten it for reading. This is accomplished through a material simulation, which is

common in video games and movies for effects like cloth flags waving in the wind.

Virtual unwrapping is completely non-invasive, as X-rays induce no damage during imaging, and the analysis takes place on the data, not the physical object. The technique was successfully applied for the first time in 2015, when an ancient Hebrew scroll from Ein Gedi was safely revealed to be an early copy of the Book of Leviticus.*

This breakthrough technology is now being applied to the 25,000 fragments from Qumran. Among them is a multilayered fragment (1032a) with text concealed between a dozen stuck layers. Even this is now readable digitally. Perhaps even more exciting, recent approaches inspired by artificial intelligence (AI) have made it possible to enhance and make more precise the results from virtual unwrapping. As anyone who has ever broken a bone knows, the gray-scale imagery that results from an X-ray is not as compelling as a color photograph. But using a machine-learning framework, researchers can now show the gray-scale images in full color.

To achieve this “data-informed colorization,” the X-ray evidence of ink and parchment from deep inside a closed fragment is matched with a color photo of the visible portions of the fragment. A convolutional neural network (CNN) is then trained to build a map between the two imaging modalities. Whenever the CNN encounters a massive number of associations between the two kinds of imagery—color photography and X-ray—it can learn the conversion between the two types of data. This learned conversion makes it possible for virtually unwrapped fragments to look like color photographs.

From layer separation of a digitized manuscript, to ink identification, to digital flattening of pages, to virtual “recoloring,” this new AI technology produces digital images of unopened manuscripts that rival actual photographs of undamaged parchment texts. As the next step in a long line of technological advances, this forges a new pathway for restoration. Machine learning and AI will continue to push against the boundaries of what was previously considered impossible. Such innovations will support and inspire the next generation of scholars dedicated to the study of fragmentary, damaged collections. 📖

* Robin Ngo, “Book of Leviticus Verses Recovered from Burnt Hebrew Bible Scroll,” *Bible History Daily* (blog), July 21, 2015.

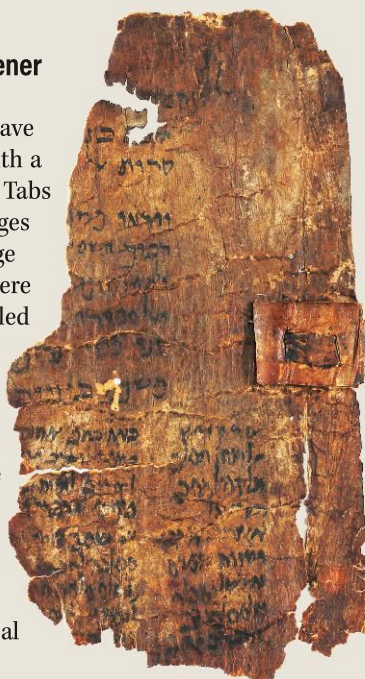
WHAT IS IT?

(SEE QUIZ ON P. 13)

Answer: 5 Scroll fastener

The leather tab would have been used in tandem with a thong to fasten a scroll. Tabs were attached to the edges of scrolls, as in the image at right. Then, thongs were wrapped around the rolled scrolls and inserted through the slotted tabs to secure them.

Dating from the first centuries B.C.E./C.E., the leather tab on p. 13 came from Qumran. Although it was not found secured to a scroll, it testifies to scribal activity at the site—as does the first-century scroll fragment, above, which records the *Prayer for King Jonathan* and comes from Qumran’s Cave 4.



Scroll fragment with fastener

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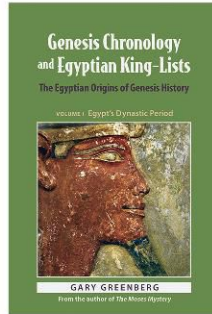
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Genesis Chronology and Egyptian King-Lists

The Egyptian Origins of Genesis History

**Volume I
Egypt's Dynastic Period**

By Gary Greenberg



In this landmark study on Genesis's literary origins, Greenberg, author of *The Moses Mystery*, makes a compelling case for a precise alignment between the Genesis birth-death chronology and Egypt's first 18 dynasties and many of its most important kings. Based on a detailed examination of Egypt's chronological records, Greenberg examines the historical meaning of such matters as Adam's death date, Enoch's 365 years, Methuselah's long life, and the identity of Joseph's pharaoh.

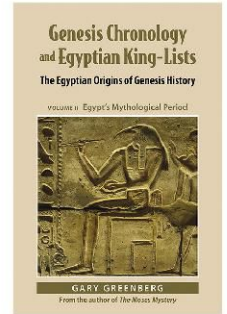
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Genesis Chronology and Egyptian King-Lists

The Egyptian Origins of Genesis History

**Volume II
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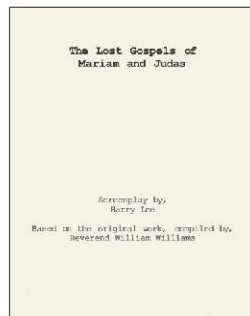


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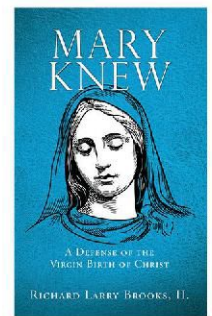
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By Richard Larry Brooks, II



How many times have Christians been told the claims written in Scripture are speculative, especially when it pertains to the life of Jesus? Within this work, the author tackles one of the most controversial subjects surrounding the life of Jesus, the virgin birth. The book explores the evidence which substantiates the claim and presents it in a manner that scholar and layperson alike can appreciate and use to strengthen their faith. The skeptics no longer get the last word on this controversial subject.

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King Tut's gold burial mask

The Discovery of King Tut's Tomb

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, on November 4, 1922, archaeologists working in Egypt's Valley of the Kings uncovered the first of 16 steps leading down to a sealed doorway. When they made an opening in the second wall, on November 26, the British Egyptologist Howard Carter (1873–1939) peeked into what turned out to be one of the most sensational discoveries of all time—the virtually intact rock-cut tomb of Pharaoh Tutankhamun (d. 1324 B.C.E.).

Carter entered the burial chamber on February 16, 1923, but it took another ten years to document and empty the tomb. The small but crowded burial place contained more than 5,300 objects and the bodies of the king and his two stillborn daughters. Almost all the artifacts found their way to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (these are now on view in the newly inaugurated Grand Egyptian Museum). Carter broke Tut's mummified body into pieces to extract it from the coffin and remove all the precious items. Now, after nearly a century and some more recent X-rays and CT scans, the king is back in his tomb, which reopened for tourists in 2019, following ten years of research, conservation, and infrastructural upgrades.*

Tutankhamun died of uncertain causes at age 19. His reign was short and relatively insignificant, and his tomb is perhaps the smallest royal burial in Egypt. Yet he is probably the most famous of ancient Egypt's kings, and his name continues to conjure images of splendor and mesmerizing treasures. 📖

* Strata: "Tutankhamun's Tomb Back in Business," *BAR*, May/June 2019.

WHO DID IT?

(SEE QUIZ ON P. 12)

Answer: Muhammad edh-Dhib

It is a well-known story, though one that is often passed over with just a few words: In the winter of 1946–1947, a Bedouin shepherd searching for his lost sheep or goat in the desert hills overlooking the Dead Sea threw a stone into a cave. Instead of hearing the expected sound of rock hitting rock, he heard the smashing of pottery. The broken pottery revealed one of biblical archaeology's greatest discoveries—the Dead Sea Scrolls.

But who was this Bedouin shepherd? His name was Muhammad edh-Dhib Hassan, also known as "the wolf" after the meaning of his Arabic nickname (edh-Dhib),



JOHN C. TREYER

Jum'a Muhammad and Muhammad edh-Dhib

although in many accounts of the discovery, he often goes unnamed and is simply referred to as a Bedouin or Arab shepherd. Yet across almost a decade, from 1947 to 1956,

Muhammad and other local shepherds, including his cousin Jum'a Muhammad, discovered 11 caves at Qumran that contained some 25,000 scroll fragments. Admittedly, many of these fragments ultimately appeared for sale on the antiquities market, but their discovery quickly led archaeologists to a systematic exploration of the Qumran caves and the excavation of nearby Khirbet Qumran.

Muhammad was a member of the Taamireh tribe, which, according to its own oral history, had migrated to the area near Bethlehem sometime during the 16th century. In the summer, tribesmen were involved in farming, but in the winter and spring, they worked as shepherds in the Judean Desert. 📖

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The Destruction of the Canaanites

REVIEWED BY RONALD S. HENDEL

THE BIBLICAL COMMAND to destroy the Canaanites is troubling. In Deuteronomy 7:1–2, Moses instructs the Israelites: “When YHWH your God ... clears away many nations before you ... you must utterly destroy them” (author’s translation). This command is fulfilled by Joshua and his army, and Joshua 10:40–43 offers a breathtaking picture of the violent destruction of the peoples of Canaan. In modern terms, we may call this a war of genocide. How is the reader of the Bible to understand the ethics of this utter destruction, including the killing of every woman, man, and child? How can we comprehend a God who commands such things? These questions have troubled interpreters for millennia.

Charlie Trimm, a biblical scholar at Biola University, has written a very readable exploration of these issues. He opens the book with the refreshing

admission that he cannot solve the moral problem. Rather, he sets out to contextualize the issue, present a variety of interpretations, and note the weaknesses in each alternative, offering thus a fuller picture of the problem.

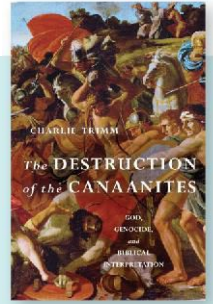
Trimm first describes the concepts and practices of war in the ancient Near East, the question of genocide in antiquity, and the identity of the Canaanites. He points out that ancient war involves the ideology of the king as the protector of cosmic order who must periodically vanquish the forces of chaos. The history of warfare is filled with this ideology, from ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia to current wars across the globe. This ideology informs concepts of biblical warfare as well.

The book then turns to assess four major proposals that have been advanced to solve the ethical problem

The Destruction of the Canaanites God, Genocide, and Biblical Interpretation

By Charlie Trimm

(Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2022), xxx + 117 pp., maps and photos, \$14.99 (paperback)



of divinely commanded genocide. These proposals are: (1) God is not good; (2) the Old Testament is not an accurate record; (3) the Old Testament does not describe the destruction as a genocide; and (4) the mass killing of the Canaanites was justified. Trimm has hard criticism for each. The first option, Trimm argues, would lead us to reject the whole package of monotheism. The second disregards scripture as divinely inspired. The third is dishonest toward the biblical text. And the fourth, according to Trimm, would practically associate God with genocide.

However, it becomes clear only in

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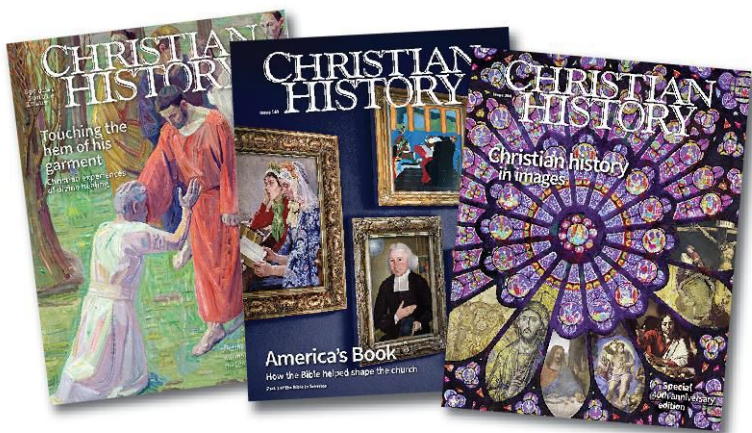
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the second part of the book that Trimm is committed to a high doctrine of the inerrancy of scripture, meaning that he considers the Bible to be utterly truthful. Consequently, he holds that the destruction of the Canaanites must have happened historically, because it is told in the Old Testament and affirmed in the New Testament (Acts 7:45; 13:19). As *BAR* readers know, however, there are serious historical problems with the biblical accounts of the conquest of Canaan. For instance, Jericho and Ai weren't inhabited in the era in question, so the story of their destruction by Joshua and his army cannot be historically accurate. Second, other biblical accounts, such as Judges 1:19–33, contradict the picture of a total destruction.

The archaeological evidence indicates that the rise of Israel was a relatively peaceful process. The early Israelites were mostly local Canaanites who settled in the previously sparsely populated highlands. Any battles with Canaanites would have occurred later, with the expansion of Israel into lowland valleys

(as in Judges 5). The wholesale destruction of the Canaanites is a later historiographical fiction. The story may still be morally troubling, but we shouldn't assume that it really happened.

Another problem that Trimm glosses over is Joshua's destruction of the indigenous giants of Canaan, called the Anakim, Nephilim, and other ethnonyms. Joshua 11:21 describes their utter destruction along with the people of Canaan. Trimm suggests that the annihilation of the Nephilim is not a moral problem. But is the destruction of fictional giants wholly different from the destruction of fictional Canaanites? There is clearly a moral difference between actual and fictional genocide, including monsters and humans.

A final critique is that Trimm does not address the one text where the biblical writers take a position on the moral problem of the destruction of the Canaanites: Deuteronomy 20. In his laws of war, Moses contrasts the total destruction of the Canaanites with the more compassionate rules

for war against other peoples. The normal rule of war that applies to all the towns beyond the territory of Canaan is to first offer terms of peace (Deuteronomy 20:10). In Canaan, however, the Israelites are commanded to "not let anything that breathes remain alive" (Deuteronomy 20:15–16).

This text perceives the moral problem and limits it by placing the conquest of Canaan in a separate category, never to be repeated. In understated fashion, it shows a moral horror of genocide, prohibiting it in future circumstances. This biblical text grapples with the moral problem of the destruction of the Canaanites and, as part of the process, produces a legal innovation—the conduct of just war. This may not solve all the problems of the destruction of the Canaanites, but in an important sense, it overcomes the problem by creating a new ethics of war. These rules form the basis for modern concepts of just war and human rights. And this interpretation has the advantage of being biblical. ☞

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Disciples of Jesus vs. Apostle Paul

FROM THE JUDAISM OF JESUS TO THE CHRISTIANITY OF PAUL



Igor P. Lipovsky

The misconception has taken root in our world that the Christian religion was created by Jesus and his disciples. In fact, the true creators of Christianity were the Apostle Paul and his followers. It was they who wrote almost all the New Testament writings, although they had never seen Christ. However, the true gospel of Jesus was much closer to Pharisaic Judaism than to Pauline Christianity. The disciples of Jesus—the apostles Peter, John and James—preached the teachings of the Son of Man, but their ideological opponent, the Apostle Paul, emphasized something else: the resurrection of the Son of God, which corresponded to the mythology of the pagans. In the second century CE, copyists, themselves former pagans, changed the original texts of New Testament writings to sanctify Paul's ideas with the authority of Jesus. To do this, they made numerous anti-Jewish and anti-Judaic additions to the New Testament. This blatant falsification of the legacy of Jesus laid the foundation for hostility to the people of Christ.

American Academy Press, Washington D.C.: 2022, 192 pp. Softcover, \$ 11.95, and in digital form for Kindle, \$ 9.00

Available at Amazon and major booksellers



Pitalkhora, India

Even though his legs are broken off below the knees, this Yaksha—a male Hindu nature spirit—still stands more than 3 feet tall and smiles benignly. Found in the ruins of a Buddhist cave-temple at the site of Pitalkhora in western India, the stone statue holds a shallow bowl over his head and may represent the Yaksha Sankarin, mentioned in *Mahamayuri*, a Buddhist text. Others believe it could be a depiction of Nalakuvara, one of the two sons of Kuvera, the Hindu god of wealth.

Pitalkhora is home to more than a dozen Buddhist cave-temples, dating from the third century B.C.E. to the fourth century C.E. An inscription, written in Brahmi on the Yaksha's right wrist, tells us that this statue, despite being made of stone, was made by Kanhadasa the goldsmith. The statue was discovered standing outside a pillared *chaitya* (cave shrine) with relics of the Buddha or a saint.

The Yaksha of Pitalkhora can be viewed today at the National Museum in New Delhi, India.

Mesha's Stele

the



and

House of David

ANDRÉ LEMAIRE AND JEAN-PHILIPPE DELORME

MORE THAN 150 YEARS AFTER ITS DISCOVERY, the Mesha Stele remains one of the most important West Semitic inscriptions and probably the one that sheds the most light on the Hebrew Bible. As many *BAR* readers know, the inscription was discovered in 1868 at the site of Dhiban (biblical Dibon), east of the Dead Sea in modern-day Jordan. After an intriguing but unfortunate series of events, the stela was broken into several pieces shortly after its discovery, which required French archaeologist Charles Clermont-Ganneau to restore the text based on the recovered fragments and a paper squeeze that was made just before the stela was damaged.* The stela, which was eventually restored and displayed in the Louvre Museum, was first erected in the ninth century B.C.E. by Mesha, king of Moab. The 34-line text provides confirmation of key biblical figures and events from the early years of the divided monarchy, with numerous references to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, its founder King Omri, and the competing gods of Israel and Moab, Yahweh and Chemosh.

* Siegfried H. Horn, "Why the Moabite Stone Was Blown to Pieces," *BAR*, May/June 1986.

MESHA'S PHOTO SHOOT. In 2015, a team of researchers journeyed to the Louvre Museum to photograph the Mesha Stele using Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI). RTI combines multiple images, taken with light shining from different angles, to create a textured map of an object's surface. Here, Kyle McCarter (left), Heather Parker (center), and Bruce Zuckerman (right) work to create an RTI image of the stela.

IMAGE BY WEST SEMITIC RESEARCH

Despite the inscription's importance and uniqueness—rivaled perhaps only by the famous Tel Dan Stele discovered in 1993—many questions remain about its content, especially whether the expression *btdwd*, “House of David” (*bt* meaning “house of” and *dwd* meaning “David”) can be found in a fragmented and particularly poorly preserved portion of the text. While I (Lemaire) first proposed this reading nearly three decades ago, based on paleographic and contextual considerations (especially the text's internal parallelism and the date and content of the Tel Dan Stele),* improved photographic evidence has allowed scholars to gain new insights into the stela's most problematic sections. These insights, which we discuss here, not only confirm that the Mesha Stele references the “House of David” but also allow us to draw new conclusions about the various historical and biblical events described in the text.

Over the past few years, new digital imaging techniques have greatly advanced our understanding of the stela's paleography, especially since the inscription's heavily damaged and fragmented left side has long made certain key sections unreadable. The paper squeeze, made before the stela was damaged, is the only direct witness of its original condition and was used by Clermont-Ganneau to restore the damaged sections. In 2015, a team from the West Semitic

* André Lemaire, “House of David' Restored in Moabite Inscription,” *BAR*, May/June 1994.



Research Project of the University of Southern California took new digital photographs of both the restored stela and the paper squeeze. The team used a method called Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI), in which numerous digital images are taken of an artifact from different angles and then combined to create a precise, three-dimensional digital rendering of the piece.** This method is especially valuable because the digital rendering allows researchers to control the lighting of an inscribed artifact, so that hidden, faint, or worn incisions become visible.¹ In 2018, the Louvre Museum also took new, high-resolution backlit pictures of the squeeze, where light was projected directly through the 150-year-old paper to provide a clearer view of the ancient letters it records.²

Based on this new photographic evidence, we

** Bruce E. Zuckerman, “Archaeological Views: ‘New Eyeballs on Ancient Texts,’” *BAR*, November/December 2011; Todd R. Hanneken, “Archaeological Views: ‘Digital Archaeology’s New Frontiers,’” *BAR*, March/April 2017.



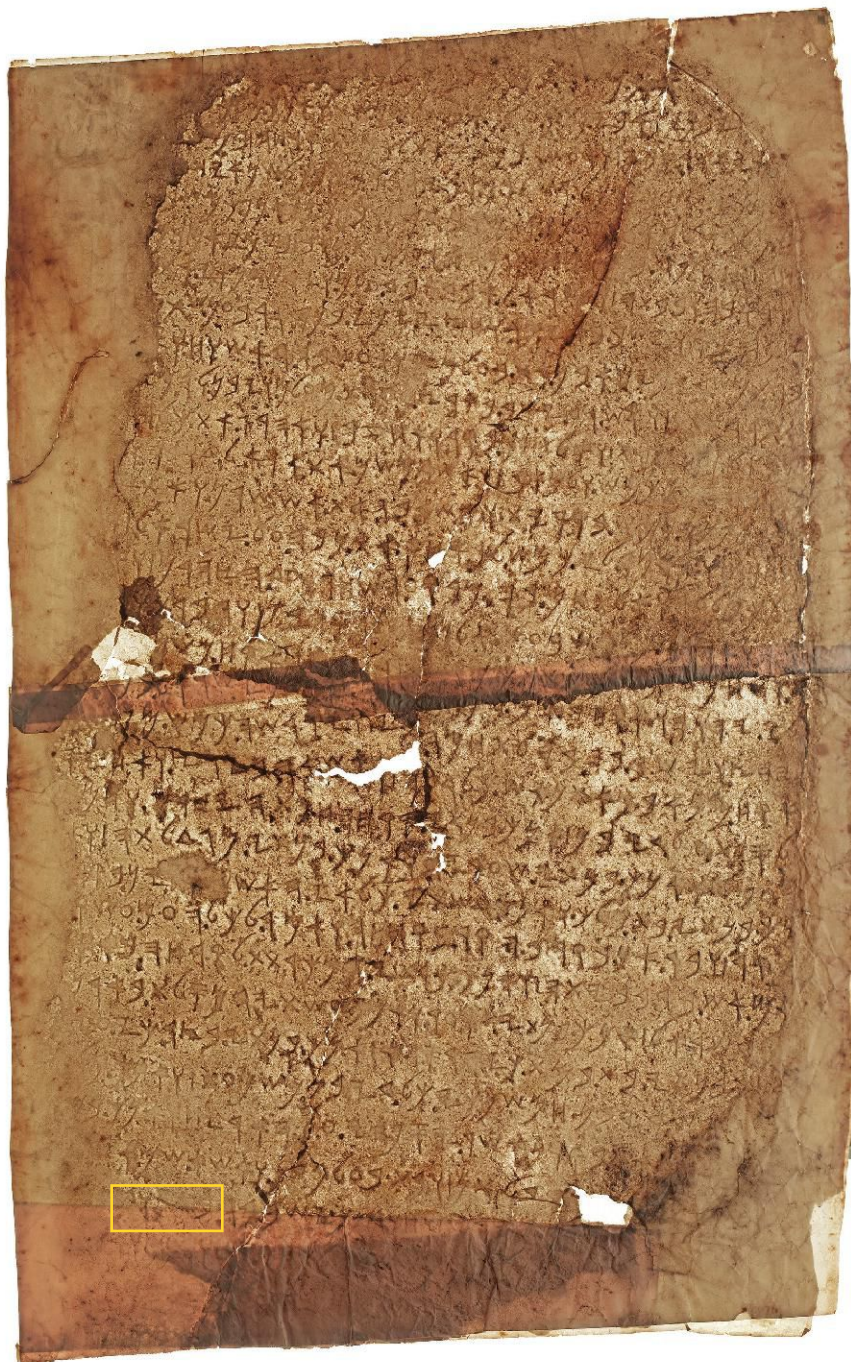
COURTESY OF ACOR, THE JANE TAYLOR COLLECTION

believe that five key letters, found in line 31 of the inscription, can be read as *btdwd*. First, it is important to note that the *bet* (first letter) and the *waw* (fourth letter) were already clear on both the stone and the squeeze and, therefore, accepted by most scholars even prior to the new photographs. As such, we focus our discussion on what the new images reveal about the preserved traces of the second, third, and fifth letters (see supporting images on p. 39).

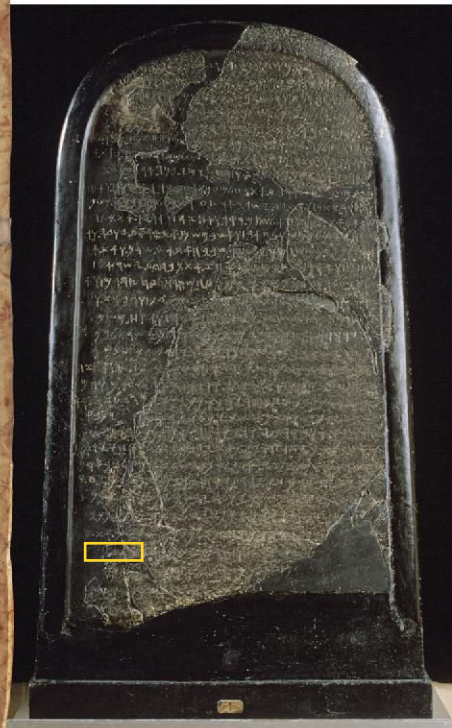
The traces of the second letter, which we interpret as a *taw*, remain unclear on the stone, although a faint diagonal line coming down from the left as well as the beginning of the upper right portion of the cross-stroke seem to be visible. The backlit photograph of the squeeze shows traces of three tips of an X-shaped letter, with no signs of any vertical or diagonal stroke extending below the line. While we acknowledge that this reading remains uncertain, the identification of a *taw* is the best reading based on the available evidence.

MESHA'S HOME. The Mesha Stele tells how King Mesha expanded the kingdom of Moab and made Dibon (above) his capital in the ninth century B.C.E. Dibon (modern Dhiban) sat on the King's Highway, the major trade route in the region that brought spices up from the south. As King Mesha's capital, Dibon was the place where he set up his victory stela. Here, you can see remains of the city's wall and other structures. Archaeologists have uncovered fortifications, a palace, and a sanctuary from the ninth century B.C.E.

The next letter, *dalet*, is lost due to a break in the stone, but it does appear on the squeeze. The traces of two strokes forming an angle are clear in the backlit photograph, where a short, upward stroke meets a long, nearly horizontal stroke at a slightly acute angle. Although the rest of the letter remains vague, its general outline seems to be triangular, suggesting either a *resh* or a *dalet*. The length of the nearly horizontal stroke, combined with the absence of a vertical or diagonal stroke below this line, are highly suggestive of a *dalet* rather than a *resh*. In fact, faint traces of a triangular letter appear on the RTI



MESHA IN A NEW LIGHT. The Mesha Stele chronicles the victories of King Mesha of Moab over Israel and Judah. It was discovered in Dibon in 1868 and broken into many pieces shortly afterward. Later, Charles Clermont-Ganneau recovered many of the pieces and reassembled the stela (below). Before it was divided, though, Yaqub Karavaca was able to make a squeeze (paper-mache impression) of it. In 2018, a new backlit picture of the squeeze was created (left). The “House of David” (*btdwd*) reference in line 31 is highlighted in both images.



images of the squeeze, establishing with practical certainty that the third letter is *dalet*.

The fifth and last letter follows the undisputed *waw* and is clear enough on the stone and the squeeze, even though the left angle of the triangular-shaped letter is slightly damaged. The new images confirm previous readings, as three lines meet to form the upper and lower angles of a triangle, while the left angle is missing. This character is now generally accepted as a second *dalet*.

Further support for the reading *btdwd*, “House

of David,” comes in the form of two small, dot-shaped word dividers, which define this idiom as a single unit. The first one is undisputed and clearly appears before the *bet*, while the second one has generally been overlooked, since it appears at the beginning of a badly damaged section toward the end of the line. Though slightly damaged, the dot does show up on the RTI images of the stone and the squeeze as well as on the backlit photograph following the second *dalet*. Additionally, no word divider is used between *bt* and *dwd*, which matches the orthography in the Tel Dan Stele, though there it is found with the Aramaic spelling *bytdwd*.

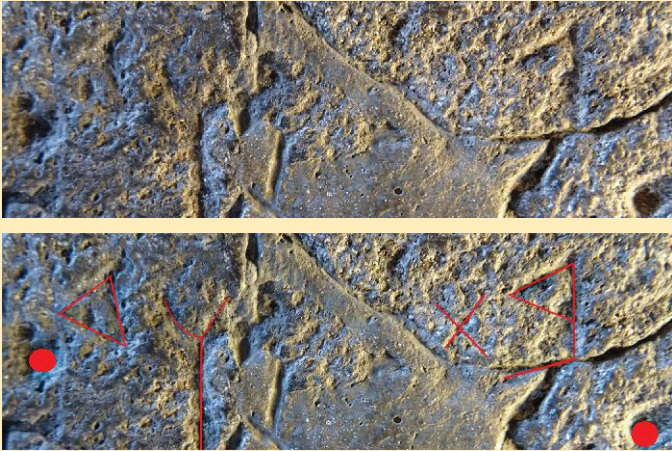
Therefore, the new photographs clearly establish the presence of the first *dalet* and confirm the last *dalet*, while only the letter *taw* remains

A Close Look at the “House of David”

The Mesha Stele, a ninth-century B.C.E. inscription from Moab, details the victories of King Mesha of Moab over the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The stone might contain a reference to *btdwd*, “House of David” (*bt* meaning “house of” and *dwd* meaning “David”) in its 31st line. Although this reading has been contested, new images of the stone and of the squeeze (paper-mache impression of the stone) confirm the reading “House of David.” In the below images, full lines represent a safe reading, while the dashed lines refer to reconstructed parts of letters for which no clear traces appear on the stone or the squeeze.

RTI Photo of Stela

Top: an RTI photo of the stela showing the *btdwd* section.
Bottom: the same photo with the letters *bt wd* (the initial *dalet* is lost) and dot-shaped word dividers highlighted in red.



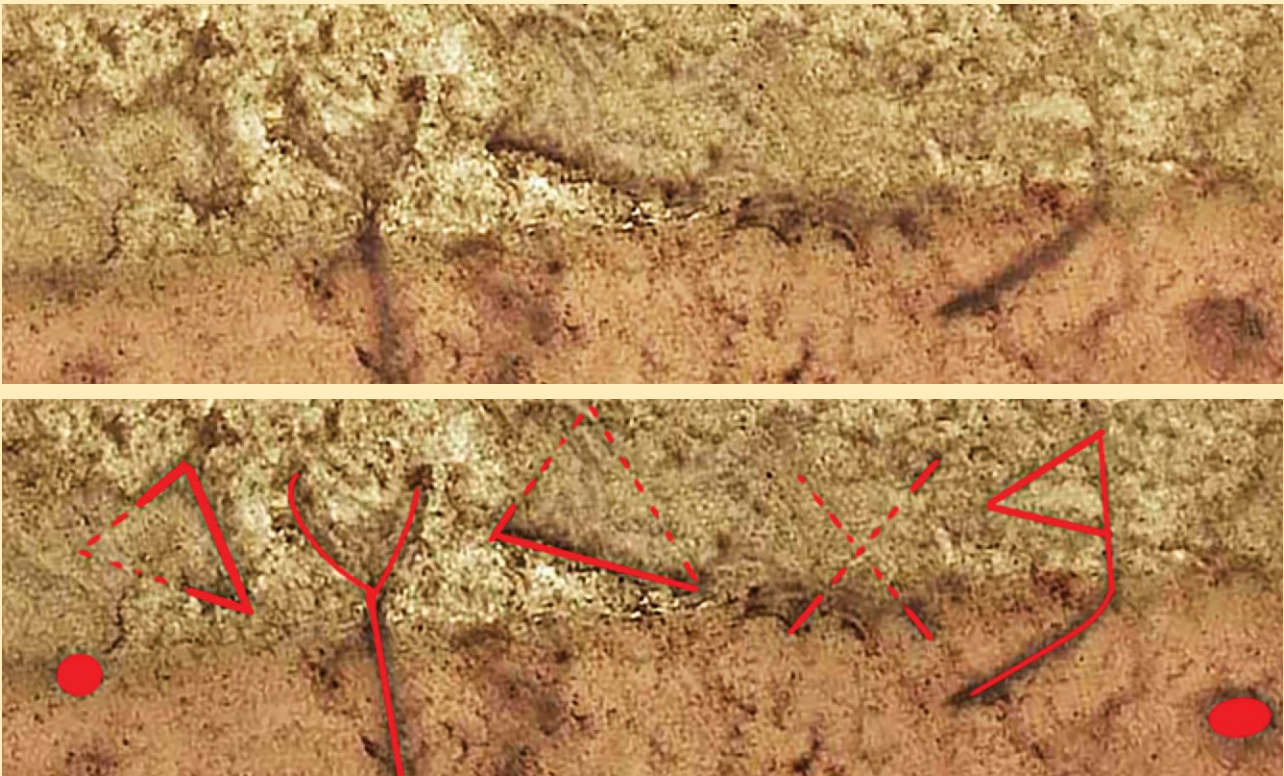
RTI Photo of Squeeze

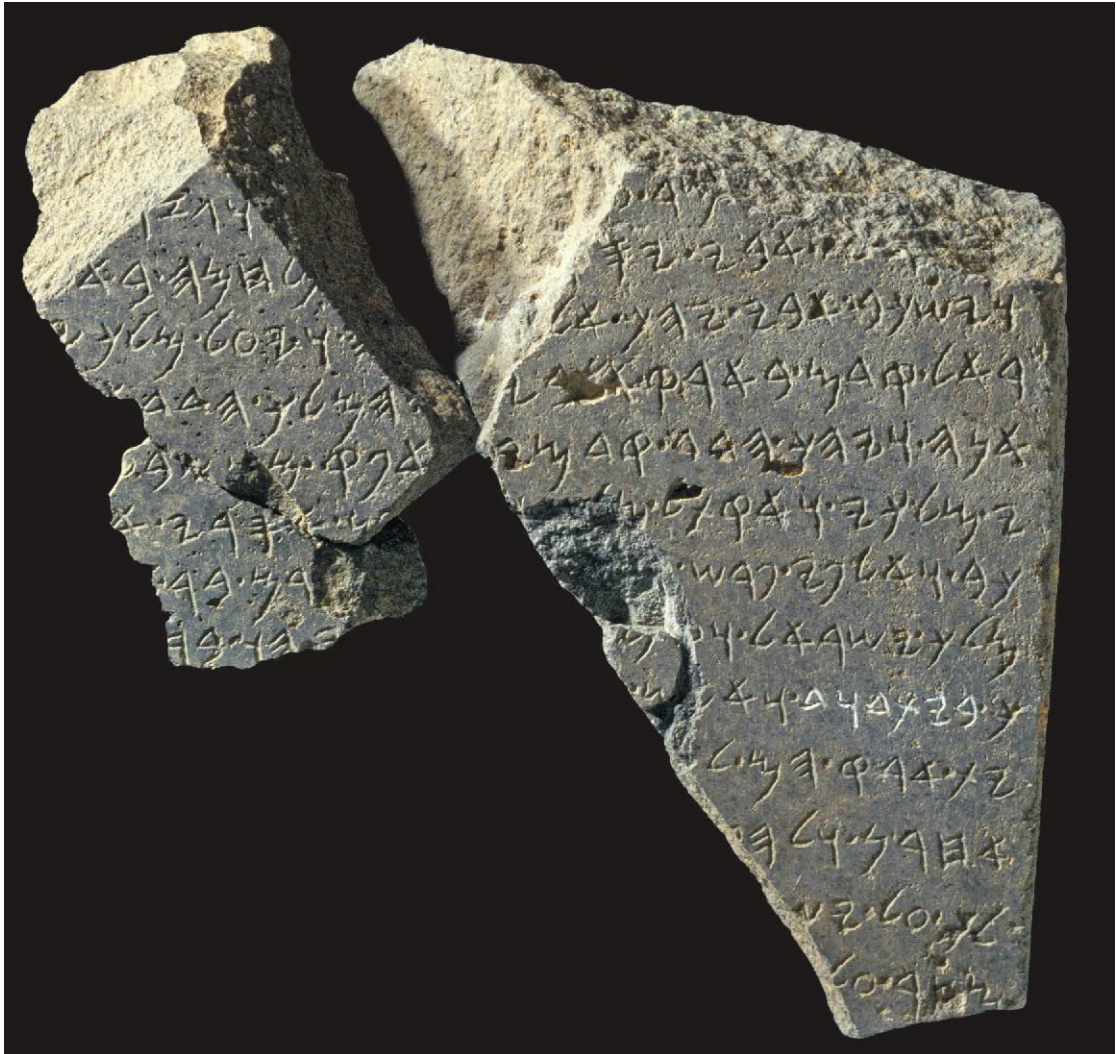
Top: an RTI photo of the squeeze showing the *btdwd* section.
Bottom: the same photo with the letters *btdwd* highlighted in red.



Backlit Photo of Squeeze

Top: a backlit photo of the squeeze showing the *btdwd* section.
Bottom: the same photo with the letters *btdwd* and dot-shaped word dividers highlighted in red.





ZEV RADOVAN / BIBLELANDPICTURES.COM

THE TEL DAN STELE tells of the victories of a foreign king, most likely King Hazael of Aram, over the kingdoms of Israel and Judah during the ninth century B.C.E. The king boasts of killing King Joram of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and King Ahaziah of the “House of David” (highlighted in white), meaning the Southern Kingdom of Judah. This text parallels the biblical account in 2 Kings 8-9. Archaeologists found the stela, written in Aramaic script, at Tel Dan in northern Israel. It is now on display at the Israel Museum.

somewhat unclear. Given this and the presence of word dividers before and after this five-letter unit, we believe the reading *btdwd* is confirmed once and for all.³

The confirmed presence of *btdwd* in the Mesha Stele offers important insights into the history of the Kingdom of Judah, especially regarding its political identity and the extent of its political hegemony. The idiom “House of David”—now firmly identified in both the Tel Dan and Mesha inscriptions—mirrors the names of several Aramaic and Levantine kingdoms that

use *bt* (“house of”) to preface the name of the dynasty’s founding ruler (e.g., House of Adini, House of Agusi, House of Omri). This nomenclature, which is attested primarily from the tenth to eighth centuries B.C.E., defined political authority in terms of kinship and, more specifically, as the rule of the house (or royal dynasty) of the eponymous founder who was remembered across generations as the patriarchal “father” of the kingdom. Modern scholars have termed such polities “patrimonial kingdoms,” as they were often decentralized and preserved the authority of the founder’s dynasty by appealing to kinship while giving political prominence to leading local families.

The presence of “House of David” in the Mesha Stele further implies that the territory of the Kingdom of Judah extended across the Dead Sea and included some areas of Transjordan, at the very least during the ninth century B.C.E. In particular, we now read in lines 31–33 of

the inscription: “As for Horonain, the House of David dwelt in it ... and Chemosh said to me: ‘Go down, fight against Horonain! I went down, [fought against the city and took it.]”⁴ While the precise location of Horonain (biblical Horonaim) remains disputed, Chemosh’s command to Mesha to “go down,” as well as references to Horonaim in the Bible (Isaiah 15:5–6; Jeremiah 48:3–5, 34) and in the Jewish historian Josephus’s writings (as Oronaim, see *Antiquities* 13.397), all suggest the area southeast of the Dead Sea, somewhere in the valley or hills leading up to the Moabite plateau. Wherever it was located, Horonain must have played a role in controlling the lucrative trade routes coming from Edom and the Arabah.*

Although it is difficult to know for certain when the House of David first began to “dwell” in Horonain, this likely happened in the tenth century B.C.E., during the reign of David, or in the first half of the ninth century B.C.E., during the reign of Jehoshaphat. The latter may have supported the economic and military expansionist policies of the kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Omri and Ahab) in Transjordan. Dating the withdrawal of the House of David from Horonain and Moab is, on the other hand, directly related to our understanding and dating of the Mesha Stele as well as the events it describes.

Historical allusions throughout the text provide us with specific temporal anchors. Line 6 clearly implies that Mesha was already king of Moab at the death of Ahab (c. 853 B.C.E.). The text further insinuates that Mesha witnessed the end of the Omride dynasty through a clear reference to Jehu’s coup in 842/841 B.C.E.: “I gloated over him and his house” (line 7). Mesha also claims that “Israel was utterly destroyed forever” (line 7), a probable allusion to the catastrophic situation prevailing in Israel during the reign of Jehoahaz, son of Jehu, when the Northern Kingdom was under intense pressure from Hazael, king of Aram-Damascus (2 Kings 13:7, 22). The stela must, therefore, date to the time of Jehoahaz (c. 810–805 B.C.E.), and was erected by Mesha in his capital of Dibon toward the end of a long and successful reign.

This date stands in direct contrast to most traditional interpretations of the stela, which have sought to link the Mesha inscription with

* See Thomas E. Levy and Mohammad Najjar, “Edom & Copper,” *BAR*, July/August 2006.

the events surrounding Mesha’s rebellion related in 2 Kings 3. In fact, the two texts are unrelated and tell of two different conflicts. Mesha first initiated a war of independence to control the core territory of Moab. This is reflected in the account found in 2 Kings 3, where Israel and Judah act together to invade Moab in response to Mesha’s rebellion and eventually fail to conquer Qir-Hareshet (probably Kerak, a major site in central Moab). Once Mesha consolidated his power, he initiated an offensive and expansionist war, benefitting from the pressure applied by Hazael on the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

The stela does mention the conquests of foreign territories north of the Arnon River (Wadi Mujib), as well as the absence of any real military opposition. Thus, the conquest of Horonain must have taken place either concomitantly with the campaign of Hazael in northern Transjordan (c. 830 B.C.E.; 2 Kings 10:32–33) or with the siege of Gath, the leading city of Philistia, after which Joash of the Southern Kingdom had to pay tribute to spare Jerusalem from destruction (c. 810 B.C.E.; 2 Kings 12:18–19). The weakening of the political influence of Judah was then considerable, with its boundaries reverting back to its core territory in the southern highlands.

The Mesha Stele also sheds light on many other aspects of southern Levantine history that cannot be dealt with here. Our focus has been to investigate the new photographs taken in 2015 and 2018 to settle an old epigraphic debate. We conclude that they confirm the reading *btdwd*, “House of David,” in line 31 of the inscription. This reading offers important insights into the history of the Kingdom of Judah, especially regarding its political identity and hegemony. Another thing is clear: The Mesha and Tel Dan inscriptions suppose the existence of an established West Semitic royal scribal tradition before 800 B.C.E. But this is the subject of another discussion. 📖

¹ See Michael Langlois, “The Kings, the City and the House of David on the Mesha Stele in Light of New Imaging Techniques,” *Semitica* 61 (2019), pp. 23–47, esp. pp. 24–26 for the RTI images.

² See Isabel Bonora Andujar, “L’estampage de la stèle de Mésha,” in Thomas Römer, ed., *Mésha et la Bible* (Paris, Collège de France, 2018), pp. 28–33.

³ Several scholars contest this reading on various grounds, but we believe their arguments are unfounded. See Matthieu Richelle, “A Re-Examination of the Reading BT DWD [House of David] on the Mesha Stele,” in Hillel Geva and Alan Paris, eds., *Ada Yardeni Volume*, Eretz-Israel 34 (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2021), pp. 152*–159*; Israel Finkelstein, Nadav Na’aman, and Thomas Römer, “Restoring Line 31 in the Mesha Stele: The ‘House of David’ or Biblical Balak?” *Tel Aviv* 46 (2019), pp. 3–11; Nadav Na’aman, “The Alleged ‘Beth David’ in the Mesha Stele: The Case Against It,” *Tel Aviv* 46 (2019), pp. 192–197.

⁴ For more, see André Lemaire, “The Mesha Stele: Revisited Text and Translation,” in Meir and Edith Lubetski, eds., *Epigraphy, Iconography, and the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Press, 2022), pp. 22–23.



The Genesis of Judaism

YONATAN ADLER

JUDAISM HAS LONG BEEN CHARACTERIZED by adherence to the laws of the Torah. Comprising manifold prohibitions and positive commandments, these laws have come to regulate all aspects of Jewish life. The scope of Torah law is so broad as to give the impression that no sphere of human experience is left unregulated. It covers daily prayers and rituals, weekly Sabbaths and annual festivals, dietary laws, life-cycle events, conjugal life and family law, criminal and civil laws, agriculture, ritual purity, and (in antiquity) rites pertaining to the Jerusalem Temple.

When did the Jewish people begin to keep these regulations? At what point in time did Jewish society first come to recognize the laws of the Torah as authoritative, and when did its members first begin to put these rules into practice in their daily lives? When, how, and why did all this come about?¹

The natural place to begin our inquiry is with the Hebrew Bible. It is in the Pentateuch (also known as the Torah or the Five Books of Moses), after all, that we find God instructing Moses with the litany of dos and don'ts that form

the basis of the Torah. But already as Moses descends from Mt. Sinai, we see the people of Israel breaking the most fundamental of these rules by worshiping a golden calf. The situation hardly improves after that. Much of the rest of the biblical narrative is a chronicle of Israel's disregard for divine admonitions and of the grim consequences this neglect brought to the nation and its land.

A survey of all the books of the Hebrew Bible outside the Pentateuch reveals something rather astonishing: Ancient Israelite society is never portrayed as keeping the laws of the Torah. The Israelites during the time of the First Temple are never said to refrain from eating pork or shrimp, from doing this or that on the Sabbath, or from

THE TORAH, or the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, serves as the basis for a system of laws that govern almost all aspects of Jewish life. But when exactly did Jewish society come to recognize these regulations as authoritative and binding? Archaeological and historical research sheds new light on this intriguing question and suggests that many key aspects of Torah observance were not widely practiced in Judea until centuries after the laws were first written down.



wearing mixtures of linen and wool. No one is ever said to blow a shofar on Rosh Hashanah, to fast on Yom Kippur, or to refrain from eating or possessing leavened bread on Passover. Nor is anybody ever said to wear fringes on their clothing, to don *tefillin* on their arm and head, or to have an inscribed mezuzah on the doorposts of their homes. Whatever it is that the biblical Israelites are doing, they do not seem to be practicing Judaism!

In an attempt to solve the problem of Judaism's beginnings, modern biblical scholars look to the biblical figure of Ezra as the primary catalyst for the promulgation of the Torah among the populace of ancient Judea. According to the biblical account (Ezra 7:1–26), Ezra was a priestly scribe sent on a mission from Babylon to Jerusalem by Artaxerxes, king of Persia, with a royal injunction to enforce the Mosaic Torah upon the people of Yehud (the name of the Persian province of Judea). After his arrival, Ezra gathers a mass assembly in a central square of Jerusalem where, standing on a wooden platform, he reads aloud from a Torah scroll and teaches the divine laws in detail (Nehemiah 8).

For 19th-century scholars, these stories suggested that the Torah came to be regarded as authoritative law during the Persian period

STONE VESSELS, according to early Torah interpreters, were immune to ritual impurity. Dating to the Herodian period (37 B.C.E.–70 C.E.), these chalk containers from Jerusalem indicate that by this time Judeans were increasingly concerned with purity laws—among other aspects of Torah observance. Interestingly, there is no archaeological evidence for such stone vessels in Judea prior to the late second century B.C.E.

(539–332 B.C.E.), probably around the middle of the fifth century, when Ezra's mission is thought to have taken place. This has been the reigning paradigm within which scholars of early Judaism tend to date the widespread promulgation of the Torah and the beginnings of Judaism itself.

I see two major problems with this model. First, the biblical narrative itself describes Ezra's success as strikingly ephemeral. A short time after Ezra's public reading from the Torah, the people of Yehud are said to be breaking the laws of the Torah by desecrating the Sabbath and marrying foreign women (Nehemiah 13:15–30). Second, we must consider what kind of historical information can be derived from the Ezra accounts. The biblical narratives provide extremely valuable historical evidence about the beliefs and ideologies of the biblical writers. These texts offer primary evidence for the *history of ideas*. The evidence they provide about what the masses of ordinary people were actually doing, on the other hand, is only indirect and thus very difficult to assess. These texts are clearly not the best source of information about *social history*. Because of both of these problems, I find little reason to surmise from the Ezra narratives that the Persian period marks the first emergence of a Judean society characterized by widespread adherence to the Torah.

When did ancient Judeans, as a society, first begin to observe the laws of the Torah in their daily lives? When did ordinary people—the farmers, craftspeople, and homemakers—first begin to regard the Torah as normatively binding and put into actual practice its detailed rules and regulations?

To answer these critical questions about Judaism's origins, I believe we must begin by



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exploring the first century C.E., an era for which we possess a great deal of textual and archaeological evidence for widespread observance of the laws of the Torah. From there, we will proceed backward in time, until we have reached a point when we can no longer see such evidence. This will establish the latest possible time when widespread observance of the Torah likely first emerged.

Strict observance of the dietary laws—especially abstinence from pork—is noted time and again by first-century C.E. writers such as Philo of Alexandria, the authors of the New Testament, Josephus, and even several non-Judean authors writing in Greek and Latin. Many of these writers also tell of widespread observance of the ritual purity laws outlined in Leviticus, a practice confirmed by the archaeological remains of hundreds of ritual immersion pools, along with the ubiquitous chalk vessels, which were regarded as impervious to ritual impurity.*

During this time, Judeans strictly eschewed depictions of humans or animals in their art and architecture, apparently in strict compliance with the second commandment (Exodus 20:4; Deuteronomy 5:8). Dozens of *tefillin* (phylacteries) and several possible mezuzot—all inscribed with

IMMERSION POOLS (later known as *mikva'ot*) began to appear in Judea around the end of the second century B.C.E. Designed to help observant Judeans restore their ritual purity through bathing, such pools attest to the widespread observance of the Torah's purity laws. This public ritual bath from the Herodian fortress at Masada is one of hundreds discovered across Judea. It was constructed next to the site's Western Palace and presumably used by Masada's Judean defenders prior to their ultimate defeat at the hands of the conquering Romans during the Great Revolt (66-73/74 C.E.).

passages from Exodus and Deuteronomy—have been found in caves near Qumran and elsewhere in the Judean Desert. First-century writers, Judean and non-Judean alike, attest to the widespread observance of the Sabbath and of such festivals as Passover, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot. The four species of Sukkot are even depicted on bronze coins minted in the fourth year of the Great Revolt (69/70 C.E.). This evidence reveals beyond any doubt that the laws of the Torah were widely regarded as binding within first-century Judean society.

Proceeding backward in time, we continue to find in the first and second centuries B.C.E. some evidence for the widespread observance of Torah laws. Several letters and decrees promulgated by Roman officials in the mid-first century B.C.E. directed cities around the Mediterranean to allow local Judean communities the freedom

* See Yonatan Adler, "Watertight and Rock Solid," *BAR*, Spring 2021.

to observe their Sabbath laws (Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.226 ff; 16.163, 168). Around 70 B.C.E., a quip about Judean avoidance of pork is attributed to the Roman orator Cicero (Plutarch, *Life of Cicero* 7:6). Immersion pools and chalk vessels begin to appear archaeologically around the end of the second century B.C.E. The earliest surviving *tefillin*, found at Qumran, may also date to the late second or the first century B.C.E.

From their earliest Judean mintages around 130 B.C.E., Hasmonean coins completely avoided figural images. Most strikingly, many of these coins feature on their obverse a floral wreath framing a lengthy legend of dense text that covers almost every available space. These legends provide the name and title of the Hasmonean

ruler and also cite “the assembly of the Judeans.” It seems clear that the designers of these coins were attempting to display a virtual portrait of the Hasmonean leader while avoiding any graphic image. The underlying message was clear: The highest echelons of the political leadership had endorsed the Torah’s strict ban on images.

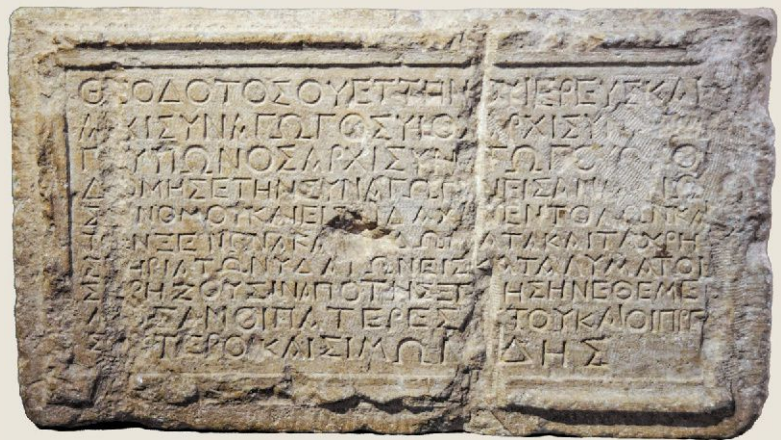
Our trail of evidence for observance of the Torah’s laws ends around the middle of the second century B.C.E. As we proceed further back in time, we no longer find any evidence—textual or archaeological—to suggest that the laws of the Torah were widely observed within Judean society. No texts from before the mid-second century speak of Judeans avoiding pork or other

The First Synagogues

YONATAN ADLER

The term “synagogue” usually conjures up images of organized prayer services. Communal prayer, however, was decidedly *not* characteristic of the earliest synagogues of the first century C.E. Instead, they are described by contemporary writers, such as Philo, Josephus, and the New Testament authors, as a place where Judeans would assemble (the Greek *synagoge* means “place of assembly”) every Sabbath to listen to a public reading of the Torah followed by oral interpretation of the text. Rather than a place of worship, the first-century synagogue functioned as a kind of educational institution where ordinary Judeans would gather weekly to study the detailed laws of the Torah.

Synagogues were found throughout Judea—even in rural towns and villages—and in cities scattered throughout the Diaspora. Evidence for the educational character of the institution comes not only from first-century writings but also from archaeology. At least ten excavated structures have been identified as first-century synagogues. These are public buildings whose interior walls are lined with tiered benches surrounding a central space, with a seating capacity capable of accommodating a large gathering



FOUND AMONG DEBRIS from the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., this Greek inscription from the late first century B.C.E. or the early first century C.E. commemorates the founding of a synagogue. It begins, “Theodotos son of Vettesnos, priest and archisynagogos (i.e., synagogue head), son of an archisynagogos, grandson of an archisynagogos, built the synagogue for the reading of the law and teaching of the commandments.”

of people. The architectural focus is toward the center of the room and suggests that the focus was on a speaker who stood in the middle of the hall—likely someone who read from a Torah scroll. The amphitheater-like design of the seating would have allowed everyone not only to listen, but also to engage in animated discussion about the text and its interpretation.

The earliest synagogue has been identified at Umm el-Umdan, in the Judean lowlands. It dates to the Hasmonean period, and nothing in the archaeological or written record

suggests such an educational institution existed in Judea before this time. It is hardly accidental that our earliest evidence for the synagogue coincides with our earliest evidence for routine adherence to the rules of the Torah. The synagogue would have been the primary vehicle for the widespread dissemination of the Torah’s laws among ordinary Judeans. In fact, it is hard to imagine how Judaism could have ever spread and taken hold among ordinary Judeans without the existence of an institution like the synagogue.

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TEFILLIN, OR PHYLACTERIES, are small leather cases containing folded slips of parchment inscribed with Torah passages from the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy. They are tied by straps to the wearer's head and arm. The earliest tefillin come from the secluded settlement at Qumran and date to the late second or early first century B.C.E. At right is a tefillin case with four folded slips found at Qumran. At left is an example of an unrolled slip, also from Qumran, that features a passage from the Book of Exodus (12:44-13:10).

prohibited species of meat or seafood.* No archaeological or textual evidence from before the mid-second century suggests that Judeans were adhering to the complex web of Pentateuchal ritual purity laws. The same lack of evidence applies to the avoidance of figural art and the observance of the Sabbath prohibitions, the Yom Kippur fast, and the tefillin and mezuzah rituals. Not only do we possess no evidence that these practices and prohibitions were widely observed—we lack evidence that the laws of the Torah on these matters were widely known at all!

It is possible that positive evidence for all these practices prior to the mid-second century B.C.E. simply may not have survived. However, certain evidence that has survived from earlier periods suggests that Judeans were not observant of the Torah laws. Remains of catfish found in several Persian-period

* For the problem of linking the material absence of pigs with a Torah prohibition, see Lidar Sapir-Hen, "Pigs as an Ethnic Marker? You Are What You Eat," BAR, November/December 2016.

archaeological contexts in Jerusalem indicate that Judeans ate this species of scaleless fish that was prohibited by the Torah.² Images of humans and animals appear on every coin minted in Judea in the fourth and early third centuries, some of which also display the names of Judean leaders, such as "Yehizqiyah the



EARLY JUDEAN COINS, represented by this Persian-era silver mintage inscribed with "Yohanan the priest" (top left), regularly featured human and animal figures. By the late second century B.C.E., however, Judean leaders consciously refrained from figural imagery, which they replaced with decorative elements and creative use of the written word. This bronze prutah of the Hasmonean high priest John Hyrcanus I (right), for example, features a lengthy Hebrew inscription inside a wreath that reads, "Yehohanan the High Priest and the assembly of the Judeans." Similarly, bronze coins (bottom left) minted during the fourth year of the Great Revolt (69/70 C.E.) display a lulav bunch flanked by etrogs and the inscription "year four."



TOP LEFT: © THE ISRAEL MUSEUM, JERUSALEM, BY YAIR HOVAV; BOTTOM LEFT: © AGORA AUCTIONS, INC. / AGORA AUCTIONS.COM; RIGHT: PUBLIC DOMAIN



THE JUDEAN COLONY on the island of Elephantine, at Egypt's southern border, began as a mercenary garrison in the service of the ruling Persian dynasty. By the fifth century B.C.E., this Aramaic-speaking community built a temple to their god YHW (an alternate form of the name YHWH). The temple was later removed to make space for a much larger temple to the Egyptian god Khnum, but its assumed location can be seen in the above photo. Ancient documents suggest that the Elephantine community was not in possession of anything resembling the Torah. Its members venerated gods other than YHWH and appear unconcerned about Sabbath prohibitions. Even though they practiced some sort of Passover sacrifice, unlike in the Torah, this offering seems to have had no set date (as noted in the Aramaic letter at left).

governor” and “Yohanan the priest.” Fifth-century papyri and ostraca from a Judean community on Elephantine, Egypt, together with clay tablets from contemporary communities of Judeans in Babylonia, suggest that Judeans sometimes paid reverence to deities other than the Judean God YHWH and that they did not even know of a seven-day week, not to mention any prohibitions against conducting transactions on the Sabbath.³

Given the available evidence, I believe that the Hellenistic period (332–63 B.C.E.) was the epoch

that most likely witnessed the earliest emergence of Judaism. Specifically, I believe that the Torah was probably made the “law of the land” during either the third or second century B.C.E.

Throughout the third century, Judea was under the control of the Ptolemies, a Macedonian dynasty founded by Ptolemy I, who had served under Alexander the Great and seized Egypt following the death of the famed Hellenistic conqueror in 323 B.C.E. Ptolemy’s son and successor, Ptolemy II Philadelphus (r. 284–246 B.C.E.),

is known to have instituted significant legal reforms around the year 275 B.C.E. Separate courts were established for different ethnic groups, with certain courts set up to hear cases of Greek-speaking parties and others for native Egyptians—each according to their own laws. The Judeans living under Ptolemaic rule would also have required a set of laws under which they were to be governed. It may have been precisely these reforms that played a significant role in re-characterizing the Pentateuch as the normatively binding, prescriptive law of the Judeans.⁴ If this is correct, we may speculate that Judaism itself might have been born out of the Ptolemaic court reforms of the early third century.

Another intriguing possibility is that the Torah was adopted as law more than a century later, when Judeans enjoyed a brief period of self-governance following the Judean revolt that broke out under the leadership of the priestly family of the Hasmoneans, probably around 167 B.C.E. Over the course of the next 25 years, the Hasmonean brothers Judas Maccabeus, Jonathan Apphus, and Simon Thassi slowly consolidated their control over Judea, until a fully independent Judean polity was established under the rule of Simon Thassi in 142 B.C.E.

Recently, some scholars have suggested that it was the Hasmonean family that sponsored the Torah as an instrument for the unification of their newly autonomous state.⁵ I would also offer that the early Hasmonean leaders may have decided to solidify their position vis-à-vis both their subjects and their enemies by officially ratifying a document that might serve to codify the core narratives of the nation's origins together with the officially sanctioned Judean laws. This single, composite work would have served the Hasmoneans in a way roughly akin to an amalgamated American Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. The Pentateuch—with both its stories about Israel's origins and its laws—would have served such a role magnificently. In adopting the Pentateuch as the formal conceptual and legal foundation of the newly emergent Judean state, the Hasmonean rulers would have provided a rallying point around which the people of Judea might unite. With this, Judaism itself would have been born.

From its earliest origins, Judaism emerged and developed in manifold directions. Rabbinic Judaism was one pathway by which Judaism continued to thrive and expand, but other, parallel and no-less-influential byways emerged. In fact, both Christianity and Islam are well rooted in the



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JUDAS MACCABEUS (d. 160 B.C.E.) led Judean rebels in the Maccabean Revolt against Seleucid rule and is credited with the liberation and cleansing of the Jerusalem Temple in 164 B.C.E. This 17th-century painting by Peter Paul Rubens portrays Judas as victorious in the Battle of Emmaus (1 Maccabees 3:38–4:25). When his brothers finally won full independence for Judea, they may have used the Torah to unify the newly established Judean state around a single “national” narrative and a codified set of officially sanctioned laws.

Judaism whose origins we have explored here. Viewed in this way, the emergence of Judaism was the catalyst for setting the course of much of world history over the past 2,000 years. ☞

¹ These are the central questions addressed in my recent book, *The Origins of Judaism: An Archaeological-Historical Reappraisal* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2022).

² Yanaton Adler and Omri Lernau, “The Pentateuchal Dietary Proscription against Finless and Scaleless Aquatic Species in Light of Ancient Fish Remains,” *Tel Aviv* 48 (2021), pp. 5–26.

³ Ilaria Bultrighini and Sacha Stern, “The Seven-Day Week in the Roman Empire,” in Sacha Stern, ed., *Calendars in the Making* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), pp. 10–79, esp. 11–17.

⁴ Michael LeFebvre, *Collections, Codes, and Torah: The Re-characterization of Israel's Written Law* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), pp. 146–182.

⁵ Reinhard G. Kratz, *Historical and Biblical Israel: The History, Tradition, and Archives of Israel and Judah*, translated by Paul M. Kurtz (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2015), pp. 185–186; John J. Collins, *The Invention of Judaism: Torah and Jewish Identity from Deuteronomy to Paul* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), pp. 184–185.

Calculating Christmas

Hippolytus and December 25th

T.C. SCHMIDT

MANY READERS WILL BE FAMILIAR with the common refrain that December 25, Christmas, was originally a pagan holiday, perhaps corresponding to the Roman festival of Saturnalia or the feast of the sun god Sol. As the chorus goes, the date was chosen for the birth of Jesus to make Christianity chime with a polytheistic society already attuned to December 25 revelry. But is the old song true?

I myself used to sing this kind of anti-carol, but then, while translating a treatise of Hippolytus of Rome, I came across a passage stating that Jesus was born on December 25.¹ Now, Hippolytus was a Christian author who wrote in the early third century A.D., and Saturnalia and the feast of Sol were not celebrated on December 25 that early in Roman history; Saturnalia never was, and the feast of Sol only came to be later. So Hippolytus clearly could not have chosen the date to please pagan sentiments.

THE FIRST CHRISTMAS. Painted in the 14th century by the Armenian miniaturist Toros Taronatsi, this Nativity scene illustrates portions of Jesus's birth stories from Christian tradition. In the center, Jesus lies in a manger that resembles an altar—foreshadowing his eventual sacrificial death. Directly above him are a donkey and ox. His mother, Mary, reclines below him. Joseph, his adoptive father, appears in the bottom right corner to underscore his noninvolvement in Jesus's conception. At the top of the composition, angels celebrate and announce Jesus's birth to shepherds, on the right, with their flocks. Guided by the star at the top, three magi appear on the left and present gifts to the infant. The bottom of the composition shows the bathing of the infant.



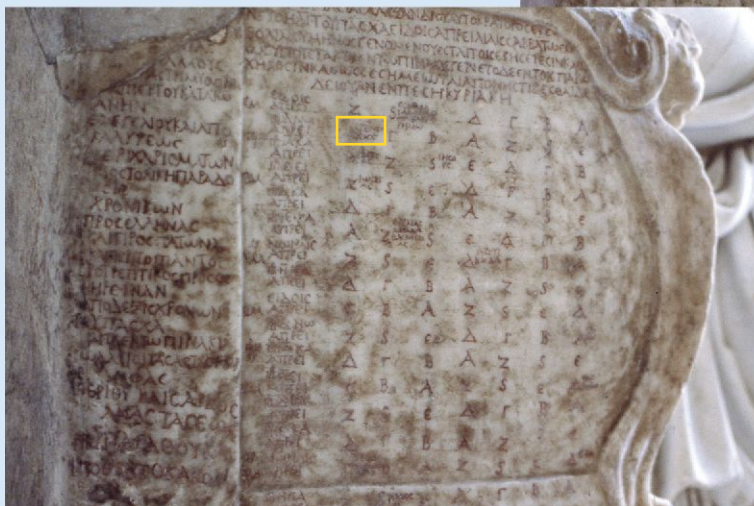
This discovery was exciting, yet as scholars have long known, the manuscripts of Hippolytus's treatise are divergent, with some claiming Jesus was born on December 25, but others giving one or two alternative dates. Because later Christians marked the birth

of Jesus on different days in December and January, many have concluded that subsequent scribes must have changed Hippolytus's original dating. These changes then ultimately contaminated the manuscript tradition, leaving us to sort out the mess. In all likelihood, though,

A Mysterious Figure

T.C. SCHMIDT

The mysterious Statue of Hippolytus now stands in the Vatican Library. Though the inscriptions on the side of the statue's chair are taken from the writings of Hippolytus, the figure seated on the chair may have originally depicted not Hippolytus, but a woman. So damaged was the statue, when discovered in the 16th century, it had to be heavily reconstructed, yet its only drawing before this restoration suggests a feminine figure sitting on the chair. And, in fact, the present male figure does seem to have feminine undergarments, as evident from the long frills flowing from beneath the figure's toga. Many believe the original statue portrayed the female philosopher Themista of Lampsacus. At some point Hippolytus's church must have obtained the statue and reimagined the female figure as a symbol of the Christian church, the bride of Christ, or perhaps as Lady Wisdom, described in Proverbs 8. Others think that the evidence regarding the statue's gender and original identity is too tenuous to make any firm judgment. The inscriptions on the chair, however, did not require restoration and are still quite legible. They date to 222 A.D. The largest of them, taken from Hippolytus's work called the *Canon*, form two calendars designed to calculate the date of all future and past Passovers and Easter Sundays.



HIPPOLYTUS STATUE. The Statue of Hippolytus (above) shows the Christian theologian seated on a chair. He lived during the second and third centuries. On either side of this chair are inscriptions that date to 222 A.D. One inscription (left) records Jesus's conception on April 2, 2 B.C., which would place his birth close to December 25, nine months later.

Hippolytus did have in mind an exact date for Jesus's birth—but was it December 25?

Fortunately, an early Christian artifact shines light on this question. I speak of the famous Statue of Hippolytus, perhaps the oldest extant piece of Christian art that can be precisely dated. This statue is now in the Vatican Library and depicts a figure seated on a chair. On the sides of the chair are extensive inscriptions extracted from the works of Hippolytus and dating to 222 A.D. Intriguingly, in one of the inscriptions Hippolytus states that the “Genesis of Christ” occurred on the Passover of April 2, 2 B.C.

Scholars have typically interpreted the Greek term *genesis* as referring to the “birth” of Jesus, but in an extensive study I have shown that the word most likely refers to the “conception” of Jesus. This is why the Gospel of Matthew says, “The genesis of Jesus Christ happened in this way: After his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child by the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:18, author’s translation).

And this is where we must do a little math. A typical gestational period is, of course, around nine months (a fact recognized already in antiquity), and nine months from April 2 is pretty near to December 25. So Hippolytus could have believed Jesus was born on December 25, but did he actually?

What we need is another good clue. Happily, this can be found in a different work of Hippolytus, one called the *Chronicon*. In this, Hippolytus makes all sorts of chronological calculations involving the dates of biblical events and personages. Careful examination of these calculations makes clear that Hippolytus believed Jesus was born precisely nine months after March 25, the vernal equinox of the Roman calendar. And naturally, nine months from March 25 is exactly December 25, the Roman winter solstice.²

Though it is not certain that Hippolytus believed that Jesus was born on December 25, it does seem to be the likeliest interpretation of the evidence as a whole. What is more, once we see Hippolytus’s computational thoughts for what they are, we can see other ancient Christians making similar calculations, beginning with Clement of Alexandria (195 A.D.) and continuing on with many other later writers. For they too believed that Jesus was conceived on Passover and was, therefore, born approximately nine months later—albeit with some selecting slightly different dates for his birth.

Was Jesus really born on December 25? The



JESUS'S GENESIS. In this scene, also illustrated by the 14th-century Armenian miniaturist Toros Taronatsi, the angel Gabriel appears to the Virgin Mary and tells her that she will give birth to the messiah. The Holy Spirit, visualized as a dove, comes upon Mary and causes her to conceive. According to tradition, the Annunciation took place at a well, represented by the water pitcher and fountain.

current evidence suggests that Hippolytus did not derive the date of December 25 from pagan celebrations, but that he also does not seem to have drawn on any ancient tradition for the actual birthday of Jesus either. Otherwise, why would he and his fellow early Christians give slightly different dates for Jesus's birth? As I said, some, like Hippolytus, do give December 25, but others place the date a bit earlier or later in December or January.

It seems then that these various dates for Jesus's birth were chosen because Hippolytus



SUN CELEBRATIONS. The Greek sun god, Helios, drives his chariot, pulled by four horses, across the sky. This third-century B.C. relief comes from the Temple of Athena at Troy. Centuries later, the feast of Sol—the Roman equivalent of the Greek god Helios—came to be celebrated on December 25, to mark the sun’s “birth” and victory over darkness, specifically over the winter solstice, the darkest day of the year. The feast was instituted in Rome no earlier than 274 A.D. by Emperor Aurelian, though it may have been instituted at a later point. Whatever the date, however, patristic writings had already connected Jesus’s birth to the winter solstice.

and others thought that God organized and balanced the cosmos so as to ensure that profound spiritual moments would coincide with important points in the solar and lunar year. In this way, such sacred happenings would be literally spotlighted by the various cycles of the sun and the moon. Hence, Hippolytus and most of his fellow Christian writers believed that the date of creation, the conception of Jesus, and the crucifixion of Jesus (or, in some cases, his resurrection) all occurred on the solar vernal equinox, or the lunar Passover, or both.

The oldest and strongest tradition, however, concerns the date of Jesus’s conception, which all the earliest sources agree occurred on Passover. And this very consistency explains the diversity of calendrical dates for Jesus’s birth. This is because the lunar Passover drifts back and forth between late March and mid-April. Given this, the dates for Jesus’s conception (and his birth nine months later) would differ in proportion to the date which an ancient Christian chose for the Passover of Jesus’s conception—for the ancients had

much trouble calculating lunar phases far into the past or future and consequently often arrived at slightly different dates. This is why some ancient Christians give the date for Jesus’s birth in mid-December, others December 25, and still others early January, since all those dates are about nine gestational months removed from when they each thought the Passover of Jesus’s conception happened to occur.

So, if this is how Hippolytus and others settled on the day of Jesus’s birth, where did they get the idea that Jesus was conceived on Passover?

This remains a mystery. They may have derived it from even more ancient traditions or from theological beliefs about how God organized the world. What is clear, however, is that Hippolytus’s choice of December 25 for the birth of Jesus won out. His choice must have been helped by the fact that only in Hippolytus’s theory would Jesus, the light of the world, begin to shine on the winter solstice, the darkest day of the year; and only on this day could the carol truly be sung:

O come, thou Day-Spring come and cheer

Our spirits by thine advent here

Disperse the gloomy clouds of night

And death’s dark shadows put to flight.³ ☞

¹ Hippolytus of Rome, *Commentary on Daniel* 4.23.3.

² Astronomically speaking, the Romans were wrong about the winter solstice, for it does not actually occur on December 25, but it is important to note that Hippolytus and his contemporaries believed this date was correct.

³ Further discussion about Hippolytus and the date of Jesus’s birth can be found in T.C. Schmidt, “Calculating December 25 as the Birth of Jesus in Hippolytus’ *Canon and Chronicon*,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 69.5 (2015), pp. 542–563; T.C. Schmidt, trans., *Hippolytus of Rome’s Commentary on Daniel* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2022).



Enduring Impressions

The Stamped Jars of Judah

ODED LIPSCHITS

PLACING STAMP IMPRESSIONS on the handles of large storage jars was a well-known phenomenon throughout the ancient Near East, from prehistoric times to the Bronze and Iron Ages and later. Some of these impressions were likely akin to a manufacturer's label, serving to brand particular varieties of wine or oil. Other impressions served to indicate private ownership or mark provisions reserved for palace or temple elites. Most stamp impressions were relatively short-lived phenomena, limited in their distribution

and lacking any indication of continued use or a larger administrative function.

Beginning in the late eighth century B.C.E., however, the Kingdom of Judah—for the first time in world history—began using stamped storage jars as part of a widespread, centrally organized administrative system. This system, which appears to have been primarily administered from the Judahite center of Ramat Rahel south of Jerusalem, was used to collect, store, and transport the agricultural products—mainly wine

and olive oil—supplied across an expansive network of royal estates, to support Judah's economy and pay the kingdom's annual tribute to the Assyrian empire. We also see, for the first time, the mass production of standardized, large-capacity storage

STANDARDIZED STORAGE JARS enabled the large-scale collection and storage of agricultural products in eighth-century B.C.E. Judah. Stamped with officially sanctioned impressions on their handles, these jars from Tel Azekah point to a widespread, centrally organized administrative system.

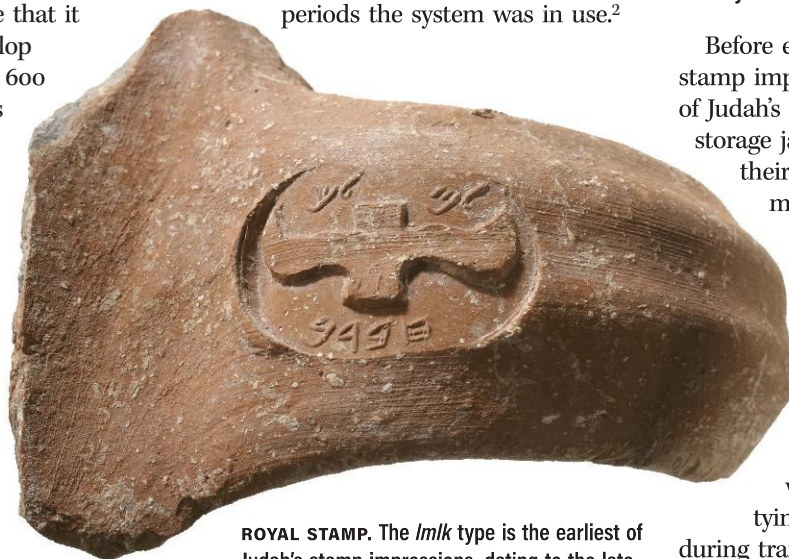


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jars that could be easily stored and shipped for large-scale distribution. These innovations indicate the transition to a more centralized, state-organized economy, which could be effectively supervised and controlled by a central authority.

This administrative system proved so effective that it continued to develop across a period of 600 years: from Judah's final years as a vassal kingdom of the Assyrians and then Babylonians, through the four centuries it was a province under the mighty Babylonian, Persian, and then Ptolemaic and Seleucid empires. During these periods, we see an abundance of similar stamp impressions that are widely distributed across the territory of Judah

and strong evidence for administrative continuity from the late eighth to late second centuries B.C.E.¹ Throughout, Ramat Rahel served as the heart of this administrative system, as evidenced by the great number of stamped handles discovered at the site that date to the various periods the system was in use.²



ROYAL STAMP. The *lmlk* type is the earliest of Judah's stamp impressions, dating to the late eighth century B.C.E. It features a two-winged sun disk with the phrase *lmlk*, meaning "[belonging] to the king," above and the name of a Judahite city below (here Hebron).

RAMAT RAHEL, about 3 miles south of Jerusalem, was the heart of a centralized administrative system based on collecting and storing agricultural products, evidenced by large quantities of stamped jars found there. The center—and the expansive administrative system it supported for six centuries—came to an end in the second century B.C.E.

Before examining the specific stamp impressions from each period of Judah's history, let us first look at storage jars in ancient Judah and their usage. The most common type of storage jar used between the eighth and second centuries was the ovoid storage jar with a straight neck, rounded base, and wide, rounded shoulders. Four thick handles, set beneath the shoulder, were presumably used for tying and securing the jar during transit and storage. The vessels are quite large, some reaching nearly 2 feet in height and having a volume of about 12 gallons. They were probably used to transport oil

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Judah's Stamp Collection

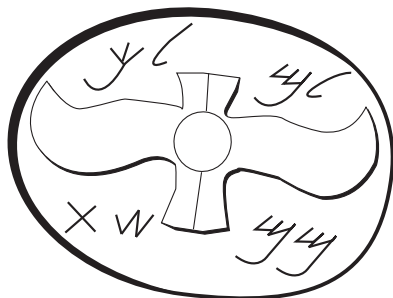
From the late eighth through the end of the second century B.C.E., these jar stamp impressions functioned in a centralized administrative system in Judah.



Four-Winged Scarab

lmlk

(8TH-7TH CENTURIES)



Two-Winged Sun Disk

rosette

(7TH-6TH CENTURIES)



lion

(6TH CENTURY)



yhwd

(6TH-2ND CENTURIES)



yršlm

(2ND CENTURY)



and wine over short distances, from pressing and production sites to nearby storage facilities. The same type of jar, with only slight modifications, continued to be produced for the more than six centuries that the administrative system was in place.

The first stamp impressions employed in Judah as part of a large and established system were the *lmlk* stamp impressions that expressed ownership by the king. The system first appears in the late eighth century and, despite its early date, is outstanding in

the quality of its seals, large number of stamp types and stamped handles attested, and widespread distribution at sites within Judah. It was likely introduced, either by King Ahaz or Hezekiah, in response to taxes imposed on Judah as it became an Assyrian vassal during the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (2 Kings 16:7–8). Each stamp impression consists of three elements: a symbol (either a four-winged scarab or a two-winged sun disk), the denotation of possession (*lmlk*, “[belonging] to the king”),

and a place name (Hebron, Socoh, Ziph, and possibly Mamshit).

Similar stamp impressions continued in use during the seventh century, although there is a notable decline in the use of writing; several stamps lack the phrase *lmlk*, while others lack the place name. Archaeological evidence suggests these later types were produced only after Judah had begun to recover from the massive destruction wreaked by Sennacherib’s campaign of 701 B.C.E. that threatened Jerusalem and destroyed many towns in the

Personal Impressions

ODED LIPSCHITS

In addition to Judah's centrally administered system of stamped storage jars, other stamps were used by various individuals and authorities, as specific needs and circumstances arose. For example, in the late eighth century B.C.E., we find a number of "private" stamp impressions, which have two rows of writing, usually separated by a line, that include the person's name and patronym, mostly without any decoration. The above example from Ramat Rahel bears the personal name *lṁnhm* [son of] *Ywbnh*. In place alongside the familiar *lmlk* stamp impressions, similar jar impressions probably constituted an ad hoc system that operated in Judah for only a brief period of time, as the kingdom was bracing itself for the Assyrian military campaign of 701 B.C.E. led by Sennacherib.

Similarly, in the sixth century, following the Babylonian taking of Jerusalem, we find stamps impressed with the place name *mṁšh* (Moza). Only a few dozen such impressions are known, and the majority of these were found at the site of Mizpah (Tell en-Nasbeh), north of Jerusalem. These impressed storage jars most likely functioned to overcome supply problems of the Babylonian governor, who had been installed at Mizpah following Jerusalem's destruction. Interestingly, only one *mṁšh*-stamped handle was found at Ramat Rahel, indicating that this system of impressions was short lived and likely not part of the central administrative system.

Judean Foothills, including Lachish and Azekah.

Rosette-stamped storage jars—which feature a rosette symbol with no text—were the last to be introduced during the monarchic period of Judah and evidence a similar though slightly more limited administrative system. This system began to operate in the second half of the seventh century and stayed in use until the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E.

New stamp impressions appeared in the early sixth century B.C.E., following Judah's incorporation as a province of the Babylonian empire.

The stamps feature a picture of lion and appear—in a variety of types—on the handles and sometimes bodies of the same type of storage jars. As in the case of the rosette seal impressions, a single iconographic motif was used, without any text. Most types depict a lion pacing to the right or left; one type depicts a lion standing on its hind legs.

The use of stamped storage jars continued into the Persian period, with the main change being the total disappearance of iconography from the seals. During the 250 years of Persian rule in Judah, stamps were marked only with the name

of the province in Aramaic writing: spelled either in full, as *yḥwd* (Yehud), or with defective spelling, as *yhd* or even just *yh*. This system of stamp impressions continued in use until the beginning of the Hasmonean period in the second century B.C.E.

The final chapter in the history of Judah's system of stamped storage jars is the *yṣlm* stamp. These stamps are characterized by the return of iconography: an engraved pentagram with five letters inserted between its points, reading *yṣlm*, an abbreviation for Jerusalem, the capital of the Hasmonean kingdom. They first appear in the mid-second century B.C.E., when the Hasmonean kingdom was firmly establishing itself in Judah, and likely they represent an ad hoc administrative system that aimed to consolidate Hasmonean rule in Jerusalem.

With the establishment of the Hasmonean kingdom—the first fully independent Judean kingdom in more than six centuries—there was no longer any need to pay taxes or tribute to a foreign imperial power. Ramat Rahel—Judah's long-lived royal administrative center—was destroyed to its foundations, with no further evidence for stamped storage jars found at the site. A Jewish village, with many ritual baths and a large columbarium, was erected at the site, and a Hasmonean citadel may have been built nearby. The administrative system that had begun under the kings of Judah in the late eighth century and persisted through most of the Second Temple period disappeared by the end of the second century, buried, like Ramat Rahel, under layers of rock and stone. ²

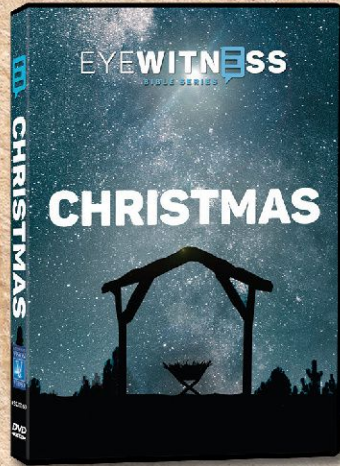
¹ For more, see Oded Lipschits, *Age of Empires: The History and Administration of Judah in the 8th–2nd Centuries BCE in Light of the Storage-Jar Stamp Impressions* (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2021).

² For Ramat Rahel, see Oded Lipschits et al., *What the Stones Are Whispering? 3000 Years of Forgotten History at Ramat Rahel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2017).

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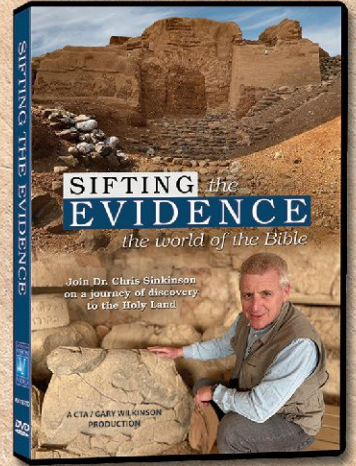
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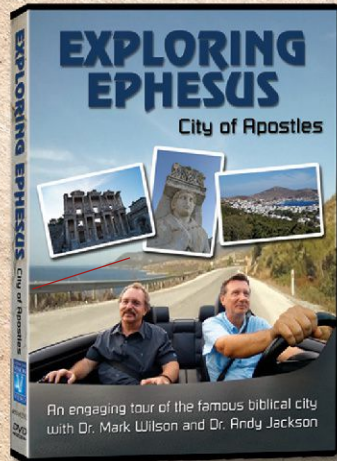


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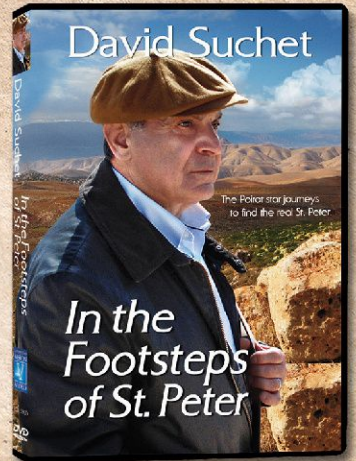
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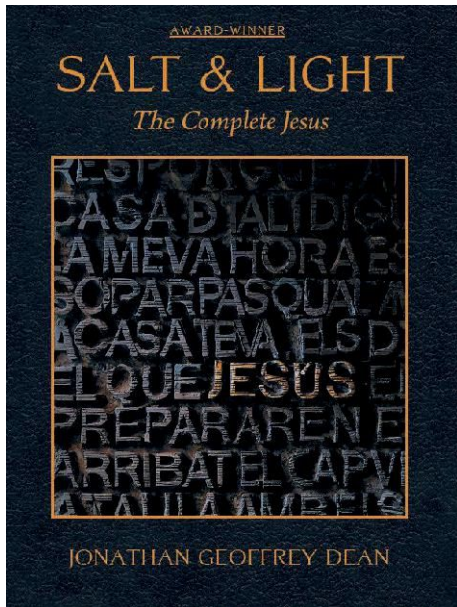
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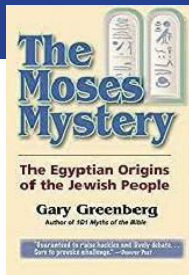
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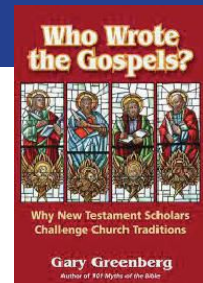
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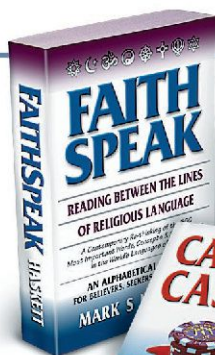
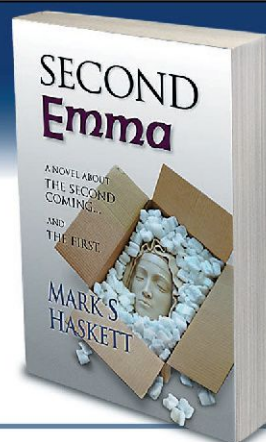
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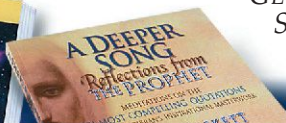
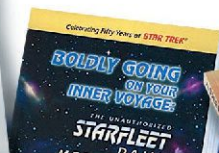
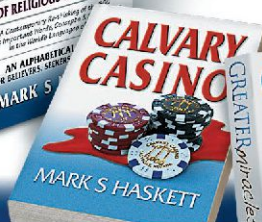
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Wedding Bells in Galilee?

DAVID A. FIENSY

WHEN JOSEPH AND MARY were engaged and then married, the process was far from the modern, Western custom. In the West, we usually have a courtship followed by a proposal of marriage (in Hallmark movies, always by the man on one knee). This is followed by a brief engagement period that has no legal status but only a certain social recognition of the couple's intentions. A few months later, the couple has a wedding that legalizes their relationship. In first-century Galilee, however, there was a more formal socio-legal process.¹

We have a rather full accounting in the Mishnah (the Jewish legal text), in the tractate *Ketubbot* ("marriage documents"), of the process for marriage in the second century C.E. In the first place, the prospective bride and groom did not choose each other; the parents chose for them. In the Mishnah, as well as in the writings of the Jewish historian Josephus, the whole thing is a business transaction. The Mishnah indicates

that there were three ways for a man to "acquire" a bride: by oral agreement, by written document, and by the couple entering a room together (*Qiddushin* 1:1; *Ketubbot* 4:4).

If you are familiar with marriage practices in the Hebrew Bible, you might be surprised to find some new customs by the first century C.E. A change had taken place decades before Joseph and Mary were wed. Simeon ben Shetach, great scribe and brother of the Hasmonean queen Salome Alexandra (r. 76–67 B.C.E.), had added the rule of the *ketubbah*. In this ruling—not at all hinted at in the Hebrew Bible—the groom pledged a divorce or widow-settlement to be paid to the bride should the marriage dissolve.

Not only do we have a rabbinic tractate with rules for this process, but we also have marriage contracts from the period. They were discovered in caves on the west side of the Dead Sea and date from the early second century C.E. Among these documents are three marriage contracts in which the grooms promise to pay an amount of money to the bride if the marriage dissolves (one promises 400 denarii, equivalent to about \$24,000), confirming that the Mishnaic regulation was in effect.

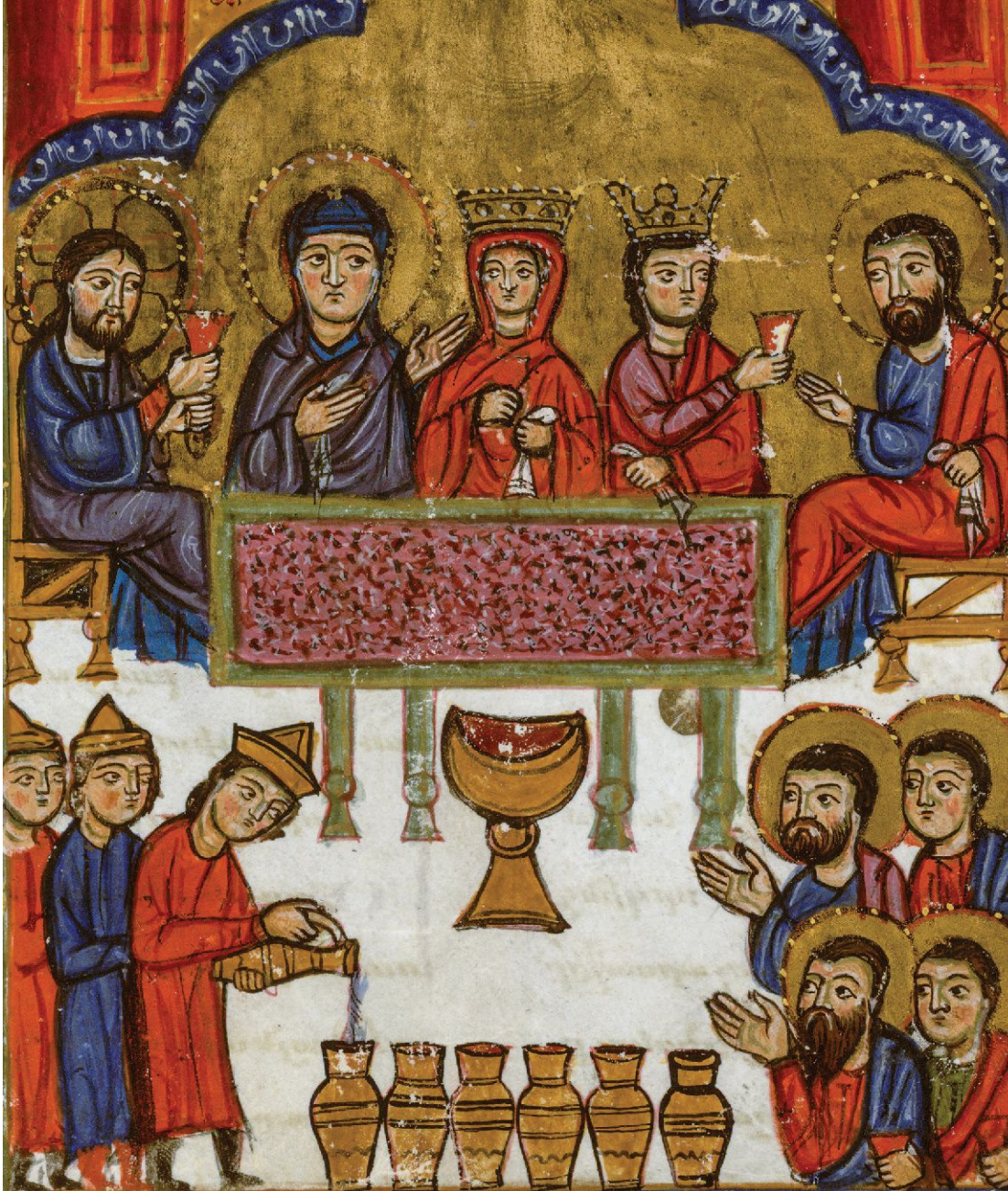
When a couple entered a marriage, the groom wrote up a document—or orally agreed—and submitted it to the bride's family. The groom promised to pay the bride, in the event the marriage dissolved, a dissolution payment. If the family approved the contract, the couple was betrothed.

That means, if Mary and Joseph were "betrothed" (Matthew 1:18–19; Luke 1:26–27), Joseph must have had such a contract with Mary's parents. He, or his parents, would have pledged a sum of money (the *ketubbah*) in the event of divorcing her later or in the event of his death.

MARRIAGE CONTRACT. In this document, Anani requests Meshullam to marry his daughter Tamut. The contract, written in Aramaic on papyrus by Nathan ben Ananiah, dates to July 3, 449 B.C.E., and comes from Elephantine, Egypt.



BROOKLYN MUSEUM, REQUEST OF THEODORA WILBOUR, FROM THE COLLECTION OF HER FATHER, CHARLES EDWIN WILBOUR, 47.218.89 (PHOTO: BROOKLYN MUSEUM, 47.218.89_SL1.JPG)



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During the betrothal period, the exclusivity of the bride to the groom was the same as after the marriage had been consummated. The presumed situation we find in the Gospel of Matthew is supported by texts from both Philo and Josephus.² When Joseph found that Mary was pregnant, he decided initially to “divorce” her (Matthew 1:19). For a betrothed girl to have sex with a man other than her future husband was adultery.

Although the Gospels never give ages for Mary or Joseph, these events probably happened when they were fairly young. Jewish girls were usually married off by their parents by the time they were teenagers. The rabbinic texts advise that a young girl—*na'arah*, a “prepubescent girl”—should be betrothed around age 12 and married about one year later (*Ketubbot* 5:2). The rabbis urged parents to marry their children close to the age of puberty.

CANA WEDDING. This 14th-century illustration from the *Gladzor Gospels* depicts the wedding at Cana, where Jesus turned water into wine (John 2). In this illuminated manuscript page, the bridal couple wears Armenian crowns, reflective of medieval Armenian culture.

There is also artifact and textual evidence of age-at-marriage for Jewish girls in the first century C.E. A woman’s tombstone, for example, might indicate how old she was when she married. Investigation of these sources shows that most Jewish girls married between the ages of 12 and 17, with the greatest number marrying at age 13. We should probably think of Mary in that age group.

What about the boys? Again, parents preferred to marry them young. One Mishnah text recommended age 18 (*Avot* 5:21). Other rabbinic texts suggested around the time of puberty. We should imagine

Joseph in the same age group as Mary.

What about the suggestion by some in the ancient church that Joseph was older than Mary and had children by a previous marriage?³ That is possible. But it need not mean Joseph was in his fifties or even older. Men married so young that Joseph in his late twenties already could have been a widower with six children (Mark 6:3).

Jewish villages in Galilee were probably endogamous. Endogamy seems to have been the norm in the Hebrew Bible (Genesis 28:2), as it is today in the Middle East. There are strong indications that in the late Second Temple period Jewish families preferred their daughters to marry either a cousin or uncle.⁴ Therefore, it is probable that Joseph and Mary were relatives.

About one year after the betrothal came the wedding. Local customs varied, but the basic act was carrying the bride to the groom's house on a litter or carriage while people applauded, played music, and perhaps danced in the streets. The bride wore a "crown" of some sort. There might also have been torches or lamps carried by the procession

(Matthew 25:1). Upon the bride's arrival at the groom's house, the groom and friends probably emerged with tambourines and drums.

No, there were no wedding bells.

There was also a wedding feast (John 2:1–10; Matthew 22:2; 25:10; Luke 12:36; 14:8), given by the groom's family, which could last a week or more. That the couple stood under a canopy (*huppah*) in the first century is doubtful. At some point, somebody uttered a benediction over the couple. The ceremony was a huge event, celebrated by the entire village.

Although the marriage process might not make a good Hallmark movie, we should not think that married couples did not have meaningful relationships. It would be a Western prejudice to think that only our customs produce happy marriages. ☞

¹ This article is based on David A. Fiensy, *The Archaeology of Daily Life: Ordinary Persons in Late Second Temple Israel* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020).

² Philo, *On the Special Laws* 3.72; Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.201.

³ See the second-century *Protevangelium of James* 9.2.

⁴ Philo, *On the Special Laws* 2.126; Tobit 4:12–13, 7:10–11; *Tosefta Qiddushin* 1:4.

DEFINE INTERVENTION

What is "Patristics"?

1

Study of shepherds
and herders

2

Study of tribal
forefathers and leaders

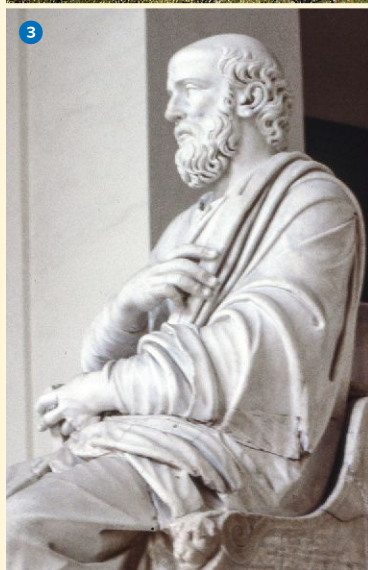
3

Study of the early church
fathers and their writings

4

Study of rural landscapes
and poetry

ANSWER ON P. 70



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In the Beginning, Was There a Word?

AARON J. KOLLER

“IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD” (John 1:1)—but what is a word?

A “word” is a thing, a concept, that seems clear from afar, but gets fuzzier the harder we look at it. Within English, is “birthday” one word or two? What about “wedding day”? If you thought it was obvious that “birthday” is one word but “wedding day” two, it is because of the way they are written.

Similarly, what gives us the idea that a written sentence is made up of individual words? Presumably, this has to do with the fact that we can extract a part of the sentence and put it into a different sentence. But the process of transforming speech into comprehensible writing is trickier than we might realize. In regular speech, we don’t hear “spaces” between words. Instead, speech is just a steady stream of sounds: it would sound very strange if we paused between words.

Ancient scribes did have an idea of what made a word. We know this from word lists that we have from both ancient Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt. Scribes organized their world into categories: a list of “trees and other things made out of wood”; a list of “body parts”; a list of “animals and cuts of meat”;

and so on. There are no verbs or adjectives in any of these lists, only nouns, which were copied over and over by scribes for thousands of years. They show that already at the beginning of writing, people—at least literate people—had a sense that language consisted of words.

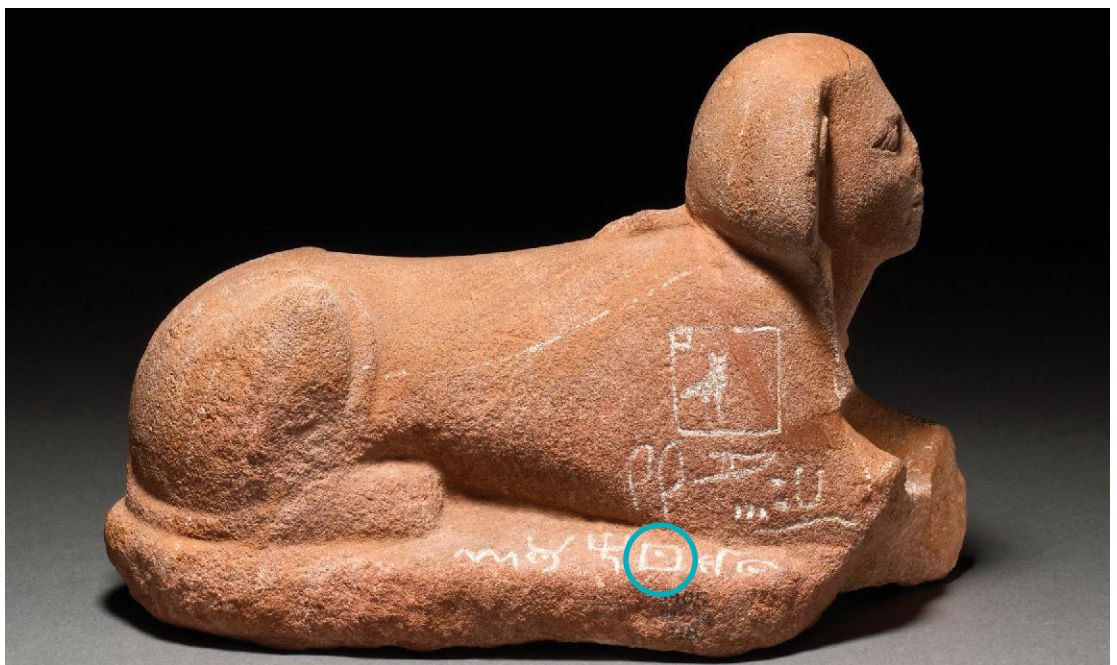
Although they seem to know what a “word” is, Mesopotamian scribes did not include any indication of the boundaries of words within their writings. In a cuneiform text, there is no visual indication of where words begin or end. Egyptian scribes did have specific signs, called “classifiers,” which marked the end of most words. These include the common plural sign (𓆎) and the seated woman (𓆑) and seated man (𓆒) signs. When you reach one of these, you know the word has ended.

Surprisingly, the early alphabet made things worse. The alphabet was invented, probably in the Sinai or in Egypt, just after 2000 B.C.E. In the earliest alphabetic writing, there were no spaces at all.

Even worse, in some of the texts the same letter served as the end of one word and the beginning of the next! In a common phrase found at Serabit el-Khadem in the Sinai, we read *m’hb’lt*, “beloved of the Lady”—but the *bet* in the middle was both the last letter of the word “beloved” and the first letter of the word “the Lady.” This would be like writing “joinow” for *join now* or “hotamale” for *hot tamale*.

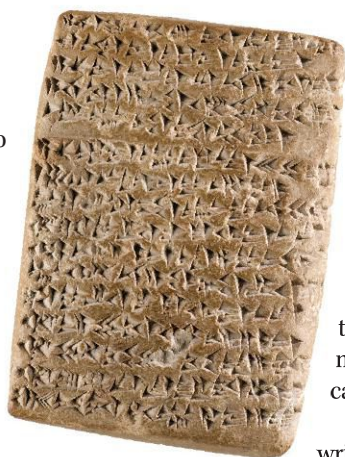
The genius (and challenge) of the alphabet was that it was one sign for one sound. In principle, all I have to do is say something under my breath, and I can write it down, sign after sign. But this brings us back to our initial problem: There are no pauses

DOUBLE DUTY. In an inscription on a miniature sphinx from Serabit el-Khadem in the Sinai, we read *m’hb’lt*, “beloved of the Lady.” However, the letter *bet* (circled) in the middle is both the last letter of the word “beloved” and the first letter of the word “the Lady.”



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between words when I say them, so do I write a space between words when I write them? Probably not. So alphabetic writers of 4,000 years ago may not have had a clear sense of where words began or ended when they wrote. In fact, it took many more centuries until word dividers were introduced, and spaces are not found in alphabetic writing until about 1,200 years after the invention of the alphabet.*



NO SPACES. This cuneiform tablet from Tell el-Amarna, Egypt, gives no indication of where words begin or end. Yet it was still legible. It is a letter from the Egyptian pharaoh to a Canaanite prince and dates to c. 1340 B.C.E.

It is very difficult to read a text that has no spaces: Sentences with no spaces give the eye no clues as to where to look to identify the words and it turns out that this makes reading significantly slower and less efficient. Since our brains read by “jumping” our eyes from word to word (the technical term is the French *saccade*, a jerky movement), we need something visual to tell us where a word begins and ends. It does not have to be spaces: Alternating **bold and not bold** **workswell too**, as do marks of different shapes: as:long:as:they:tell:us:where:each:word:ends.

So how were the early alphabetic texts read? With no spaces or word dividers, how did anyone know what the texts said?

One possibility is that people read aloud. The medievalist Paul Saenger showed that, in classical and medieval texts, the introduction of spaces went along with silent reading. For centuries, European reading was out loud, and it turns out that spaces are less important. **THISMAYBEHARDTOREAD WITHYOUREYESBUTTRYTOREADITOUTLOUD ANDITWILLBEMUCHEASIER.** So perhaps the early alphabetic texts were also meant to be read out loud. Many have observed that the Hebrew word for “read,” *qara*, is really the word meaning “to call,” suggesting that “to read” was originally “to call a text aloud.”

But in many of the early alphabetic cases, there is even a simpler explanation: They were not meant to be read at all! The inscribed miniature sphinx from Serabit el-Khadem (opposite), for example, was dedicated to the goddess Hathor and deposited at her temple. Its early alphabetic inscription, then, was supposed to be read only by a deity—and it is likely that goddesses can read even without spaces.

We moderns take for granted that we write for someone else to read. But ancient writing did not always serve this purpose: Some writing was done for the purpose of writing alone. This is not entirely foreign to us. Journaling is often done for the purpose of purely writing, with no intention of anyone ever reading it. Notes tucked between the stones of

the Western Wall in Jerusalem are not meant to be read again, except (as in the case of Serabit el-Khadem) by a deity.

The ways in which ancient texts are written, then, can help us think about why they were written. People used the new alphabetic writing to express themselves, to put their words down on paper—or on stone, as the case may be. They were not writing for other people, though. In reading these texts, we are eavesdropping on a monologue that was never meant to be overheard. 🗨️

WHAT'S IN A NAME? 🌀



Ankhesenamun

'nkhs-n-jmn

'nkhs = she lives | n = “for” | Jmn = “god Amun”

Ankhesenamun was the chief wife and queen of Pharaoh Tutankhamun. Born to the royal couple Akhenaten and Nefertiti in around 1350 B.C.E., she was King Tut's half-sister.

Her original name was Ankh-es-en-pa-aten, meaning “she lives for the Aten,” which referred to the sun god Aten, whom her father established as Egypt's supreme deity. Following Akhenaten's death and the reversal of his religious reforms, the then queen replaced Aten with Amun in her name, to become Ankh-es-en-amun, “she lives for Amun.” Grammatically, the name is a simple sentence consisting of the verb *'nkh* “to live,” with the affixed pronominal subject *s* “she,” followed by the preposition *n* “for,” and then the divine name Amun. In the hieroglyphs, the god's name comes first, in what is called the honorific transposition.

Her husband similarly changed his name from Tutankhaten (“living image of the Aten”) to Tutankhamun (“living image of Amun”), honoring thus the restored primacy of the Theban god Amun. It was, however, only a few years after King Tut's death that their old names (and any traces of the “heretic” era) were systematically purged. The Aten-bearing names, therefore, survived inscribed on items buried with the boy king, including on the marvelous golden throne that features both forms of their names.

Following King Tut's early death, Ankhesenamun probably asked the Hittite king Suppiluliuma I for a Hittite prince in marriage, but the potential suitor appears to have died en route. She then likely married Tutankhamun's much older successor and her own supposed grandfather, Ay, but her later life and final resting place remain an enigma.

* See Alan R. Millard, “Were Words Separated in Ancient Hebrew Writing?” *Bible Review*, June 1992.



The Riddle of the Rephaim

JONATHAN YOGEV

THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE BEINGS known as “Rephaim” in biblical and ancient Near Eastern sources has caused much bewilderment throughout the years. Biblical dictionaries and encyclopedias usually provide two main meanings for the word: (1) ghosts or shades of the dead, and (2) a mythical and ancient race of giants. These meanings are mostly derived from the mentions of the Rephaim in the Bible.

The Rephaim appear in the Bible in a variety of contexts. Here are some examples (author’s translation):

Only King Og of the Bashan was left of the remaining Rephaim. His bedstead, an iron bedstead, is now in Rabbah of the Ammonites; it is nine cubits long and four cubits wide, by a standard cubit.

Deuteronomy 3:11

After this, fighting broke out with the Philistines at Gezer; that was when Sibbecai the Hushathite killed Sipai, a descendant of the Rephaim, and they were humbled.

1 Chronicles 20:4

Do you work wonders for the dead? Do Rephaim rise to praise you?

Psalms 88:11(12)

It will save you from the forbidden woman, from the alien woman whose talk is smooth. ... Her house sinks down to Death, and her course leads to the Rephaim.

Proverbs 2:16–18

The dead will not live, the Rephaim will not rise, you punished them and brought them to ruin; you wiped out all memory of them.

Isaiah 26:14

Were the Rephaim great warriors or leaders, such as King Og or the Philistine generals? Were they affiliated with a certain nation or people? Is the word Rephaim a synonym for the dead? Why were they considered to be so frightening



LUISA RICCIARINI / BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

in the afterlife? And why did God take it upon himself to punish and destroy them?

If we go over the dozens of references to the Rephaim in the Bible, we see that it is very difficult to reach a single clear conclusion about their identity. Luckily, we have other sources from the ancient Near East that mention them. The first source is the Ugaritic texts, written in alphabetic cuneiform. These texts were mostly found in the ancient city of Ugarit in northern Syria in the mid-20th century. They tell much of the mythical concepts and belief systems of the people who lived there during the Bronze Age until the destruction of the city (c. 1200 B.C.E.). Some of these concepts are also known from the Bible, such as rituals associated with the gods Baal and Asherah.

What do we know of the Rephaim in Ugaritic texts? They are heroes, warriors, judges, kings, and demigods, much like Heracles or Theseus in Greek myths. They are beloved and celebrated both by gods and men, in life and death.



BIBLICAL GIANTS. This 12th-century illumination from the Seralgio Octateuch depicts the biblical Rephaim. The manuscript can be found in the Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul, Turkey.

according to different agendas over hundreds of years.

The second is to analyze the negative treatment of the Rephaim in the Bible. Whenever we encounter the Rephaim in biblical texts, they are either dead or being killed, enemies of Israel and of God, giants, monstrous humans, and objects of terror. It seems that although the Rephaim were highly regarded by many ancient Near Eastern peoples, they were hated and reviled by the biblical authors. What is it about them that causes God to struggle against them and their memory, and why are they still demonized long after death?

The fact that the Rephaim are considered to be demi-gods and the mortal descendants of the gods in the ancient Levant could not be tolerated through monotheistic perceptions. Monotheistic belief systems were fragile in ancient Israel and caused great dispute among the people, prophets, priests, and monarchy. The idea that some men might be divine or descendants of God was thought outrageous, as presented in Genesis 6:1–4, when a race of heroes (Nephilim) with divine blood is born to the “sons of God” and the “daughters of men.”* This race is later identified with giants and Rephaim whom the biblical writers believe need to be eliminated. This can also be demonstrated through the eyes of the prophets, who ridicule foreign kings who presented themselves as gods (see Isaiah 14:1–23; Ezekiel 28:1–9).

The Rephaim can be found in various places throughout the Levant, including Canaan, Philistia, Judah, Ammon, Moab, Bashan, Syria, and Phoenicia. This suggests a shared concept, which likely originated in a single place and then spread to different societies in the ancient Levant. The concept identifies a beloved ruler as a part of an ancient divine bloodline of mortal heroes, which provides justification for his own bloodline to rule.

In biblical texts, however, the idea of a semi-divine monarch or a leader cannot be tolerated. The concept of the Rephaim needed to be eradicated from the belief system of Israel and Judah, and this explains the negative treatment they receive in the Bible, which is the complete opposite of how they are viewed in Ugaritic and Phoenician sources. ☞

¹ See Jonathan Yogeve, *The Rephaim: Sons of the Gods*, Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 121 (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

* See, e.g., Jaap Doedens, Biblical Profiles: “Exploring the Story of the Sons of God,” *BAR*, Summer 2020.

The word Rephaim is also found in three Phoenician burial inscriptions. These inscriptions share similar concepts with the Ugaritic texts: The Rephaim were ancient heroes and kings, and once they perished, they dwelled together in a specific place in the underworld.

Although we have plenty of sources that mention the Rephaim, scholars still debate their identity. The Rephaim have been affiliated with or depicted as: (1) shades of the dead or a specific group among the dead; (2) healers or physicians; (3) ancestors; (4) kings, rulers, judges, heroes, and generals; (5) gods or demi-gods; (6) giants or titans; (7) an ethnic group or tribe; and (8) household gods (biblical teraphim) or fertility deities.

In my recent study, I tried to unlock the riddle of the Rephaim in the ancient Near East using two main keys.¹ The first is to prioritize the archaeological evidence, namely ancient inscriptions, which depict the Rephaim in a clearer sense than the Bible, which was edited and corrected

Dove

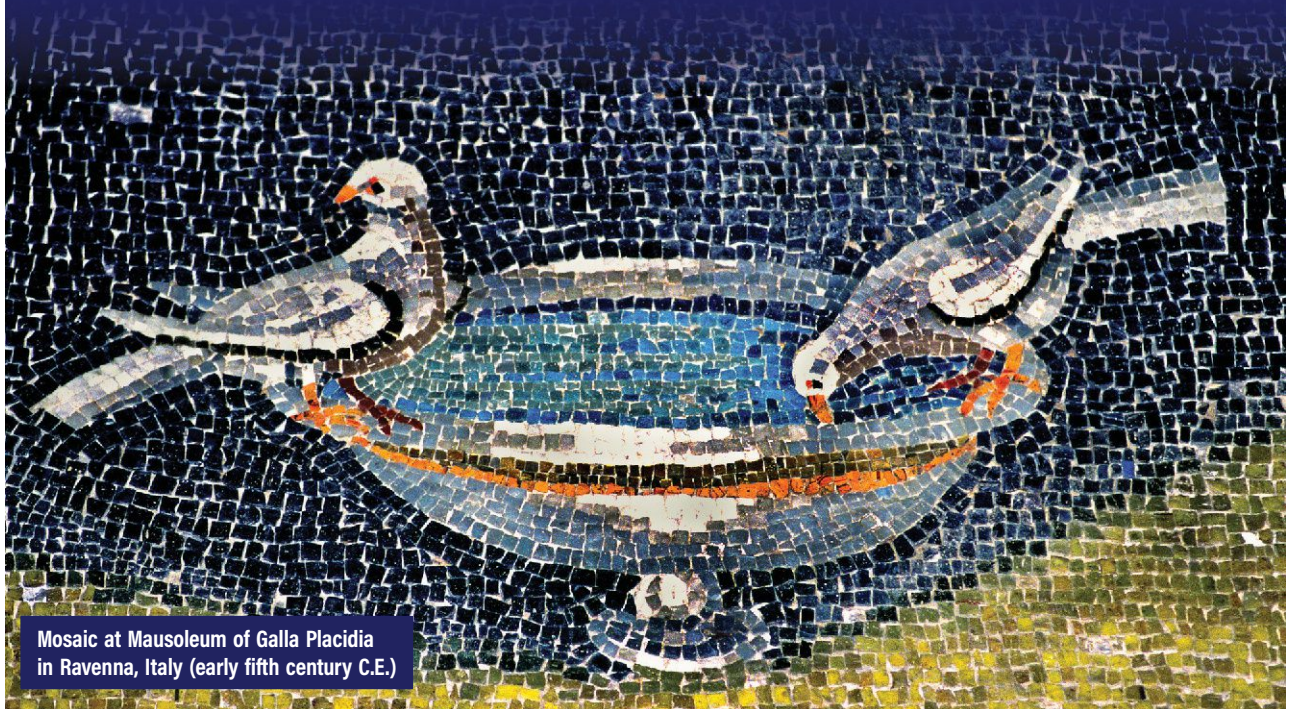
Across history and cultures, the dove is a universal symbol of peace and tranquility. Its several species belong to the bird family *columbidae*, which also includes pigeons. In biblical tradition, the dove first appears in the story of the flood (Genesis 8). When the dove (Hebrew: *yonah*) released from Noah's ark returns with an olive leaf, the patriarch knows that dry land has appeared, marking a new beginning for humanity. Considered ritually clean and one of only four birds acceptable for sacrifice (Leviticus 1:14), the dove also appears as an emblem of purity (Psalm 68:13) and innocence (Song of Songs 2:14). In the Talmudic tradition, the spirit of God hovering over the waters in Genesis 1:2 is likened to a dove (*Chagigah* 15a:3).

In the ancient Near East, doves were birds sacred to a wide range of mother goddesses. As symbols of feminine fertility and procreation, they are associated, in both texts and art, with the Mesopotamian goddesses Semiramis and Inanna-Ishtar, the Canaanite Asherah and Astarte, or the Phoenician Tanet. Miniature house shrines from the Levant

occasionally feature doves. In the Greco-Roman world, the dove is sacred to Aphrodite, Fortuna, and Venus.

Early Christians saw the dove as a symbol of the spirit of God and an embodiment of purity and harmlessness, which they combined with the Greco-Roman meaning of the olive branch as a symbol of peace. In Christian iconography, therefore, the dove represents the Holy Spirit and appears prominently in depictions of the Holy Trinity, the baptism of Jesus, and the Good Shepherd, among other subjects.

Easily domesticated, doves were kept in temples and households throughout the ancient Near East and the Mediterranean. For the biblical prophets, the dove's mournful voice evoked the unjust persecution of Israel (Isaiah 38:14; 59:11; Ezekiel 7:16). Doves also appear in Greek and Roman funerary art as beloved pets and symbols of tenderness and devotion. In the Christian catacombs of Rome, they are often depicted holding an olive branch and accompanied by the word "peace," wishing thus for the peace of the soul.



Mosaic at Mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna, Italy (early fifth century C.E.)

PETER HÖRBE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

DEFINE INTERVENTION (SEE QUIZ ON P. 64)

Answer: **3**

Patristics is the study of the early church fathers and their writings. The Patristic Age spanned much of the first millennium C.E., from c. 100 to 451 (Council of Chalcedon) or 787 (Second Council of Nicea). Some well-known church fathers include Ignatius (c. 35–108), Polycarp (c. 69–155), Irenaeus (c. 120–202), Tertullian (c. 160–225), Jerome (c. 347–430), and Augustine (c. 354–430). Patristic works recount early Christian theology and Church history. Texts by the second–third-century theologian Hippolytus even elucidate the traditional date for the conception and birth of Jesus (see T.C. Schmidt, “Calculating Christmas,” p. 50).

Yonatan Adler (p. 42) is Associate Professor in the Department of Land of Israel Studies and Archaeology at Ariel University. His research focuses on Jewish ritual practices as evidenced in the archaeological record.

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Oded Lipschits (p. 58) is Professor of Jewish History at Tel Aviv University and Director of the Sonia and Marco Nadler Institute of Archaeology. He directed excavations at Ramat Rahel and currently co-directs the Lautenschläger Azekah Expedition and the Moza Expedition Project.

Katharine D. Scherff (p. 16) is a lecturer at Texas Tech University and teaches for the School of Art and the Medieval and Renaissance Studies Center. She focuses on medieval visual culture, liturgy, ritual, and media technology.

T.C. Schmidt (p. 50) is Assistant Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at Fairfield University. He earned his Ph.D. from Yale and is currently preparing a monograph titled *Josephus and Jesus* (Oxford Univ. Press).

W. Brent Seales (p. 25) is Gill Professor in the Department of Computer Science at the University of Kentucky and Director of the Center for Visualization and Virtual Environments. He focuses on digital study and restoration of inscribed artifacts.

Jonathan Yogev (p. 68) is a lecturer in the Bible Department at Kaye Academic College of Education in Beersheba, Israel.

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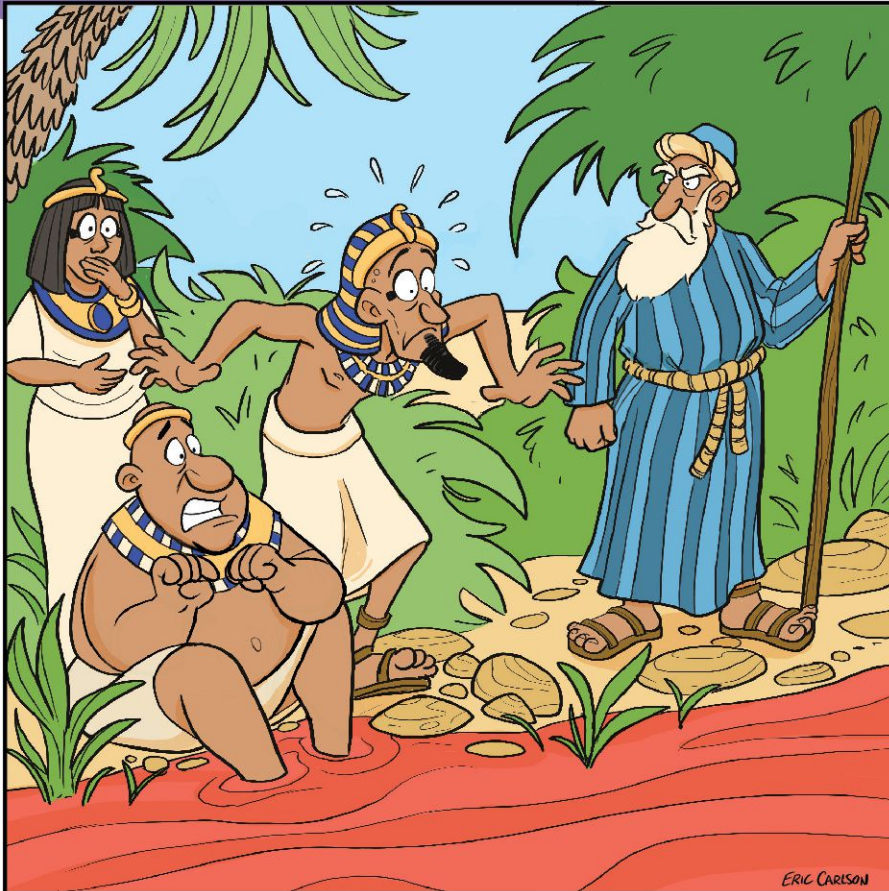
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Thank you to all those who submitted caption entries for our Summer 2022 cartoon (left), based on Exodus 7:20: "Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and of his officials he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the river, and all the water in the river was turned into blood." We are pleased to congratulate Jay Levy of Sherman Oaks, California, who wrote the winning caption, and our runners-up:

RUNNERS-UP

"If you had asked politely, it might have been wine!"

MICHAEL J. PRESTON
SAUSALITO, CALIFORNIA

"Clean up! Nile 5!"

MARC TULEY
CARTHAGE, TENNESSEE


HONORABLE MENTIONS

"Don't drink *that* Kool-Aid!"

JOHN W. POSEY
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

"This will ruin my crocs."

ELLEN COVINGTON
WELLSVILLE, MISSOURI

 For additional caption entries, as well as past cartoons and captions, please visit biblicalarchaeology.org/captioncontest.

"I may be in De-Nile, but this looks more like the Red Sea to me!"

JAY LEVY
SHERMAN OAKS, CALIFORNIA

Write a caption for the cartoon (right) based on Joshua 4:8: "The Israelites did as Joshua commanded. They took up twelve stones out of the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as the Lord had told Joshua, carried them over with them to the place where they camped, and laid them down there." Submit it via our website at biblicalarchaeology.org/captioncontest.

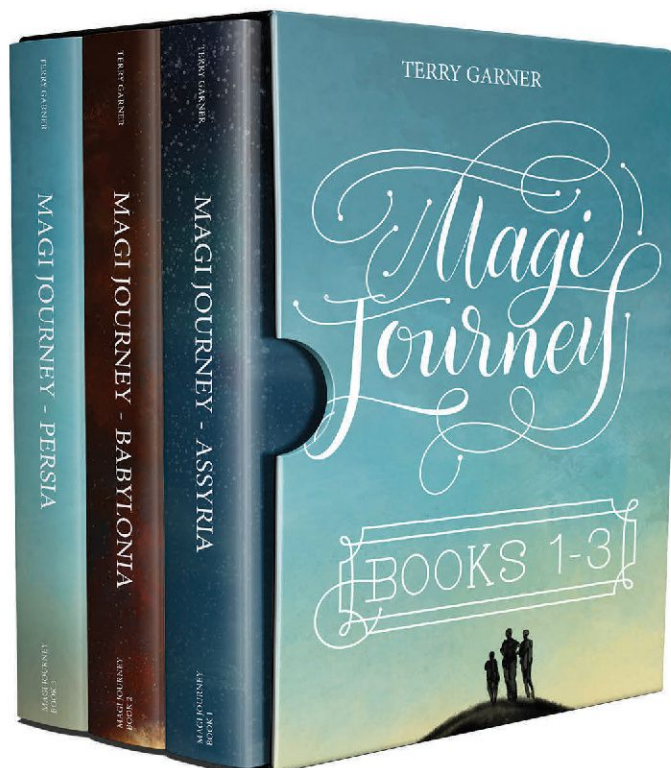
Please include your name and address. The deadline for entries is February 15, 2023. The author of the winning caption will receive a BAS All-Access membership and three gift subscriptions to give **BAR** to friends. Runners-up will receive an All-Access membership and two gift subscriptions for friends.



Joshua 4:8

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A former Marine, and retired finance and operations executive. Terry has been a follower of Jesus Christ for the past twenty-five years. He served in the College Ministry of Trinity Baptist Church of Norman, Oklahoma for over fifteen years.

Magi Journey

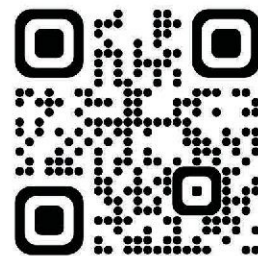
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