

# Judaism

## Moses and the Exodus

### Abstract

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The bible is at odds with ancient textual sources and with archaeology. Egyptian papyri detail the least things about Egyptian events of the time. One explains that two(!) escaping slaves were pursued across the border, yet there is no record of two million Israelite slaves all leaving one night. Uneducated slaves, desperately escaping from the armies of their powerful oppressor in the desert do not sit down each night and write out a diary of the day's events. Nomads keep up their spirits by telling tall stories around their campfires. The story was written by Persian administrators sent to secure the loyalty of the Jews for Persia, not Egypt. They used the myth, presented then as it was ever after as true history, to depict those loyal to the traditional gods and goddesses as apostates and backsliders from the true God of Israel, Yehouah, who had made a covenant with Moses.

Scriptural books are warnings to the natives in Palestine to back the god the Persians were introducing as the God of the Israelites. They pretended that the people were always backsliding from worship of the true god, so they invented a history to prove it. Moses was not important in it. The Prophets could not have avoided talking about Moses and the Sinai covenant had it really been a long known and central element of Jewish history. Prophets preceding Jeremiah are mainly silent about Moses and rarely use the word covenant, but criticize the people for disobedience. The saga of Moses must have been one of the last additions to the history. Invented pseudepigraphic prophecies showed God would punish the people for their backsliding. Since they were written after the events they could seem accurate. The Persians depicted Jewish prophets during the monarchy as incessantly warning the people not to apostatize. They always did!

Books were written in Greek professing to give accounts of Egyptian and Babylonian culture, but in the light of modern discovery they were inaccurate. The Jewish one, the bible, was divinely accurate. In it Jews had been in the Nile Delta of Egypt since before 1600 BC, but Greek writers know nothing of these Egyptian Jews. Herodotus, a Greek born about 484 BC, is the "Father of History", even though Moses was supposed to have been writing a thousand years earlier. Exodus in biblical chronology was written before 1200 BC, making it the first history written. No one thinks it was. It was really written after 300 BC. Jews and their Temple did not exist until the time of Darius II in 417 BC. The Egyptian priest, Manetho wrote a history of Egypt in Greek, in which he related the fables of the Jews. What he wrote could have been the earliest form of the Jewish scriptures. The great Jewish leader Moses was recorded nowhere else before.

Moses is... the most re-written... remodelled to the standards of the latest Jewish revisers some centuries before Christ...

T R Glover

That he gave Israel the Law is abundantly emphasized, but in ancient story all institutions and laws tend to be assigned to a great national hero, real or legendary, to Solon at Athens, to Lycurgus at Sparta, to Numa Pompilius at Rome.

T R Glover

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## Moses and Exodus

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The links between ancient Egypt and the events described in the *Old Testament* are generally problematic and beset by controversy.

Ian Shaw and Paul Nicholson,

*The British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt*

The exodus events are vitally important to Jews and Christians, the latter because their god was crucified on the annual celebration of the Jewish exodus. Research into it has therefore been “constant and zealous”, in the words of professor J Alberto Soggin.

In the book of *Exodus*, the presence of the Israelites in Egypt is regarded as a given, and the only questions are whether, how and when God will remove them from the house of bondage. The story of the exodus begins only at the point when the Israelites groan under their hard labour. Then the Lord remembers (*Ex 2:23-24*) his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the narrative of *Genesis 12-36*. No one in *Exodus*, seems to remember the events of *Genesis 37-50*, chapters that have told us how the Israelites happen to be in Egypt in the first place, and no one seems to remember Joseph’s words to his brothers:

So it was not you who sent me here, but God.

**Genesis 45:8**

Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good.

**Genesis 50:20**

It is evidently not only the new Egyptian king who knows not Joseph (*Ex 1:8*), but the narrator also, and his character, God, seems to regard the presence of the Israelites in Egypt as nothing more than an unfortunate accident that has happened to them. He

never acknowledges that it is his own deliberate design.

Ian Shaw and Paul Nicholson, in *The British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt*, say the cultural and ethnic origin of the Israelites are difficult because the archaeological and biblical evidence have not been reconciled. The accounts “in the books of *Numbers*, *Joshua* and *Judges*, are often at odds both with other ancient textual sources and with the archaeological evidence for the settlement of Canaan in the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age (c 1600-750 BC)”. The story of the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt and the Exodus to Canaan described in *Genesis* and *Exodus* of the Jewish scriptures have no relationship with any known history. Biblical “scholars” cannot bring themselves to accept this simple fact. Uneducated slaves, desperately escaping from the armies of their powerful oppressor, forced into a primitive nomadic existence in the desert, do not sit down each night and write out a diary of the day’s events. Nomads keep up their spirits by telling tall stories around their campfires.

The migration of the Israelites is presented, like that of Abraham, as a one off passage, not anything to do with nomads. Nomads rarely choose to settle, valuing their *al fresco* lifestyle. They usually have to be forced to settle. Even settled people do not keep official records until they form themselves into a nation. Whatever preceded the formation of the statelets around Jerusalem and Shechem was not recorded as history, so what is recorded must be tall stories—mythology if you like. Will biblical “scholars” stop the pretence it is history? Not while their comfortable incomes depend on it!

If the Israelites were first slaves then nomads, how did they get such diverse skills? They can be allowed bricklaying no doubt, though bricklaying is a worthless skill in the desert, but how did they come to be wealthy stockbreeders, and even successful fishermen and gardeners (*Ex* 10:24;12:38; *Num* 11:5,22; 20:4) if they were enslaved? Before long, in the wilderness, they were also skilled carpenters, decorators and goldsmiths.

Moses, as the author of his *Exodus*, used the names cities had at a much later date, like Luz (Bethel) and Cariath Arbe (Hebron). He used the names of people who had not yet arrived in their lands in his day, such as the Chaldeans or the Philistines. The Law of Moses records a census and temple tax implying the use of coins, which first came into use (so far as is known) in the kingdom of Lydia in the seventh century BC, 700 years later. *Genesis* 36:31 presupposes a kingdom in Israel, 500 years before it existed. The *Ten Commandments* also presuppose that the Israelites are already in the Promised Land, even though they were handed out in Sinai.

The ***Ten Commandments***, it is agreed by scholars, can hardly be primitive.

T R Glover

Doubtless believers will attribute these to God’s prescience, but those who are less gullible will put it down to bad editing.

K Koch as long ago as 1962 declared that he could see nothing historical in the biography of Moses, and J Alberto Soggin ( *An Introduction to the History of Israel and Judah* ) is blunt about these biblical accounts:

The biblical sources are rich in anecdotes, popular tradition and elements of folklore... [but] they lack information which is capable of verification by historical investigation: the Pharaohs or other important officials are never named, and the chronological information is imprecise. To this must be added the almost complete silence of the Egyptian sources.

Egyptian papyri from the end of the thirteenth century BC have been found that detail the least things about Egyptian life and events of the time. One note explains that two(!) escaping slaves were diligently pursued across the border, yet there is no record of two million Israelite slaves leaving all at once one night. Many many Egyptian inscriptions on temples and papyri have been read but not one mentions *any* Israelites that were slaves or even legitimate settlers in Egypt. Jewish and Christian scholars have no choice but to recognize the truth of this—it *is* true—but they pretend it does not matter because the biblical story *could be* true, even so! Could it?

## Biblical Chronology

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Seventy people went down to Egypt at the time of Joseph (*Gen* 46:27). After three generations, two million emerged (*Ex* 12:37). The sons of Machir, Joseph's grandson, were born while Joseph was still alive, yet took part in the Exodus, the conquest of Canaan and even the settlement in the Promised Land (*Gen* 50:23; *Num* 32:39-40; *Josh* 13:31;17:1; *Ex* 6:16-20). For this to be true and the period of the wandering in the wilderness to be 40 years, the period of enslavement in Egypt could hardly have been more than another 40 years. In this short time, the Israelites had multiplied until the land of Egypt was "filled with them" (*Ex* 1:7). Each of the Israelite men would have had to have had a harem of wives for this to have been true. No slave could provide for a dozen wives and about 40 children.

The time spent in slavery is not clear:

- *Genesis* 15:13 says 400 years.
- *Genesis* 15:16 says four generations, normally forty years each but here evidently 100 years each.
- *Exodus* 12:40-41 says 430 years.
- The Jewish historian Josephus says it was 215 years.

The date of the Exodus is given in *1 Kings* 6:1 as 480 years before Solomon began to build his temple. Solomon, the biblicalists tell us, began his reign about 960 BC, so the Exodus occurred about 1440 BC. Josephus placed the Exodus in the fifteenth century with the expulsion of the Hyksos, the mysterious Asiatic kings of Egypt. A few years ago, some scholars again favoured such an early date after many years when the thirteenth century was favoured. Garstang dated the fall of the walls of Jericho in 1400 BC, fitting a fifteenth century Exodus, if the Israelites were assumed to have caused that particular destruction of Jericho. Since the Amarna letters spoke of attacks by "Apiru", a word that reminded some philologists of the word "Hebrew", the biblicalists were overjoyed. Egyptian texts from the next century spoke of "Asaru", more joy for biblicalists, who declared them to be the tribe of Asher!

The Jewish scriptures are, however, built around an idealized chronology. 480 years

is twelve Jewish generations of 40 years, each the length of the reigns of both king David and king Solomon. The date when the temple was started is given in *Kings* relative to the “return” from “exile”. It is precisely 480 years earlier. If all this does not signal that the whole tale is made up, it is hard to know what would.

The authors of the mythical Jewish history wanted to put the construction of the first temple at the centre of Jewish history because they were claiming that by restoring the temple and setting up its laws and priesthood, they were re-establishing God’s will! The scriptures were written by people with a vested interest in the authority of the temple, the Jewish priesthood sent from Persia by the Persian kings to establish a loyal buffer state between Persia and Egypt. The Persians under Cambyses had conquered Egypt but it was too large a victim to be easily swallowed, and the Egyptians rebelled constantly against their Persian masters.

The story of Egyptian captivity was initially intended to paint Egypt as the natural enemy of the Jews. The Egyptians would as soon enslave them again. Believing this, the Jews would remain loyal to their kind benefactors and deliverers, the Persians. Cyrus ordered the settling of Judah in about 536 BC but the chronology suggests that the “return” must have been during the fifth century BC, culminating in the reign of shah's Artaxerxes I and Darius II when groups of settlers were moved in, perhaps Nehemiah’s group and given a law by Ezra.

Unfortunately for the historical confirmation of the stylized chronology of the Exodus tale, the Pharaohs in about 1440 BC, when it was supposed to have happened, were strong monarchs, Thutmose III and Amenhotep, who we know were not letting Canaanites go back to Canaan from Egypt but were subjugating the whole territory of Palestine in a phase of colonial expansion. They were actually enslaving Canaanites rather than allowing them to escape slavery.

Inasmuch as there is any truth in Israel being “in Egypt”, it is more likely that notionally they were because Canaan was effectively a part of Egypt for several hundred years thereafter—indeed was almost always in the Egyptian sphere of influence—a fact that the Persians wanted to change. All the indications are that, in the first part of the first millennium BC, Palestine was a colony or vassal of Egypt. Though the degree of domination was slight, the people looked to Egypt for protection.

Pharaoh Shoshenq affirmed Egyptian overlordship in the tenth century BC. An expedition against Sennacherib requested by Judah went out in 701 BC. Pharaoh Necho II led further expeditions around 600 BC. Finally, Judah asked for Egyptian help against the Babylonians, but it either failed or was not given. Egypt dominated Palestine until the “exile” and Egyptian names like Phinehas, Hophin, Assir (Osiris) and Pashur were not unusual in Palestine.

Since the biblical chronology looks impossible, the biblical “scholars” ignore it—they have no qualms about biblical inerrancy if they can find an unlikely historical match by declaring the Word of God slightly wrong! They declare the Exodus to have occurred 200 years later in the thirteenth century BC not the fifteenth century. This later date gets some credence from certain scriptural references that could place the Exodus in the time of Rameses II. Of course, there is no more historical evidence of this than there was for the earlier date, but such lack of evidence is “no proof that it

did not happen” (an argument of their “scholars” that Christians have to get used to hearing).

The absence of evidence, they say, is because there was not one Moses and one Joshua but lots of little Moseses and Joshuas, who have been mythically conflated to create the story but actually slowly migrated into Palestine over about 200 years, too slowly to make any cultural impact on the country that is today detectable in archaeology. Convinced? Not even the biblicists are convinced. Their ultimate justification is that millions of Jews and Christians could not believe something that was not true! Nahum S Sarna writes:

No nation would be likely to invent for itself, and faithfully transmit century after century and millennium after millennium, an inglorious and inconvenient tradition of this nature unless it had an authentic core.

Sarna is a clever man, a professor and editor of the Jewish Publications Society of America, so it is hard to accept that he really thinks the story of the Jewish escape from Egypt and conquest of Canaan celebrated in the most venerable Jewish family celebration of Jewishness, the Passover, is “inglorious”. Presumably he means the many instances, recorded in the wanderings, of Israelite bad will and backsliding that the myth highlights, that “no nation” would want to feature about itself.

This though is the very point, utterly missed or rather not admitted by Sarna. The backsliding story was written by Persian administrators sent to secure the loyalty of the Jews for Persia. Their means was to win the local people to the Persian-styled god, Yehouah, based on Ahuramazda, and away from their traditional Canaanite and Egyptian deities. They used the myth of the true remnant and the backsliding majority, presented then as it was ever after as true history, to depict those loyal to the traditional gods and goddesses as apostates and backsliders from the true God of Israel, Yehouah. Later, the Ptolemies devised the story of Moses, the ancestor of the Israelites who were escaping from Egypt, but nevertheless whose true origin was Egypt! It was meant to put primacy back into Egypt even though the story of slavery in Egypt was, by then, too well entrenched to change.

Consequently, the Jewish scriptures have the boringly uniform theme of warnings of apostasy against the Israelites, and their constant sliding back to their old ways and away from the true (new) god. Since worship of Yehouah in the form of a Canaanite Baal seems to have been one of the ancient Israelite sects, even worship of this old Yehouah was depicted as mistaken. The new god was a universal God of Heaven in the Persian mould and quite alien to the Canaanites of the hill country of Judah.

## **Rameses**

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Unwilling to consider the truth, the biblicists return to their effort to place the Exodus and conquest of Canaan in the 1200s BC. They see the Israelites in the Hyksos, who occupied Egypt from Asia between the 1700s and the 1500s BC, setting up the 15th and 16th dynasties. The resurgent Egyptians, especially in the vigorous 18th dynasty, then enslaved their former foreign masters but, in the reign of Rameses II, they escaped back to Canaan—the Hyksos were the Israelites all along! Rameses is mentioned in *Genesis* 47:11 and in *Exodus* 1:11 and that is proof enough

for the biblical experts.

Biblicists are fond of saying glibly things like, “There is evidence that... so and so”, but then they do not cite either the evidence or the source. The reason is that the evidence is the believer’s faith in biblical truth. The evidence is what the bible says, but much of it has now been shown to be false. Professor Kyle McCarter Jr can write:

Many scholars believe the events described in the story of Joseph have an ultimate basis in historical fact. It has often been supposed... that Joseph lived during the so-called Hyksos period...

Such statements are devoid of any useful meaning except to dispose the reader to believe reliable historians have confirmed the bible. “Believing” and “supposing” means nothing whether someone is an expert or not. These “scholars” believe it because it is in the bible and for no other reason, but they will seek to pretend they have other reasons. And what is “an ultimate basis in historical fact”? Walter Scott’s novels doubtless have an ultimate basis in historical fact but does anyone not believe that they are fiction? We have to conclude that “many scholars” are ignorant. McCarter himself is more honest than the “many scholars” to which he refers, admitting:

It is unlikely that much of the information found in **Genesis** 37 and 39-47 is historically factual.

Rameses (1279-1212 BC) was a vigorous and famous pharaoh known for his building programme and his new city of Rameses featured in the story of Moses. If this is proof of authenticity, we have to assume that the Persian officials were such dunces they could not put a myth in a historical setting, yet the Persians had captured the civilisations of Babylon and Assyria in the land of the two rivers—a civilisation that went back as far as the Egyptians did, and had permanent archives written on clay tablets in their cuneiform script. Knowledge of the Assyrian diplomatic correspondence allowed the Persian governors to write the histories of Israel and Judah, so there is no reason why they should not have known of a suitable pharaoh to allocate to the enslavement period. Further, the towns Rameses and Pithom were still being mentioned in much later texts and so are compatible with a later date.

In Egyptian, Moses means “born of”, and therefore in most names means “son of”. Tutmoses is “born of Thoth” or “son of Thoth”. Rameses is “born of Ra”. Moses left Egypt, so it has always been assumed that his name (Mosha) was also “son of X” with an Egyptian god X suppressed. But the crowd in the fifth century, obliged to hear Ezra address them in a foreign tongue, heard what they thought was “Tooramoshah”. It was Ahuramazda.

The myth of Moses emerging from the river to be the founder of the Jewish state was an invention of the Ptolemies enhanced by the Maccabees who wrote allegories of the foundation of the state that they had founded in fact only then, in the second century BC. They used the legendary birth narrative of a real Mesopotamian king, Sargon I (2334-2279 BC), who ruled over Akkadia—Babylon and Sumer—two millennia before. Is it not strange that the early books of the Jewish scriptures supposedly relating events long before the Jews experienced the period of “exile”

should draw so extensively on Mesopotamian legend?

The death of Rameses II was effectively the end of Egypt because no other strong native monarch ever came to the fore, and the period following his death was chaotic. Perhaps here was a chance for the putative Israelite slaves to escape. Unfortunately, at this point we find a historic reference to the Israelites and they are already apparently in Palestine! Pharaoh Merneptah (1212-1200 BC) commissioned a stele to announce his punishment expedition into Canaan. It tells us that the Israelites were already there (but that he wiped them out saying their “seed was no more”). The biblicists ignore the massacre and conclude that the Exodus must have been in about 1250 BC, the very time when Rameses II was in his prime.

Martin Noth is considered a great scholar and witness to the historicity of the Exodus, but he puts the Exodus in the reign of this last great Egyptian pharaoh, Rameses II, whose empire included all of Palestine as far as Syria and included Sinai. Two stelae have been excavated at Beth Shan that shows that Canaan was under Egyptian control during the time of Seti I and Ramses II. The escaping Egyptian slaves were therefore not escaping at all, but running from one part of the Egyptian empire into another nearby part. Redford says the extra-Biblical evidence discredits the biblical account of the “conquest” of Palestine when they are compared:

Not only is there a complete absence... in the records of the Egyptian empire of any mention or allusion to such a whirlwind of annihilation, but also Egyptian control over Canaan and the very cities Joshua is supposed to have taken scarcely wavered during the entire period of the Late Bronze Age... Far more damaging, however, than this argument from silence is the archaeological record. Sites such as Hormah, Arad, Jericho, Ai, and Jarmuth had indeed suffered violent destruction, but this had been during the Early Bronze Age or at the end of Middle Bronze and during the Late Bronze Age they had lain unoccupied (save for squatters). Others such as Kadesh Barnea, Heshbon, and Gibeon were not to be settled until the Iron Age. ...The Edomite and Moabite kingdoms, which *Numbers* wrongly understands to be already in existence, did not put in an appearance before the ninth century BC.

Donald B Redford

Noth does not regard the two million or so escaping slaves as the nation of Israel, or even tribes—none of which existed—yet they supposedly imposed on the Israelite tribes their own religion. Giovanni Garbini, the Italian historian, considers this a greater miracle than the passage over the Red Sea. The story of the people settling in Palestine, for Garbini, was an adaptation of the story of the settling down there of the Philistines whose name the land still has.

## **The “Apiru”**

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There were about 200 Middle Bronze Age settlements in the Palestinian hill country but six out of every seven of them were abandoned, and few Late Bronze Age sites remained occupied until the Iron Age when over 300 Iron I sites were settled.

Altogether only 25-30 sites were occupied in the Late Bronze II between Jezreel and Beer Sheba.

Israel Finkelstein

The biblical Israelites conquered a hill country empty of settlements, occupied by



nomads. Scholars suspect a long period of drought accounted for this abandonment, the hills being marginal land.

The el-Amarna letters, tablets of cuneiform correspondence from Egyptian colonial governors and foreign kings to the pharaoh, Akhenaten, in the fourteenth century BC, mention raiders called “Apiru” as causing trouble in the colony of Canaan. The biblicists identify the “Apiru” with the Israelites—Hebrews. The el-Amarna letters and the ancient tablets of Ugarit in northern Canaan, indicate that the hill country of Palestine was densely wooded before the Mycenaean drought, and only sparsely populated. They do not mention Israel or Judah, and leave no place where they could have been. Only Jerusalem, Shechem, Hebron and Hazor are mentioned as towns. Jerusalem, in Egyptian records, was a city state ruled by an Egyptian vassal “king” and it is likely to have had the same status until the Palestinian statelets were established.

In the lowlands were many densely populated city states. Each city controlled an expanse of countryside, including some lesser towns, that it exploited—though the exploitation never seemed to lead to rebellion. The rebellions that commonly occurred were palace coups rather than uprisings of peasants. It was these unsuccessful nobles and their supporters or displaced princes that fled to the hillsides and the countryside that were the “Apiru”—outlaws.

Only at the end of the great Mycenaean drought and the deforestation that accompanied and followed it, with the subsequent growth of population, were villages, terracing for gardening, and cisterns to capture water built in the hills. In none of this is there any convincing evidence of any cultural change. In other words, the changes were effected by local people recovering from the drought and not by a strange people, “Apiru” or whoever, entering from elsewhere with a different culture.

The changes noted can be seen in the archaeological record, but another problem is their dating. Biblicists like them to be about 1250 BC but more objective observers see them as being from 900 to 800 BC. The small states that rivalled Israel in the Exodus narrative and the subsequent history of Israel and Judah, namely Edom, Moab and Ammon, seemed not to have existed in the 1200s BC but actually arose about the same time as the states of Israel and supposedly Judah, at the beginning of the first millennium BC as a result of the drought lifting. Israelites *do* seem to have been mentioned on the stele of Merneptah—if it is read correctly—but from the end of the thirteenth century BC silence reigned until the stele of Mesha of Moab in about 800 BC.

If the great Mycenaean drought was the drought of the biblical narrative that drove the Patriarchs into Egypt, they would have been settling there at about the time they should have been leaving. The Mycenaean drought was an extended period of drought in the eastern Mediterranean that caused a ferment of political change from about 1200 BC to about 800 BC. There is every reason why such an extended and devastating period of drought should be remembered in myth, and perhaps that is what we can read in the stories of Abraham and Jacob going down into Egypt, but few of the details are likely to be remembered, only the recollection of the event itself. The notorious biblicist, W F Albright, actually said at the outset of his career in 1918:

The long memory possessed by semi-civilized people for historical fact is a pious

fiction of over-zealous apologists.

Albright soon forgot his own words and set up a loyal school of “over-zealous apologists” that is still vigorous today, albeit with their backs pressed hard against the wall.

The rest of the Patriarchal story is myth, possibly allegorical, devised to explain how the Jews got into Palestine from the region of Harran in the first place. Later, Ptolemaic priests may have read in the temple archives a thirteenth century BC Egyptian record reports that a frontier official allowed some shepherds to cross the frontier and settle near Per-Atum (biblical Pithom?) to keep themselves alive through the ka of the Pharaoh. They could have seen that as explaining what happened to the real Abraham they took to be behind the Persian allegory.

## The Plagues

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Most of the allusions in the Moses saga could otherwise have been had from anyone who knew of everyday life in Egypt. Using bricks for building rather than stone was a necessity in a river delta where no stone was available, and would have subsided into the clay if it had been brought in from upriver. (The pyramids were built at the head of the delta on bedrock.) Knowledge of such matters does not imply authenticity. Indeed, the author of *Genesis* is wrong in several important respects. The east wind does not scorch Egypt, it is the south wind. The east wind from the Arabian desert scorches Palestine. The titles and offices in the story of Joseph are not Egyptian. Potiphar is a genuine Egyptian name but one that did not appear until the last millennium BC not a millennium before. The same applies to Joseph’s Egyptian name.

The plagues on the Egyptians represented the superiority of the Persian God of the Heavens over the old Egyptian and Canaanite gods. The Nile itself, the sun and many other entities, given bizarre animal headed representations, were gods in Egypt and these stood for the pre-exilic gods of the Israelites, some of whom they doubtless were, like the goddesses Hathor and Astarte, and perhaps the god, Thoth (Djehuti, Dwd—pronounced Dude, Jude?). The Pharaoh keeps conceding then relenting—all meant to dissuade the native Israelites of Canaan from vacillating about accepting their imposed god, Yehouah. They could never defy such a god any more than the mighty Pharaoh of Egypt could.

The myth of seven lean years is a Pagan myth known from Egyptian, Akkadian (Gilgamesh) and Canaanite sources, and in the latter is the result of Baal going awol for seven years at a time. Some of the stories about plagues undoubtedly existed already in old Egyptian cautionary tales like *The Admonitions of Ipu-wer* and *The Prophecy of Nefer-rohu*, that tell of calamities that overcome the country when piety is ignored. So the fact that the *Exodus* stories seem to reflect a genuine Egyptian provenance has no more value as proof of their authenticity than has the genuinely eighteenth century British Naval provenance of the Horatio Hornblower stories. These details prove only that the authors of the Moses cycle knew about Egypt.

The final plague of the death of the firstborn is certainly an early misrepresentation or misunderstanding of the death of the first fruits—the succession of earlier troubles led ultimately to the death of the produce of cultivation. Some of the other plagues

such as those of mosquitos and flies are probably meant to be the same. There were probably originally five or seven plagues but errors in recollection or restoration when the library of Nehemiah had to be reconstructed from remnants will have led to repetition and confusion.

Five words in the Jewish scriptures are uniformly translated “plague” in English. They suggest that the author used different sources for his “plagues”. The words are really: an “affliction”, a “blow”, a “wonder”, a “natural sign” and a “supernatural sign”. Such mistranslation is dishonest and hides the fact that the story was probably not originally as uniform as it is made to seem through false translation and editing. Hail, one of the plagues of Egypt, is a real miracle because it is unknown there but is common in Palestine in winter.

## Red Sea and Sinai Wanderings

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The supposed miracle at the Red Sea is agreed by all honest scholars to have been only vaguely set in the eastern Delta or at Lake Sirbonis to provide a plausible setting for it, because, as M Noth realized, there was no known setting for the original tale. The bible says the Israelites did not take the Way of the Philistines. The mention of it is anachronistic because there were no Philistines blocking the way. They had not yet settled, unless this is a later story than it pretends to be. It is! The text also contradicts this because the reference to reeds could only be true where reeds grow, namely in fresh water by the Way of the Sea in the north. They do not grow in the brackish (“bitter”) water to the south. Nothing is convincing in the rest of the itinerary, and some guesses of what it was require the Sea of Reeds to be the Gulf of Aqaba. This absence of agreement and confirmation is typical of mythology purporting to be history.

Even the parting of the Red Sea has detectable layers of tradition. One of the earliest dispenses with the supernatural and simply has the waters blown back by a continuous wind (*Ex 14:21*). This could be a valid explanation if the waters were shallow anyway. Some editor took this and made it into a miracle induced by Moses raising his arm. Another tradition slotted into the earlier one is that the Egyptian chariots were held up as if having to drive through viscous mud or as if the wheels were falling off (*Ex 14:24-25*), and the charioteers decide to cease the pursuit.

Another tradition (*Ex 15:19*) is that the Israelites were crossing a sort of ford but the Egyptian chariots drove headstrong into the sea, presumably expecting it to be shallow but it was deep, and “the Lord brought the waters of the sea upon them” and the charioteers and their officers drowned. Here, the appearance of Mesopotamian words meaning “abyss” and “depth” betrays again that the authors were from Mesopotamia and suggest that this was the original version.

Considering that this was written in Ptolemaic Egypt not earlier than 300 BC, it is curious that Alexander the Great had an identical experience when he set out to conquer Asia about thirty years before! Josephus says of Alexander and his army moving along the coast of Asia Minor:

The Pamphylian Sea retired and afforded them a passage through itself, when they had no other way to go. Josephus, *Antiquities* (Whiston) 2:16:5

In his notes, Whiston preserves the accounts of the four earlier authors who record this event. Callisthenes wrote, according to Eustathius:

The Pamphylian Sea did not only open a passage for Alexander, but, by rising and elevating its waters, did pay homage as its king.

Strabo's account is:

Now about Phaselis is that narrow passage, about the sea side, through which Alexander led his army. There is a mountain called Climax, which adjoins to the Sea of Pamphylia, leaving a narrow passage on the shore, which, in calm weather, is bare, so as to be passable by travellers. But when the sea overflows, it is covered to a great degree by the waves. Now then the ascent by the mountains being round about and steep, in still weather they make use of the road along the coast. But Alexander fell into the winter season, and committing himself chiefly to fortune, he marched on before the waves retired; and so it happened that they were a whole day in journeying over it, and were under water up to the navel.

Arrian's account is this:

When Alexander removed from Phaselis, he sent some part of his army over the mountains to Perga, which road the Thracians showed him. A difficult way it was, but short. However, he himself conducted those that were with him by the sea-shore. This road is impassable at any other time than when the north wind blows. But if the south wind prevail, there is no passing by the shore. Now at this time, after strong south winds, a north wind blew, and that not without the Divine Providence (as both he and they that were with him supposed), and afforded him as easy and quick passage.

Appian, comparing Caesar and Alexander said:

They both depended on their boldness and fortune, as much as their skill in war. As an instance of which, Alexander journeyed over a country without water in the heat of the summer to the oracle of Hammon, and quickly passed over the Bay of Pamphylia, when, by divine providence the sea was cut off.

An even earlier example, recently found but unknown to Whiston, was Sargon's boast:

But I, Sargon... led my army over the Tigris and the Euphrates at the peak of the flood, the spring flood, as dry ground.

Biblicists will say that the original one was that of Moses, having been dated by the chronology of the bible to the second millennium BC. Believers will, of course, believe, but there is no ground for it. Alexander seems to have really done it and been the model for the biblical parting of the sea.

The Sinai wanderings contain nothing to prove them as anything other than mythical.

The story after the miracle, from the Sea to Kadesh, is full of names of places touched on during the journey. They are all, without exception, unknown.

J A Soggin

The number of Israelites is impossible. Most of the place names in the narrative no longer exist, or rather never did. Archaeology offers no support for any of the places, even when they seem identifiable. When the Israelis occupied Sinai, from 1967 to 1982, they feverishly sought evidence of Moses and the Israelite wanderings. Under the pretence of doing salvage excavations to save sites from potential destruction, thousands of sites were examined and surveyed. Not a *matzah* of evidence was found of the mass exodus.

In going into Sinai, the Israelites were not escaping from Egypt. Archaeologist, Eliezer Oren, found that Egypt and Canaan were not separated by an almost impassable desert. The coastal strip from the Delta into Philistia was a ribbon development, a stretched out city, a busy route that had become almost urbanised along its whole length. The Sinai peninsula itself was part of Egypt, was economically important, was the entrance to Egypt from Asia, and so was well fortified and patrolled by the Egyptian army. People moved back and forth into Canaan from Egypt. Pottery found was a mixture of Egyptian and Canaanite. The grave goods found in the characteristic beehive shaped tombs were mixed also.

There was no barrier between Africa and Asia but a well used land bridge. It testifies that Canaan was for long an Egyptian colony, and the south of it retained cultural ties with Egypt even when the statelets there achieved their independence around 850 BC. Even the Canaanite coastal city states to the north, called Phoenicia, were manifestly within the Egyptian sphere of influence as many artefacts plainly show. Nevertheless, if Sinai was the route the escapers took, Soggin says it is certain that they went straight from the Sea of Reeds to Kadesh Barnea, and nowhere else in between.

The promulgation of the Torah at Mount Sinai is presented in detail from *Exodus* 19 to *Numbers* 10, the two books being really a single composition. Clearly linked themes occur before and after this long interpolation, showing it was plonked right in the middle of an existing account of the journey from Egypt to Canaan via Kadesh. The Sinai tradition itself was already a compilation of earlier traditions.

The incident at Sinai must therefore have been interpolated into the tradition of the direct route. The location of Mount Sinai is unknown—the extant tradition is only from the fourth century AD and, for Sinai to have been an active volcano, the story would have had to have been set in Arabia. So, it is a different tradition which, if based on history, could have come from anywhere else at all. It is impossible from the saga to identify the mountain called Sinai, but a sensible guess would be that it was really Zion, the mountain on which the Jerusalem temple was placed.

From the marking of the lintels onward, the story is meant to show how the God of Heaven had given them the land and would solve all the problems of the Israelite people. They hunger, thirst, get demoralized, turn to apostasy, get threatened, and so on, but those who remained loyal to the new god and his earthly agent would be delivered into the land of milk and honey. The story is transparently propaganda

aimed at bribing and shaming people to turn to the God of Heaven, and warning them off their old deities.

The Golden Calf (*Ex 32*) was one of the warnings. The Canaanite religion reflected the climate of the country, according to Soggin. The Samaria ostraca of the eighth century show that Samaria was polytheistic. Theophoric names in Baal as well as Yehouah appear among the Royal officials. The people of biblical Israel seem not to have been intolerant of Baal in their religion. It follows that the intolerance must have come out of Judah, and Judah only became significant in Persian and Hellenistic times. But the bible also says that in Judah, before the destruction of Jerusalem (*2 Kg 23*), Baal was worshipped with Yehouah in the temple. Moreover, the figurines of Asherah and new inscriptions confirm what the fifth century Elephantine papyri said—Yehouah had an associated goddess.

So, the original religion of the hill country was polytheistic, and among its elements undoubtedly was worship of a bull as representative of the god of storms. The rains in autumn made the land bloom, but the vegetation begins to die in the spring and by the heat of the summer only the hardy trees and shrubs were still alive, having evolved to withstand half a year's dessication. Baal, the Canaanite fertility god who in some aspects at least was a bull, also died in the spring when the god of death, Mot, arose for the summer. The autumn rains were the "seed of Baal" that fertilized the earth and the flocks. Mot was vanquished and the people celebrated. The bible depicts this fertility religion as orgiastic, and perhaps it was, but there is no external evidence of it being so. The Canaanite Autumn and Spring festivals of Baal's resurrection and death are the same as the Jewish festivals of Booths and Passover.

Moses complained that the Israelites built a Golden "Calf" (*Ex 32*), a deliberate biblical demeaning of the bull that signified the storm gods who brought rain and fertility. Yehouah was one of them. Yet, at the same time, the biblical authors maintain that Yehouah was giving instructions to his Chosen on how to build two cherubim (*Ex 25:18*). If one figure is idolatry, then why are the other ones not?

The two cherubs are actually the throne of Yehouah, not representations of the God himself, and that is the Judaeo-Christian excuse, but an empty throne or pedestal for an invisible god was not unusual in the ancient near east. Deities, whether gods or goddesses, are commonly depicted standing or sitting on an associated animal acting as the throne or pedestal. Garbini points out that, in the Golden Calf incident, the bull image was the throne or pedestal of the storm god. The mighty god need not be depicted, but when it was, the bull was its footstool. If both cases, bull and cherubim, were simply the throne or pedestal of the god, then Moses's anger looks hypocritical. Moreover, Aaron, whose plan it was to build the bull, was only mildly rebuked by his brother. Is it a case of nepotism by God's chief prophet?

The answer must be that an earlier tradition of the Moses saga was that the bull image was built legitimately, but later, this was considered as idolatry, and the cherubs were substituted expressly as a throne so that there could be no mistake. The well known trick used by priests when needing to change mythology is to tell people that they had misapprehended the myth. This happened here. The tablets of the law were what was important all along but the people had taken to the bull, which was a mistake. So, the bull incident was refashioned into an explicit error in the story.

It left Aaron, who in the original myth had encouraged the people to offer up their gold to make the bull, in limbo, but it was impossible for him to be punished as savagely as others because he had an important role in the cult, as the founder of the priesthood. So he was merely rebuked. The change of the myth also gave the mythologers the chance to bring in the Levites, a supposed tribe, but legitimised as favoured in cult matters in this revised mythical history. Only the Levites remained loyal, giving a justification for a priestly class equivalent to the Magi, while the thousands who were disloyal were murdered. Quite a severe warning, one might think.

From *2 Kings* 23:5, 20; *2 Chronicles* 34:5 and the massacre of 3000 people in the Golden Calf incident, some described as the brothers of the Levites, even though they were supposed to have all remained loyal, it seems that the earliest returners from exile, actually murdered the native priesthood by burning them, or an earlier priesthood of colonists was massacred by a later one. However, these are additions by the Levitical priests in the third century BC. The sheer intolerance of the Jewish God, the savagery and intolerance of His laws and the narrative savagery that the bible describes seems disgusting to religious skeptics, though Christians, who claim to have the same God, seem to think He is a god of love.

The tablets of the law in the episode of the Golden Calf had been inscribed on both surfaces, and were easily broken. Stone tablets were normally inscribed on one surface, being intended to be rested against or built into a structure as a monument, and would have needed a mallet to break. These were not stone tablets but the baked clay tablets used for inscribing cuneiform letters in Mesopotamia. The author was thinking in terms of Mesopotamian practices. When Moses arrived from Sinai with the covenant written on clay tablets, the revised story was that he found the Israelites apostatizing by reverting to the worship of a calf, so he broke the tablets, the Mesopotamian way of formally breaking a contract.

What is most remarkable, Garbini points out, is that no other oriental codex “from the Sumerian to that of Hammurabi, from the Assyrian to the Hittite” lays down laws of religious belief. While *Exodus* and *Leviticus* lays down the death penalty for any number of religious misdemeanours, equivalent legal systems of other countries in the ancient near east do not even mention religion.

The reason is the very polytheism of these countries and times that the monotheists hate. Polytheistic societies did not prescribe who or how people should worship. Towns or nations might have been under the protection of a specific god, but that was no excuse to offend all the others with the risk of divine vengeance despite the protection of their particular lord. Kings of countries were confident of the general piety of the people, and need not penalise them for worshipping this god or that. They could use any or all of them for their political purposes. Only a country working to impose a particular god, or type of god, needed to enforce it in law, and this could not have happened in Palestine until after the Persian conquest.

# The Sinai Covenant

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How old is the idea of the “covenant” between Israel and Israel’s God—Shaddai, Jahweh, Adonai, Jehovah, however he is named?

T R Glover

The Passover myth of *Exodus* 1-15 gave a new reason for the celebration of the seasonal new year when the sun crossed the celestial equator. The opportunity was there to constantly remind the Israelites that the Egyptians were their historic enemies. So the old spring equinoctial festival was given a new spin by associating it with the Exodus from Egypt and bondage. With this constant reminder, the Jews would become the ideal sentinels for Persia on the boundary of Egypt and Asia. Since this was also closely associated with the covenant of God with the Israelites on Sinai, the festival also reminded them that they were committed to a covenant with the new Persian god, and therefore with Persia.

If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people. For all the earth is mine. **Exodus** 19:5

All the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord. **Exodus** 19:8

In the third month after the Exodus, the community arrived at Sinai, where they were to enter into a covenant with God. Covenants with their gods had been commonly sealed by the peoples of Mesopotamia for centuries. They were ways of imposing law on to the people, especially subjugated people. There is not a scholar of the Ancient Near East who does not know this, but all pretend that the covenants in the bible are a different matter entirely. They insist all the covenants and all the gods are phony except for this one with the God of the Jews and Christians. This one is genuinely agreed with God!

The Mitanni, in a treaty with the Hittites of about 1375 BC, as in typical covenant treaties, calls on the gods to witness its terms. The Hittites called on the sun god. The Mitanni called on Mitra (Mithras). The name Mithras is from the Indo-European root “Mihra”, meaning “friend” and “contract”, but which itself is from “mei”, meaning “exchange”.

The friendship or contract offered by Mithras to his devotees was an exchange between unequal partners with Mithras the greater one. Friendship or contracts imposed obligations on the parties. Mithras oversaw the affairs of his worshippers, and established justice for them. In return, his worshippers had to be upright in their dealings with others.

Because Mithras was “lord of the contract”, a title frequently applied to him, the Persians invoked Mithras to preserve the sanctity of legal contracts. They associated him with fire, and like both Indian and Roman worshippers, the Persians concluded contracts before fires so that they might be made in the presence of Mithras.

Mithras was a moral god concerned with the rightness of the action, and upholding the sanctity of the contract even when it was made with those who would break it.



When traditional national gods looked after the welfare of the state and its wealthiest members, Mithras was the first moral deity who stood up for justice for all.

A relief of the first century BC shows Mithras shaking hands with a King Antiochus. Earlier Cyrus had shaken hands with Marduk in Babylon, and with Yehouah, according to the bible. Many such images exist of covenants being arranged by the ruler (on behalf of his subjects!) with a god and being sealed by the exchange of a ring. Here Moses comes down with tablets—the medium of writing in Mesopotamia not Arabia, Egypt or Palestine—but they served the same purpose, to seal the agreement.

The inspiration for the covenant and the particular form it took may be found in the political treaty of vassalage that frequently regulated international relations at the time. The suzerain (monarch) would make a contract with a vassal state, assuring it of protection in return for the vassal's exclusive and unreserved loyalty.

Nahum S Sarna

Israel was committing itself to fealty to Persia through the Persian God they were being obliged to adopt. A breach of loyalty to the god was a breach of loyalty to Persia.

Yehouah is shown calling upon Moses to occupy the land of Canaan (*Ex 3:8;6:6-8*). He makes no promise of a covenant. The various credal summaries of the Exodus story in the scriptures (*Dt 26:5-9;6:21-23; Josh 24:2-13*) do not include the story of the receiving of the covenant at Sinai. It looks as though the Sinai covenant was interpolated into the Exodus tale after *Joshua* and *Deuteronomy* were written. They have the stylistic qualities of the Deuteronomic writers. Several hymns and psalms that refer to the Exodus might also be expected to mention the Sinai covenant also, but do not (*1 Sam 12:8; Pss 78;105;135-136*). *Psalms* 106 mentions the Golden Calf but not the covenant. A statement definitely post-Persian conquest (*Neh 9*) does mention it. So the covenant looks to be associated with a late group of “returners” —probably Ezra's priests. The original purpose of the Exodus story was simply to justify the “returners” occupying the land of Israel.

Wellhausen, who shrewdly realized that the prophets preceded the law, thought that the covenant had been written into the Mosaic history at the time of the prophets. He was a few centuries out, the prophets and the law both being fifth century but the prophets preceding the law by about half a century or so. The purpose of the biblical prophets was to counter the prophets of the Canaanite Baals, probably shamans who prophesied under the influence of intoxicants or drugs like the Delphic oracles of Greece. Amos decries Amaziah.

Evidently one of the first ways the Persian deportees tried to influence the Canaanites was to introduce the ethical prophets of the God of Heaven to counter the traditional prophets of the country. The prophets were not interested in particular ethical matters but merely in loyalty and obedience to God. The sins that are mentioned are meant to show up the pre-Persian kings of Israel. They are oppression, cruelty, exploitation, greed and dishonesty. They raised these matters, though they were not unusually interested in them, simply to get over their main message—to get people to accept this strange God. If they accepted Him, they would be loyal and obedient to the god of the Persians and therefore would be reliable and lawful subjects. The main sin of the people was not to accept Yehouah as their salvation.

Later the covenant was imposed by the Persians, delivered to the people of Israel as a historic covenant by the founder of the Israelites with their God in the depth of antiquity. Since then, of course, many had stumbled but their God had remained faithful. The references to the covenant in the so-called eighth century prophets are few and show that the covenant followed their writings, the few references there are being redactional. Isaiah and Micah hardly mention the Sinai saga. The covenant ( *berith* ) tradition has been said to be the work of the Deuteronomist.

Bizarrely some Christians decided that God had used as his model of a covenant the form used by Hittite monarchs at about the time the Sinai covenant was supposed to have happened. G E Mendenhall claimed an exclusively congenial context for the covenant in that the Hittites ceased as a power in about 1200 BC. This proved that the chronology was correct and the treaty was genuine! They have not explained why God should have chosen to copy Hittite treaties with a large body of Egyptian slaves who had probably never heard of the Hittites anyway.

And, if the God of Israel could make use of Hittite treaty forms, why not other nations closer to the heartland of the Hittites than Sinai and Palestine—like the Assyrians? In fact, that is just what did happen, the form of the Hittite treaties (which even themselves were common to earlier states) becoming the standard treaty form of the Near East for a thousand years. Its use in *Exodus* is therefore more likely to be through the Assyrians and Persians.

The form and ideology of the divine covenant in Israel was based on the pattern of the treaties between the suzerain and his vassal which were prevalent in the Ancient Near East.

Eryl W Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics*

Mendenhall found nine elements in the Hittite treaties but not all were always present, certainly in other Ancient Near East treaties that were considered based on the Hittite form. The central elements, to which any of the remaining elements might be added, are:

1. A list of the gods of the suzerain and the vassal as witnesses to the treaty.
2. Stipulations laid upon the vassal as conditions for the treaty from the suzerain—tribute, non-hostility to other vassal states of the suzerain, not allying with any other power while allied with the suzerain, extradition, provision of soldiers and appearance in the suzerain's court as required.
3. A preamble, a historical review and a procedure for punishing the vassal if the treaty were violated in which the I/thou forms of address were used respectively for the suzerain and the vassal.
4. A list of curses and blessings to accompany the possible outcomes.
5. A formal oath of allegiance arranged at a public ceremony.
6. Informing the vassal's subjects by depositing the treaty in their temples and arranging for the treaty to be read on prescribed occasions.

The first element is illustrated by Assyrian treaties with the Medes and the Aramaeans. Listed along with the deities are often natural objects such as heaven, earth, mountains, springs and rivers, winds and clouds. In a treaty of Rameses II there occurs a list of a thousand gods to witness the treaty and then, "the mountains and rivers of the land of Egypt, the sky, the earth, the great sea, the winds, the

clouds”. In the covenants of Yehouah, no such a list is appropriate because Yehouah is the only god, so only Yehouah himself appears as a witness and guarantor of the covenant. And yet heaven and earth do appear too, just as they do in the old treaties (*Dt* 4:26;30:19;31:28;32:1; *Isa* 1:2). McCarthy ( *Treaty and Covenant* ) says the whole of *Deuteronomy* has been influenced by Ancient Near Eastern treaty traditions.

Historical reviews often feature in God’s covenants and instructions to his people. The treaties review the benefits conferred on the people of the subject state by the suzerain and the reactions expected of the vassal. In the scriptures these are paralleled by lists of the benefits conferred on His people by God and what he expects of them in return. In these God has the role of an eastern emperor and Israel that of a vassal state.

Most interesting is that the relationship between the suzerain and the vassal in the treaties is expressed in terms of blood kinship. The suzerain is the father and the vassal the son! The relationship Father to Son therefore signified the relationship of an overlord to his subordinate. Equal parties were called brothers. Compare their use in the scriptures (*Dt* 32:19; *Isa* 1:2; *Jer* 3:19; *Mal* 1:6). In the scriptures sons are condemned for seeking help from a third party (*Isa* 30:1) thus breaking the fidelity to the father (suzerain) that excluded dealings with others. In the Exodus story, God describes Israel as his first born son (*Ex* 4:22) thus linking an important feature of the treaty protocol with the Sinai covenant.

Christian commentators see the family relationship used by the prophets to depict God’s relationship with Israel (*Hos* 1-3;11:1-9; *Amos* 3:1-2; *Isa* 1:2-3) as an alternative, more personal way of expressing a relationship than the treaty forms, apparently failing to realize that family relations were used in the treaties.

Curiously, a word used often in the covenant treaties and in the scriptures clearly relates to the word for Passover (“pesach”, understood to mean “protect”). The verb “to rebel” (PSC) or revolt against an overlord appears frequently meaning the subject state’s failure to meet the suzerain’s stipulations (and forgo his protection?). It is not a word in general usage but a diplomatic or political term, so could hardly have been used in a religious context without a deliberate intention to use a diplomatic form. The scriptures use it in just the proper sense (*Isa* 1:2).

Besides diplomatic language, legal language is a feature of the covenants. The authors seem to be intent on making God as witness and upholder of the covenant sound like a judge. The agreement is considered as a legal entity between God and His people, and God is one of the parties, the witness and the judge in the breach. God often has the role of judge in the psalms, passing sentence on Israel and other nations.

*The Decalogue* (*Ex* 20:1-17) follows this sort of plan. The treaties were called the “words” of the suzerain and *The Decalogue* begins appropriately, “And God spoke these words... “ God declares himself so He is the divine witness. He states His historical benefit to Israel in bringing her out of bondage in Egypt, then lists a catalogue of stipulations and obligations he required in return—the commandments. A required stipulation in the Near Eastern treaties was that the vassal would not seek any other overlord, and this appears as the first of the commandments. Some of the later proscriptions on injuring other people match the proscription in the treaties on

injuring others of the suzerain's sons—his other vassals. Elsewhere, the commandments are inscribed on tablets and deposited in the Ark of the Covenant, a mobile temple. There are also provisions for re-reading the words (*Dt* 31:9-13). Curses and blessings are dotted about freely in the scriptures and so are not separately listed. There are other examples (*Ex* 19:3-8;24:3-8;34:10-28).

Typically, some biblicists will not hear of the covenant being a Near Eastern treaty unless the form is a perfect fit. The agreement between the covenant and the ancient treaty form is far from rigid for several reasons. The treaties were not of a rigid form, God was a party to the covenant and was the only admissible witness, the national form of the treaty of Persian times has been changed to a set of personal commandments after the Persian defeat by Alexander, and finally the books of the bible have been re-written again in the Hellenistic period, notably by the Ptolemies and Maccabees. So purity of form of anything in the scriptures is hardly to be expected. Even so, the treaty form of the covenant is still evident and it is still, to this day, deposited in temples (synagogues or churches) and is read out in public. Darius and Artaxerxes would have been amazed!

## The Covenant as a Vassalage Treaty

### The Covenant as a Vassalage Treaty

Elements of the Treaty	Statements of the Covenant		
	Ex 20-31	Deut 1-32	Joshua 24
1. Preamble: the author	20:1	1:1-5	24:2
2. Historical Review: showing the benefactions of the suzerain	20:2	1:6-3:29	24:2-13
3. Stipulations: obligations on the vassal...			
a. ...essential	20:3-17; 22-26	4,5-11	24:14-15
b. ...additional	21-23, 25-31	12-26	24:16-25
4. Propagating the treaty locally...			
a. ...placing the treaty in the vassal's sanctuary	25:16; 40:22	31:9,24-26	24:26
b. ...publicly reading: to the subject people		31:10-13	
5. Witnesses: the gods—Yehouah alone in the bible—and natural phenomena	24:4	31:28; 32:1	24:22; 27
6. Curses and Blessings	Lev 26:14-20, 3-13	28:15-68, 1-14; 31:16-22; 27;29	24:19-20

Inasmuch as they are based on treaty forms, McCarthy sees them as fitting first millennium BC types not second millennium ones. Thus *Exodus* 24 is confirmed by a rite, the later practice, not by an oath. Moses in the fifteenth or thirteenth centuries BC would not have known about or followed a Hittite practice but a Moses

myth composed in the fifth century could obviously have followed the practices current then in international treaty forms.

The treaty patterns in *Deuteronomy* are perhaps closer to the common form and are universally accepted as first millennium BC. The Exodus story and the Sinai tradition has also accreted later additions, for example by the priestly writer (*Ex* 19:3-8;20:22-23:19, the *Book of the Covenant* 24:15b-31:18;35-40; *Num* 1-10). Even *The Decalogue* (*Ex* 20:2-17) has been added because the passage in which it is set reads more comfortably when it runs from *Exodus* 19:19 directly to *Exodus* 20:18. What remains when these additions are excized is simply a theophany, with perhaps the earliest form of the covenant in *Exodus* 24:3-8, where the “blood of the covenant” and the sacrificing and sprinkling by young men rather than priests sounds primitive—there apparently being no priests—and not from the hand of the Deuteronomist. It is also depicted as simply a theophany elsewhere in the scriptures (*Dt* 33:2; *Jg* 5:5; *Ps* 68:9), no mention being made of the law or covenant in references to Sinai outside the Pentateuch. It seems to represent an early stage of the “return”.

To this primitive covenant, all the law codes were added subsequently, mostly, of course, by the priestly writers possibly in the Ptolemaic period. Prophets preceding Jeremiah are mainly silent about Moses and rarely use the word “berith” (covenant), but criticize the people for disobedience. Elements of the treaty forms might nevertheless be present in the prophetic writings through their use of woes, judgements curses perhaps reflecting the curses section of the treaties. The legal parts have also been related to the prophetic lawsuit (*rib*). The Prophets could not have avoided talking about Moses and the Sinai covenant had it really been a long known and central element of Jewish history.

The word “berith” is a word of the Deuteronomist school of “returners”, for whom Sinai becomes Horeb, but they had noticed the earlier theophany with its crude covenant and altered it to fit their improved ideas. Sinai obvious refers to the god, Sin, suggesting that the people who composed the original were formerly worshippers of Sin and were from Harran. Ai is another god from Syria, who might have been the same as Ia (Yehouah) or confused with him, and so Sinai means “Yehouah is Sin”.

## **The Ark of the Covenant to Balaam**

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The Ark of the Covenant is constructed as the place where the tablets of the renewed covenant will be kept. The Ark is similar to the devices used by nomadic tribes of the time for housing and transporting their idols. Cherubim were inscribed on the sides of the Ark, the winged figures that represented the Persian god, Ahuramazda. The myth is plainly invention because the wealth and skill implied for its construction was hardly what impoverished bricklaying slaves would have. Someone has noticed this and has explained the discrepancy by stating that the Israelites had robbed their Egyptian masters (*Ex* 12:36) when they left Egypt!

No less a scholar than the great Julius Wellhausen pointed out that the story of the tabernacles is an idea of the priests retrojected in history. That is what practically the whole of the Jewish scriptures is too.

The horde of Israelites stayed at Kadesh-Barnea for 38 years and must have left some

sort of detectable impact upon their surroundings surely. Archaeology can find no trace of anything there before the tenth century BC, but a coarse sort of pottery called Negevite ware found there was dated to the tenth century, seeming to support biblical dates. The trouble was it was found alongside decorated Edomite pots that could not have been earlier than the seventh century, many centuries after Moses and a great horde of tribesmen and their families had supposedly lived there for a long period. So, the model of the Israelites on the move has to be much later. Greek instances of mobile cities admittedly go back to about 1200 BC, but are better known in the fourth century BC.

The Greek tyrants of the late archaic age signified their inter-state family ties through names. Herodotus remarked that Pisistratus was named after the son of Neleus of Pylos as a way of indicating his family's connexion with the early Athenian kings, Melanthus and Codrus. Parentage was essential to one's identity in antiquity, not only in terms of heredity but the degree of citizenship—full membership, with its rights and privileges, or slavery, and a range of classes, each consenting to its status through birth, between these two poles. It was effectively a caste system. Land ownership was important to the communities of the Greek city-states. It was often a *sine qua non* of full membership in the community.

Those who lacked the wherewithal of citizenship became wanderers—"planomenoi". Matthew F Trundle, discussing Greek mercenaries in *Ancient History Bulletin* says:

Those who had suffered exile from their native state theoretically had lost their identity as well as their community. Exile was a theme of Greek politics... Exiles were on the increase in the Greek world of the fourth century BC.

Wanderers and their families formed moving communities. They had no land and no traditions. The armed male heads of households and their sons had an original status from their position before their exile or loss of landholding rights. Thereafter, they maintained their status simply as a "*kyrios*" having authority within the "*oikos*". Such wanderers joined together to form larger communities, becoming wandering cities. The Sea People evidently organized this way. They too were moving cities.

Similar were the roving armies overseas of the fourth century where the armed body of men formed the assembly of "citizens" politically organized below the army's commanders who made up the political council. Camp followers and families, as with any army, accompanied them. G B Nussbaum illustrated the mercenary army as the rootless city-state using as his example the Cyreans who Cyrus the Younger had employed to overthrow his brother, the Great King of Persia, in 401 BC. The mobile city of the Israelites in the exodus reflects this model.

The Moses saga continues with further rebellions of the wilful Israelites overcome, and the Levites under Aaron again being confirmed as the upholders of God. Scholars have seen in the points of this story (*Num* 16-17) a disguised history of Levitical struggle. Doubtless all of it and some of the stories of the Patriarchs are allegories of the struggles of the settlers, against the Am ha-Eretz and against each other, to get control of the colony from the edict of Cyrus to the final establishment of the new religion about a hundred years later. Moses is an allegorical Ezra, the Persian administrator who finally establishes the new religion.

*Nehemiah* 8 clearly describes Ezra reading the law, specified as the law of Moses, to the people at the Feast of Booths. If Moses delivered this law in 1300 BC and it was ever after considered so important, why did Ezra have to re-introduce it to the Israelites in the fifth century BC? The plain fact is that this is when the law was introduced to the Israelites. It is most likely that Ezra was Moses, insofar as he it was who introduced the law to the Canaanites of the Palestinian Hill Country.

In *Numbers* 20:21-29, the Israelites fight a battle and occupy the region of Heshbon. No archaeological evidence of any presence before 900 BC has ever been found there. Of the biblical names for people living in the region, Canaanite, Amorite and Hittite were simply alternative designations for Canaanites, the latter two being Mesopotamian words for Syrian people. Nothing is known in history about the Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites and Jebusites who also appear. It must be considered that these are allegorical names for factions that opposed the “returners”.

The story of Balaam is introduced. A seventh century BC inscription mentioning Balaam has been uncovered in Jordan. It seems that he was a Moabite Merlin, but he could have had nothing to do with the thirteenth century Moses as Moab did not exist then.

Most of the cities along the alleged route that the Israelites travelled immediately before reaching the Jordan River—Iyyim, Divon, Almon-divlatayim, Nevo, and Avel Shittim (*Num* 33:45-50)—have not been located, and those that have been found did not exist at the time of the supposed exodus. Yet Charles Krahmalkov notes what are apparently the same names on the walls of the Egyptian temple of Karnak, recorded in the same order as in the bible. If the places are marked on the temple walls in precisely the same order, and are so obviously places on the way from Egypt to Canaan, then that could have been the source of them used by the much later author.

Graffiti found on the walls of the Chapel of Achoris at Karnak are dated to the fourth century BC. The first five names are Greek and a further fifty-five names are in Cypriote syllabic script. They probably were the names of mercenaries from Cyprus stationed at Karnak. More Greeks died fighting in the service of the Persians than died in the defence of Greece in the Persian wars. The Greeks in the army of Darius III fought loyally for him against Alexander the Great. Greeks in the Persian army and Alexander’s Greeks must then have seen the walls of the temple at Karnak. By the third century, the Ptolemaic Greeks had integrated with the Egyptians, and been able to translate the inscriptions at Karnak for inclusion in the newly written *Septuagint*.

## Successive “Returns”

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The Israelite religion before the Babylonian conquest was Canaanite. The local god was called Yehouah but his title was the same as that of other Canaanite gods, and it still is. His title was Baal—Lord! Admitting this, biblicists like to think that the Canaanite version of Yehouah was an aberration, a falling back of the people to idolatry just as they had done when Moses ascended the mountain and they immediately took to bull worship. The experts tell us the prophets in the 800s, 700s and 600s constantly warned the people to return to the true god, the God introduced by Moses, but they failed to mention Moses, and the people failed to take any notice.

The truth is that the books of the prophets are all post-exilic, written as warnings to the natives in Palestine to back the new god the Persians were trying to introduce as the true God of the Israelites, and His temple. The strategy was to pretend that the people had always been ready to backslide from the proper worship of the true god, so they invented a history to prove it, but Moses was not important in it, if he appeared at all. Not only that, but they wrote pseudepigraphic prophecies that the true god would punish them for their backsliding. Since they were writing these after the events or after mythical events had been invented, they were able to put convincing prophecy into the mouths of the prophets. The Persians depicted Jewish prophets in the days of the monarchy as incessantly warning the people not to apostatize. They always did! The saga of the Exodus must have been one of the last additions to the history.

The priest-administrators had to justify their own position, the situation of the state as a loyal subject of the Persian king and the wretchedness of the people who had to find tribute for the temple and the Persian king out of their stony soil. Their wretchedness was God's punishment for them for previously backsliding, but with the grace of God and their own commitment to obedience, they might be saved.

The Persians covered their introduction of new laws and histories by pretending to find lost books of scripture, like *Deuteronomy* (Second Law—so-called by Christians: First Law, really), which like the prophets they again back-dated into the monarchy. Ezra introduced these as new laws that the people could not even understand—the law of Moses. They are now all in the Jewish scriptures as the priestly rules of temple worship and sacrifice.

We are confronted with highly idealized attempts at reconstructing the past, the aim of which was not to transmit a precise framework for the pre-exilic history, far less for the pre-monarchial history of Israel and Judah.

J Alberto Soggin

Textual analysis of the scriptures long ago found different sources, notably the J, E, P and D sources in the Pentateuch. The J and E sources, mainly of *Genesis*, are considered the oldest layer of writing in the bible, J standing for the use of Yehouah as the name of God, and E standing for the use of El or Elohim as the name of God. We have two gods here at the very least, and “Elohim” is an odd name for a single god because it has the form of a plural noun. Once again, these distinctions mean nothing to those innocents that read the bible in English, because the translators eliminate this implication of polytheism by translating all of them as God or Lord.

There is no avoiding the fact that there must have been two schools or more involved in writing the stories of *Genesis* and attributing them to quite different gods. El was the Canaanite high god, as is known from extra-biblical sources, and Yehouah or Yeho was a lesser god, identified even in the bible as a son of El. The presence of both in parts of the scriptures must testify to a disagreement among the “returners” about which of the Canaanite gods to make into the God of Heaven.

The god, El, seems the obvious choice as the high god, but people evidently were more devoted to their Baals, the sons of the high god, as being more personal and accessible. The local Baal was Yehouah. Different versions of the early books of the bible must have been written by the first “returners” to suit the different factions, but



Yehouah seems to have soon prevailed, and the state came to be called Judah and the people Yehudim—those who worship Yehouah—instead of Israel—“we are the sons of El”—and Israelites.

Julius Wellhausen long ago pointed out that Israel and Judah were never two separate small states but were the same place—the hill country of Palestine. Israel was its name before the Persian administration and Judah its name during and after it.

There might be traces in *Genesis* of ancient Canaanite myth, though most of the biblical mythology is Mesopotamian. Familiar material to the Canaanites will at first have been written into the new polemical books of the “returners” to allow the Am ha-Eretz to identify with the re-cast mythology. The next phase of “returners” were the ones who discovered *Deuteronomy* and wrote the *Deuteronomic History*, inserting new references into the earlier books at key points to set the framework for the additions. This school has also been involved in writing *Hosea*, *Jeremiah*, *Ezekiel* and perhaps *Amos*. *Haggai*, and proto-*Zechariah* are from shortly after the “exile” and *Third-Isaiah*, *Obadiah* and *Malachi* are all later still.

The book of *Deuteronomy* was supposedly found by Josiah before the “exile” but was really introduced by a new group of “returners”. The discovery was cast back in time two hundred years to shortly before the defeat of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, a time that nobody would remember because the rulers who knew and recorded history had all been deported. It allowed the administrators to claim that the reforms had already been started by kings before the deportation by the Babylonians, and were not being imposed by the Persian Satraps. The Deuteronomic school revised the works of the earlier less effective “returners” and effectively produced the first complete version of the Jewish scriptures. Probably later additions were the extensive Priestly laws meant to enslave the people to raise tithes.

*Deuteronomy* is the origin and first book of the bible. It is the law read out to the sobbing people by Ezra. It then had to be read out regularly to the people, being the basis of modern church services. The colonists added to *Deuteronomy* a pseudo-history, the Deuteronomistic History, that depicted the kings and people of the country as being inveterate apostates from the true God. It gave lots of material to the priests to offer to the people in their exhortations that accompanied the readings of the law. The earlier “returners” had allegorized some of the troubles they had experienced in the century before Ezra arrived. It made up *Judges* and parts of *Joshua*. Earlier allegories of the arrival of people from Syria (Aram) were combined with myths brought with them from Syria and Mesopotamia. Later they were to make up *Genesis*. The Egyptian priests under the Ptolemies, who themselves sought to use the temple state for their own ends, added *Exodus* and *Numbers*, and *Leviticus* was added about the same time to codify all the additional laws that the priests of the temple cult, now independent of the Persians, wanted to generate riches faster. The first four books of the *Pentateuch* were additions to the original one, *Deuteronomy*, as was the beginning of *Joshua*, and the history, and all were substantially edited by P, the priestly school to seem coherent.

## Historical Criteria

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The biblicists use different criteria for the Jewish scriptures than they use for other historical accounts in the ancient Near East in the same period. They recognize that Egyptian Pharaohs glorified themselves and their reign by building grand temples inscribed with their public benefits and deeds, and monuments and stelae similarly inscribed. Other great kings of the ancient Near East did the same. None of this applies to the Jewish scriptures, however. While all these other public declarations are heavily laced with propaganda, the bible is true!

Unfortunately, it is just as much propaganda as the others—or more so. It was aimed at winning over a dissident people to the side of the Persians. The Persian kings realized they could not get a subjugated people to love them but they thought they could get them to love a common god—the universal God of Heaven. That was why they wrote the books of the Jewish bible. Their ploy worked far better than they had reason to expect. Doubtless they would be astonished to know that their propaganda still survives though the civilisation that founded it was destroyed 2,300 years ago by the Greeks.

In all honesty, there is no even remotely contemporary evidence, literary, inscriptional or archaeological of Moses or the Exodus outside of the Jewish scriptures, and the internal chronology of the scriptures is useless historically because it is manifestly symbolic. Despite this utter lack of evidence, the biblicists tell us it does not mean the account is not true.

Herodotus, a Greek writer born in Asia Minor about 484 BC, was known as the Father of History, even though the work of Moses was supposed to have been written a thousand years earlier. In his famous *Histories*, written about 450 BC, he knew of the peoples of Syria but did not mention Jerusalem or Judah nor the Jewish settlements in Egypt. Notionally, based on the bible, the two peoples had been in contact on the Nile Delta of Egypt since before 1600 BC, but Greek writers betray no knowledge of these Egyptian Jews. Herodotus was silent on Abraham, Israel, David, Solomon, Moses, the temple, and all of that famous long “history”. The fact is that Jews and their Temple did not exist when Herodotus wrote. They were not founded until the time of Darius II in 417 BC.

Aristotle did not mention the Jews, not even in connexion with his comment on the Dead Sea, but his student, Clearchus of Soli, around 300 BC, quoted Aristotle as describing a Jew he had met in Asia Minor. This Jew, like many subsequent ones, tried to compare favorably the principles of the Greeks with the teachings of the Jewish God. Clearchus is the earliest Greek writer to give a decent transliteration of “Jerusalem”, but, despite his information, the Greeks remained unaware of the Jews as a separate nation in the Levant. The extract implied he was the first of his kind met by the Greeks. Alexander brought Jews and Greeks together, and revealed the Jews to the Greek world. From the date of Clearchus, the Jew he spoke of might really have been met after Alexander’s invasion, making even more significant the Greek world’s ignorance of the Jews before it.

Nothing is known of the Jews until Alexander won the battle of Issus (333 BC), took Tyre and Gaza by siege, then went to Egypt and the oracle of Ammon. Josephus

relates that the High Priest Jaddua refused to obey the conqueror's summons from Tyre because of his oath of fealty to the Persians. To punish him Alexander marched on Jerusalem from Gaza, and Jaddua, told by God in a dream, met him at Sapha, dressed in his robes of office and wearing the mitre bearing the sacred name. To the astonishment of his generals, Alexander saluted Jaddua and adored the name, for Jaddua had appeared to him in a dream in Macedonia and urged him to march against the Persians. Alexander went with the High Priest into the temple, offered sacrifices, was shown the prophecies of Daniel concerning himself, and gave permission to the Jews, not only of Judah but of Media and Babylonia, to live under their own laws.

No other writer states that Jerusalem was visited by Alexander, and it looks strange that a gentile would be allowed to sacrifice in the temple of the peculiarly exclusive Jews. Moreover, the prophecies of Daniel were not yet written. Typically of biblical prophecies, they were written about 160 years later! Arrian mentions no detour from Gaza to Jerusalem but rather implies that Alexander went straight to Egypt. Some recollection of such a visit would surely have been preserved by other Jews. Alexander appears by name in only one Jewish book (*1 Macc* 1:1-8; 6:2) with no suggestion of a visit to Jerusalem, or of special treatment for the Jews. Nor do the histories of his expedition mention any acquaintance with the Jerusalem temple, its ceremonies and its books, even though they carefully describe his visit to Gordium after the battle of Issus, his relations with the oracle of Amon, and his worship of Bel at Babylon. Nor do those Greeks who took an interest in Jerusalem once it had been revealed to the west ever mention Alexander's visit.

Not until the second century before Christ, did Hellenist historians and tragic and epic poets—Demetrius, Eupolemus, Artapanus, Aristeeas, Ezekiel, Pseudo-Philo, and Theodotus—begin to describe Jewish history, more than a thousand years after it was supposed to have started, and sang of the Exodus, Jerusalem, and the rape of Dinah. The translation of the Jewish law into Greek explains this burst of activity and interest in the Jewish scriptures and rabbis. It took decades and, in a sense, was never finished because the Jewish scriptures were never finished. The *Septuagint* began being compiled in the third century BC by the then rulers of Judah, the Ptolemaic Egyptians, and was not fully completed until the middle of the second century BC, as the *Jewish Encyclopedia* admits—perhaps even later still. Nothing at all had been heard of Judaism or the Jewish scriptures before this time.

In the same period, Manetho and Berosus wrote books in Greek professing to give accounts of Egyptian and Babylonian religion respectively, but, what is known of them, in the light of modern discovery, is largely inaccurate. The Jewish one, though, was divinely accurate—it is the *Old Testament*! It was a time when to have an ancient civilization was a matter of national pride. Kings were anxious to prove their nation had been civilized longest. Manetho and Berosus were contemporaries, Manetho writing for Ptolemaic Egypt, and Berosus for Seleucid Babylon (Chaldaeae). Both copied Herodotus and both had the same aim—to puff their nation's history, as Georgius Syncellus also thought.

Manetho, an Egyptian priest from Sebennytyos ("City of the Sacred Calf"!) in the Delta, closely associated with the court of Ptolemy I Soter and Ptolemy II Philadelphus, wrote his history of Egypt in Greek with this nationalistic purpose in mind. It is this exaggerated book that provided the Egyptian list of kings still relied

upon by Egyptologists. In it he incidentally related the fables of the Jews. Lysimakhos of Alexandria wrote similarly, and no one knows when Manetho's work stopped being glossed by copyists and editors, until Josephus cited it frequently in *Against Apion*, three centuries later. What he wrote could have been the earliest form of the Jewish scriptures as we know them. The great Jewish leader (Osarseph, Moses) was heard of nowhere else before. It seems significant that Manetho was involved in the creation of another religion besides that of the Jews, helping the Greek priest, Timotheus of Eleusis, to set up the cult of Serapis!

John Dillery (*The First Egyptian Narrative History: Manetho And Greek Historiography*) explains that Manetho's tale of Osarseph and the lepers is a *Königsnovelle*, an Egyptian narrative form that focuses an historical event on a particular king of Egypt. The acts of the king and their outcome are what Egyptian history is all about. Manetho's tale of the lepers and the stories in the *Pentateuch* are of this sort of plan. A message, a dream or a prophecy comes to pharaoh—as in the Joseph romance—and is raised in council. They form a plan that the pharaoh must act upon with some urgency, but the planning and execution might not be sound, and the plan can go wrong. “Prophetic *Königsnovelle*” depend on some prophecy which is recorded so that it can be later referred back. A much earlier king receives and records the prophecy in a book. It prophesies a later king who “restores” or “saves” Egypt, just as the Persians did. In the meantime, while the times remain bad, the prophecy offers hope of salvation in the future. Really, both kings, though they have the names of historically relevant pharaohs, are fictional or mythical figures (A Hermann, *Die ägyptische Königsnovelle*, (1938), cited by Dillery).

At the time of Manetho, John Dillery tells us, the priests at Philae were subtly changing ancient Egyptian texts to new purposes, playing down the significance of the pharaoh, and emphasizing the priesthood, continuing practices started in the Persian occupation. Plainly, from Persian times, there was no compunction about changing sacred texts. It is what we have suggested happened in Judah, the nature of the native religion being utterly changed by the colonists, but seems to have happened also in Egypt, Darius taking a great interest in restoring the temples. Demotic narratives often concern the king and the court, but also concern priests. Significantly, only the priesthood of Egypt could read Demotic, so the prime audience was plain, though they will have performed the narratives for the people as dramas. The Jerusalem priesthood had the same scheme in which they alone could read Hebrew, but dramatized or simply read out the biblical stories as exhortations during temple services.

Dillery says it is no accident that this process accelerated during periods of the foreign domination of Egypt. Foreign rulers depended on the priests to carry out the duties that the pharaoh had formerly undertaken. The Persian rulers of Egypt will have preferred officials to undertake state ceremonial duties, under the supervision of their judges and spies, and will have readily replaced any that did not do the job according to Persian prescriptions. So, the priests took the duties of the native king when there wasn't one:

Correspondingly, the Egyptian wisdom texts became increasingly apocalyptic when a native king was no longer available to secure the cosmic order. This does not necessarily mean that the priests saw themselves as oppositional figures in relation

to their Persian, and then their Macedonian overlords. Rather, they became the crucial intermediaries who helped the new dynasts secure the backing of the indigenous clergy and therefore also access to whatever influence they continued to exercise throughout Egypt.

J Dillery

The priestly autobiographies from the Persian and Alexander periods illustrate that the practising priesthood assisted the foreign rulers, as their link to the religious life of Egypt, as long as they respected the native cult. The Persians were careful to do it, except for rebellious or uncooperative people—Aristotle had taught Alexander the same, the Persians themselves being the exception for the Greeks. Of course, any priest who did not help the Persians then the Macedonians were unceremoniously stripped of their office. The king granted authority to the priesthood. The king objectively had the power, but depended on the priests to rule effectively *via* the native religion. The native, priestly elite of Egypt maintained its own status by granting legitimacy to the foreign rulers of Egypt.

The propaganda of the Ptolemies, whose aim was the same as the policy of the earlier Persians, but in reverse, so to speak—to gain the favor of the Jews of Jerusalem—evidently became the tradition in the Mediterranean. Egypt under the Ptolemies wanted Judah as a buffer against their rivals the Seleucid Greeks of Syria, and so set about favoring the Jerusalem temple and priesthood, helping them to revise their holy books to suit Egyptian geopolitics. Manetho, Chaeromon and Apion all call Moses an Egyptian priest, Josephus says. It is hard for believers nowadays, conditioned by a peculiar reverence for the Jewish scriptures, to accept that they evolved as a consequence of ancient politics, though nothing much has changed.

Berosus was a Seleucid writer who wrote an *History of Babylonia* around 278-290 BC for Antiochus I, also in the manner of Herodotus. Fragments cited by Eusebius or Syncellus include the Babylonian creation myth, now known as the *Enuma Elish*, including the defeat of the chaos monster, Tiamat, by Bel Marduk. After the Creation, Oannes (Ea, Iah) acted as a type of Orpheus to give humanity its crafts and skills. Berosus relates the *Epic of Gilgamesh* but calls the Atrahasis figure (Noah) Xisouthros not Utnapishtim, probably a Greek rendering of Ziusudra, the Sumerian hero. Like Manetho, he also wrote the history of Babylonian kings from mythical times to his own present day, apparently making use of king lists. He mentions Sennacherib, who ruled Babylon from Assyria, and queen, Semiramis (Sammuramat, wife of Samshi Adad V, 823-811 BC), whom the Greeks had made legendary. Otherwise little of it makes any sense.

So these histories are unreliable, except for one that was miraculously supervised by a holy ghost. Though the Jews rejected the *Septuagint* after about 150 AD, it became the Christian bible, the bible that S Paul read long before he was converted. Though Judaism renounced and excommunicated Greek culture later on, 3,000 words of foreign origin, many Greek, are found in the *Talmud*, the writings of the Jewish rabbis.

The Seleucid king, Antiochus Epiphanes (175-164 BC), aimed to destroy superstition—the Persian inspired Jewish religion—and introduce the Greek way of life, but a war with the Parthians held him back. He called himself Epiphanes or “the Brilliant” but his Greek subjects changed “phi” to “mu” and made him Epimanes or “not quite mad”. He hoped to be a new Alexander the Great, just as today madmen

think they are Napoleon. The Jewish priesthood, the Sadducees or Zadokites, an hereditary body as the Magi were, were averse to losing their lucrative position, and saw even more profit in accommodating the king's wishes. They carried forward a considerable faction happy to Hellenize the Temple. Another considerable faction, however, were appalled that the tradition, they now accepted as God-given, was being impiously altered, and the Temple was being polluted. The nation exploded in civil war. The family of the Maccabees or Hammers led the rebels with the help of the Romans, *via* the treaty arranged by Judas Maccabaeus (*1 Maccabees* 8). Jewish history proper had begun, and some original Jewish tradition was preserved from submergence in Hellenization, although it began to change anyway. The Maccabees never let any traditional Zadokites, if they were the original Persian priests, have Judaism restored.

## Jewish Forgeries

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Hellenized Jews cleverly sought to forge ancient works in the name of Pagan authorities, and in Pagan form as propaganda for Judaism. The poet Phocylides of Miletus of the sixth century BC, has his name on a fragmentary book which includes, maxims of various kinds, that closely echo the *Old Testament*, especially the *Pentateuch*. It is a first century AD forgery.

Jewish and Christian apologists claim other verses by Greek poets suggest a Jewish inspiration. Most of these lines are forgeries from a source called *On the Jews* or *On Abraham*, a glorification of Judaism supposedly by Hecataeus of Abdera (c 300 BC), a companion of Ptolemy I Soter (323-282 BC), and near contemporary of Manetho.

In the Graeco-Roman world, there was a widespread belief in the primacy of Egyptian culture and its pantheon, that many of the gods of Greece had come from Egypt, and the priests of Egypt were sages and wise men who had access to the secrets of the universe. If the Ptolemies had not created this impression, they were keen to emphasize it. When they ruled Judaea in the third century BC, they had a great chance to change the Jewish scriptures from emphasizing the Persian to emphasizing the Egyptian, and they did.

Pseudo-Hecataeus related Jewish origins and customs in what purports to be a digression from his main work on Egypt, apparently the work of the genuine Hecataeus. He had a legend of the Egyptian origin of the Jews who, according to a surviving fragment, fled Egypt after plagues and made their way with Moses to Jerusalem. Manetho, shortly after, expanded the story, then Lysimachus added his contribution, according to Josephus in *Contra Apionem*. Moses was a rebellious Egyptian priest who made himself the head of a colony of lepers, and was expelled from Egypt with his leprous gang by some Pharaoh. The leper colony does not have to be taken literally. Leper was an insulting word.

Hecataeus offered several versions derogatory to Moses, showing that these "historians" were seeking an alternative to the Egyptian bondage and liberation story propagated by the Persians. Aristaeus the Exegete, Josephus, Clement of Alexandria, Diodorus Siculus and Origen all quote from Hecataeus. In the third century AD, Origen noted that Herennius Philo doubted the authenticity of this book in the second century. Extracts in Josephus show the author cited was ignorant of Greek

augural lore. They cannot be what any educated Greek writer must have known. The attitude to the destruction of Pagan temples and altars is unimaginable in a Greek author, and the impossibly Jewish ideas it attributes to the Greek playwright, Sophocles, shows it to be a Jewish forgery. Even so, extracts in Diodorus Siculus tell us that Moses founded the Jewish state, temple and priesthood. The high priests ruled, and the Jews had *never* had a king. It is true when Moses is read as Mazda, and Judah is seen as founded by Darius II.

The forger of Hecataeus attempts an excuse for the absence of any references to Judaism until then. Josephus quotes Hecataeus as writing that earlier poets and historians have not mentioned the Law or the Jewish people because the Law was holy and “not to be discussed openly by profane mouths”, these latter words being an explanatory gloss. Josephus also says that the High Priest, Hezekiah, in the time of Ptolemy I, a man “expert in business” went with a group of followers under an agreement with Ptolemy to Alexandria. It sounds right. Ptolemy doubtless wanted to pander to the large number of Jews in Alexandria, and to the Jerusalem priesthood, at the same time. A period of Ptolemaic indulgence with Jerusalem culminated in the revision and translation into Greek of the *Pentateuch*, actually the law—*Deuteronomy*—at first, in the decades coming up to 200 BC. Just at that point Seleucia took over Jerusalem, and a new stage began. The trouble is no high priest named Hezekiah is otherwise known in this period, but perhaps it was expedient to erase his memory.

When were the works of Hecataeus forged? Jewish attitudes to persecution and martyrdom are implausible before the age of Antiochus Epiphanes. Josephus in *Against Apion* attributes to Hecataeus the story that Alexander the Great gave Samaria to the Jews tax-free for their loyalty to him. Alexander seems to have made Samaria a Macedonian colony, but *1 Maccabees* 11:34 says Demetrius II made a partial gift of three districts in 145 BC. It suggests the forger worked some time after this, so not before about 100 BC. N Walter and B Z Wacholder distinguish two pseudo-Hecataeuses. The first wrote *On the Jews* towards 100 BC, and another author, also confused with Hecataeus, wrote *On Abraham* between then and Josephus. The *Letter of Aristeas*, to Philocrates on the Greek translation of the Jewish law, is similarly dated between 118 BC and 113 BC.

## The Letter of Aristeas

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The story of the Exodus has been built up in layers, and, soon the Ptolemies realized they were taking the wrong tack. They were alienating the Jews when they needed them as allies, just as the Persians did. They began sponsoring the Jerusalem temple and its priesthood financially, and offered to help them write up an accurate history of the people and their temple. These they would place in the massive library they were collecting in Alexandria in Greek and Hebrew, the Jerusalem priests having decided to use sixth century Hebrew as their sacred language though everyone was speaking Aramaic in everyday life.

Sir L C L Brenton (1807-1862), introducing his *Septuagint*, explains that the *Letter of Aristeas* to his brother Philocrates, paraphrased by Josephus in *Antiquities*, related in mythical form how the Jewish *Torah* was translated into Greek. The name, *Septuagint*, of Jewish scriptures in Greek comes from this story. It relates to the time

when Demetrius of Phalerus was the librarian of the Alexandrine Library in the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-247 BC) and specifically to the time of Queen Arsinoë (278-270 BC). Aristeeas is presented as a Greek official of the royal court, and this Demetrius seems to have died in 283 BC, so doubt is immediately cast on the letter's authenticity. Anyway, the Greek king, Ptolemy, allegedly sent him with a delegation to the high priest in Jerusalem saying he wanted to translate the Jewish law into Greek for the wonderful new Alexandrine library. It would benefit the many Greek speaking Jews of that city, some of whom had been "uprooted" from Jerusalem by the Persians, and others who were brought into Alexandria more recently as captives by "our fathers"—Alexander's conquering Greeks. Indeed, the king released more than one hundred thousand Jewish captives himself, and sent costly presents to Jerusalem as sweeteners.

The mention of the Persians in this context was probably propaganda intended to relieve the Greeks of the whole burden of displacing Jews from the Palestinian hills, and to distance the first century Jews who would be reading this "letter" from their own founding fathers, the Persians. When the Persians had set up the temple state, they had moved in new colonists and thereafter had no wish to alienate them and risk driving them back into the sphere of the Egyptians.

Eusebius of Caesarea (*Ecclesiastical History*, 8:32) drawing on Aristobulus, explains it's name as the *Septuagint* (*Seventy*, *LXX*) because the high priest, Eleazar, sent seventy-two elders familiar with both languages, six from each of the twelve tribes, to Alexandria with an official copy of the law. Then they translated it from Hebrew into Greek in seventy-two days, it was read to the Alexandrine Jews to great acclamation, and was presented to the king. The Jews had to ask permission to take copies of it. Pseudo-Aristeeas, writing 150 years later, speaks of the translation of the law (*nomos*), of the legislation (*nomothesia*), and of the *books* of the legislator, implying, especially by the latter, the *Pentateuch*. But the implication of books is hindsight, for this "law" could only be the law code of *Deuteronomy*—that *was* the law until the Ptolemies expanded it. So, an Egyptian king had the translation made, and Jews had the copies they used from the royal library at Alexandria.

Changes were made during translation, or soon after, with the additions of *Exodus* and *Numbers*. In *Deuteronomy* 18:10; 31:25, Moses entrusts the law to the Levites, but, in this myth, six experts from each of the tribes were involved in the important matter concerning its translation. If the caste of Levites were solely responsible for the law from Persian times, then they had been by-passed, otherwise their sole responsibility for the law had not yet been settled. Before long, with the publication of the saga of Moses in *Exodus-Numbers*, the Exodus myth was used to give the Aaronite priesthood and the Zadokites the chief responsibility for sacerdotal matters, and the Levites were downgraded to functionaries. It looks as if the original Jewish *magi*, the Levites, had been bypassed to set up a new priesthood with more power (*Num* 18:2-6).

Given the large number of Jews in Alexandria, many of whom ought to have spoken Hebrew having been taken into slavery and just ransomed from it—it is hard to know why translators had to be requested from Jerusalem unless they had to be Levites. Hebrew might have been better understood in Jerusalem but Greek must have been better understood in Alexandria. The myth puffs the Jerusalem temple and its priesthood, and the names of the translators are given as Jerusalem names not



Egyptian or Greek ones. Giovanni Garbini, whose expertise is in language, highlights the passage in the letter that gives away the truth—that the books were not simply being translated but were being re-written or even written! Demetrius is described as saying:

Scrolls of the law of the Jews, together with a few others, are missing from the library, for these books are written in Hebrew characters and language. But they have been transcribed somewhat carelessly, and not as they should be, according to the report of the experts, because they have not received royal patronage.

Here are two contradictory reasons for the work of translation. The original scrolls are missing and replacements were evidently needed. Yet, the library's Hebrew experts knew they were wrong, anyway, so replacements were needed to correct faulty translations! It sets a perfect scene for the legal experts from Jerusalem and Alexandria to get together and remodel the Jewish laws. The translation exercise led them to realize the errors in the originals so they were altered too! No trace of any translations of the law into other languages of countries with Jewish inhabitants have ever been found or noted by contemporaries, and only doubtful dates for some *Dead Sea Scrolls* testify to earlier versions at all, though we need not doubt that the Persians had supplied them.

The Greek of the *Septuagint Pentateuch* is good compared with most books of the *Septuagint*, but its *koine* words and constructions betray an Egyptian provenance. It seems to have been an Alexandrine Greek dialect, so it was not translated by Jerusalem Jews. The Samaritan *Pentateuch*, differing from the Masoretic Text in about 6,000 places, has been denigrated as having been translated from the Greek. In many passages, the *Septuagint* matches the Samaritan but differs from the Jewish *Torah*. It is an argument that assumes the Masoretic Text is original. Both the Samaritan and the Jewish versions of the *Torah* could have been translated from Greek, but the Jewish *Torah* subsequently tinkered with when the Samaritan one was not, notably to eliminate any traces of its Greek origins. *Exodus* found in Qumran cave four and dated c 100 BC matched the Samaritan version. A copy of *Jeremiah* found in cave four at Qumran and dated c 100 BC matched the *Septuagint*. Now, the longer Masoretic version is considered to have been a "Palestinian reworking" (J A Fitzmyer). When the regnal years of some kings of Judah and Israel differ in the *Septuagint* from the *Masoretic Text*, the scholars' inclination is to favor the Hebrew. Yet, besides the scattering of the manuscripts when the Library of Nehemiah was plundered in the civil war, Judaism was changed by the rabbis early in the era to ameliorate messianism and adjust to the loss of temple worship. They are good reasons for "reworking".

J D Shenkel (*Chronology and Recensional Development in the Greek Text of Kings*, 1968) favored the Greek over the Hebrew, the latter having been changed. The supposed consistency of the *Masoretic Text* over the *Septuagint* could more convincingly show that the former has had a lot more time for inconsistencies to be removed, and what inconsistencies remain biblicalists then explain away by clever devices such as regency years or joint rule that are purely supposition. Since many of the kings are supposition based solely on the bible, it piles supposition on top of supposition. The Greek of many scriptural books other than the *Pentateuch* seems almost intentionally bad, *Isaiah* particularly, abounding in Semitic constructions and

badly translated words, and often seeming to be such bad Greek paraphrases of the Hebrew that they often seem meaningless.

Eventually the name “*Septuagint*” was used for the whole of the Greek scriptures that emerged whether they had been translated by the mythical seventy scholars or not. The earliest writer mentioning a Greek version of the Jewish scriptures is Aristobulus, a Jewish priest in the time of the Maccabees who wrote a commentary on the law, fragments of which have been preserved by Eusebius (*Praep Ev* 8:10 and 8:12). Aristobulus it was who said the law was translated into Greek supervised by Demetrius Phalereus in the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus. Eusebius believed Aristobulus was one of the seventy translators. Aristobulus said the Exodus and conquest stories had already been translated in the time of Pythagoras. Really they had been translated by the Ptolemaic priests about 100 years before Aristobulus wrote, but Pythagoras was a contemporary of Cyrus, on whose authority the Jews claimed the right to return. Before the Ptolemies, the mythical history knew no Exodus, though the Jews had been slaves of Egyptian colonists, and the conquest was an allegory of what is now called the “return”.

In these revised histories of the Jews, in the third century BC, the original story will have been ameliorating for the Egyptians. They could not change the, by then, well established story of Egyptian bondage, but the Egyptians were to be presented as generally generous and helpful to the Aramaeans and Israelites in giving assistance to them in hard times, promoting them to high office and showing Pharaoh as being kind to Abraham and his wife, Sarah, as soon as he realized they were married and not brother and sister. Pharaoh allowed the Israelites to leave, as he did the Hyksos of Avaris centuries before, and the incident of the Red Sea will have been taken from the recent exploit of Alexander, whose army crossed a bay in Asia Minor as the tide came in to save a long diversion, and only just made it across, his men ending up wading deep in the water.

The part that had to be presented as harsh, because of the established folk tale, was made into a drama directed by God with impossible miracles to mark it all as myth, but believers can believe anything, and, when Egypt was taken over by the Romans, the guardians of the truth vanished, and soon so did the temple in Jerusalem itself, so that only the impossible myths remained, recorded apparently as true history. Not only that, but the myth became the cement that kept Jews distinct, with their Passover ceremony celebrating the Exodus from Egypt, and thus keeping alive an absurdity.

The next layer was added by the Seleucid kings of Syria, the new rulers of Judah, whose enemies were the Egyptian Ptolemies. They wanted to make the Egyptians anathema again to the Jews, and perhaps added the wicked Pharaoh, the plagues and modified the incident of the swamping of pharaoh’s army. It seems, from *Maccabees*, that during the civil war of the Hasmoneans against the Greeks and Hellenized Jews in the second century, that the Library of Nehemiah, presumably left by the Persians for their colonists and added to, as noted here over the succeeding years, was attacked and the sacred texts damaged and scattered. When the Maccabees won the war, they attempted to piece the remains together again, but took the chance to add new compositions, where they had been lost or new ones seemed appropriate. It is the reason why some incidents appear as doublets or even triplets, from different earlier versions, and why some stories are virtually complete romances, hardly edited

at all. The Exodus story is mainly a late romance as is evident from even a reading of the English versions.

The collaboration of the Alexandrine library with the Jerusalem priesthood under the patronage of Ptolemy allowed the *Torah* to be extended from a single book of *Deuteronomy* to something much closer to what we now have, except perhaps for *Genesis*, which Aristobulus seemed to know nothing about. There was no *Genesis* in the original *Pentateuch*, but it was still five books because then *Joshua* was the fifth one. As Garbini notes, the beginning of *Exodus* probably contained some elements of *Genesis* which otherwise was contained in separate writings. When it was enlarged by compiling them all together and adding new compositions like the Joseph saga, it became a new book, and *Joshua* had to drop out of the *Pentateuch*, if it was to be the first five books of the Jewish scriptures. *Joshua* is obviously the continuation of the saga of Moses, and so looks uncomfortable separated from the *Pentateuch*, accounting for the development of the theory of the *Hexateuch*. That is, of course what it really is, but the tradition of the *Pentateuch* was too strong to admit of a *Hexateuch*.

Elsewhere in the *Letter of Aristeas*, the author, supposed to have been the contemporary historian, Aristeas, confirms our suspicions:

I have previously sent you an account of what I regarded as the most memorable matters. We received this account of the people of the Jews from the most renowned high priests in renowned Egypt.

The author is excusing the extension of the story by saying it came from reputable Egyptian priests. Egypt had a long history that everyone admired, and its priests were guardians of it. Any Egyptian Moses must have been in their archives, and naturally they were claiming he was, whence their authority to write about the Exodus properly. So, here is confirmation that *Exodus* and *Numbers* were written in collaboration with the scholars of Ptolemy Philadelphus. *Leviticus* will have been added at this time too, and the conquest by Joshua adapted and added to.

G Larssen (*JBL*, 1983) dates the priestly redaction of the *Pentateuch* to the latter half of the third century BC, under the Ptolemies. He says “P” is a collection of old and new source material “supplemented with new written texts”. Opinion puts the date of the *Pentateuch* to the end of the third century BC.

The texts which were to be put into Greek at Alexandria were new texts which gave a new face to Judaism. G Garbini, *History and Ideology in Ancient Israel*

The repeated mention of Hebrew characters in the *Letter of Aristeas* is now known to mean the old Hebrew (Phœnician) script, and not the Aramaic characters that are paradoxically now used for Hebrew. Hebrew script was used in some of the Qumran fragments. Garbini has shown that this script is phony in that it never was used continuously from the sixth century. It never evolved from then, when it stopped being used. It was only revived again at the end of the third century, coinciding with the translation of the *Pentateuch* into Greek. So, in fact, the *Pentateuch* was being translated twice, into Greek, and into Hebrew written in the archaic script. The old disused alphabet was copied as it was on old inscriptions for re-use in this Hebrew

revival. Jews stopped using it again about the time of the Bar Kosiba revolt, when the Samaritans started to use it.

## The Age of Scriptural Invention

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The dominance of early fragments of *Deuteronomy* suggests it was the most important book. The earliest fragments of the Greek bible ever found—late first or second century BC, if the dates are secure—are:

- PRyl 458 [#957]—a second century BC papyrus fragment of *Deuteronomy* 23-28
- 4Q122 [#819]—a second century BC parchment fragment of *Deuteronomy* 11
- 7Q1 [#805]—a first century BC papyrus fragment of *Exodus* 28
- 4Q119 [#801]—a first century BC parchment fragment of *Leviticus* 26
- Papyri Frouad 266, Cairo[#847,#848] — first century BC papyri fragments of *Deuteronomy* 10-33

The Rylands papyrus is entirely legal, but the Frouad features Moses, so the narrative of Moses had been written into *Deuteronomy* by the first century. Of ten Greek fragments, all scrolls, dated as BC listed by Robert Kraft, four are of *Deuteronomy*, two are *Exodus* and two are *Leviticus*. The other two are *Genesis* and the apocryphal *Epistle of Jeremiah*. A remarkable feature of some of this old Greek writing is the way “YHWH” is represented. Origen and Jerome thought the Greek *Old Testament* had the Name YHWH in archaic Hebrew characters. In a Qumran *Leviticus* fragment, it is written as “Iao”, in other cases in Greek letters that approximate to the look of the Aramaic script as “PIPI” (Frouad), and sometimes, like the Christian usage, as “Kurios” or an abbreviation of it (KS). The latter was maybe the norm (Albert Pietersma), suggesting that “Iao” was a Canaanite word for “Lord”, but the diversity in such a small sample shows a lack of standardization. The extreme reverence for “Yehouah” that excluded writing or saying it was Essene, not Pharisee. The Pharisees *did* pronounce it, but Essenes substituted “El”.

Demetrius, a Jew living at Alexandria in Egypt under the Ptolemies, wrote a work on the Jewish kings. One fragment takes the history up to Ptolemy IV Philopator (221-204 BC). Demetrius’s use of proper names and characteristic expressions match the *Septuagint*, the Greek bible, not the Hebrew scriptures. If he used the *Septuagint*, he was the first writer to do so, even though he was a Jew, and this dates when books of the *Septuagint* were first available. But perhaps the *Septuagint* used the works of Demetrius, or perhaps he was mistaken by Pseudo-Aristeas as the Demetrius of Phalarum who supervised the writing of the *Septuagint*, eighty years earlier. The fragments of his history that have been preserved by Alexander Polyhistor (80-40 BC), whose own works have also been lost but appear in fragments in Josephus and Eusebius, are about the legends of Jacob and Moses, and say nothing about the Jewish kings, but Moses had finally appeared in history outside the bible, about 200 BC.

The Palestinian Jew, Eupolemus (158 BC), the son of John, the son of Accos (*1 Macc* 8:17 and *2 Macc* 4:11) drawing upon other traditions besides the biblical accounts, wrote *On the Kings in Judea*, fragments from which are in Alexander Polyhistor. Eupolemus, a diplomat and a friend of the Jewish ruler Judas Maccabee, was sent with Jason, son of Eleazar, on to Rome in 161 BC to get support from the Romans for

the Hasmonean uprising against the Greek rulers. The Romans gave it, boosting the rebellion. Eupolemus wanted to show that the Jewish people went back further in history than the Greeks. In one fragment, Eupolemus says Moses taught writing to the Jews, who gave it to the Phœnicians, who passed it on to the Greeks.

A work *On the Jews* was excerpted by the Greek historian Alexander Polyhistor and attributed to Eupolemus. Polyhistor's excerpts were used by Eusebius in *Praeparatio Evangelica*. This Eupolemus is not, though, the Jewish writer, Eupolemus, but an earlier Samaritan, so called Pseudo-Eupolemus. Pseudo-Eupolemus combined Greek tradition and Babylonian mythology with biblical narrative to yield a history of the Jews, now lost except for two fragments consisting of sixteen verses. It was written between 200 and 150 BC, and speaks of Mount Gerizim as "the mountain of the Most High", betraying its Samaritan authorship. In these fragments, Abraham is the Jewish Orpheus, the father of the world's science. After the deluge, he built the tower of Babel, emigrated from Chaldaea to Phœnicia to teach the Phœnicians, helping them in war. Famine drove him to Egypt, where he taught the priests of Heliopolis. Meanwhile, Enoch received astrology from the angels.

More evidence is the work of Artapanus who wrote about 50 BC, only a century before the Christians decided themselves to add their own books to the Jewish canon. Artapanus was an Egyptian Jew with a Persian name, known to us only through excerpts in the Church Fathers, but apparently keen on Egyptian and Greek culture. Moses is Musæus, the teacher of Orpheus, called Hermes, and superior in all things to his pupil. The Jews were called Hermioth before Abraham called them Hebrews!

His work, *On the Jews*, knew of Abraham, Jacob and Joseph but still emphasized Moses. The prominence of Egyptian references show the author was an Egyptian, but Artapanus glorified the Jewish people by elaborating even on the bible! There was even a tradition that Moses *did* enter the Promised Land. Perhaps that was the work of Artapanus. He makes the Egyptians indebted to the Jews for everything they knew. Abraham taught astrology to the Pharaoh Pharethothes. Jacob and his sons found the sanctuaries at Athos and Heliopolis. Joseph showed the Egyptians how to cultivate. Moses became the greatest benefactor of Egypt, founded the Egyptian religion, directing each of the 36 provinces to honor God, and introduced circumcision. He prescribed the consecration of the Ibis and of the Apis bull. Moses taught the Egyptians hieroglyphics! Moses was himself deified.

Aristobulus was a Hellenized Jew of Alexandria in Egypt, living about 160 BC, and might be the same Aristobulus as he to whom the letter in *2 Maccabees* (*2 Macc* 1:10) was addressed. There, he is of the family of anointed priests and is the teacher of Ptolemy the king—presumably Philometer VI (181-145 BC). A fragment of a paraphrase and commentary on the *Pentateuch*, for a Pagan readership and dedicated to Ptolemy Philometor, has been preserved by Clement of Alexandria, and by Eusebius.

Aristobulus says the *Pentateuch* had been put into Greek so long before the Greek translation of the *Pentateuch* made under Ptolemy Philadelphus that even Homer and Hesiod were indebted to Moses. Clement confirmed he aimed to prove that all the Greek philosophers and many Greek poets, as well as Aristotle, took from the law of Moses—the *Pentateuch* and the prophets—and so Greek culture was entirely derived from the *Old Testament*. The whole system of Aristotle could, he thought, be

found in the bible, and philosophers as prominent as Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato all copied Moses. Later Jewish Hellenists—notably Philo—accepted that Moses was the father of Greek philosophy and culture. The truth in it is that Mazda was, not Moses. It was the new religion of the Persians that stimulated the Greek philosophers to levels of genius, and also invented a law for the Jews. The lawgiver, Mazda, was then brought down to earth as Moses.

That ancient Greek philosophy had no detectable sign that it had ever heard of Moses—it knew of Oromazdes—did not deter Aristobulus. Typically, he invented the historical evidence, making spurious citations from Hesiod, Homer, Linus, and especially from Orpheus, even though Musæus and Orpheus are mythical! In fact, these citations themselves are forged, and transparently by someone Jewish. If the forger was Aristobulus, then the whole work is dubious. Moreover, since he particularly drew upon Hellenized Jewish works like *Proverbs*, *Ben Sira*, and the *Wisdom of Solomon*, Greek influence was clear, but, on the familiar conviction that the Jewish scriptures are terribly ancient, he put the cart before the horse. The old cons are the best ones! What is interesting is that one of the fragments discusses the Jewish calendar. Aristobulus established that the Passover always falls immediately after the vernal equinox.

Hellenistic Judaism and Christianity also used the *Sibylline Oracles*, first written about 160 BC, in Egypt, but easily added to, various copies being accessible for adaptation for religious propaganda. The forgers recast the classical theogony in a Jewish *Old Testament* mould—Noah becomes Uranos, Shem Saturn, Ham Titan, and Japheth Japetus. The ancient oracles—of the Erythraean predicting the fall of Troy, and of the Sibyl of Cumae that Tarquinius Superbus deposited in the Capitol when Rome was new—became propaganda for the Jewish God. The earliest sentences, besides a few Pagan oracles, are Jewish in form, while most of the later ones are Christian. The dates of these forgeries are first and second century AD. Diodorus of Sicily (Siculus), writing in the first century BC, mentions the expulsion of foreigners from Egypt, including Danaus and Cadmus who went to Greece(!), and Moses who went to Judaea.

Philo of Alexandria (20 BC-50 AD) knew little Hebrew, reading his scriptures in the *Septuagint*, but he explained in *Moses* that the *Septuagint* perfectly accords with “the Chaldæan”, because the 72 priests on the island of Pharos all gave the same Greek translation of the original, God’s guarantee the translation was holy. Actually, Chaldæan is Aramaic not Hebrew, and Philo wanders considerably from what is considered to be acceptable in the *Septuagint*. He seems to extend freely the story of Moses, and alters the order of the plagues of Egypt. It all suggests that no received version of the story of Moses was known even to Philo. A variety of traditions existed, and Philo might have been happy to add to them his own versions. The Chaldæan he spoke of was the Magian tradition of Moses expanded by the Egyptian priests 2-300 years before, written in Aramaic script (Chaldæan). Some descriptions are mystical sounding, in the mystery tradition rather than what is now accepted. Moses entered the darkness, saw what was hidden from the gaze of mortals, saw his life arrayed for all to view as a model for everyone. He was a demi-god.

Philo deliberately never mentions the story of Balaam’s ass. Jews had been considered as worshipers of an ass or an ass’s head from about the third century BC, when the Mosaic tales and the Exodus were first written out fully by the Ptolemaic

priesthood in conjunction with the priests of the Jerusalem temple, then controlled by the Egyptian Greek kings. For example, Plutarch, a man acknowledged to have a solid foundation in Jewish lore, takes it as given that Jews worshipped an ass because an ass had led the people to water in the desert during the Exodus. Half a century later, Josephus confirms that the belief was widespread from his need to refute it. Jews also were said to sacrifice young men, never to have had an empire, and to take an oath against the Greeks, all of which were true at one time. Josephus blames it all on the Egyptians. Bishop Epiphanius tells a story from the *Gospel of the Birth of Mary* that Zacharias had a vision in the temple of a man in the form of an ass. Amazed, he was about to blurt out to the Jews whom they worshipped when he was struck dumb. Later, though, he recovered, told it to the Jews and they killed him for it. It was said to be the reason why the high priest wore bells, so that, when he went into the temple, “he whom they worshipped, hearing the noise of the bells, might have time enough to hide himself, and not be caught in that ugly shape and figure”.

Certainly, the Moses legend was elaborated late, then started growing and suppressing the Babylonian tradition. This tendency left unmolested by developments like Christianity would have probably ended with the stories of the Patriarchs suppressed, and so too the return from Babylon. By around 100 AD, Justus of Tiberias was writing a history of the Jews beginning with Moses. The legends of Abraham and the origin of the Jews in Ur of the Chaldees, Babylonia, had been suppressed by the Alexandrines. Tacitus also refers briefly to the origins of the Jews as being Egypt. The Jews having been evicted by the Pharaoh, Bocchoris, on the instructions of the oracle of Amon, were led by Moses in a six day march. Arriving in a thinly populated land on the seventh day, they expelled the locals and founded a temple and a city.

Other Jewish works not included in the biblical canon are no more help. None are older. Stephen C Meyers reckons the oldest non-biblical Jewish chronicle is *Seder Olam Rabbah* or *Book of the Order of the World*, written by Jose Ben Halafta who died about 160 AD, but edited in the eighth century AD. *Jubilees* (c 100 BC) is non-canonical and has the novelty of giving a history of the Jews dated in Jubilees, periods of 49 years. Pseudo-Philo’s *Biblical Antiquities*, a scriptural history from Adam to David, is dated in the first half of the first century AD. The *Testament of Moses*, a dying testament by Moses to Joshua, dates in the first century AD.

## **Exodus a Late Addition to the Jewish Scriptures**

The Essenes were still compiling, revising and composing psalms, at least until the first century BC and probably until they were dispersed after the Jewish War, and the exploits of some of the Hasmonaeans were written into the stories of Moses and David, most obviously the story of Phinehas.

*The Genesis Apocryphon* of the Dead Sea scrolls, relates Abraham’s journey to Egypt, naming the Pharaoh as “Pharaoh Zoan, the king of Egypt”. Zoan is a place not the name of a Pharaoh, once considered the same place as Avaris, Raamses, and Tanis. The Pharaoh lived at Zoan, confirmation for biblicalists that the Hyksos were the Jews, because the Hyksos had their capital at Avaris.

Now, Tanis (cognate with Zoan) was unimportant until it became the residence of the

Pharaohs in the twenty-first and twenty-third Dynasties, 1070-946 and 828-715 BC. Thereafter, Sais became the main Egyptian city. So many monuments were found at Tanis inscribed with the name Rameses, it was thought that Tanis was the store-city of Rameses mentioned in *Exodus* 1:11. Then these monuments were found to have been moved to Tanis from Qantir or Tell ed-Dab'a, some fifteen miles south on the Pelusiac Branch of the Nile, the proper site of the Hyksos capital of Avaris. Tanis or Zoan was therefore not Avaris or Raamses and could have had nothing to do with Moses!

Significantly, Zoan (later, San al-Hagar) was again an important political and commercial center during the Ptolemaic period from 300 BC—and remained so until the sixth century AD. *Numbers* 13:22 states parenthetically that Hebron was built seven years before Zoan, an apparently pointless remark, but the name “Talmi” (Ptolemy) appears in the same verse, crying out the period when it was written. The authors of *Isaiah* and *Ezekiel* (*Isa* 19:11,13; *Ezek* 30:14) speak of it. It implies that *Numbers* and these prophetic works were written in the Ptolemaic period by people who knew Egypt at the time.

Even in the bible, considering that Moses is the Jewish lawgiver, he is rarely mentioned in the Jewish scriptures outside of *Exodus*. The founder of any religion ought to be frequently and multiply mentioned, as Christ is in the *New Testament*. Few texts of the bible outside the *Torah* mention Moses, surely a remarkable and inexplicable fact if Moses was as important to Jewish identity as he seems to be, and was as early in their history as they claim. Moses appears in 40 passages of *Exodus*, 16 of *Numbers*, 6 of *Deuteronomy*, 6 of *Joshua*, 5 of *Psalms*. Elsewhere the “law of Moses” appears occasionally but Moses himself is never mentioned more than twice (*Leviticus*, *1 Chronicles*). In the prophets, Moses is only mentioned in *Micah* 6:4, *Isaiah* 63:11-12 and *Jeremiah* 15:1. Perhaps even more significant is the discovery by Tomasz Derda (*ZPE* 115, 1997) that Jews in antiquity rarely or never used Moses as a name. Christians began doing it. The Moses myth had no impact on late Judaism.

All this cries out that *Exodus* was a late addition to the collection of biblical books, and that the prophets certainly knew nothing about the amazing founder of the Jewish race and religion. The psalms in which Moses appears are all Persian period, and the other citations are recognized as post-“exilic” editorial insertions. The reason is that only after the “exile” was the figure of Moses invented.

Only with the Babylonian exile did the figure of Moses acquire the importance that the Jewish tradition attributes to it.

J Alberto Soggin

## A Parable of the Return from Exile

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Soggin accurately notes that the Moses myth is also a parable of the “return” from “exile” in Babylon. Moses brings the true Israel from a foreign oppression into a home provided by God as His theocracy despite the opposition of the false Israel who prefer to worship idols. Moses *is* Ezra, the last and greatest of the “returners”. Moses found refuge in Midian as the son-in-law of the priest of Midian. Midian seems to be biblical code for the Medes (and Persians). It was while he was a shepherd in Midian that he saw the burning bush. The Zoroastrian religion venerated fire which was also



their name for truth.

The Christian librarian, Julius Africanus, born about 200 AD, and a pupil of Heraclas in Alexandria, declares there is no certain history before the first Olympiad (776 BC). It is an honest enough statement but he then goes on to establish the date of Moses, even though it is long before the first Olympiad! Plainly enough, even for the Christian Fathers, concepts in *Exodus*, (19:1ff) like a “kingdom of priests” and a “holy nation” as alternatives to a corrupt monarchy, cannot have been written by Moses who knew nothing about monarchy because he died before the Promised Land was ever entered, let alone run as a kingdom. They were written by priests sent from Persia to do just as they said.

Professor Sarna wants us to believe that no biblical writer could have had any reason to invent the bondage in Egypt and the Exodus, and would have written down a proper historical account if it differed from the one in the bible. He quotes Bright who wrote a well known “history” of Israel:

It is not the sort of tradition any people would invent! Here is no heroic epic of migration but the recollection shameful servitude from which only the power of God brought deliverance.

John Bright

This defence is nonsense. The British still celebrate a shameful defeat by the Nazi tank brigades in WWII because the defeat was ameliorated by the evacuation from Dunkirk’s beaches in small boats of a substantial part of the BEF. There is no way of seeing it as other than a disastrous defeat but the British succeed in seeing it as a victory. Without it, and demoralized, the war might have been lost. The Romans equally note the tragedy of the defeated Aeneas fleeing the flames of Troy, carrying his elderly father on his back and holding his young son by the hand, into exile in Italy where his dynasty becomes the Alban kings, scions of whom, Romulus and Remus, founded their city. Bright, anyway, assumes that the Jews wrote the story of Moses themselves. They did not.

Professor Sarna also puts the same argument in his own words:

We are at a loss to explain the necessity of fabricating an uncomfortable and disreputable account of Israel’s national origins, nor can we conceive how such a falsity could so persuade the national psyche as to eliminate all other traditions and historical memories, let alone become the dominant and controlling theme in the national religion.

Sarna is not a professor for nothing, but whatever it is, it is not for scientific objectivity. He steadfastly puts his telescope to his blind eye! Let us put it up to his good eye.

The account was fabricated to justify the imposition on Israel of the Persian religion. It is uncomfortable and disreputable because it seeks to depict the polytheistic Israelites that remained in Judah as apostates from the true God, Yehouah, a mirror image of the Persian God, Ahuramazda. The story shows the benefits of acceptance of this god and the horrors of refusing to accept him, or of apostatizing, having initially accepted him.

It succeeded in eliminating earlier traditions only with difficulty, but after about four generations and the construction of a thoroughly mythical history, Jews not only had accepted it as the controlling theme in the national religion, they jealously guarded it as proof that God had chosen them as His elect. By 300 BC, the Greeks had defeated and replaced Persia as the ruling culture, had destroyed the Persian holy books and priesthood, and the remaining Persian tradition was left in the hands of the Jews, now convinced that the religion they had had imposed on them was their own, and the mythology that had been used to justify it was true history.

In the second century BC, the Jewish holy books were in turn largely destroyed in the war between the Maccabees and the Greeks. Only the success of the Maccabees allowed them to be restored from what fragments remained, the memories of the priests and the imagination of the Hasmonaeans seeking to justify their newly established kingdom. They were largely re-written or newly written. From this period the religion factionalized and then spun off Christianity and itself was consciously modified into Rabbinism.

## A Note on the Islam

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The heroes of Judaism such as Abraham, Moses, Solomon and David are mythical. They are in the same bracket as Jason, Hercules, Aeneas and King Arthur. Any almighty God, whether of the Jews, Christians or the Moslems knows it and could hardly have written or even inspired any books in which He addressed these heroes as if they were real. Inasmuch as the Quran does (eg 21:52 Abraham; 20:8-14 Moses; 21:49 Moses; 7:139 Moses; 21:79 Solomon; 21:82 David), it is as faulty as the bible is, and has its own proof within its body that it is not the book of any almighty God, who must have known better. Human beings, on the other hand, thought these were real historical heroes. That is why they appear in these books. They were written by fallible human beings and not by any God, or angels instructed by the God, or even any humans inspired by God.

## Addendum—Russell E Gmirkin

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Sometimes even in the realm of biblical “scholarship”, a scholar becomes egregious—they stand up against the immovable consensus. Usually it simply means they are ignored and sometimes villified, so it does their career no good at all, which is why it requires courage. It is good for the conscience, though, and sometimes does cause tremblings and a little movement among those “scholars” who contrive to believe in God as well as scholarship. Recently a scholar has come out in support of the thesis for long described on these pages. *Berosus and Genesis, Manetho and Exodus: Hellenistic Histories and the Date of the Pentateuch*, by Russell E Gmirkin (2006), supports the idea argued here that much of the *Pentateuch* was composed by Jewish and Egyptian scholars at Alexandria—in about 273-272 BC, Gmirkin says.

His carefully argued bases for dating the early third century BC as the *terminus a quo* of the *Pentateuch* principally center on:

- the names and geopolitical relations in the table of nations in *Genesis*
- the dependence of *Genesis* 1-11 on Berosus’s *Babyloniaca* (278 BC)
- the *Exodus* story in Manetho’s *Aegyptiaca* (c 285-280 BC).

As the Ptolemies were collecting books from everywhere, necessary sources like *Babyloniaca* must have been available at the Museum in Alexandria. The Church fathers thought Berosus had used *Genesis* 1-11, but Hellenistic scholars have now concluded that allusions to *Genesis* have later been interpolated into *Babyloniaca* by Jewish editors. Modern editions of *Babyloniaca* omit the inserted passages. Gmirkin has turned the argument on its head—the authors of *Genesis* used Berosus. Critics think clever Jews of the third century BC could never have used such a poor work as *Babyloniaca* written in bad Koine to introduce their national history. The truth is that the Jews will have already had these legends as part of their world view from their deportation from Mesopotamia. If Berosus was used at all, as Gmirkin thinks, it will have been for the Egyptian editors of the *Pentateuch*, who will not have been familiar with the stories, but had to include them because of their place in Jewish Persian tradition.

Our Babylonian source of these legends is the Enuma Elish which does not have the darkness of the primeval waters, and the creation of animals in it. The *Babyloniaca* does have passages which parallel these biblical passages, though the sequence of creation of the animals is not the same. Of course, it is possible that the legends taken by the Persian colonists from their homelands around the Beth Eden region of the upper Euphrates had evolved from the original Enuma Elish script, and that Berosus had a similar source. Or the Jerusalem priests could have decided that the *Babyloniaca*, if they had sight of it, was more authoritative than their own legends, poor Koine or not—they would hardly have been accomplished Greek speakers themselves—and so had preferred them. It seems unlikely that Egyptian priests could have been familiar with Babylonian religious myths unless they had access to sources about them in the Alexandrine library, or the Jerusalem priests had preserved the stories of their fathers of their fathers—the legends taken with them from Mesopotamia to Palestine—and Berosus had at least some of them.

Interestingly, Gmirkin thinks Oannes, the Babylonian god of life, depicted as half fish, is the origin of the snake of the Garden of Eden. The god of life is a water god, and Oannes is the Greek name of Ea, the Babylonian water god. Just as Derek is Eric, Yah is Ea! Ea has the tail of a fish to associate him with water, but symbolically, a wavy line in Babylonian glyphs represents water, and water is represented as a serpent, a wavy monster—Tiamat. Images of Yehouah (Yah) were forbidden just as they were of Ahuramazda, a legacy from Judaism's Persian origins, but the Greeks had no such restriction, and illustrated Yah on their coins. His legs were serpents! Like Oannes and Dagon, His wavy serpenty legs symbolized his association with water, and thus life. In the exodus myth created by the Ptolemies, Moses set up a serpent on a stick for the Israelites to worship. So, if Gmirkin is right, Oannes is Ea is Yah is the serpent of the Garden of Eden! God Himself tempted the primeval pair. It was a premise of Gnosticism.

The biblical exodus story was Manetho's derogatory story of the expulsion of lepers from Egypt, ameliorated in response to the need to please the Jewish priesthood. Regrettably, the *Aegyptiaca* does not survive intact—we have no original version of Manetho, only citations of poor quality to judge by their differences. So far as we can judge, Josephus had his story of the expulsion of the Hyksos from Manetho, and it was this story that must have given the Egyptian priests the idea of identifying the Israelites with them. It would not have suited either the Egyptian leadership or the Jewish leadership to identify the Jews with hated former rulers of Egypt, so the

Asians had to be subject to the Egyptians, who had initially been kind to them. E Bickerman has noted (*Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults. Studies for Morton Smith III*) that not only Jews but Egyptian priests were critical of Manetho's apparent dislike of Jews. Manetho had made them into undesirables or lepers who had escaped. Leper was a word for the least desirable people imaginable, and that would not have done, so the biblical compromise was arrived at.

The Aristeas tradition has it that the Greek translation of the Jewish bible was made just at this time. Gmirkin thinks this tradition later disguised the original writing of the *Torah* as the *Septuagint* translation of the *Pentateuch* into Greek. Here we have suggested that the law already existed as *Deuteronomy*, and so too did an outline of the Deuteronomic History, whereas Gmirkin says the *Torah* was written in its entirety at this time, first in Hebrew then immediately translated into Greek, though, in Alexandria, the books might have been written in Greek first, then put into Hebrew, a liturgical language, carefully supervised by the cooperating Jerusalem priests.

The Gmirkin thesis that the *Torah* was written in its entirety at this point is unnecessary, and impossible to defend, so he doesn't, admitting that sources were used, the J, P, E, and D sources of the Documentary Hypothesis. Of course, the Documentary Hypothesis has to be changed in that its early dating based on the Bible's internal chronology must be false because the documents inferred from the *Pentateuch* are traces of the sources available to the Ptolemaic authors. All of those parts of the Jewish scriptures which depend on the *Pentateuch* must have been added later, and those that have no references to Moses, or ones that were plainly interpolated must have been earlier than the Alexandrian composition. We noted that once Moses was invented, he ought to have appeared everywhere as Christ does in the Christian books.

Gmirkin is concerned with dating the work, not whether it tells true history or not. It will have reflected the sources available to the Egyptian priests, and they will have thought that was history, but it was given an angle to suit Jerusalem, whom the Ptolemies needed on their side and not tipped towards the Seleucids, Egypt's enemies who also wanted Palestine. Biblicists, as usual, want a degree of proof from biblical critics, like Gmirkin, that is quite impossible at this distance from the events, and which is hypocritical because faith is accepted on far less proof, and often none at all!

The thesis here that the law was given by Persia, and the history added in support of the aim of *Deuteronomy*, but then that major revisions were made in Greek times, suits the evidence better than Gmirkin's.

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## **Dr Michael David Magee**

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Michael D Magee was born in Hunslet, an industrial suburb of Leeds, Yorkshire, in 1941. He attended Cockburn High School in South Leeds. He won a studentship to the Royal Military College of Science, Shrivenham, where he graduated with an honours degree in natural science in 1963. He went on to obtain a PhD degree from the University of Aston in Birmingham in 1967 and a teaching qualification, a PGCE, from Huddersfield before it was a university.

He carried out research at the Universities of Aston and Bradford, and at the Wool Industries Research Association, taught in a Further Education College in Devon for seven years and for ten years was an advisor to the UK government at the National Economic Development Office in London.

He has written three books, and, mainly in collaboration with Professor S Walker, a dozen scientific papers on the structure and interactions of small molecules investigated using microwave radiation. Working for the government he has written or edited some forty publications on microeconomic issues, and very many discussion papers and reports for the Sector Working Parties (SWPs) and Economic Development Committees (EDCs)—Wool Textiles, Man Made Fibres, Footwear and Electronics—of which he was secretary at various times in the 1980s.

He was brought up by Christian parents but was never indoctrinated into one dogma and was able from an early age to make his own judgements about the Christian religion.

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