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*The Evangelical Contribution to Understanding the (Early) History of Ancient Israel in Recent Scholarship**

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Although some evangelical scholars have responded to the recent movement toward historical minimalism, not enough is being done. If responsible, evangelical, historical perspectives are to bring some balance to the scholarly debate, evangelical scholars must publish more of their work in academic presses and in trade journals where they cannot be ignored. For the present writer Egyptology and sojourn-exodus narratives are of special interest. It is concluded that the principal components of the biblical story of Israel's presence in Egypt, their enslavement, their departure, and their sojourn in the Sinai wilderness are consistent with archaeological evidence. There is little justification in the conclusion that the biblical narratives lack any historical basis, but are late fictions. The theological implications of this issue are not insignificant.

Key words: Archaeology, Egypt, the exodus, history of ancient Israel

I. INTRODUCTION: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

The quest for early Israel in history, also known as the "origins of Israel" within the guild, has been the most provocative issue to face OT scholarship since the early 1980s. The "origins of Israel" debate has created as much of a furor in OT studies as the "Third Quest for the Historical Jesus" has for NT scholarship. I am delighted that the leadership of IBR has recognized the importance of these controversial issues and has provided a forum for their discussion at the 1996 Annual Meeting.

* This paper was presented at the 1996 annual meeting of the Institute of Biblical Research in New Orleans. Because much of the material presented below is extracted from my forthcoming book, *Israel in Egypt* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), I will not fully document this essay, but will instead cite chapter and section numbers from the book.

Many here recall the papers and panels that have been aired at the SBL meetings over the past decade by scholars like the late Gösta Ahlström, Thomas Thompson, Neils Peter Lemche, Diana Edelman, Robert Coote, Keith Whitelam and others. These scholars have penned a massive array of monographs and articles questioning the historicity of such central events to OT history as the Israelite sojourn in Egypt, the exodus story, the Sinai wanderings and Joshua's conquest of Canaan. The attempt to rediscover Israel's origins in Canaan without the Bible playing a central role initially met with surprisingly little emotion or thoughtful critique by the scholarly community in general and the Evangelical world in particular. In view of the fact that the events being expunged from the annals of history, the exodus from Egypt and the Sinai experience, are foundational for OT salvation history, the absence of a timely, thorough and convincing response by Evangelical scholars is troubling.

The dismissal of the events recorded in Exodus and the exploits of Joshua by minimalist scholars during the 1980s and early 90s was a logical progression (or digression) from the developments in Patriarchal studies in the 1970s. Here I refer to the influential works of John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (1977), and Thompson, *Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives* (1976). These studies argued for a return to Wellhausen's and Gunkel's earlier views that the Patriarchal narratives were sagas and legends, over against the Albright-Wright school's more historical conclusions. For Van Seters, the Patriarchal narratives are exclusively the works of J (no E) which he down dates from the traditional 10th century date to the 6th century. Once on the slippery slope of historical minimalism, these biblical scholars moved from Genesis to Exodus and marched on Joshua and Judges, and soon even the courts of David and Solomon were under siege. This latter challenge was somewhat parried by the timely discovery of the now famous Tel Dan inscription in 1992 and its reference to "the House of David."[1] Despite the protests of Philip Davies[2]

1. Avraham Biran and Joseph Naveh, "An Aramaic Stele Fragment from Tel Dan," *IEJ* 43 (1993) 81-98 and "'David' Found at Dan," *BAR* 20.2 (1994) 26-39.

2. For Philip Davies's rejections of Biran and Naveh's reading, see "'House of David' Built on Sand: Sins of the Biblical Maximizers," *BAR* 20.4 (1994) 54-55. In defense of the reading for "David," see Anson Rainey, "The 'House of David' and the House of the Deconstructionists," *BAR* 20.6 (1994) 47 and my comments in *BAR* 20.4 (1994) 68-69. For a more extensive discussion of my critique of Davies, see "The Recently Discovered Tell Dan Inscription: Controversy and Confirmation," in *Archaeology in the Biblical World* 3.1 (1995) 12-15. Other defenders of the Hebrew king's name being on the stela include, Baruch Halpern, "The Stela from Dan: Epigraphic and Historical Considerations," *BASOR* 296 (1994) 63-80, and Gary Rendsburg, "On the Writing ביתדור in the Aramaic Inscription from Tel Dan," *IEJ* 45 (1995) 22-25.

and members of "the Copenhagen school,"[3] who posit other readings for *DWD*, it seems quite clear that the renowned Judaean monarch's name is etched on this Aramaic inscription of the 9th century BC, thanks to the discovery of a second fragment of the same stela.[4]

What has happened in the past 15 years that has caused a significant number of scholars to reject the historicity of the events described in the Pentateuch, Joshua and 1 and 2 Samuel? This dramatic shift in early Israel's fortunes is clearly illustrated in a comparison of John Bright's affirmation about Israel's origin in the third edition of *A History of Israel* and the positions taken by the scholars listed above. In 1981 Bright maintained, "There can really be little doubt that ancestors of Israel had been slaves in Egypt and had escaped in some marvelous way. Almost no one today would question it."[5] Shortly thereafter, the pendulum of scholarly opinion began to swing quickly in the opposite direction. By 1986 Ahlström's book title *Who Were the Israelites?* showed that what most people thought was clearly enough answered in the Pentateuch was now up for grabs. More recently, Robert Coote offers what has become rather typical of the thinking to the biblical minimalists, opining:

> The writers of ancient Israel knew little or nothing about the origin of Israel, although the Scriptures can provide much information relevant to the investigation of early Israel. The period under discussion, therefore, does not include the period of the patriarchs, exodus, conquest, or judges as devised by the writers of the Scriptures. These periods never existed.[6]

No single reason can be offered to explain this radical change, rather a number of factors are responsible for the rise of the minimalist school which has dominated OT studies and set the agenda for the

3. Fredrick H. Cryer, "The 'BETDAWD' Miscellany: DWD, DWD' or DWDH?" *SJOT* 9 (1995) 52-58; Thomas L. Thompson, "'House of David': An Eponymic Referent to Yahweh as Godfather," *Scandinavian Journal of Old Testament* 9 (1995) 159-74.

4. The second fragment of the stela was discovered a year later which further clarified the historical context of the text. It was published as "The Tel Dan Inscription: A New Fragment," *IEJ* (1995) 1-15.

5. *The History of Israel,* 120.

6. Robert B. Coote, *Early Israel: A New Horizon* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990). Interestingly, R. S. Hess began a recent article ("Early Israel in Canaan: A Survey of Recent Evidence and Interpretations," *PEQ* 125 [1993] 125-42) comparing quotes from Bright and Coote, but different ones. My thanks to Dr. Hess for giving me an off-print of this study. The comparison drawn between the two here was made before seeing his study. It is intriguing that we both saw the contrast between Bright and Coote as exemplifying the radical change that has occurred among Old Testament scholars in a short period of time.

past decade and a half. I believe four developments have contributed to the present crisis:[7]

A) The collapse of the Albright-Wright synthesis of the "conquest" of Canaan by Joshua and the Israelites.
B) The demise of the Wellhausenian, or traditional source critical, certainties regarding the composition of the Pentateuch and the traditional dating of those sources. New literary approaches and sociological approaches now rival the older Continental methods.
C) The redefining of historiography or history writing by Van Seters, Giovanni Garbini and others which resulted in the spurning of biblical writings for reconstructing Israel's early history.[8]
D) The emergence of a new skepticism towards the historical reliability of the biblical narratives, what might be called a "hermeneutic of suspicion."

As mentioned above, there was initially little formal response by Evangelical scholars to these sobering developments in OT scholarship. Certainly not as much as I would have hoped for given the implications of these revisionist histories for the Evangelical understanding of history. I vividly recall storming out of a session on the "Origins of Israel" at the SBL annual meeting in Anaheim (1989) frustrated that while a good portion of the large audience were Evangelicals, no one rose in the discussion period to question the radical claims being articulated. Bill Arnold was the first person I saw as I exited the ballroom. I said, "Bill, we've got to do something." Before the weekend was over, a number of colleagues agreed to meet at Wheaton College the following November (1990) to present papers focusing upon historiographical issues. The fruits of the effort was the collection *Faith, Tradition and History*.[9] Nearly all the contributors to this volume are IBR members.

Happily, the 1990s saw the appearance of a number of other works by Evangelical scholars who took up the challenge presented by the minimalist school. One very significant work to appear in 1990, which addressed the nature of the Joshua narratives, was Lawson

7. The following points are listed randomly and not in the order of their development or importance to the unraveling of the consensus of the 1950s through 1970s. This material is discussed in *Israel in Egypt*, chapter 1.

8. Also see my discussion in "The Problem of 'History' in Egyptian Royal Inscriptions" in VI *Congresso Internazionale Di Egittologia Atti* (ed. S. Curto; Turin, 1992) 1.291-99.

9. *Faith, Tradition, and History* (ed. A. R. Millard, J. K. Hoffmeier, and D. W. Baker; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994).

Younger's *Ancient Conquest Accounts.*[10] This seminal work is the first sustained effort to examine the Joshua narratives in a comparative way with other Near Eastern military writings. By including Assyrian, Hittite and Egyptian sources, Younger was able to make a very compelling case for viewing the "conquest" narratives in Joshua as a comparable piece of Near Eastern military writing, rather than the fabrication of the DtrH in the late 7th century as Van Seters contends.[11] New insights are offered by Younger into the literary character Joshua which assist in dealing with some of the historical problems frequently raised about the grandiose claims of conquest.

Other helpful contributions by Evangelical scholars to the historiographical questions were made by David Howard and V. Phillips Long.[12] These two works wrestled with some of the questions emerging from the new minimalist school and provided some helpful critique of its approach and conclusions. However, because Howard's and Long's works were written for Evangelicals and published by conservative presses, they have not received the attention they deserve in the main stream of scholarship. George Kelm's book *Escape to Conflict*[13] treats many problems related to the Exodus-conquest narratives, but his work is aimed at a lay and not a scholarly audience (cf. p. xxi). Hence it is not likely to meaningfully impact the field.

Richard Hess, another IBR member, has entered the fray, offering a helpful, up-to-date survey of the range of models found in scholarly literature regarding Israel's origins. He identified four main positions, viz., the conquest, peaceful infiltration, peasant revolt and pastoral Canaanites.[14] After providing some insightful criticism of each model, Hess offers a generous compromise to these apparently conflicting views by saying, "Aspects of each of the models may be attested in the biblical accounts of early Israel. Aspects of each of them may well have been true in some measure."[15]

10. L. Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical History Writing* (JSOTSup 98; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990).

11. "Joshua's Campaign and Near Eastern Historiography," *Scandinavian Journal of Old Testament* 2 (1990) 11-12. See my critique in "The Structure of Joshua 1-11 and the Annals of Thutmose III," in *Faith, Tradition and History*, 165-79; and chapter 2 in Israel in Egypt.

12. D. Howard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament History Books* (Chicago: Moody, 1993); V. P. Long, *The Art of Biblical History* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994).

13. G. Kelm, *Escape to Conflict: A Biblical and Archaeological Approach to the Hebrew Exodus and Settlement in Canaan* (Fort Worth, Tex.: IAR, 1991).

14. Hess, "Early Israel in Canaan," 125-42.

15. Ibid., 132.

To this growing bibliography we can now add Iain Provan's masterful critique[16] of the methods of the minimalist approach and their ideologically based assumptions. His exposé has certainly got the attention of the other side, prompting rather vicious rejoinders from Thomas Thompson and Philip Davies in the same issue.

Younger, Hess and Provan have tackled some issues related to the Joshua narratives in trade outlets which will hopefully result in Evangelicals being heard in what, until recently, has been a largely one-sided conversation. There has also been some response on the Exodus narratives by Kenneth Kitchen in his article "The Exodus" and mine on the "Plagues of Egypt."[17]

Despite these positive contributions to the ongoing debate concerning Israel's origins, I felt that much more needed to be said, especially with Egyptological materials. These sources, I agree, do elucidate the Exodus narratives, but these background materials have, by and large, been ignored in the writings of the historical minimalists. This glaring omission in research was a motivating factor behind my *Israel in Egypt*. The choice of a university press like Oxford for this study was because I am convinced that if our ideas are to be heard in academe, and hopefully influence the direction of scholarship, they will have to take place in academic presses and in trade journals where they cannot be ignored. Provan's *JBL* article is proof of that!

In chapters 1 and 2 of *Israel in Egypt* an extensive critique of the minimalist reading of Israel's early history in the Bible is presented. However, the main thrust of my study is to make a positive contribution to the nagging historical questions. It is to this we must now briefly turn to illustrate how Egyptian materials can be used to demonstrate the plausibility of the historicity of the sojourn-exodus narratives.

II. EGYPTOLOGY AND THE SOJOURN-EXODUS NARRATIVES

Lemche has noted that "the silence in the Egyptian sources as to the presence of Israel in the country" is "an obstacle to the notion of Israel's 400 year sojourn. . . ."[18] Thus scholars are faced with a dilemma not unlike that encountered in Canaan with the absence of clear archaeological evidence for a violent invasion by Israel, and have arrived at a similar conclusion, viz., the lack of evidence means the events described in Genesis-Exodus are retrojections of a later

16. I. Provan, "Ideologies, Literary and Critical: Reflections on Recent Writing on the History of Israel," *JBL* 114 (1995) 858-606.

17. K. A. Kitchen, "*The Exodus,*" *ABD* 2.700-708; J. K. Hoffmeier, "Egypt, Plagues In," *ABD* 2.374-78.

18. N. P. Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (Biblical Seminar 5; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988) 31.

period and do not reflect historical reality. Indeed, no one has been able to identify any direct evidence in Egypt, either historical or archaeological, to support the biblical accounts of the sojourn and exodus events. If one were to draw any conclusions from the current state of knowledge (i.e., the absence of direct evidence), one would succumb to the fallacy of negative proof.[19] How do we deal with this dilemma? The approach I take is to examine the main points of the story line described in Genesis-Exodus to see if they are plausible within the limits of our present knowledge of Egyptian sources. This method, known as the "comparative" or contextual, has been championed by leading scholars like William Hallo and Kenneth Kitchen.

The main points of the Israelite sojourn are as follows. The descendants of Israel come to Egypt during a time of famine, having been preceded by Joseph who has advanced to an important post in pharaoh's administration. After a period of peaceful coexistence in the NE delta, the fortunes of the Israelites change when a new regime accedes the throne and a period of enslavement (forced labor) follows. Finally, under the leadership of Moses, the Hebrews depart Egypt, spending some years in the Sinai before entering Canaan. The question is, does this plot make any sense in an Egyptian setting? Based upon my concentrated investigation of this question in Egyptian sources for a concentrated period of three years in which this book was being prepared, I believe the answer is yes!

It has been known for many decades that literature such as the Wisdom for Merikare and the Prophecy of Neferti report that during the 1st Intermediate period (e.g., 2200-2000 BC), thousands of Semitic speaking people from the Levant had penetrated Egypt's delta and settled there. This scenario is repeated in the 2nd Intermediate period, culminating with the Hyksos rule of Egypt (ca. 1650-1550 BC). What can now be added to the epigraphic sources for an Asiatic presence in Egypt's NE delta is archaeological evidence of the past couple of decades from the ongoing work at Tel el-Daba^{c}, Tell el-Maskhutta (several other sites in the Wadi Tumilat) and Tell el-Kebir to go along with evidence excavated some time ago from Tell el-Yehudiyeh, Inshas and Tell Farasha. The picture now emerging as the new and old evidence is incorporated is that there was a significant Asiatic population in the Delta from the 1st Intermediate and 2nd Intermediate periods and into the New Kingdom (ca. 2200-1300 BC). According to Merikare, the need for food is what brought the Aamu[20] to Egypt. Similarly, Genesis 12 and 41 report of famines in Canaan

19. David Hackett Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970) 47-48.

20. The Egyptian terms for semitic-speaking Asiatics.

that prompted Abraham and Jacob and the family to go to Egypt to survive.

Following the Hyksos interlude, Egypt was reunited and led by the dynamic Theban and Ramesside monarchs of the 18th and 19th Dynasties. During this period (ca. 1550-1200 BC) Egypt wielded control over most of Canaan and Syria, resulting in thousands of POWs being brought to Egypt, as the Annals of Thutmose III and Stelae of Amenhotep II record.[21] In many cases, written and pictorial sources indicate that these people were pressed into labor projects for the crown, from making bricks and hauling stone for temples, to working in agriculture. In my judgment, after the expulsion of the Hyksos ruling and military elite, Pharaoh Ahmose and his successors discovered large numbers of Semitic speaking peoples, including the Hebrews, in the Delta, who were subsequently forced to work alongside the POWs. This shift in status from being tolerated immigrants to an enslaved population described in Exodus 1:8ff may represent the transition from the Hyksos period to the 18th Dynasty. It is worth noting that the practice of using forced labor for building projects is only documented for the period 1450-1200, the very time most biblical historians place the Israelites in Egypt. The realization that there were others enslaved along with the Hebrews may explain who the "mixed multitude" (*ᶜēreḇ*) of Exod 12:38 are who joined the "freedom train."

As for Joseph's service for pharaoh, Kitchen has amassed considerable evidence in various studies demonstrating the feasibility of the claims of Genesis 45. To this we can now add some new evidence. Situated near the entrance of the Sakkara necropolis, is the tomb of Aper-e1.[22] Discovered in the mid-1980s, it is still being studied and has been only partially published in a preliminary, semi-popular report. This name type is well known viz., Aper + deity (e.g., Resheph, Dagan) in the late Middle Kingdom,[23] and Aper-el was attested for the New Kingdom prior to this discovery.[24] The second element in the

21. See chapter 5, §III.

22. Alain Zivie, *Découvert à Saqqarah: Le Vizier oublié* (Paris: Alain Zivie, 1990) 93-181.

23. W. F. Albright, "Northwest-Semitic Names in a List of Egyptian Slaves from the Eighteenth Century B.C.," *JAOS* 74 (1954) 225; Hayes, *A Papyrus of the Late Middle Kingdom,* 94; Georges Posener, "Les Asiatics en Égypte sous les XIIe et XIIIe Dynasties," *Syria* 34 (1957) 148.

24. Thomas Schneider, *Asiatische Personennamen in des Neuen Reiches* (OBO 114; Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1992) 66-68. Schneider considers the possibility that *ᶜpr* might be a writing for the Semitic *ᶜbd*, "servant," a position shared by James Hoch (*Semitic Words in Egyptian Texts of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994] 64). While this reading is possible, I am not convinced. The Egyptian writing system was perfectly capable of writing Semitic *ᶜbd* and this name is attested in Egypt (see Hoch's entry #69).

name, *ᶜel*, could be the generic term in Semitic languages for "god," or it could point to El the head of the Canaanite pantheon.[25] The name is clearly Semitic as was the tomb owner. Aper-el's son, who was buried in the same chamber as his parents, bears the name "*knn3* who is called *ḥwy*," and he also has a good Egyptian name, Amen-emhet. The common family burial is not typical of the Egyptian nobility during the empire period and appears to reflect a Canaanite burial tradition this family continued in Egypt despite the many areas where they had become Egyptianized.

Aper-el's titles include *ṯ3ty*, vizier, *ḥ3ty-ᶜ* , "mayor of the city," it *nṯr*, "father of the god," as well as *ḫrd n k3p*, "child of the nursery,"[26] He oversaw the king's affairs in Lower Egypt during the final years of Amenhotep III and well into the reign of Akhenaten, apparently dying in his 10th regnal year to judge from the date on the 'wine docket, ca. 1355-1340 BC.

Only when full publication of the tomb and its contents are made can firm comparative analysis with Joseph be advanced. But for the present, it is safe to say that in Aper-el, who was a Vizier and a Semite who held the highest political office in the Court, we have a striking parallel to Joseph in Genesis.

The birth narrative of Moses (Exod 2:1-10), so often compared with the birth of Sargon in the so-called "Sargon Legend," has striking Egyptian features. Consider verse 3 and the highlighted terms: And when she could hide him no longer she took for him a **basket** made of **bulrushes**, and daubed it with bitumen and **pitch**; and she put the child in it and placed it among the **reeds** at the **river's brink** (RSV).

Five of these words have clear Egyptian etymologies, while a sixth is a possibility, and these are:

Hebrew		**Egyptian**	**Translation**
tēbaṯ	>	*ḏb3t*	"chest, box, coffin"
gōme'	>	*ḳm3/gmy*	"papyrus"
zāpeṯ	>	*spt* (?)	"resin, oil"
sûp	>	*ṯwfy*	"reeds, rushes"
hayᵉ'ôr	>	*itrw*	"river Nile"
sᵉpah	>	*spt*	"bank"[27]

The presence of Egyptian terms in this verse, the pivotal one in the story, raise serious questions about a Hebrew dependence upon the "Sargon Legend" or any other Levantine prototype. To continue to

25. Helmer Ringgren, *Religions of the Ancient Near East* (London: SPCK, 1973) 127-32.

26. Zevie, *Découverte à Saqqara*, 152.

27. Cf. Chapter 6, §§II-III.

hold to traditional source critical conclusions that this narrative is the work of J, E, or JE, who shaped his story with the "Sargon Legend" as his archtype, is untenable. Going down this worn out path would require the author, who is heavily influenced by the Mesopotamian *vorlage*, to have also been familiar with New Kingdom Egyptian terms and worked them into the text as a part of his historicist strategy. This scenario is quite a stretch and defies logic. It is far more likely that the birth narrative is at home in an Egyptian setting because Moses actually was born and lived in Egypt!

Moses' upbringing in Pharaoh's court has a ring of authenticity in a New Kingdom palace setting. Earlier it was noted that Aper-el, a Semite, was a *hrd n k3p*, a "child of the nursery." The *k3p* seems to have been connected to the palaces of Egypt, and appears to have had an educational component to them, the *mn*^{c} or *mn*^{c}*t* being the tutor.[28] Little is known about this institution in the Middle Kingdom, but it flourished in the New Kingdom, and was open to foreigners, Nubians and Semites alike.[29] In a study of the "children of the nursery" during the 18th Dynasty, Betsy Bryan observes that "among the children of the Nursery were also children of foreign rulers who were sent or taken as hostages to Egypt to be 'civilized' and then returned to rule as vassals."[30] She also points out that some of "children of the nursery" went on to be court officials, with a few attaining high positions in the government. It was Thutmose III who established the practice of taking princes to Egypt to train them for future service back in their homelands. This practice is attested in the Amarna letters. Aziru of Amurru, in order to show his loyalty to Egypt says "I herewith give [my] sons as 2 att[endants] and they are to do what the k[ing, my lord] orders" (EA 156:9-14).[31] Biryawaza of Damascus writes, "[I] herewith [s]end [m]y brother [t]o you" (194:30-32).[32] Meanwhile, Arasha of Kumidu claimed: "Truly I send my own son to the king, my lord . ." (EA 199.15-21).[33]

The evidence I have gathered indicates that foreign princes in the court of pharaoh during the 18th and 19th Dynasties was a common feature. And, it appears, some would have been reared and trained in the royal nursery. The picture of Moses being taken to

28. Erika Feucht, "The *Hrdw n k3p* Reconsidered," in *Pharaonic Egypt: The Bible and Christianity* (ed. Sarah Israelit-Groll; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1985) 41-44.

29. Ibid., 38-44

30. *The Reign of Thutmose IV* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991) 261.

31. William L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992) 242. A further allusion to Aziru's son being sent to Egypt is found in EA 162.42-54 (Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 249).

32. Ibid., 272.

33. Ibid., 276.

the court by a princess where he was reared and educated[34] is quite consistent with the emerging information about the *k3p* in the New Kingdom, and only during this period were foreigners included in this royal institution.

Time permits me to introduce only one other new piece of archaeological information from Egypt which sheds light and brings credibility to the story of Israel's escape from Egypt.[35] Exod 13:17 states that God did not lead the Israelites out of Egypt by the expected route from Rameses, named *derek ᶜereṣ pilištîm*, "lest they see war and return to Egypt." The excavations over the past ten years at Tell Hebua in NW Sinai reveals the reason, I believe, for avoiding this route. Perched on a narrow strip of elevated land, with swampy marshes on either side, was the ancient town and fortress of Tjaru. Its excavator, Mohammed Abdul Maksoud, has uncovered a massive fort with a defense wall measuring 800 by 400 meters which defended this strategic entry and exit point. The earliest remains of this military installation date back to the 14th Dynasty (ca. 1700 BC), and it continued in use during the Hyksos period and down through the New Kingdom where it reached its greatest size. Had the Israelites followed the logical route out of Egypt, they would have had to pass this imposing fort, or try to circumvent it by passing through the surrounding marshes, a hazard indeed.[36] Hence, a more southerly route was taken, "the way of the wilderness" (Exod 13:18). In my view, this discovery, coupled with recent geomorphological study of the region should deal a death blow to Otto Eissfeldt's northern route exodus theory, a position still held by some biblical scholars and geographers.

III. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

This brief discussion is meant to introduce some of the evidence I have assembled that, apart from any appeals to theology, illustrates that the Pentateuchal sojourn-exodus narratives are historically plausible. A demonstration of the plausibility of the biblical exodus tradition should be a welcomed outcome for Christian scholars since the events described in these narratives are so central to ancient Israel's faith, a point stressed repeatedly in later prophetic literature (cf. Hos 11:1;

34. The New Testament records that "Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22). This tradition concerning Moses follows Philo (*De Vita Mosis* 1.5) and is continued in Josephus' *Antiquities* (2.9.7).

35. Cf. Chapter 7, §III, A.

36. In the marsh or lake that lay to the southeast of Hebua I, I augered for soil samples to a depth of nearly three meters and could not reach what must have been the bottom of this body of water, an indication that it could have been quite deep!

Amos 3:1-2, 9:7; Isa 11:16; Jer 2:6, 7:22; Ezek 20:5) and affirmed by the New Testament (cf. Acts 7:9- 40, 13:17; Heb 3:16, 8:9; 11:26-29; Jude 1:5). Finally, Jesus Christ himself celebrated the exodus by observing Passover, and tying that remembrance to his own death and resurrection, the ultimate salvific event (Luke 22:8-20.)

Catholic and Protestant biblical scholars and theologians alike have agreed on the centrality of the exodus event for the rest of Old Testament history because it was on this event that Israel's nationhood and understanding of God were based. *A Heilsgeschichte* approach to the scriptures insists that God revealed himself through is acts in history. G. Ernest Wright averred, "In Biblical faith everything depends upon whether the central events actually occurred."[37] The exodus from Egypt is certainly central, as Wolfhart Pannenberg likewise affirms, describing it as "Jawheh's primal act of salvation."[38] Thus, the exodus cannot be regarded as a parable or a paradigm, a point advocated by Colin Brown: "If an event such as the Exodus is seen as a paradigm of God's care for his people, the comfort and hope that the believer is exhorted to draw from it are surely ill founded if there is no corresponding historical base."[39]

God's redemptive act, revealed through the exodus event, is not only the "historical base" for ancient Israel's faith, it is also foundation upon which the superstructure of Christianity is built. Consequently, it is impossible to separate the God who revealed himself in the events of the Passover in Egypt from the Son of God who was the Passover lamb of the Gospels. This is why John Bright maintained

> The two Testaments have to do with one and the same God, one history, one heritage, one people. Since this is so, the Christian must claim the Old Testament, as the New Testament did. . . . The unity of the Testaments within a single redemptive history must at all times be affirmed.[40]

This affirmation is personalized by Father Roland de Vaux who confesses, "If the historical faith of Israel is not in a certain way founded in history, this faith is erroneous and cannot command my assent."[41]

Since the faith of Israel rested on the reality of the exodus, and because our Christian faith cannot be understood apart from the same event, the new revisionist history of early Israel must continue to be scrutinized. In this presentation I have only advanced a few ar-

37. *The God Who Acts* (Naperville, Ill.: Allenson, 1952) 126.
38. *Revelation as History* (New York: McMillan, 1968) 125.
39. *History and Faith: A Personal Exploration* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987) 76.
40. *The Authority of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1967) 199-200.
41. "Method in the Study of Early Hebrew History," in *The Bible in Modern Scholarship* (ed. J. P. Hyatt; Nashville: Abingdon, 1965) 16.

guments from my forthcoming book, but I believe a good case can be made for the historicity of the main events of the sojourn-exodus narratives by a careful study of the Hebrew text alongside Egyptian sources. While I am convinced of the necessity of the exodus-Sinai event for theological reasons, the archaeological and epigraphic evidence from Egypt in no way undermines this faith. In fact strongly supports it.

There are still other areas awaiting investigation because the "origins of Israel" debate is far from over. Hopefully my study will encourage others in IBR to use their specialization to provide a positive alternative to the current reductionist tendencies that have dominated the recent discussions of early Israel's history.