

The Old Testament in its World Today

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Introduction.

After tentative experiments, some two hundred years ago, a tidal wave began to rise, to dismiss the Old Testament as a reliable historical source, culminating in the works of Wellhausen and his contemporaries during the 1870s to 1890s, servilely followed by such as S.R. Driver in Oxford, and contemporaries in both Britain and North America. From then on, almost entirely in isolation, the "battle for the Bible" was fought in an academic vacuum. No serious attempt was made to collate the Old Testament writings with their Ancient Near Eastern context. Largely because, during the 1870s to 1890s, that context remained largely unknown and inaccessible. References to Assyrian kings named in the Old Testament turned up in cuneiform, while Egyptian royal names (in essence, Ramesses (II), Shishak and Tirhakah, Necho (II) and Hophra) emerged from hieroglyphic inscriptions. Those, plus references to a mighty primeval Flood in Babylonian, were almost the sum of such knowledge. West-Semitic sources were limited to the Moabite Stone (1868), the Siloam tunnel inscription (1880s), and a few Aramaic items. Parallel with historical scepticism (no patriarchs; Moses divorced from most of the Pentateuch) ran the arbitrary division of the latter five books into imaginary source-documents, and the drastic remodelling of early Hebrew religion, to give the sequence primitive "natural" religion, then prophecy and "reform", then priest-dominated cult, with the Law set up as normative only after the Babylonian Exile. By the First World War, the process of

repetition in print and in collegiate teaching ensured that this body of purely theoretical concepts was progressively enshrined as though it were absolute truth, not to be challenged. This attitude, not rational belief in the authenticity of the Old Testament, was and still is, the real *a priori* "fundamentalism" of anti-intellectual stamp. And so things stayed from the 1800s into the 1930s.

But during the period c. 1920-1940, there was a brief "golden age" of archaeology in the Near East, highlighted by particularly spectacular discoveries such as the tomb of the pharaoh Tutankhamun, and the great Sumerian tombs at Ur in Iraq. Then by major archives such as the 20,000 tablets at ancient Mari, and those in a 'new' West-Semitic language at Ugarit, having much affinity with biblical Hebrew. And, at last, a proper material archaeology of Palestine began to be established, that could be aligned with known historical periods in both ancient Near-Eastern and biblical history. In the light of the new perspectives thus to be gained from work in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Anatolia and Syria as well as in Palestine, enquiring minds in North America, less dominated by German dogma than was Europe, began to correlate the vast new resources with the Old Testament data, and dared to doubt the *a priori* "critical consensus". This was led by W.F. Albright, a scholar of very wide learning and considerable vision, and then his former students John Bright, G.E. Wright, F.M. Cross, D.N. Freedman and others besides, during the 1940s to 1970s.

The new input was stimulating, often fact-based, but not all of it was soundly-founded. In obscurantist mood, German scholarship largely held back from the new approaches, and from the 1970s onward, hostile sceptics (such as T.L. Thompson, J. van Seters, D.B. Redford) sought to discredit the "Albright school". It was easy to pick off

the mistakes of that group, and to turn more recent developments against them, especially when dead and unable therefore to reply to their critics. However, as usual, the neo-critical school had nothing really new or constructive to offer; they were - and are - still immured in the far more serious errors of the 1870s-1890s, compounded with a few more of more recent date. And in the last decades of the 20th century, running into the 21st-century present, the mood of scepticism has in effect run amok, with ever wilder and more strident anti-biblical propaganda trumpeted on all sides.

But going back to a 19th-century mentality, and in cultural isolation, solves nothing. All views need to be put to the test, against a systematically assembled *factual* panorama of life and thought as actually given us by 3,000 years of literate civilisation in the pre-Roman Near East. Which is nearer to the truth by this factual acid test: the Old Testament that we actually possess, or the hypothetical reconstructions by 19th-century gurus and their latter-day imitators? Already, back in 1966, I advocated such a programme of systematic collation of the Hebrew Bible against its ancient context;¹ but this appeal has largely fallen on deaf ears this past 40 years. It is easier to stay in well-trodden paths and have an easier life, than to branch out into the rigours of less familiar ancient languages or of systematic archaeology. So, the really urgent and pioneering work still remains largely unattempted and not done. Maybe some day, some will catch the vision, and buckle down to the honest and long-enduring hard work that is called-for, if any enduring and worthwhile results are to be attained and permanently established. One voice crying out in the wilderness cannot do all. But here, it must suffice to

¹ K.A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*, London: Tyndale Press, 1966, 171-173, in simple form; see now Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003, [hereinafter cited as *OROT*], 497-499, also briefly.

exemplify what fruits can be gained from such studies; today a handful of such case-histories must suffice.

Early Times: Adam to Exodus.

Adam to Abraham.² Very wisely, the writer of the opening of the book of Genesis dates the Creation simply to "In the beginning...". In heroic times gone by, bold spirits like Archbishop Ussher tried to date that primordial event simply by totting up all the years BC from a safe point like Ezra and Nehemiah under well-known Persian kings, back through exile and monarchy, and Judges to Abraham, by simply stringing all the numbers back in one line, and then doing the same to the birth-intervals from Abraham back to Adam, to reach the figure of 4004 BC. However, this kind of procedure fails on several points. It assumes that every single figure has been preserved perfectly; not impossible, but figures were sometimes notoriously difficult so to transmit in antiquity. It also assumes that ancient figures were to be treated as if composed by modern Europeans, and not in any other way, and that no abbreviation has taken place. And (before the last half-century of work) it is subject to error even in monarchy times, because the modes of calculation employed then were not properly understood prior to 1944. And the schematic or abbreviated use of genealogies was not envisaged. The biblical books are *not* modern compositions, but ancient ones, and their methods are those of far antiquity, *not* of our modern times.

² For what follows, see more fully *OROT*, chapter 9 (pp. 421-447), and references (pp. 591-597).

Thus, Hebrew tradition shares not only the concepts of initial Creation and of a punitive Flood with its Mesopotamian contemporaries, but also (more importantly) the entire framework of:

Creation > *generations* > Crisis (Flood) > *generations* > "modern times".

In this context, "modern times" is c. 2000 BC. Alongside Genesis 1-11, we have three other 'primeval protohistories', namely the Sumerian King List, the Atrakhasis Epic, and the "Eridu Genesis". All reflect the same basic concept, and none were composed any later than within c. 2000-1600 BC. In other words, this was a current theme and type of composition in Mesopotamia in patriarchal times. Such matters were live and current when Abraham left Ur for Harran and Canaan. But never again. After c. 1600, people ceased to compose any more such treatments of far antiquity, but were content merely to continue recopying these old works for the 15 to 20 centuries that followed - just as people today no longer write Shakespeare plays or medieval chronicles, but simply reissue them in successive modern reprints. Thus, Genesis 1-11 should be treated as preserving the oldest-formed biblical traditions, ancient even to Abraham.

The Patriarchs. It was dogma from 1880 to the 1940s, that (following Wellhausen) the patriarchal narratives preserved no history, but merely reflected the period of the much later Hebrew monarchy. Here, Albright and others objected, and offered a variety of features that seemed to set the patriarchs squarely in the 2nd millennium BC, especially its earlier half. Then, from the 1970s onward the die-hard sceptics tried to put the clock back almost a century, by showing up weaknesses in part of the Albright-style case, and then decrying the rest noisily but in error. More recent minimalists have simply extended the hostile rhetoric and the errors, but can offer nothing more. Contrary to all

these shrieking siren voices, a careful examination of the available factual data shows (i) that the patriarchal narratives have almost nothing in common with the Hebrew monarchy period (except that both are largely in Canaan!) and (ii) that there is a firm residue of indicators for reaffirming the dating of the patriarchs and various features of the traditions about them back in the early 2nd millennium BC - in fact, more than previously.³ Let us note these briefly.

First, wide scope of non-royal, long-distance travel, as when Terah and Abraham migrated from Ur to Harran, and Abraham onward to Canaan, and Abraham visited Egypt, and his descendants lodged there. As others have noted, this was a period (Old-Babylonian epoch, c. 1900-1600 BC) with unusually open freedom of movement for people other than the privileged few (*e.g.*, kings and armies, royal envoys, merchants).

Second, similarly wide-ranging pastoral transhumance of people and herds/flocks in the same epoch, from southern Babylonia (*cf.* Ur), up into Upper Mesopotamia, across to Syria to Lebanon and Amurru.

Third, long-distance marriages; both Abraham and Jacob sent or travelled back to Harran to procure wives for son or self, even as Shamshi-Adad I of Assyria in the east obtained a daughter for his own son from the King of Qatna in the Syrian west, with which city the kings of Mari also kept up relations.

Fourth, both Abraham and Joseph and Jacob met their respective pharaohs in the East Delta (not 100 miles upstream at more distant Memphis). This was only possible at certain periods, such as c. 1970-1540 BC, during the 12th-15th Dynasties. Earlier is irrelevant; later was not possible until Moses' time about the late 14th/13th centuries BC (much too late for the patriarchs!)

³ For an extensive treatment, see *OROT*, chapter 7 (pp. 313-372), and references (pp. 566-581).

Fifth, the appearance of alliances from the East (Mesopotamia and neighbours) in Genesis 14. In greater Mesopotamia, such alliances were commonplace between the jostling groups of city-states that flourished independently between the fall of the empire of the IIIrd Dynasty of Ur (c. 2000 BC) and the supremacy over most of Mesopotamia attained by Hammurabi of Babylon, c. 1750/1700 BC, after whom only the basic kingdoms of Babylon and Assyria remained as major players.

Sixth, the intervention of Elam (from W. Iran) away up in Upper Mesopotamia and in some matters further westward (*e.g.*, envoys to Qatna), as in Genesis 14. Never before, and never again, did distant Elam get involved beyond her local squabbles with Babylon and Assyria.

Seventh, Genesis 14 finds a close literary and topical parallel (but from an Easterner's viewpoint!) in the foundation-inscription of Iahdun-Lim, King of Mari, of the 18th century BC.

Eighth, the name of Tid^ēal, ruler of groups in Gen. 14, is but a Hebrew transcript of the well-attested Hittite royal name Tudkhalia, first attested in Hittite records from before the Old Kingdom (*i.e.*, before c. 1650 BC), and still earlier as a Hittite name in the Old-Assyrian merchant-records in Anatolia, c. 1950-1840 BC. At that period, local supreme chiefs were masters of confederated settlements or groups, like Tid^ēal.⁴

Ninth, the treaties between the patriarchs and their neighbours and relations (Gen. 21; 31; 36) find clear analogues in actual treaties published from Mari and Tell Leilan, of the 18th century BC - and of no earlier or later dates when the treaty-formats were entirely different.

⁴ Cf. long since, with references, Kitchen, *Ancient Orient & Old Testament*, London: Tyndale Press, 1966, 46.

Tenth, the price paid for Joseph (Gen. 37:28) at 20 shekels agrees well with the average prices of young male slaves at that sum, in both a Mari tablet and the Laws of Hammurabi, 18th century BC. Prices rose in later times, and were cheaper in previous epochs.

Eleventh, social usages (marriage, children, inheritance, etc.) correspond with those known from the first half of the 2nd millennium BC, these comparisons petering out after the Nuzi period (15th century).

Twelfth, patriarchal religion shows early-2nd-millennium usage, and differs clearly from that of later times in several respects.

Thirteenth, patriarchal Canaan is a land of small city-states and of areas within which pastoralists (like the patriarchs) could circulate freely; it is the world of the Egyptian Execration-Texts that list city-states and tribal hinterlands and groups in the 19th/18th centuries BC. All of this is radically different from the Canaan of the Hebrew monarchy, unified under its monarchs to the exclusion of little more than Philistia and Phoenicia, and without independent tribal pastoralists within its borders (goodbye, Wellhausen!)

Fourteenth, the patriarchal proper names are mainly of well-attested types; the so-called Amorite Imperfective type (initial Y in Hebrew; initial J in English) is found overwhelmingly in the early 2nd millennium, and massively less in any later period.

Fifteenth, their shepherding usages are closer to the Old-Babylonian than to later periods.

Sixteenth, the Egyptian titles "in the house", "over the house" (for domestic servants) is mainly Old and Middle-Kingdom terminology (3rd and early 2nd millennia BC).

Seventeenth, the term *saris* is used of officials, not eunuchs, in Egypt, and mainly so in the parallel Old-Babylonian period.

There are also other features going back to the early 2nd millennium, but which continue into later times also. One may add that camels are *not* anachronistic at this period, as external data show; "Philistines" is a 12th-century substitution for some outdated term (such as Caphtorim, etc.), and the patriarchal ones are in character very unlike those of the later Pentapolis. Other minor adjustments are likewise from later times, but have no bearing on the basic date of the main patriarchal data.

In the light of the foregoing, there is no reason whatsoever to doubt either the former existence of these folk, or the fact of transmission of data from their lives and epoch without which the phenomena listed would be very difficult to account for.

Exodus and Sinai/Moab Covenant. Well after the period of the patriarchs, the books of Exodus to Deuteronomy purport to record the oppression of their descendants, the early Hebrews, in Egypt, their exodus from Egypt, their establishment by covenant as subjects of their deity YHWH, first in Sinai, then renewed in Moab and Canaan, and the instituting of a portable shrine and cult in YHWH's honour as their sovereign. Precisely as with the patriarchs, all of this has been summarily dismissed both in the 19th century and currently as if it were 100% fiction - and with no more justification than in the case of the patriarchs. Here again, there is very considerable background that rules out a late/fictional origin. And again, we must summarise this situation with concision.⁵

Much nonsense has been talked about "no trace of the Exodus is found in Egypt, therefore no Exodus". Such allegations neatly sidestep the underlying reasons for the apparent silence. First, the exodus of a large body of slaves with loss of a royal chariot-

squadron following on other severe losses to Egypt represented a physical and ideological defeat for the pharaoh concerned; *and no pharaoh ever commemorated disasters of this kind*. And in the wet Delta mud, no papyrus records survive. We have only a few wine-jar labels!

Second, like any other bottom-of-the-pile labourers, the Hebrew slaves would have lived rough, in mud hovels at most, in temporary encampments, moved around when and where needed. These simply dissolved back into the ground, once abandoned. Such people left no identifying traces.

Third, the actual work-conditions recorded (as in Exodus 4, etc.) do find clear analogues in specifically Egyptian data. The use of two levels of oversight; the Egyptian overseers armed with staff or whip; the concern for numbers and quality of bricks produced; the use of straw in the making of bricks [to enhance plasticity and good drying] - all these and other aspects are clearly mirrored in such Egyptian sources as the brickmaking scene in the tomb-chapel of Rekhmire, the Louvre leather scroll (Year 5 of Ramesses II), the "Miscellany" papyri, and so on. On top of these is the issue of absence from work for worship or similar reasons (cf. Exodus 5:1-4). Pharaoh's annoyance is well understandable if one peruses the work-registers for the teams labouring in the Valley of the Kings, and notes the long series of absences from work that these often reveal. Not least those that give reasons for individual absenteeism: having a birthday; brewing beer with the boss; mummifying or burying a relative; and - "worshipping his God".

Fourth, the sequence and content of the infamous plagues that smote Egypt on the eve of the Exodus (Exodus 7-11). Quite some time ago, it was shown that the first nine

⁵ See for full details and references, my *OROT*, chapter 6 (pp. 241-312) and notes (pp. 553-566).

plagues form an interrelated sequence based directly on conditions that reflect an excessive annual Nile-flood, through the Egyptian agricultural year from July/August through to March/April. This had to derive ultimately from somebody who had actually seen such conditions on the spot (In Egypt); it could not be simply be invented by some over-imaginative priest in exilic Babylon a thousand miles away, centuries later.

Fifth, the geography of the Exodus is coherent so far as it can be followed.⁶ *Raamses* is none other than the massive East Delta capital Pi-Ramesse (based around Khataana-Qantir) built by Ramesses II, and covering an area about four miles long (north-south) by two miles wide (west-east). It long eluded detection, because it had been razed to the ground from c. 1070 BC onwards to provide building-materials for the next Delta capital, Tanis (Zoan); only foundations are left. But ground-penetrating radar has vividly revealed the ground-plans of palaces, horse-stabling, workshops, etc. South of it, at no great distance was *Pithom*, to be located very probably at Tell er-Retaba. This was too far west to lie on the Exodus-route, hence it features only as a building-site (Ex. 1:11). But it was in fact 9 Roman miles from Tell Maskhuta, which was *Succoth* (and NOT Pithom, as inscriptions make clear), on the escape-route to the south-east; this exit was later also successfully used by a pair of slaves under Sethos II. Beyond that point, the trail currently gets fainter, but would go slightly north, then east through the *yam-suph* or Sea of Reeds, a zone irrevocably changed by the building of the Suez Canal some 130 years ago. Thence, south along the west side of the Sinai peninsula, well away from the Mediterranean and its road bristling with Egyptian army-depots and fortresses in Ramesses II's time, and thus to be avoided (cf. Ex. 13:17-18).

Sixth, the ecology of the travels through Sinai and on to the Arabah and up towards Moab shows a variety of natural features that bear on the route. This applies to water and wells down Sinai's west side, to water from the rock, to the direction and seasonal landings of quails, and to people sinking into mudflats (*kewirs*), Nu. 16). All these phenomena are special to the districts concerned - not remotely familiar to captives in later Babylon.

Seventh, the Sinai Covenant (Exodus-Leviticus) and its renewals in Moab (Deuteronomy) and Canaan (Joshua 24). The format and content of this covenant is clear, especially in its simplest reports (Deut.; Jos. 24). It has title-lines, historical prologue, a full set of laws/stipulations, deposit of the text by the Ark and to be read-out periodically; there were witnesses; and it was sanctioned by blessings and curses, for obedience or disobedience. This format and content is very specific, and is reflected in treaties of the 14th/13th centuries BC - and from no other period, in the 2000 years (c. 2600-650) during which such items are attested. Only the blessings/curses sequence (with more curses than blessings) is a yet *older* inheritance from the law-collection tradition going back to Lipit-Ishtar and Hammurabi in the patriarchal period. Nothing is later, where evidence exists. The endless yapping about Deuteronomic theology (and the book Deuteronomy) dating only from the 7th century BC is a delusion; "Deuteronomic" principles occur all over the biblical world, from the 2nd millennium onwards, as does monotheism (cf. Akhenaten of Egypt). Hence, we have no valid excuse not to trace the Sinai covenant back to the period of the Exodus.

⁶ Besides *OROT*, see my paper "Egyptians and Hebrews from Ra'amses to Jericho", in E.D. Oren (ed.), *The Origin of Early Israel - Current Debate* (Beer-Sheva XII), London/Beersheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negeb Press, 1998, 65-131, esp. 69-85.

Eighth, the Tabernacle and its cult. For most of this last century, it has been condemned by biblicists as a late "priestly fiction", dreamed up in exile in Babylon (from at least Wellhausen onwards). However, the truth appears to be the opposite. Collapsible shrines and ceremonial structures were used and known in Egypt from before the Pyramids, over 1000 years before Moses, never mind the Exile. Mother of Kheops who built the Great Pyramid at Giza, Queen Hetepheres had just such a gold-plated wooden tabernacle as part of her bedroom suite; the recovered original is in Cairo Museum, and a full-sized facsimile in Boston Museum. Other Egyptian examples (in tomb-scenes) were used for funerary and mummification rites, all in the 3rd millennium BC. In the early 2nd millennium (patriarchal period), the authorities at Mari on the Middle Euphrates used such structures for outdoor worship - in rectangular enclosures (just as in Exodus), using the same terminology (*qarasu*). Coming down to Moses' period, the war-tent of Ramesses II at the Battle of Qadesh was of the same design as the Hebrew Tabernacle, also within a rectangular enclosure (in his case, of shields). Contemporary with this, the god El at Ugarit in N. Phoenicia is described as using a tabernacle, and the term *qrs* again is mentioned. Then, in the 12th century, the Midianites at Timna (NE Sinai) built a fixed tabernacle, with stone base, wooden frame and yellow and red woollen cover (traces were found). And so on. Thus, the use of collapsible, portable structures is widely and well attested, from considerable antiquity down to the exodus and even later (not, so far, after the 11th century). Significantly, no Mesopotamian temple or site shows any use of such structures after the 13th century BC. Thus, the whole of our evidence, positive and negative, condemns outright the negativism of Wellhausen and his servile followers to this day. The use of ritual and offering is

attested as far back as ancient temples and shrines go, for millennia before either Moses or the Exile. No Hebrew need have waited until the latter to learn about priestly service or offerings and ritual! That of the Tabernacle was quite incredibly simple and 'primitive': a small offering twice daily, and barely a dozen feasts in the year. Contrast the festal calendar of 15th-12th century Egyptian Thebes with almost 60 annual festivals, some of immense length (up to 3 weeks!), wealth of foods and lavish magnificence. Or the daily rites of an Egyptian temple - a six-act rite, twice daily? Away with such poverty! Pharaoh's temples had thrice daily offertories with rituals habitually 48 to 62 'acts' long! Scapegoat rites, priesthood installation rites, use of long-shaft trumpets, - these and much more from Exodus-Leviticus and Numbers were customary in the biblical world from at least Moses' time and also well before his epoch.

In short, look where we may, there is abundant and emphatically 'early' background that gives us the real context of what we find at the Exodus and its consequences at Sinai.

Later Times: the Hebrew Monarchies and After.

United Monarchy: David & Solomon. After the entry into Canaan and settlement there, the Hebrews found themselves eventually under much pressure, especially from the Philistines, and resorted to asking for a human king. The first one, Saul, came adrift, and eventually succumbed to the Philistine threat. After him, his youthful lieutenant David was appointed. He not only repulsed the Philistine foe, but took over his East-of-Jordan neighbours, which involved him with the Arameans from the north. Defeating them gave him control of central Syria, and alliance with Hamath access to the W. bend of the Euphrates.

So arose what should be called a "mini-empire". The vast Hittite and Egyptian empires had crashed or crumbled by c. 1180 (Hittites) and c. 1150 (Egyptians), leaving the Levant to make its own way. No other major power arose until the reawakening of Assyria in the 9th century BC. But within the three centuries between c. 1180 and 900 BC, there was a power-vacuum in the Levant and environs - and lesser powers arose to fill it. These were local empires with vassals, but *not* on the vast scale of Egypt, Hatti or Assyria. In the north, Tarhuntassa took over the southern edge of Anatolia and, as Tabal, lasted until the Assyrians arrived about the 8th century. In N. Syria, its neighbour Carchemish kept control of the areas it had ruled formerly under central Hittite control, and its kings (like Tarhuntassa) then took the appropriate title of "Great King", only giving it up in the 10th century, when their dominion collapsed, leaving Carchemish as simply a city-state.⁷

This was partly under Aramean pressure by c. 1000-990 BC, from Aram-Zobah, whose ruler even gained control of the Euphrates fords (as reported by a later Assyrian king). This was most likely the biblical Hadadezer, then overthrown by David who inherited his mantle and passed this Israelite dominion on to Solomon. However, after a firm beginning and an ambitious building-programme, Solomon's wisdom failed him eventually, and by the end of his reign he lost Aram (and thus Hamath) and Edom. After his time, the Hebrew kingdom split in two, and these fragments had to cope successively with the prowling powers of Egypt, Aram-Damascus, and finally Assyria. For all this, we have Samuel and Kings.

⁷ See Kitchen, "The Controlling Role of External Evidence in assessing the Historical Status of the Israelite United Monarchy", in V.P. Long, D.W. Baker, G.J. Wenham (eds.), *Windows into Old Testament History*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002, 111-130 with maps. For the rest of this section, cf. *OROT*, chapter 4 (pp. 81-158) and notes thereto (pp. 520-539).

However, our minimalist 'friends', both old and new, will have none of it. For them David and Solomon either did not exist, or at best were shadows of what the biblical writers portray. And, as usual, this issue reflects the unevenness of current knowledge, and misunderstanding (both genuine and deliberate) of what we do have. The charge that the Davidic-Solomonic "empire" is but a reflection of the later vast Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian and Persian empires will not wash; these were radically different not only in size but also in organisation. The "mini-empire" period (1180-900) is a special phenomenon unto itself, and must be recognised as such, thanks to the external data from Tarhuntassa and Carchemish, and intelligent use of the Assyrian inscriptions and biblical data.

David's real existence is no longer open to any legitimate doubt. After much silly fuss, the mention of the "House (=Dynasty) of David" on the Tel Dan stela should be regarded as definitive; and a damaged mention on the Moabite Stone is very probable (with no convincing alternative). These are (at c. 840 BC) barely 130 years after his death. More dramatic still, date-wise, is the highly probable reading of *hadabiyat-Dawit*, "Heights of David", in the topographical list of Shishak (Shoshenq I of Egypt), of c. 925 BC, less than 50 years after David's death. Again, no convincing alternative is apparent.

As for Solomon, we need always to bear in mind the sheer destruction of Jerusalem as a building-site, over and over again (Neo-Babylonians; Persians; Seleucids and Hasmoneans; Herod and Rome; Byzantines; Arabic rulers; Crusaders; the Ottomans; and modern times...). It is almost a wonder that anything survives; and much today is covered by the buildings of the existing city, and remains entirely inaccessible. So, we need not expect to recover anything structural from either his temple or his palace. However, from the descriptions in Kings, both institutions can be seen to conform to

well-attested models known archaeologically from Syria-Palestine and places further afield. Likewise, such details as gold-sheet decoration, cherubim, and multi-story storerooms around the outside of the Temple. The same applies to such furnishings as the wheeled lavers for example. Many palace features can likewise be paralleled.⁸ Elsewhere, Solomon is said to have built at Gezer, Megiddo and Hazor; three matching gateways at these sites in suitably datable strata would illustrate this; noisy objections to this dating rest on PC prejudice, not on the total facts available.

His foreign relations are above criticism. Unlike Amenophis III some 400 years earlier, the pharaohs of the Late Period were entirely willing to marry off daughters to both foreigners and commoners to further their political aims. So a daughter of pharaoh could well be welcomed into Solomon's court. The action at Gezer (cf. 1 Kings 9:16) suggests that Solomon and a pharaoh had collaborated to crush Philistine and local Canaanite opposition; on date, this would fall into the reign of Siamun, of whom we have a minor martial monument. And the Queen of Sheba hailed from a developing kingdom; her involvement in politics is no different to that of North-Arabian queens a century or so later in Assyrian sources.

There can be no objection to Solomon's association with wisdom writings (cf. Prov. 1:1); in this, he was heir to an almost 2,000-year-old tradition in Egypt and Mesopotamia, and his work on multiple grounds is consistent with a 10th-century date.

As for wealth, the gifts of 120 talents of gold from the king of Tyre and the queen of Sheba are quite ordinary; two centuries later, Metten II of Tyre had to pay 150 talents to Tigalath-pileser III of Assyria. The 666 talents Solomon received in a year (about 26 tons) is more imposing - but is abject poverty when compared with the 383 tons of gold

⁸ Cf. *OROT*, 122-131, with plates XVII-XX.

and silver that Osorkon I gave to the gods of Egypt, beginning just 4 years after his father Shishak's raid on Rehoboam of Judah and neighbouring Jeroboam. Where did most of that (even for Egypt) unparalleled sum come from, if not substantially from the late Solomon's hoarded wealth? In 30 years he might have amassed about 500 tons; but that pales into insignificance compared with what Alexander the Great extracted from the far vaster Persian Empire: 1,180 tons of gold at Susa, and a breathtaking 7,000 tons overall. Any talk of fantasy in Solomon's figures is, to say the least, premature.

Divided Kingdoms to Persian Judea.

The Twin Kingdoms. Here, we concentrate on the Egyptian episodes. Shishak's campaign in Palestine is amply attested by his own monuments, notably the great scene and topographical list at Karnak in Thebes, and by the stela (now a mere fragment) that he planted in Megiddo, as visiting card and mark of his overlordship (however brief). Back in Egypt, Shishak celebrated his victory with investment in enormous temple buildings. The only one to survive is the great colonnaded forecourt at Karnak temple, left (like the adjoining gateway) wholly unfinished at his sudden death within about a year of his campaign. The surviving content of the topographical list shows that he brought Jeroboam to book as well as Rehoboam.

Later contacts were more friendly, if sometimes ill-starred. In about 725 BC, Hoshea (last king of Israel) rebelled against Assyria, expecting help from So of Egypt - but none came, and his kingdom was ended by the Assyrians by 722. So would at this date have been Osorkon IV, the all but powerless last ruler of the 22nd Dynasty, founded by the mighty Shishak just over 200 years before. As shilkanni, the luckless Osorkon IV had in turn to grovel to Sargon II of Assyria. A few years later, it was prince Taharqa as

ruler of Kush that Shebitku as king in Egypt sent out against Sennacherib in 701 BC (to the great confusion of Egyptologically disorientated biblical scholars). Not so about Necho II of Egypt slaying Josiah of Judah in 609 BC, or about Hophra (Apries) letting down Zedekiah in 588/587 BC.

Arabia comes as our end. The Exile was a Babylonian affair. But the Jews that resettled in Judea under the Persian Empire had other foes. Sanballat of Samaria and Tobiah of Ammon belonged to familiar contexts, but not so Nehemiah's third foe, Geshem/Gashmu, the Arabian. A discovery in the Egyptian East Delta revealed an Arabian shrine, whence came costly votive gifts, including a silver bowl dedicated by "Qaynu son of Geshem, King of Qedar", and Greek coins of the 4th/early 5th century BC. So, Geshem stands revealed as a close southern neighbour of Nehemiah in the later 5th century BC. The foregoing deliberately bald, concise, sharply contoured extract from the data that suggest our Old Testament is serious writing must for the moment stand for a much greater whole. Its message is clear.