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REDATING THE MOUNT EVAL ALTAR: A RE-EVALUATION OF THE EVIDENCE

In 1980, archaeologist Adam Zertal discovered a structure on Mount Eval whose unique features and dimensions closely match the biblical and rabbinic description of Joshua's sacrificial altar. The altar's generally accepted XIII century BCE dating places it at odds with the biblical chronology. This article considers the evidence for both the XIII century and XV century Exodus approaches. The Egyptian historical record and relevant archaeological data are shown to support the biblical chronology. The Mount Eval pottery assemblage is reviewed and a re-examination of the Mount Eval scarab collection is presented. New evidence is presented showing the scarabs of Mount Eval to support the Bible's account of a XV century BCE Exodus.

Introduction

In 1980, archaeologist Adam Zertal discovered a structure on Mount Eval, built entirely from uncut stones, whose unique features and dimensions closely match both the biblical and rabbinic description of the sacrificial altar.¹ The large rectangular structure, (9x7 meters and 4 meters high),

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1 Cf. Adam Zertal, *A Nation Is Born: The Altar on Mount Ebal and the Emergence of Israel* (Tel Aviv: Yedioth, 2007) [Hebrew].

which may only be accessed from the top via a central ramp, connects with another foundation wall surrounding the structure on three sides, in line with what the Mishna refers to as the ‘*sovev*’.² The fill’s approximately 1,000 burnt bones of ritually pure male animals and conspicuous lack of any pig bones or pagan figurines, distinguish the site from all contemporary Canaanite cultic locations.³ The site’s exceedingly brief period of function and interment beneath a thick camouflage layer of field stones intended to decommission it while protecting it, point to its function as a temporary Israelite worship site.⁴ The altar’s location, structure, and duration of use appear to conform with Deuteronomy’s instructions for the erection of a temporary altar on Mount Eval, which would play a central role in the covenant renewal ceremony described in the book of Joshua.⁵ The altar’s generally accepted XIII century BCE dating presents a challenge inasmuch as it is at odds with the biblical chronology.⁶ Three possible explanations for this discrepancy may be considered:

2 Cf. Ex. 20:21; Mishna Middot 3.

3 Critics who suggested the altar to be a watchtower, or alternatively a farmstead, ignore the unique features of the site. Cf. Zertal, *A Nation is Born*, 190-206; Aaron Kempinski “Joshua’s Altar – An Iron Age I Watchtower,” *BAR* 12.1 (1986), 42, 44-49, and Zertal’s response, “How Can Kempinski be so Wrong?” *BAR* 12.1 (1986), 43, 49-53; cf. Anson Rainey, “Zertal’s Altar – A Blatant Phony,” *BAR* 12.4 (1986), 66, and R. K. Hawkins’ refutation of the farmstead theory in Hawkins, *The Iron Age I Structure on Mt. Ebal: Excavation and Interpretation* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 79-81. Cf. Nadav Na’aman, who argues that the structure is the Temple of Ba’al Berith in idem, “The Tower of Shechem and the House of El-berith” [Hebrew], *Zion* 51.3 (1986), 259–80. This approach raises more problems than it attempts to solve as it fails to consider the numerous features of the altar that correlate with the biblical text. Furthermore, it does not satisfactorily address the problem of Mount Eval’s location outside of biblical Shechem.

4 Adam Zertal, “An Early Iron Age Cultic Site on Mount Ebal: Excavation Seasons 1982–1987; Preliminary Report,” *Tel Aviv* 13–14 (1986-1987), 105–165, 12.

5 Deut. 27; Josh. 8.

6 The biblical chronology which places the Exodus in the XV century BCE is primarily based on 1 Kings 6:1 which dates the beginning of the construction of the Temple of Solomon to the 480th year from the Exodus. Another relevant source is Jud. 11:26, in which Jephthah the Judge, in his message to the king of the Ammonites, declares that

- 1- Whereas the altar is an authentic Israelite altar, it is not the altar of Joshua.
- 2- The altar is Joshua's altar, and as such poses a challenge to the biblical chronology.
- 3- The altar is Joshua's altar; however, an error has been made in its dating.

In this article I will explore all the above possibilities. The evidence presented will lead us to adopt the third option.

1. Is the Israelite Altar on Mount Eval the Altar of Joshua?

It is highly improbable that a major Israelite center of worship would have been established atop Mount Eval disconnected from the site of Israel's formative covenant renewal ceremony. Such a seminal event would most surely have been preserved within the national collective memory.⁷ This assumption is bolstered by the unique nature of the finds that support the site's function as a place of centralized worship as opposed to a local tribal shrine.⁸ A trapezoid stone seal decorated with grooves and drillings found in the fill of the altar bears a close resemblance to similar dice-like objects

Israel had been ensconced in the land for 300 years. Since Jephthah lived approximately a century before the monarchic period, ca, 1100 BCE [cf. Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 170], 300 years brings us back to ca.1400 BCE. Advocates of a XIII century Exodus need to squeeze the entire period of the Judges into 200 years which is exceedingly difficult, even assuming the different judges to have overlapped.

- 7 The Mishna preserves just such an oral history with its statement that the erection of Joshua's altar on Mount Eval took place apart from the blessings and curses on the slopes of Mount Eval and Gerizim. Cf. *Sota* 7:5.
- 8 Cf. Ben-Noon's discussion of the Mount Eval altar and its correlation with the biblical data in Yoel Ben-Noon, "The Structure on Mt. Ebal and Its Identification as an Altar," in *Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh: A Collection of Researches and Discoveries in Historical Geography* (Z. Ehrlich ed.; Ophrah, Israel: Ophrah Field School, 1985), 137-163, [Hebrew]. Regarding the requirement that the altar be square in shape, Ben-Noon suggests that the obligation does not relate to the length of the sides but rather to the corners; that they be right angles.

found at the cultic center at Arad.⁹ Beerli and Ben-Yosef propose that these dice were likely used as part of what the Bible refers to as the ‘casting of lots’, or divine prognostication, possibly associated with the *Urim veTummim*.¹⁰ A small pumice incense altar placed in the favissa, or votive deposit, common in cultic buildings, in addition to six characteristic Egyptian bronze bracelets that appear to have been interred as ritual foundational offerings, point to the consecration of the site as a sanctuary.¹¹ The unique nature of these finds reinforces the fundamental character of the Mount Eval site as a sanctuary, casting doubt on the assumption that the altar is unrelated to the Israelite covenantal ceremony that took place in the days of Joshua. Furthermore, in comparison with the late XII–early XI century altar discovered in the sanctuary in Arad, the altar on Mount Eval is considerably larger, testament to its singular function.¹² Finally, the altar’s location within a large circular sandal shaped enclosure, similar to other Iron Age enclosures discovered by Zertal in the Menashe territory and identified by him as ‘*gilgalim*’, further point to the altar as having functioned as a centralized Israelite cultic site.¹³

The specific connection to Joshua’s altar is strengthened by the twenty pieces of white plaster found in the altar’s fill (about 3 cm thick) carefully organized in layers, in what appears to have been a deliberate attempt to ensconce them within the altar.¹⁴ This find correlates well with the biblical command to plaster the altar so that the text of the Torah could be inscribed upon it.¹⁵ More recently, a small lead amulet containing a Hebrew proto alphabetic curse inscription together with the name of God was found in the discarded material from the excavation. This new find further supports the

9 Hawkins, *The Iron Age I Structure*, 62-63.

10 R. Beerli and D. Ben-Yosef, “Gaming Dice and Dice for Prognostication in the Ancient East in Light of the Finds from Mount Ebal,” *Revue Biblique* 117 (2010), 408–28.

11 Zertal, “An Early Iron Age Cultic Site,” 148-150.

12 Cf. Miriam Aharoni, “Arad: The Israelite Citadels,” *NEAEHL* 1, (1993), 82-87, 83.

13 Cf. Zertal, *A Nation Is Born*, 118-122.

14 Zertal, “An Early Iron Age Cultic Site,” 113. Traces of plaster were also found in the area surrounding the altar.

15 Deut. 27:2,4; cf. Josh. 8:32.

identification of the altar with the one erected in the days of Joshua, which was inextricably connected to the ceremony of the blessing and the curse.¹⁶

One of the obstacles to identifying the altar on Mount Eval with Joshua's altar is the fact that it is located on Eval's northern slope; out of view of Mount Gerizim, the site of Joshua's covenant renewal ceremony.¹⁷ Zertal's attempt to 'move mountains' and resolve this problem by reassigning the locations of Mount Gerizim and Kabir creates more problems than it solves.¹⁸ There is, however, no compelling reason to assume that the altar was necessarily constructed at the site of the covenant renewal ceremony. Whereas the biblical mandate does list these two commandments consecutively,¹⁹ it does not link the two ceremonies.²⁰ In fact, the Jerusalem Talmud records a tradition that the building of the altar and the covenant renewal ceremony were separated by a span of fourteen years; even though the description of the two events in Joshua appears consecutively.²¹ It is also, however, entirely possible that the ceremonies were conducted in an essentially contiguous manner, with a three kilometer walk connecting one event to the other.

The collective weight of the evidence pointing to the correlation between the Mount Eval site and Joshua's altar is overwhelming. It may best be expressed in popular parlance, 'if it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it probably is a duck!' This of course brings us back to the problem of the altar's proposed XIII century date.

16 Scott Stripling et al., "'You are Cursed by the God YHW!': An Early Hebrew Inscription from Mt. Ebal," *Heritage Science* (2023) 11:105. <<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40494-023-00920-9>>

17 Josh. 8:30-35.

18 Zertal, *A Nation is Born*, 225-241.

19 Deut. 27:4-26. Cf. Deut. 11:21-32 which does not even mention the altar ceremony.

20 The two commandments in Deut. 27 are introduced separately and presented in distinct units.

21 JT Sotah, VII:3.

2. Is the Biblical Chronology Accurate?

Before examining the biblical chronology indicating a XV century Exodus, I will briefly present and evaluate the XIII century approach. Proponents of the XIII century Exodus-conquest theory cite Albright's excavations at Bethel, Lachish, Debir and Ai,²² and Yadin's excavations at Hazor.²³ Re-evaluation of the data however, by Wood and Ussishkin, has shown that Beitin/ Bethel was destroyed in the early XII century, likely by the Philistines,²⁴ and that inscriptions unearthed at Lachish indicate an even later destruction.²⁵ It has further been demonstrated that Albright's identification of Ai was mistaken as the proposed site lacks critical topographical features presented by the text.²⁶ Wood identifies *Kh. el-Maqatir*, as biblical Ai, based on its Late Bronze occupation/ destruction and its topographical agreement with the narrative specifications of the story told in Joshua. Moshe Kochavi's excavations at Kh. Rabud have likewise presented a far more likely candidate for biblical Debir.²⁷ Regarding Hazor, it remains undetermined if its XIII century destruction layer should be attributed to Joshua or to Deborah. Bruce Waltke makes a strong case for an even earlier Late Bronze destruction layer.²⁸ Data from the Jericho excavations contraindicating the XIII century approach

22 Cf. John J. Bimson, *Redating the Exodus and Conquest* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield, 1981) 30–73; William F. Albright, "Ai and Beth-Aven," in *Excavations and Results at Tell el-Fûl (Gibeah of Saul)* (AASOR 4, ed. Benjamin W. Bacon; New Haven, American Schools of oriental research, 1924), 141-149.

23 William F. Albright, *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963) 27–28.

24 Bryant G. Wood, *Palestinian Pottery of the Late Bronze Age: An Investigation of the Terminal LB IIB Phase* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1985), 353–55, 447–48, 471–72.

25 David Ussishkin, "Lachish," *OEANE* 3.319.

26 Bryant Wood, "Locating 'Ai: Excavations at Kh. El-Maqatir 1995-2000 and 2009-2014," in *In the Highland's Depth: Journal for the Study of Archaeology and History of the Highland's Region* 6 (2016), 17-49.

27 Moshe Kochavi, "Khirbet Rabud," *Tel Aviv: Journal of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University* 1 (1974), 2-23.

28 Bruce K. Waltke, "Palestinian Artifactual Evidence Supporting the Early Date of the Exodus," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129 (January 1972), 33-47.

and offering strong support for a XV century conquest will be presented below in the section devoted to the archaeological basis for a XV century Exodus.

Support for the XIII-century Exodus theory is also based on an assumed correlation between the topographical name Raamses, one of the two storage cities mentioned by the Bible as having been built by Israelite slave labor,²⁹ and the pharaonic dynastic name Ramesses.³⁰ This argument fails to stand up to scrutiny. To begin with, Wood compellingly argues that the biblical text is replete with later editorials of place names.³¹ Therefore, the assumption that the name of the historical figure, Ramesses, appears in the biblical narrative is inconclusive. If however, one insists on assuming to the contrary; that the names used in biblical narratives are necessarily the same as they were referred to at the time, then the XIII century approach fails to take into account the fact that during the lifetime of Joseph, Israel settled in the Land of Raamses, albeit a different locality than the later storage city, indicating that the toponym appears to have already been in use hundreds of years prior to the rise of the XIX Dynasty.³²

Naville's 1883 excavation of Tell el-Maskhuta, one of the treasure cities of Ramesses II, and what Naville assumed to be the site of biblical Pithom,³³ has served as further basis for the Ramesses II theory.³⁴ However, if Ramesses II was the Pharaoh of the Exodus then Moses would have had to have fled from Ramesses' father, Seti I.³⁵ Since Pithom and Raamses were built prior to these events,³⁶ the city of Raamses had to have been built

29 Ex. 1:11.

30 Cf. Kenneth Kitchen who promotes this claim in idem, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 256, 309–10.

31 Cf. Bryant Wood, "The Rise and Fall of the 13th Century Exodus Conquest Theory," *JETS* 48.3 (2005), 475-489, 479.

32 Gen. 47:11.

33 John Day, *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 29.

34 This view is summarized by E. L. Curtis in, "Chronology of the Old Testament," in James Hastings, *Dictionary of the Bible*, (Fort Collins: Delmarva, 2015), p. 26.

35 Cf. Ex. 2:15.

36 Cf. Ex. 1:11.

well before the rise of Ramesses II and his storage city at Tell el-Maskhuta.³⁷ Therefore, the fact that one of the storage cities was named Raamses cannot serve as a basis for identifying the pharaoh of the Exodus with Ramesses II.³⁸ To sum up, arguments in favor of a XIII century Exodus base themselves on the specious interpretation of archaeological data. The historical and archaeological record, which I will now present, offers firm evidence in support of the biblical chronology, and a XV century Exodus.

2.1 The Historical Approach

The historical argument in support of the biblical chronology rests on the supposition that from a geopolitical perspective, the only window of time during which the conquest of Canaan could have reasonably occurred was sometime between the XVIII Dynasty's sharp decline and its ultimate dissolution. There were very few periods during the Late Bronze Age when Canaan was not firmly beneath Egyptian control.³⁹ During the reigns of the great warrior pharaohs Thutmose III and his son/coregent Amenhotep II, Egypt's XVIII Dynasty reached its military apex.⁴⁰ Thutmose III led yearly expeditions to the Levant,⁴¹ and like his grandfather Thutmose I,⁴²

37 The exceedingly short reign of Ramesses I makes him an extremely unlikely candidate for the namesake of the two infamous treasure cities.

38 Gardiner attempted to identify biblical Raamses with Pi-Ramesses. Cf. Alan H. Gardiner, "The Delta Residence of the Ramessides," *JEA* 5 (1918), 127–138, 242-271. Redford rejects this association in part based on the omission of the *pr* prefix meaning house. Cf. Donald Redford, "The Land of Ramesses," p. 175-177 in *Causing His Name to Live: Studies in Egyptian Epigraphy and History in Memory of William J. Murnane* (Peter Brand and Louise Cooper eds., Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2009).

39 Lester Grabbe, "Reflections on the Discussion," in *The Land of Canaan in the Late Bronze Age* (Lester Grabbe ed.; London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 179-188.

40 Ann Rosalie David, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Egypt*, (Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 230.

41 Betsy Bryan, "Antecedents to Amenhotep III," in *Amenhotep III: Perspectives on His Reign* (David O'Connor, Eric H. Cline eds.; Ann Arbor: Michigan Univ. Press, 2001), 27-62, 27.

42 Cf. Colleen Manassa, *The Great Karnak Inscription of Merneptah: Grand Strategy in the 13th Century BC* (Bristol: ISD LLC, 2004), 75.

erected a victory stela on the bank of the Euphrates River.⁴³ Amenhotep II, a revered warrior in his own right as well as a legendary archer, also embarked on numerous northern campaigns.⁴⁴ Interestingly, Thutmose IV, the successor of Amenhotep II, whose court consisted almost entirely of a bureaucratic as opposed to a military administration,⁴⁵ began his reign with the appellation “conqueror of Syria”, although there are no records of any military campaign.⁴⁶ Neither Thutmose IV, who ruled for only a decade, nor Amenhotep III who succeeded him, are believed to have conducted any northern expeditions.⁴⁷ Whereas Amenhotep III’s reliance on foreign diplomatic alliances as opposed to military confrontation has been interpreted by some as a sign of security and prosperity,⁴⁸ the Amarna Letters, which document the last years of Amenhotep III through the reign of Tutankhamun, provide ample evidence of what can be best be described as Amenhotep III’s and Akhenaton’s wholesale neglect of the greater Egyptian empire.⁴⁹ These letters report lavish gifts being sent to Egypt’s allies and vassals who often

43 Richard Gabriel, *Thutmose III: A Military Biography of Egypt’s Greatest Warrior King* (Lincoln: Potomac Books, 2009).

44 William Stienbing Jr. and Susan Helft, *Ancient Near Eastern History and Culture* (London: Routledge, 2017), 180.

45 Bryan, “Antecedents to Amenhotep III,” 61. It is noteworthy that Thutmose IV probably not always been the crown prince. This suspicion is based on a stela Thutmose IV erected between the paws of the Great Sphinx at Giza, propagandizing his accession. The text of the stela asserts that Thutmose IV ascended the throne following a dream in which the sun god represented by the Sphinx informed him of his future ascendancy contingent on his removing the sand covering its body. Cf. Stienbing and Helft, *Ancient Near Eastern History*, 181.

46 Thutmose IV is twice referred to as “conqueror of Syria” on the Stele of Semen (*Smn*) in the Louvre (C 202). Cf. P. Pierret: *Recueil d’inscriptions inédites du Musée Egyptien du Louvre*, II partie (Paris, 1878), 35; *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, XXVII (1941), 18.

47 Lester L. Grabbe, “Canaan Under the Rule of the Egyptian New Kingdom: From the Hyksos to the Sea Peoples,” in idem, *The Land of Canaan*, 90-101, 93. Despite Amenhotep III’s lack of military forays, he erected more statues of himself throughout Egypt than any other Pharaoh. Cf. Stienbing and Helft, *Ancient Near Eastern History and Culture*, 182.

48 Trevor Bryce, *Letters of the Great Kings of the Ancient Near East: The Royal Correspondence of the Late Bronze Age* (London: Routledge, 2004), 19.

49 Ibid, 187.

brazenly protested that the amount sent was insufficient. Egypt's presence abroad continued to deteriorate during the reign of Akhenaton, the religious reformer.⁵⁰ Harbinger of the XVIII Dynasty's demise is the bizarre behavior of the widowed queen, (perhaps Nefertiti or possibly Tutankhamun's widow), who for all intents and purposes offered the throne of Egypt to a foreigner, with her request for a marriage alliance with Hittite king Suppililiumas.⁵¹ The extinction of the royal line of the XVIII Dynasty culminates with the ascension of a succession of army officers.⁵²

Suspicion that the demise of the XVIII Dynasty stemmed from events occurring sometime during the reign of Amenhotep II is reinforced by the booty list of one of Amenhotep II's Asiatic campaigns listing astronomical numbers of human booty in comparison to previous military campaigns.⁵³ Shea comments "While some have questioned the very high number given here, if one looks at the need for state labor right after the exodus, the number does not look so high after all."⁵⁴

Egypt's waning foreign influence was restored during the XIX Dynasty under Pharaohs Seti and Ramesses II who embarked on campaigns to

50 Akhenaton's drastic monotheistic-like religious reform and defamation of other gods in other temples are especially interesting considering the events surrounding the Exodus. Cf. Jan Assman, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 198-221.

51 Carlos Ramirez-Faria, *Concise Encyclopedia of World History*, (Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Dist, 2007), 192. The Hittite groom, (Zananza), was summarily assassinated. Cf. Trevor Bryce, *The Kingdom of the Hittites* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 194.

52 Cf. Aidan Dodson, *Amarna Sunset: Nefertiti, Tutankhamun, Ay, Horemheb, and the Egyptian Counter-reformation* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2009).

53 Cf. Pritchard, *ANET*, 239, 246; "The Memphis and Karnak Stelae of Amenhotep II," in *The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions, Monumental Inscriptions and Archival Documents from the Biblical World*, vol.2 (James K. Hoffmeier, trans.; William Hallo and K. Lawson Younger eds.: Leiden: Brill, 2000), 19-23, 22; Hoffmeier, "The Annals of Thutmose III," *ibid*, 12. The unusual timing of the launching of this campaign in the winter season adds to the suspicion that it was undertaken to recoup the loss of slave labor sustained in the Exodus. Cf. Pritchard, *ANET*, 246.

54 William Shea, "Amenhotep II as Pharaoh of the Exodus," *Bible and Spade* 16:2 (2003), 42-52, 47.

reinstate the territories lost during the Amarna period.⁵⁵ Seti led an expedition to Southern Canaan, and Ramesses II, the renowned military leader, pursued numerous campaigns up the Mediterranean coast, plundering towns in his path.⁵⁶ Considering Ramesses II's multiple forays in Canaan, he certainly appears to be, to quote Lester Grabbe, "an unlikely ruler for the exodus!"⁵⁷ Even if we assume, based on the Hittite archives, that Ramesses exaggerated his performance on the battlefield, he nevertheless succeeded in preventing any further Hittite incursions into Egyptian territory.⁵⁸ Skepticism of Ramesses II having been the pharaoh of the Exodus is reinforced by the tremendous increase in the archaeological record of the remains of XIX Dynasty Egyptian buildings, municipal and military, found within Israel.⁵⁹ On the other hand, the Exodus could not have occurred later than Ramesses II in light of the famous stela of Merenptah, his successor, which attests to Israel's firm settlement in their land.⁶⁰ This leads to the conclusion that the Exodus must have preceded Ramesses II. In order for the XIII century Exodus theory to work, the Israelite conquest of Canaan would had to have taken place sometime during the reign of Ramesses II, and before Merenptah and his famous stela.

Our brief review of the historical record shows the XIX Dynasty, ca. XIII century BCE, to have been a highly improbable time period for an Israelite conquest. A far more compelling approach would place the conquest of Canaan ca. the XIV century BCE, during the XVIII Dynasty's

55 Charlotte Booth, *Horemheb: The Forgotten Pharaoh* (Gloucestershire: Amberley, 2009).

56 Lester L. Grabbe, "Canaan Under the Rule of the Egyptian New Kingdom: From the Hyksos to the Sea Peoples," in Grabbe ed., *The Land of Canaan in the Late Bronze Age*, 90-101.

57 Ibid, 101.

58 Gérard Chaliand, *A Global History of War: From Assyria to the Twenty-First Century* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 20140), 20.

59 Alan Millard, "Ramesses Was Here . . . and Others, Too!" in *Ramesside Studies in Honour of K. A. Kitchen* (ed. M. Collier and S. Snape; Bolton: Rutherford, 2011), 305-12.

60 Michael G. Hasel, "Israel in the Merneptah Stela," *BASOR* 296 (1994), 45-61.

abandonment of the northern territories and rapid decline.⁶¹ Meitlis finds further reinforcement for a XV century Exodus in XIV century Egyptian and Assyrian inscriptions.⁶² A victory stele erected by Pharaoh Seti in Beth-Shean reports battles fought in the Lower Galilee against a tribe bearing the Hebrew name Asher.⁶³ Assyrian records report battles fought against a tribe named Yairi (son of Menashe), on the banks of the Euphrates.⁶⁴ Meitlis also cites the first known appearance of the name Yhwh in an Egyptian topographical list from the reign of Amenhotep III.⁶⁵

2.2 *The Archeological Approach*

The archeological record provides rich support for the biblical chronology.⁶⁶ Whereas the Merenptah stela is commonly referenced in demonstration of Israel's firmly established presence in Canaan by at least 1210 BC,⁶⁷ a column base fragment from the XVIII Dynasty housed in the Egyptian Museum in Berlin has posed a challenge to the widely accepted XIII century Exodus theory.⁶⁸ Updated deciphering methods have shown the inscription, like the Merenptah stela, to list Israel together with Ashkelon and Canaan,

61 Further support for the biblical chronology may be found in the only known depiction of mud bricks being fashioned by foreign slaves, from the tomb of Rekhmire, who lived during the reign of Thutmose III. Cf. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 247.

62 Yitzhak Meitlis, "Shalosh Shitot Betiaruch Yetziat Mitzraim," in *Be-Hag Ha-Matzot: Studies on the Festival of Passover* (A. Bazak, R. Gafni et. al. eds.; Alon Shvut: Tevunot, Herzog College, 2015), 11-24, 19, (Heb.). Meitlis also suggests that the commandment to sacrifice the Pascal lamb served to undermine the worship of the god Amun, chief god of the XVIII Dynasty, which was often depicted as a sheep.

63 Abraham Malamat, Hayim Tadmor, *A History of the Jewish People* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1976), 23.

64 Benjamin Mazar, "Yair, Yairi," *Encyclopedia Biblica* vol.3 (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1965), 415-416, (Heb.).

65 Meitlis, "Shalosh Shitot," 20. Cf. Titus Kennedy, "The Land of the šꜣꜣw (Nomads) of yhwꜣ at Soleb," p. 175-192 in *Dotawo: A Journal of Nubian Studies* 6.1 (2019), 178.

66 Cf. Wood, "The Rise and Fall," 475-489.

67 Hasel, "Israel in the Merneptah Stela," 45-61.

68 Manfred Görg, "Israel in Hieroglyphen," *BN* 106 (2001), 24.

in support of a XV century Exodus.⁶⁹ This epigraphic evidence correlates well with the findings of the Jericho excavations. I have chosen to focus specifically on Jericho as its excavation yielded numerous correlations with the details of the story recounted in Joshua.⁷⁰ John Garstang's excavations at Jericho yielded an array of XVIII Dynasty royal scarabs, amulet seals fashioned in the form of the dung beetle, and bearing pharaonic throne names from Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III through Amenhotep III (early XV century- early/mid XIV century BCE).⁷¹ Garstang noted the conspicuous absence from this rich collection of any fragments relating to Akhenaton's distinctive rule (early XIV century BCE).⁷² He buttressed his XV century assessment for the fall of Jericho by citing Jericho's glaring absence from the XIV century BCE Amarna letters.⁷³ Kathleen Kenyon's re-assessment of the data, dating the destruction of Jericho to no later than the mid-XVI century BCE, was primarily based on the absence of pottery imported from

- 69 Cf. Peter van der Veen, Christopher Theis, Manfred Görg, "Israel in Canaan (long) before Merneptah? A Fresh Look at Berlin Statue Pedestal Relief 21687," *JAEI* 2:4 (2010), 1-11. Not all scholars agree with the reading suggested by these scholars due to a slight variation in the spelling from the Merneptah stela. The authors attribute this discrepancy to the earlier orthography of XVIII Dynasty spelling. Thomas Römer's objection to Görg's reading in idem, *The Invention of God* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2015), 75, fails to take into account that the hieroglyphic 'r' can also sound like an 'l', as it does in Chinese. The preference of the 'Israel' reading is further indicated by the word's grouping together with Ashkelon and Canaan, as in the Merneptah stela.
- 70 Evidence of the well-fortified city having suffered a devastating earthquake, and its subsequent wholesale burning together with abundant un plundered stores of post-harvest grain, correlates seamlessly with the biblical narrative. Jericho's centuries long period of abandonment also correlates well with the biblical account.
- 71 J. Garstang and J. B. E. Garstang, *The Story of Jericho* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1940).
- 72 Piotr Bienkowski argues that the scarabs could have been re-makes or heirlooms. Cf. Piotr Bienkowski, "Jericho Was Destroyed in the Middle Bronze Age, Not the Late Bronze Age," *BAR* 16.5 (1990), 45; idem, *Jericho in the Late Bronze Age* (Wiltshire: Aris & Phillips, 1986), 68.
- 73 J. Garstang and J. B. E. Garstang, *The Story of Jericho* 2nd ed. (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1948), 126-127.

Cyprus and common to the LB I period.⁷⁴ Bryant Wood's re-examination of both excavation reports led him to the conclusion that whereas Kenyon had correctly dated a collapsed wall that Garstang mistakenly assumed to be Late Bronze, her primary argument which was based on the absence of distinctive period pottery, was fundamentally flawed.⁷⁵ Wood points to the abundant imitation bichrome 'Cypriot' pottery uncovered by Garstang and referred to by him as 'red-ware', as having been overlooked by Kenyon. Wood further argues that given Hatshepsut's detested place in the Egyptian pantheon of Pharaohs, the scarab found by Garstang bearing her inscription could not be a re-issue and should be viewed as authentic, lending credence to the authenticity of the rest of the scarab collection.⁷⁶ The combined evidence of the wide assortment of XVIII Dynasty scarabs found at Jericho together with its abundant imitation bichrome 'Cypriot' pottery support Garstang's original ca. 1400 BCE conquest date.

The weight of the historical and archaeological evidence leads us to suspect that the error lies in the dating of the altar on Mount Eval, rather than in the Bible's chronology.

3. Errors Made in the Dating of Joshua's Altar

The XIII century date attributed to the Mount Eval altar site is based on its prodigious Iron Age pottery yields,⁷⁷ and the two rare Egyptian style scarabs found at the site.⁷⁸ I will begin my re-assessment of the data with a review of

74 K. Kenyon, *Digging up Jericho* (London: Ernest Benn, 1957) 262; idem, *The Bible in Recent Archaeology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978), 33-37.

75 Bryant Wood, "Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho? A New Look at the Archaeological Evidence," *BAR* 16.2 (1990), 44-59.

76 Bryant Wood, "Dating Jericho's Destruction: Bienkowski is Wrong on All Counts," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 16.5 (Sept/Oct 1990), 45, 47-49, 68.

77 Adam Zertal, *The Manasseh Hill Country Survey Volume II: The Eastern Valleys and the Fringes of the Desert* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2008), 124-147.

78 Cf. Zertal, *A Nation is Born*, 64, 369; Baruch Brandl, "Two Scarabs and a Trapezoid Seal from Mount Ebal," *Tel Aviv* 13-14 (1986-1987), 166- 173; Hawkins, *The Iron Age Structure*, 66-70.

the pottery collection. Of the many bowls found at the altar site, the type that was found in greatest concentration, dominating the collection (82%), is a large open bowl, with a ring base and a thickened inverted rim, which Zertal refers to as the “Manassite” bowl, due to its prevalence in the Manasseh hill country. Zertal notes that the “Manassite” bowl is transitional Late Bronze / Iron Age I crockery.⁷⁹ Another significant example of Late Bronze pottery found at the site is a biconical jug sherd that was found in the fill’s main structure. It is white slipped and painted black and red in the triglyphic metope style, a well-known jug type and decoration, which according to Zertal, dates to the Late Bronze Age, and is “particularly common in the XIV century B.C.E.”⁸⁰ Another distinctive find, also from the altar’s fill, a carinated bowl, is identified by Zertal exclusively as Late Bronze.⁸¹ Two chalice shards likewise found in the altar’s fill are noted by Zertal for their difference in style from Iron Age I chalices, and their similarity to Late Bronze chalices.⁸² Zertal calls attention to a biconical krater with an inward slanting rim that “belongs to a long tradition of Late Bronze kraters.”⁸³ Two complete restored two handled jars found beneath the pavement of the site’s southern courtyard are described by Zertal as having “originated in the broad family of Late Bronze Age/Iron Age I jars.”⁸⁴ In Zertal’s overall assessment of Mount Eval’s ceramic artifacts he emphasizes the unique nature of the finds:⁸⁵

The pottery of Stratum II is different from that of the 31 Late Bronze Age sites explored in the survey of the Manasseh hill country or the published material of the four that have been excavated in the region (Shechem, Taanach, Tell el-Far‘ah (N), Megiddo) and

79 Zertal, “An Early Iron Age Cultic Site on Mount Ebal,” 125.

80 *Ibid.*, 137.

81 *Ibid.*

82 *Ibid.*

83 *Ibid.*, 139.

84 *Ibid.*, 140.

85 *Ibid.*, 142.

from the general LB assemblages in Canaan. Nonetheless, 3% of the total finds are in the Late Bronze Age tradition, including two Mycenaean IIIB-C sherds. The assemblage of Stratum II also differs from that of other Iron Age sites by the types of pottery and their relative frequencies. Some new and unique types make their appearance.

The Mount Eval pottery assemblage includes pottery containing features identified with crockery spanning several centuries, complicating our ability to assign a precise dating.⁸⁶ Meitlis' examination of the chronology of the Israeli highlands through the concurrence of different pottery types led him to the conclusion that the beginning of the Iron Age should in fact be dated earlier than commonly accepted, to the XIV century BCE.⁸⁷ Meitlis observes that Mycenaean and Cypriot vessels, considered to be the main chronological anchors for the Late Bronze Age, have been found at central highlands sites assigned to the Iron Age.⁸⁸ Meitlis explains that the major cultural changes associated with Iron Age I first occurred in the highlands, and only later arose in the urban centers, pointing to the contemporaneous nature of Late Bronze and Early Iron Age pottery.

Our efforts to narrow down a more precise time frame for the Mount Eval site requires examination of evidence which can be more accurately

86 Another important Bronze Age artifact from Mount Eval is the pumice chalice which was found at the earliest stratum of the Mount Eval altar, ostensibly as a foundation deposit. Zertal notes that whereas no exact parallels are known for the vessel, its shape, proportions, and likely intended function as an incense altar are similar to a group of cultic stone vessels discovered in the Hathor cave of the Egyptian temple at Serabil el-Khadim in Sinai. *Ibid.*, 148-149. The Hathor cave was in use between the XII and XX Dynasties, making it exceedingly difficult to pin down an absolute date for the chalice.

87 Itzhak Meitlis, "A Re-analysis of the Archaeological Evidence for the Beginning of the Iron Age," in *Bene Israel: Studies in the Archaeology of Israel and the Levant During the Bronze and Iron Ages in Honour of Israel Finkelstein* (A. Fantalkin and A. Yasur-Landau eds.; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 105-111. These findings are supported by 14C tests of carbonized wood from Strata V and VI at Tel Dan, *idem.*, 109-110.

88 Meitlis bases his conclusions on the pottery assemblages of the following highland sites: Mount Eval, Tell en-Nasbeh, Beth Zur, Tel Sasa, Shiloah, and Tel Qiri.

fixed temporally. To this end, we will now turn our attention to the topic of the scarabs found at the site.

3.1 Scarab no. 1

The XIII century BCE designation of the Mount Eval altar is primarily based on the two rare Egyptian style scarabs found at the site, which were assessed by Baruch Brandl.⁸⁹ The first scarab is a mold formed of faience with a pattern consisting of a four-petal rosette. Between each of the petals are four branches from which are suspended uraeus heads, stylized cobra forms representing sovereignty. Two of the cobra heads are particularly well fashioned and may be easily discerned.

Brandl cites six parallels for this design; one from Egypt, four from Israel and another from Cyprus.⁹⁰ It should be noted that one of the scarabs from Beth Peleth cited by Brandl does not actually feature a rosette, but rather, what can best be described as a cross.⁹¹ The five remaining parallels *do* contain a four petalled rosette with extended branches, although it should be stressed that *none* of the scarabs feature the distinctive uraeus motif.⁹²

89 Brandl, "Two Scarabs and a Trapezoid Seal," 166- 173; Hawkins, *The Iron Age Structure*, 66-70.

90 Regarding the Egyptian parallel, Scarab no.92 from Tomb 202 at Riqqeh, Brandl asserts that "all five scarabs discovered in Tomb 202 are dated to Ramesses II," (Brandl, 168). The five scarabs found in Tomb 202 at Riqqeh are nos. 92, 95, 98, 103, and 104. A review of Engelbach's excavation report from Riqqeh reveals that of the five scarabs noted, only *one* of them- no.98, has been determined by Engelbach to be Ramesses II. Cf. R. Engelbach, *British School of Archaeology in Egypt and Egyptian Research Account Nineteenth Year, 1913: Riqqeh and Memphis VI* (London: British School of Archaeology in Egypt University College, 1915), 18. While Engelbach entertains the possibility that nos. 103 and 104 "may well be as late," he himself does not reach a definitive conclusion. Engelbach further suggests that many of the scarabs found between caves 202 and 201, (including nos.92 and 95), "may be earlier" (than Ay), or XVIII Dynasty.

91 Cf. J. L. Starkey and Lankester Harding, *Beth Pelet II: Beth Pelet Cemetery* (London: British School of Archaeology in Egypt University College, 1932), LV: 314.

92 For the parallel scarabs from Israel and Cyprus cited by Brandl cf. Starkey, *Beth Pelet II*, XLVIII: 23; LV: 314; Gordon Loud, *The University of Chicago Oriental Institute Publications vol. LXII: Megiddo II Seasons of 1935-39 Plates* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948), Pl. 152:169; Othmar Keel, *Corpus DerStempelsiegel-Amulette*

Brandl's criteria for dating the first scarab takes into consideration its design as well as its side type. Whereas the back pattern is consistent with XII to XXVI Dynasties, Brandl relies on scarab one's side type which is listed by Rowe as exclusive to the XIX Dynasty. Rowe himself cautioned that his approximate dates "are those of the scarabs in the Palestine Museum; it is possible, of course, that scarabs elsewhere may increase the range of dates for any particular type."⁹³ Considering the conspicuous absence of the uraeus-head motif from Brandl's entire collection of parallel scarabs, the side type alone is not nearly enough evidence upon which to establish a date.

I would like to call attention to two seals that may shed light on the discussion.⁹⁴ The first is from the Petrie collection. It features both the four petalled rosette and the entwined uraei, as well as a Thutmose III prenomen cartouche on its reverse side.⁹⁵ The convergence of both the rosette and the uraei motifs on a seal bearing Thutmose III's cartouche raises the possibility that perhaps scarab no.1 from Mount Eval should also be dated to the XVIII Dynasty. The cartouche provides some measure of evidence to the scarab's likely date, despite the fact that the Thutmose III cartouche was often co-

aus Palastina/Israel. Von den Anfängen bis zur Perserzeit. Katalog Band V: Von Tel ek-idham bis Tel Kitan (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis Series Archaeologica, 35; Fribourg: Academic Press; Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 10-13, 11; Vassos Karageorghis, *Excavations at Kition I: The Tombs* (London: Harrison and Sons Ltd. For the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus, 1974), Pl. LXXXIX: 195. Of the five parallel scarabs cited by Brandl, only two; the scarabs from Yavneh and Cyprus, bear a close resemblance to the Eval scarab, inasmuch as they contain a four petalled rosette and a looped branch design similar to the Eval scarab. They all, however, lack the critical uraeus feature.

93 Alan Rowe, *A Catalogue of Egyptian Scarabs, Scaraboids, Seals and Amulets in the Palestine Archaeological Museum* (Cairo; government of Palestine, Department of Antiquities, 1936), xxxii.

94 W. M. Flinders Petrie, *Scarabs and Cylinders with Names: Illustrated by the Egyptian Collection in University College, London* (London: Publications of the British School of Archaeology in Egypt, 1917), Pl. XXVII: 53.

95 The term prenomen cartouche describes the pharaonic throne name which was inscribed within an oval with a horizontal line at one end, representing a scroll.

opted by Rameses II.⁹⁶ Petrie acknowledges that although the Thutmose III inscription was often re-used, “On looking over the series here of 150 selected examples, it does not seem, however that any large number can be assigned to the style of later times. The great majority are clearly contemporary.”⁹⁷ While this is inconclusive, it establishes a tentative probability as to its date.

The second seal, also unprovenanced, is from the Ward collection.⁹⁸ It features an upright image of Thutmose III, the royal cartouche, and a four-petalled rosette surrounded by four uraei on the opposite side.⁹⁹

Evidence to be presented below, in the discussion relating to scarab no. 2, will add weight to the hypothesis that scarab no. 1 derives from the XV century BCE.

3.2 *Scarab no. 2*

Scarab no. 2’s back and legs are executed in a manner consistent with XII/XIII-XXV Dynasties. It bears the cartouche of Thutmose III’s prenomen on its right side. On its left is a squatting archer with two ostrich feathers on his head and a composite bow; a hieroglyph meaning army.¹⁰⁰ Above the archer appears a lizard/gecko sign meaning numerous.¹⁰¹ Beneath the archer appears the sign for lord.¹⁰² The inscription reads: “Thutmose III, lord of many troops.” Brandl cites four parallel scarabs, of which only one is provenanced. I will begin with a discussion of the provenanced scarab from Tomb 935 at Tel el-Far’ah.¹⁰³

96 H. R. Hall, *Catalogue of Egyptian Scarabs in the British Museum* vol. I: Royal Scarabs (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1913), XXXV-XXXVI.

97 *Ibid.*, 26.

98 John Ward, *The Sacred Beetle: A Popular Treatise on Egyptian Scarabs in Art and History* (F. Llewellyn Griffith trans., London: Harrison and Sons, 1902).

99 *Ibid.*, 54, Pl. III, no. 447.

100 Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), sign list A-12.

101 Gardiner sign list I-1.

102 Gardiner sign list V-30.

103 *Beth-Peleth II*: Pl. LIII:220.

The scarab from Tomb 935 at Tel el-Far'ah

The scarab from Tomb 935 at Tel el-Far'ah is extremely close to the Mount Eval scarab.¹⁰⁴ Brandl points out that despite the cave's assumed XIX-XX Dynasty date, the excavators attribute the scarab to the XVIII Dynasty, probably because the tomb also yielded a scarab inscribed with the name of Thutmose IV. Nonetheless, Brandl chooses to date the scarab to the XIX Dynasty as the tomb itself "is well dated to the reign of Ramesses II."¹⁰⁵ Since neither Brandl, nor the excavators for that matter, suggest that the Thutmose IV scarab found in Tomb 935 is a re-issue, the presence of this scarab in Tomb 935 strengthens the probability that the Thutmose III scarab found there may also be an heirloom.¹⁰⁶ The excavators also report that Tomb 935 had been robbed anciently; the stone blocking the doorway had been removed sometime shortly after the tomb fell into disuse and was found lying at the foot of the entrance steps.¹⁰⁷ The plunder of Tomb 935 makes it impossible to determine its terminus a quo, casting doubt on its proposed date and strengthening the likelihood that the Thutmose III scarab found there may indeed be authentic. We will revisit the question of the provenance of the parallel scarab from Tomb 935 at Tel el-Far'ah after we have gathered more data.

3.3 *The Unprovenanced Collection*

The three remaining parallel scarabs cited by Brandl are all unprovenanced. One is from the Timnis collection and the remaining two are from the British Museum collection.¹⁰⁸ Due to their unknown origins, Brandl does not relate to these scarabs any further. He proceeds to date the Mount Eval scarab

104 The two scarabs are essentially the same with the following minor differences: Instead of a composite bow there is a simple bow, the lord sign appears above the archer as opposed to below it, and the plural sign is on the side of the cartouche.

105 Brandl, "Two Scarabs and a Trapezoid Seal," 170.

106 Since Thutmose IV was not a popular Pharaoh with a history of foreign conquests, his prenomen, unlike his predecessor Thutmose III, was not re-used by later pharaohs.

107 Harding, *Beth Pelet II*, 24-25.

108 Cf. Percy Newberry, *Ancient Egyptian Scarabs and Cylinder Seals* (London, New York:

according to the evidence from Tel el-Far'ah, while taking into account the fact that Thutmose III's prenomen was often re-used during the XIX Dynasty.

It was noted above that the evidence from Tel el-Far'ah remains inconclusive. Furthermore, the evidence presented by the British Museum scarabs was essentially disregarded by Brandl on account of their unknown origins. I propose that we revisit the British Museum collection as these scarabs may contain valuable clues for the dating of the Mount Eval scarab.

The British collection

The two scarabs from the British Museum collection cited by Brandl are more or less the same. On the right they both have a cartouche of Thutmose III, and on the top left, there is a lizard/ gecko beneath which appears a soldier with a bow and arrow. Scarab no. 41860 shows the soldier sign with plural strokes.¹⁰⁹ Scarab no. 27779 depicts the same sign rotated ninety degrees to the right without plural strokes. I would like to call attention to a third scarab, no. 40797 (henceforth the locust scarab) also from the British Museum collection, that was grouped by Hall together with the above two.¹¹⁰ Like Mount Eval scarab no.2 and its parallels, this scarab also features the Thutmose cartouche on the right side, and the lizard/ gecko on the top left; however, beneath the lizard/ gecko, there is a locust/ grasshopper.¹¹¹ Between the locust/grasshopper and the lizard/ gecko signs are hieroglyphs for abundant things with plural strokes.¹¹² Further to the left appear the symbols for beloved¹¹³ and divinities.¹¹⁴ Hall assigns

Routledge, 2011), Pl. VIII:26; Hall, *Catalogue of Egyptian Scarabs*, 69. The scarab from the Timnis collection is an extremely close match.

109 Gardiner sign list Z-2.

110 Hall, *Catalogue of Egyptian Scarabs*, 69, numbered 673 in the Hall catalogue.

111 Gardiner sign list L-4.

112 Gardiner sign list Aa-1and X-1, which together mean many things; cf. idem p.583; Gardiner sign list Z-2 (plural strokes). The combined meaning is great multitudes.

113 Gardiner, sign list U-6; M-17.

114 Gardiner sign list R-8.

the scarab's back and side type as exclusive to the XVIII Dynasty, and transcribes the inscription, "Men-Kheper-Ra (Thutmose III), beloved of the gods, multitudes of grasshoppers," noting that the grasshopper/locust sign is most likely a metaphoric expression for an army. The Berliner Wörterbuch notes that the locust hieroglyph can also be used as "bild der menge und der verachtlichkeit," 'an image of quantity and contemptibility,' as connoted by the words swarm, mob or horde. Such pejorative language, however, does not suit the celebratory message of the scarab.¹¹⁵ Cherry and Kritsky confirm Hall's reading of the locust hieroglyph: "Grasshoppers were major pests in Egypt. When used as a hieroglyph, they represented soldiers. Since soldiers or armies attacked in large numbers, it is easy to appreciate how the ancient Egyptians would think of hordes of locusts as attacking armies."¹¹⁶

If Hall's reading can be shown to be accurate; and the locust/grasshopper hieroglyph does indeed stand for armed forces, then this unusual scarab may serve as a parallel to the above scarabs linking Thutmose III with myriad troops. If it can further be substantiated that the linking of locusts/grasshoppers with Egyptian soldiers was unique to the XVIII Dynasty, then the scarab's XV century BCE provenance, and by extension the XV century BCE provenance of its parallel scarabs may be reinforced.

Locusts

Our analysis of the two Mount Eval scarabs has focused attention on the Egyptian scarab; amulet seals fashioned in the form of the dung beetle. Another significant insect in Egyptian entomological art is the locust/grasshopper.¹¹⁷

115 Cf. WB III, 461.8.

116 R. H. Cherry, Gene Kritsky, "Insects as Sacred Symbols in Ancient Egypt," *Bulletin of the Entomological Society of America* 31.2 (1985), 15-19, 18. Further attestation to the notion of an insect commonly thought of as a pest being used to represent Egyptian soldiers may be inferred from the fact that large golden flies were awarded to Egyptian soldiers for valour in battle in recognition of their tenacity. Cf. idem, 19.

117 Ludwig Keimer has gathered a large collection of grasshoppers in Egyptian art in "Pendeloques en forme d'insectes faisant partie de colliers égyptiens, B. Pendeloques et pieces de colliers en forme de sauterelles," *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte*,

Grasshoppers were not always viewed by the ancient Egyptians as pejorative symbols of ‘quantity and contemptibility’, as mentioned above. Kritsky observes that “The grasshopper like the scarab was a common insect motif for the ancient Egyptians. It was used as a hieroglyph, a seal, an amulet, as a symbol of beauty, and an illustration of life along the Nile.”¹¹⁸ Thompson observes that the locust horde motif was frequently used in Ancient Near Eastern texts to depict armies.¹¹⁹ In the biblical tradition there are numerous examples of invading armies being compared to swarms of locusts.¹²⁰ Thompson cites the inscription of Ramesses II who referred to the Hittite enemy as a multitude of locusts,¹²¹ and The Great Karnak Inscription of Merneptah which compares the Libyan enemy to locusts.¹²² We may add to Thompson’s New Kingdom locust inscription list the Ramesses III inscriptions from Medinet Habu reading: “battalions will come like the locusts,”¹²³ and “He (Ramesses III) regards a thick phalanx as grasshoppers to be pounded and crushed, pulverized like grain.”¹²⁴ Thompson observes that in the Egyptian texts it is usually the

XXXII (1932), 129-50, Pls. VIII-XI; XXXIII (1933), 97-130, Pls. XII, XIII; “E. Notes additionnelles (suite),” *ibid.*, XXXVII (1937), 143-59, Pls. XXI-XXIII.

118 Gene Kritsky, Ron H. Cherry, *Insect Mythology* (San Jose, New York, Lincoln, Shanghai: Writers Club Press, 2000), 57; cf. Mohamed A. Kenawy and Yousrya M. Abdel-Hamid, “Insects in ancient (Pharaonic) Egypt: a review of fauna, their mythological and religious significance and associated diseases,” *Egypt.Acad.J.Biolog.Sci. (A.Entomology)* 8.1 (2015), 15-32, 21.

119 John A. Thompson, “Joel’s Locusts in the Light of Near Eastern Parallels Author(s),” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 14. 1 (1955), 52-55. Thompson also cites the Ugaritic legend of King Keret in which the army of Keret is compared to locusts. Cf. H. L. Ginsberg, *The Legend of King Keret* (Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research, Supplementary Studies, Nos. 2-3; New Haven: American School of Oriental Research, 1946), 16, 18.

120 Cf. MT: Jud.6:5; 7:12; Amos 7:1-2; Jer.46:23; Jer.51:14, 27; Nah.3:15, Joel 1, 2.

121 Cf. M. Lichtheim: *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings vol.2* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1973), 64.

122 Cf. Manassa, *The Great Karnak Inscription of Merneptah*, 74.

123 Cf. Kenawy and Abdel-Hamid, “Insects in ancient (Pharaonic) Egypt,” 21; cf. Manassa, *The Great Karnak Inscription of Merneptah*, 74 nt. 408.

124 Donald Bruce Redford, *The Medinet Habu Records of the Foreign Wars of Ramesses III* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 16.

defeated enemies who are compared with locusts.¹²⁵ He concludes that in Ancient Near Eastern cultures “armies are compared with locusts or locusts with armies, but locusts are never symbols of armies.”¹²⁶

Leaving aside for the moment the British Museum locust scarab, Thompson’s position, that the locust is never used to symbolize armies, is not borne out by the evidence. Ahhotep’s rare XVIII Dynasty dagger from the Ahhotep collection confirms that the locust was used in Ancient Egypt as a symbol for Egyptian military might. The ornate dagger depicts a lion representing king Ahmose, in hot pursuit of the enemy represented by a fleeing calf, and flanked on the opposite end of the blade by four fiercely rendered *locusts*, symbolizing the king’s army.¹²⁷ Redford comments on the dagger’s unusual motif: “The meaning of the grasshopper as a symbol for soldiers is seen again in an important XVIII Dynasty XVI century find in the Luxor museum-dagger belonging to Ahhotep inlaid with locusts depicting a destroying army.”¹²⁸ Lacovara also points to the role of the locust as a destroyer making “the creature an appropriate image for an Egyptian dagger blade.”¹²⁹ Lacovara finds support for Egyptian veneration of the locust symbol in several pyramid texts which describe the king as flying to the sky as a locust.¹³⁰ The identification of the pharaoh with the locust is not surprising given the Ancient Egyptian belief that the locust’s ability to eclipse the sun was an indicator of its immense power.¹³¹

Malek rejects the locust/Egyptian-warrior comparison, on account of

125 Thompson, “Joel’s Locusts,” 52.

126 Ibid, 52.

127 Peter Lacovara, “The Burial of Queen Ahhotep,” in *Beyond Babylon: Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C.* (Joan Aruz, Kim Benzel, and Jean M. Evans, eds.; New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008), 119-122, 121.

128 Donald Redford, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt vol. 2* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 163.

129 Lacovara, “The Burial of Queen Ahhotep,” 121.

130 Cf. idem, 122; Peter Lacovara, *The World of Ancient Egypt: A Daily Life Encyclopedia* (2 vols.), (ABC-CLIO, 2016), 506.

131 Cf. *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* Translated into English by R. O. Faulkner, Hymn 467 in R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford, 1969), 76.

the more common usage of the locust metaphor in Egyptian inscriptions as a representation of something that is easily crushed. He proposes that the locusts on the dagger of Ahmose are meant to represent bound and prostrate captives.¹³² Morenz rejects Malek's association between the locust symbol and bound captives, although he too understands the locust to consistently function as a non-threatening representation of enemy forces.¹³³ Keimer, however, maintains that the locust symbol in Ancient Egyptian art sometimes took on a fierce, even leonine character.¹³⁴ He points to New Kingdom locust amulets featuring strikingly realistic lion-like muzzles. Interestingly, the Ahmose dagger depicts fiercely stylized locusts working in unison with a lion in pursuit of their common prey. Furthermore, the locusts on the dagger are all of equal proportion to the lion, whom they face, with their prey caught between them, indicating their mutual goal, the ensnarement of the calf. That the Ancient Egyptians used the locust image to convey the idea of aggression and power may also be inferred from a scene of locust-hunters painted on a tomb wall in Thebes from the period of Thutmose III.¹³⁵

Confirmation of the locust symbol as an XVIII Dynasty expression of Egyptian military might is provided by a rare inscription from the Theban tomb of Kha; chief overseer of the royal necropolis in the middle of the XVIII Dynasty; during the reigns of Amenhotep II and Thutmose IV.¹³⁶

132 Jaromir Malek, "The Locusts on the Daggers of Ahmose," in *Chief of Seers: Egyptian Studies in Memory of Cyril Aldred* (E. Goring, N. Reeves and J. Ruffle eds.; London: Routledge), 207-219.

133 L. D. Morenz, "Das Lese-Bild von Königskartusche, Löwe und Stier versus vier Heuschrecken"- Königspropaganda und Selbstindoktrinierung der ägyptischen Elite," *ZAS* 126 (1999), 132-141.

134 Ludwig Keimer, "Une analogie curieuse entre certaines representations égyptiennes de sauterelles et la description de ces insectes donnée par Joel et par Jean dans l'Apocalypse," *Bulletin de l'Institut d'Égypte* XX (1937- 1938), 255-58.

135 Eric H. Cline, David B. O'Connor, *Thutmose III: A New Biography* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 313.

136 Marcella Trapani, "Behind the Mirror: Art and Prestige in Kha's Funerary Equipment," in *Art and Society: Ancient and Modern Contexts of Egyptian Art: Proceedings of the International Conference Held at the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, 13-15 May 2010* (Budapest: Museum of Fine Arts, 2012), 159-168.

Among the funerary equipment found in Kha's tomb is a pentagonal shaped royal cubit upon which an inscription praising the bravery of Amenhotep II reads: "May the perfect god be alive, the real brave, lord of the Two Lands Aa-kheperu-Re. His Majesty came with a glad heart to the domain of Amun, his venerable father, *while his army was before him as the grasshoppers...*"¹³⁷

Centuries later, during the Saite period (VII century BCE), the armor of Prince Inaros is described as having been decorated with grasshopper and lion images.¹³⁸ Later still, in the Ptolemaic period, we find inscriptions replete with depictions of the locust as a symbol of Egyptian might.¹³⁹ Inscriptions at the Temple at Dendara state: "make your infantry soldiers as numerous as *locusts*,"¹⁴⁰ "lord of eternity, your circle of protection is behind you, the combatants are like *locusts*, they protect you every day,"¹⁴¹ "your circles of protection are behind you, they are numerous more than *locust*,"¹⁴² "the great god, prince of gods, his circles of protection are behind him, his followers are beside him, they as numerous as *locust*,"¹⁴³ "you rule the two lands, your followers as numerous as *locust*."¹⁴⁴ The Edfou inscriptions declare: "Great of strength in battlefield, his [followers] are behind [him] as numerous as *locusts*,"¹⁴⁵ "Beloved of Ptah the good god, the sovereign lord of eternity, the circle of protection is behind him as numerous as *locust*,"¹⁴⁶ "son of Re, he is lord of eternity, his circle of protection is behind him as

137 Ibid, 161.

138 Rana Salim, *Cultural Identity and Self-presentation in Ancient Egyptian Fictional Narratives. An Intertextual Study of Narrative Motifs from the Middle Kingdom to the Roman Period* (PhD Thesis; Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies Faculty of Humanities University of Copenhagen, April 2013), 121.

139 Cf. Mohamed Ragab Sayed, "Locust and its Signification in Ptolemaic Texts," *Journal of Historical Archaeology and Anthropological Sciences* 3.4 (2018), 584-588.

140 Ibid, 585; Dendara III 176,4-5.

141 Ibid; Dendara IV 18,4-6.

142 Ibid, 586; Dendara V 56,12-13.

143 Ibid; Dendara XII 265,7-9.

144 Ibid; Dendara XIV 136,2-3.

145 Ibid; Edfou VI, 345,18.

146 Ibid; Edfou VI 132,13.

numerous as *locust*,”¹⁴⁷ “Great of strength in battlefield, his [followers] are behind [him] as numerous as *locusts*,”¹⁴⁸ “Lord of eternity shine in Bedhet, his followers around him as *locusts*,”¹⁴⁹ “numerous of infantry soldiers, like *locusts*, treading the battlefield, to bring an end to one who attacks.”¹⁵⁰

Manassa addresses the perplexing duality of the locust symbol in Ancient Egypt, at times used to depict Egyptian forces and at others used to refer to enemy forces: “The image of the locust can be both favorably used to describe the multitudinous Egyptian army and negatively applied to enemy forces.”¹⁵¹ Manassa’s suggestion, that a single symbol simultaneously represented two opposing notions; weak enemy forces and mighty Egyptian forces, is highly improbable. Egyptian hieroglyphics convey conventionally agreed upon meanings, offering a range of possible uses, however these uses are never self-contradictory. That the locust symbol could simultaneously disparage enemy forces insinuating that they are easily crushed and celebrate the insuperable powerful of Egyptian forces, is highly doubtful.

A review of the evidence from a chronological perspective, however, points to the locust hieroglyph as a symbol whose usage underwent a dramatic shift for a limited period. In other words, in order to properly understand the Egyptian locust symbol, it must necessarily be viewed within its historical context. The Pyramid Texts cited above whose spells sought to reanimate the king’s body after death and help him ascend to the heavens like a locust, derive from the Old Kingdom.¹⁵² The locust decorated dagger of Ahmose, the locust-hunters on the tomb wall in Thebes from the period of Thutmose III, and Kha’s royal cubit inscription that draws a clear analogy between locusts and Egyptian military forces, all derive from the XVIII Dynasty. Later 7th century BCE images of grasshoppers on the armor of Prince Inaros

147 Ibid; Edfou VI 133,8.

148 Ibid; Edfou VI, 345,18.

149 Ibid; Edfou VII 123,6-7.

150 Ibid; Edfou VII 200,4-5.

151 Colleen Manassa, *The Great Karnak Inscription of Merneptah*, 74.

152 Cf. Dorothea Arnold, *An Egyptian Bestiary* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995), 49; Lacovara, *The World of Ancient Egypt*, 506.

and later still Ptolemaic inscriptions are testament to the restoration of the ancient hieroglyphic tradition, according to which the locust was once again cast as a symbol of Egyptian forces. When viewed against the backdrop of the longstanding Egyptian hieroglyphic tradition, the XIX -XX Dynasty's consistent casting of the locust as a symbol of enemy forces presents a striking aberration. It is critical to stress that in *all* of the abundant XIX -XX Dynasty inscriptions that we have to date, the locust is *never* used as a symbol representing the Egyptian military. One can only wonder what watershed event occurring between the XVIII and XIX Dynasties might have served as the catalyst for the dramatic, albeit temporary shift, associated with the locust symbol. Could it be that this transformation was precipitated by the devastating locust plague of the Exodus, noted in the Bible for being the harbinger of Egypt's doom? ¹⁵³

With valuable insight gained into the evolution of the locust hieroglyph, we may now revisit the locust scarab from the British Museum collection. The locust, representing great multitudes of Egyptian forces, on a celebratory scarab bearing the cartouche of Thutmose III, could not be a product of the XIX Dynasty. The seal is a bona fide Thutmose III, XVIII Dynasty scarab, and so too are its rare scarab parallels, including of course, scarab no.2 from Mount Eval.

Scarab no.1 revisited

In our discussion of scarab no.1, we observed that whereas each of the parallels cited by Brandl featured a variation of the rosette design, none of them contained the critical uraei motif, rendering them inconclusive. By contrast, *both* of these motifs *do* appear on two seals bearing the Thutmose III cartouche, furnishing us with the closest parallel to scarab no.1 and suggesting that scarab no.1 should presumably be dated to the time of Thutmose III.

Scarab no.2 was found among the foundation stones, where it had been

153 Cf, Ex. 10:7, 14, Ps. 78:46; 105:34-35.

deliberately placed as a votive deposit at the time of the altar's construction and, as such, serves to fix the time of the altar's construction.¹⁵⁴ Since the altar at Mount Eval was functional for a very brief period, scarab no.1 which was found in the altar's fill must be very close in time to scarab no. 2. Given the evidence that we have seen establishing the authenticity of the Thutmose III cartouche on scarab no. 2, we may ascribe an XVIII Dynasty provenance to scarab no.1 as well. This bolsters the above-mentioned suggestion that scarab no. 1, closely paralleling two other seals bearing the Thutmose III eponym, should be dated to the reign of Thutmose III.

Conclusion

The generally accepted XIII century BCE dating of the Mount Eval altar discovered by Adam Zertal places it at odds with the biblical chronology. The possibility that the biblical dates are not accurate was considered. However, from a historical point of view the XIX Dynasty, ca. XIII century BCE, was a highly improbable time period for an Israelite conquest. The only window of time during which the conquest of Canaan could have reasonably occurred was sometime during the XVIII Dynasty's sharp decline which brought with it the brief abandonment of the northern territories. The archeological record was also shown to provide rich support for the biblical chronology, prompting a re-evaluation of the Mount Eval data.

The XIII century BCE date attributed to the Mount Eval altar is based on the site's Iron Age ceramic assemblage and Baruch Brandl's assessment of two rare Egyptian style scarabs found at the site. Our review of Zertal's excavation report yielded numerous examples of distinctive Late Bronze pottery, pointing to the site's transitional nature. Brandl's assessment of the scaraboid evidence also raised question marks. The first scarab was suggested by Brandl to be parallel to six different XIII century scarabs. Of the six parallels cited by Brandl, *none of them* feature the critical uraeus motif, casting a shadow of uncertainty on Brandl's dating of scarab no.1.

¹⁵⁴ Zertal, *A Nation is Born*, 367.

The two seals from the Petrie and Ward collection presented for consideration, featuring both the four petalled rosette as well as the entwined uraei motifs, together with a Thutmose III cartouche on the reverse side, offer a closer parallel to Mount Eval scarab no.1. Given the fact that the Thutmose III cartouche was often re-issued by Rameses II, the unprovenanced nature of these parallel seals prevents us from relying on them exclusively for dating purposes. Evidence presented in the discussion relating to scarab no. 2, however, supports the supposition that scarab no. 1 also derives from the XV century BCE.

Brandl cites four parallel scarabs to scarab no. 2, which reads: “Thutmose III, lord of many troops.” Only one of them, a scarab from Tomb 935 at Tel el-Far’ah, is provenanced. Among the finds from Tomb 935 at Tel el-Far’ah is a Thutmose IV scarab, whose authenticity is widely agreed upon. The presence of this scarab in Tomb 935 strengthens the likelihood that the Thutmose III scarab found there is also authentic. Furthermore, Tomb 935 was found to have been robbed anciently, making it impossible to determine its terminus a quo, and casting further doubt on the XIII century date suggested by Brandl.

The locust scarab from the British Museum collection, whose inscription reads “Men-Kheper-Ra, (Thutmose III), beloved of the gods, multitudes of grasshoppers,” was introduced. The scarab’s unique features which it shares with two other parallel scarabs to Mount Eval scarab no.2 seem to have been behind Hall’s decision to group the three scarabs together. This scarab features a locust/grasshopper in place of the soldier/army sign, and is suggested by Hall to read, “Men-Kheper- Ra, (Thutmose III), beloved of the gods, multitudes of soldiers.” The interpretation of the locust on the British Museum scarab, offered by Hall, was substantiated by the rare XVIII Dynasty dagger from the Ahhotep collection that depicts four fiercely rendered *locusts*, symbolizing the king’s soldiers. The Ancient Egyptians’ use of the locust image to portray their own aggression and power was seen in the locusts-hunters painted on a tomb wall in Thebes from the period of Thutmose III. The veracity of the Egyptian-military interpretation of the

locust symbol during the XVIII Dynast is confirmed by the rare inscription from the XVIII Dynast tomb of Kha, comparing the king's troops to grasshoppers. The VII century BCE grasshopper decorated armor of Prince Inaros and later Ptolemaic inscriptions were also observed casting the locust as a symbol of Egyptian military might.

The propagandizing inscriptions of Ramesses II, Merneptah and Ramesses III from the XIX-XX Dynasties and their pejorative use of the locust image as a symbol of feeble enemy forces went against a longstanding Egyptian hieroglyphic tradition. The locust symbol could not, nor did it, simultaneously represent both military prowess and vulnerability. A chronological review of the data reveals that the locust symbol underwent a relatively brief, yet dramatic change sometime between the XVIII and XIX Dynasties. The Pyramid Texts whose spells were believed to enable the king's body to ascend to the heavens like a locust, derive from the Old Kingdom. The locust bedecked dagger of Ahmose, the Thutmose III period locust-hunters on the tomb wall in Thebes, and Kha's royal cubit whose inscription draws an indisputable analogy between locusts and Egyptian forces, all derive from the XVIII Dynast. The rise of the XIX Dynast brought with it a different perspective on the locust symbol; an enemy horde that is easily crushed. Whereas the propagandizing inscriptions of Ramesses II, Merneptah, and Ramesses III broke with the longstanding Egyptian tradition, using the locust image to describe weak enemy forces, the symbol ultimately reverted to its original, traditional usage.

An awareness of the evolution of the locust hieroglyph enables us to properly assess the locust scarab from the British Museum collection. The locust appearing on that celebratory scarab could not have derived from the XIX Dynast. The seal's presentation of the locust as a symbol of Egypt's dominating military power shows it to be an authentic product of the XVIII Dynast. Its parallel seals by extension should all be regarded as genuine Thutmose III issued scarabs. Due to the brief duration of the Mount Eval altar's use, Scarab no.1, which was found in its fill, and whose parallel seals bear the Thutmose III eponym, should also be attributed to

the XVIII Dynasty. The scaraboid evidence from Mount Eval presented here, in conjunction with the site's numerous examples of distinctive Late Bronze pottery, show the altar at Mount Eval to join a cadre of historical and archaeological evidence in support of the Bible's account of a XV century BCE Exodus.

Mount Eval Scarabs



Scarab no.1 Parallels

Riqqeh	Beth Peleth II (a)	Beth Peleth II (b)	Megiddo	Yavneh
Kition Cyprus	Petrie seal (side 1)	Petrie seal (side 2)	Ward seal (side 1)	Ward seal (side 2)

Scarab no.2 Parallels

Beth-Peleth II	Timnis	British Museum no. 27779	British Museum no. 41860	British Museum no. 40797
				