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neilgodfrey ▾

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Why the Hellenistic era for ALL "Old Testament" books should be taken seriously

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Re: Why the Hellenistic era for ALL "Old Testament" books should be taken seriously



by neilgodfrey » Mon Feb 19, 2024 9:34 am

StephenGoranson wrote: ↑ Mon Feb 19, 2024 9:14 am
Caricature is different than (or from) demonstration.

Can you explain why it is caricature? Where, specifically, does it misrepresent any argument? I would hope an academic discussion can move beyond mere assertions and counterclaims and explore justifications for one's position, and present a reasoned argument for one's claims.

I have read many reviews and criticisms of Davies' yet very few, if any critical ones, that I have encountered actually addresses this point by Davies. Certainly none that I have read have criticized Davies for making a caricature of the reasoning process. They simply ignore his critique on this point.

Rainey, for example, simply responds to Davies' reasoned outline with incredulity:

“
Davies is an "uncritical" Bible critic. In the section entitled "Common Sense and Credulity," Davies denies that there was even a Josianic reform (pp. 40–41;. . .

Rainey, A. F. "Uncritical Criticism." Journal of the American Oriental Society, edited by Philip R. Davies, vol. 115, no. 1, 1995, pp. 101–04, <https://doi.org/10.2307/605312>.

He makes no rebuttal to Davies' reasoning.

Rainey's argument from incredulity extends to a misrepresenting caricature of Davies' argument and doubling down on argument from incredulity:



neilgodfrey

Posts: 6154

Joined: Sun Oct 06, 2013 10:08 am

Contact:

“

Then he goes on to reject the idea that the exiles to Babylon could have done any writing! This, of course, means that Ezekiel did not write anything; his book is a creation of the post-exilic scribes (pp. 100, 102). It would follow, then, that there could have been no "Deuteronomistic History" prepared by an exilic writer or editor.

That is an example of caricature. Davies does not at all say or even hint that exiles in Babylon could not have done any writing. That is absurd. Is there any comparable absurdity to be found within Davies' summary of how mainstream conventional dating has been undertaken?



Re: Why the Hellenistic era for ALL "Old Testament" books should be taken seriously



StephenGoranson

Posts: 2192

Joined: Thu Apr 02, 2015 8:10 pm

Contact:

by **StephenGoranson** » Mon Feb 19, 2024 9:50 am

I am not Anson Rainey.



Re: Why the Hellenistic era for ALL "Old Testament" books should be taken seriously

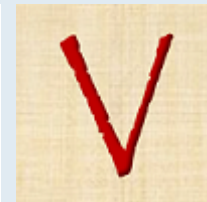


by **neilgodfrey** » Mon Feb 19, 2024 10:18 am

“ **StephenGoranson** wrote: ↑ Mon Feb 19, 2024 9:50 am

I am not Anson Rainey.

Can you explain why Davies' outline of how dating has been carried out is a caricature?



neilgodfrey

Posts: 6154

Joined: Sun Oct 06, 2013 10:08 am

Contact:



Re: Why the Hellenistic era for ALL "Old Testament" books should be taken seriously



StephenGoranson

Posts: 2192

Joined: Thu Apr 02, 2015 8:10 pm

Contact:

by **StephenGoranson** » Mon Feb 19, 2024 10:34 am

Perhaps we can agree that "how dating has been carried out" is passive voice.

In other words, by whom? All? Joke?

Without going into reductionist obscurantisms nor personalities (I met him) nor book reviews, why address a straw man?

I do not credit such stuff as representing my view.



Re: Why the Hellenistic era for ALL "Old Testament" books should be taken seriously



by **neilgodfrey** » Mon Feb 19, 2024 10:58 am

“ **StephenGoranson** wrote: ↑ Mon Feb 19, 2024 10:34 am

Perhaps we can agree that "how dating has been carried out" is passive voice.

In other words, by whom? . . .



neilgodfrey

Posts: 6154

Joined: Sun Oct 06, 2013 10:08 am

Contact:

Can you explain then how dating of the texts we are talking about has been carried out if Davies' account is so misguided?

By whom? Here is what Julius Wellhausen wrote in *Prolegomena: I.II.2*

“

The Jehovistic Book of the Covenant lies indeed at the foundation of Deuteronomy, but in one point they differ materially, and that precisely the one which concerns us here. As there, so here also, the legislation properly so called begins (Deut. xii.) with an ordinance relating to the service of the altar; but now we have Moses addressing the Israeites in the following terms: "When ye come into the land of Canaan, ye shall utterly destroy all the places of worship which ye find there, and ye shall not worship Jehovah your God after the manner in which the heathen serve theirs. Nay, but only unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes for His habitation shall ye seek, and thither shall ye bring your offerings and gifts, and there shall ye eat before Him and rejoice. Here at this day we do every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes, but when ye have found fixed abodes, and rest from your enemies round about, then shall the place which Jehovah shall choose for His habitation in one of your tribes be the one place to which ye shall bring your offerings and gifts. Take heed that ye offer not in every place that ye see; ye may not eat your holy gifts in every town, but only in the place which Jehovah shall choose."

The Law is never weary of again and again repeating its injunction of local unity of worship. In doing so, it is in conscious opposition to "the things that we do here this day," and throughout has a polemical and reforming attitude towards existing usage. It is rightly therefore assigned by historical criticism to the period of the attacks made on the Bamoth by the reforming party at Jerusalem. As the Book of the Covenant, and the whole Jehovistic writing in general, reflects the first pre-prophetic period in the history of the cultus, so Deuteronomy is the legal expression of the second period of struggle and transition. The historical order is all the more certain because the literary dependence of Deuteronomy on the Jehovistic laws and narratives can be demonstrated independently, and is an admitted fact. **From this the step is easy to the belief that the work whose discovery gave occasion to King Josiah to destroy the local sanctuaries was this very Book of Deuteronomy . . .**

The whole reasoning process begins with the assumption of the historical veracity (at least in its core) of the biblical Josiah account. From that assumption it follows that the book of Deuteronomy was the source of those reforms (after all, Deuteronomy attacks false worship, just like Josiah did) and therefore Deuteronomy had to have been in existence before the time of Josiah.

That is an invalid argument. How do we know Deuteronomy existed before Josiah? Because the Josiah narrative tells us so? How do we know the Josiah narrative is based on true history? Because the book of Deuteronomy explains his motivation for the reforms. How do we know the book of Deuteronomy explains his reforms? . . . gets dizzying....



Re: Why the Hellenistic era for ALL "Old Testament" books should be taken seriously



Posts: 2192

Joined: Thu Apr 02, 2015 8:10 pm

Contact:

by **StephenGoranson** » Mon Feb 19, 2024 11:03 am

I am not Julius Wellhausen.



Re: Why the Hellenistic era for ALL "Old Testament" books should be taken seriously

by **neilgodfrey** » Mon Feb 19, 2024 11:55 am

StephenGoranson wrote: ↑ Mon Feb 19, 2024 11:03 am

I am not Julius Wellhausen.

I am not writing about you but about the arguments and asking you for a reasoned and evidence-based defence of your assertions.

I am sure you can point me to scholars who have provided arguments for dating that are not circular, of scholars who do not follow the same circular reasoning as Wellhausen, who falsify Davies' description and prove it to be a caricature.

I look forward to an "academic discussion", not mere contradictory assertions.

**neilgodfrey**

Posts: 6154

Joined: Sun Oct 06, 2013 10:08 am

Contact:



Re: Why the Hellenistic era for ALL "Old Testament" books should be taken seriously

by **neilgodfrey** » Mon Feb 19, 2024 2:54 pm

Here is another demonstration of the circularity in the dating of Deuteronomy to the time of (or before) Josiah. It is from William Dever in *Beyond the Texts: An Archaeological Portrait of Ancient Israel and Judah* (2017), pp 611–613.

First, Dever reminds us of the importance of archaeology in assessing the historicity of the biblical accounts:

“

[A]rchaeological data are primary because an external witness is required to lend support to the historicity of the biblical narratives, if possible, and archaeology is, by definition, the only candidate (including, of course, the texts that it may recover). Archaeology is primary because it provides an independent witness in the court of adjudication, and when properly interrogated it is often an unimpeachable witness. (p. 18)

Agreed 100%.

But then compare that noble statement with how he actually uses archaeological data to "confirm" a biblical narrative:

“

**neilgodfrey**

Posts: 6154

Joined: Sun Oct 06, 2013 10:08 am

Contact:

It is the reign of Josiah (648-609) that is best correlated with the archaeological evidence that we now have. His reputation as a reformer, a restorer of tradition, comports especially well with the more favorable situation that we know obtained with the decline of Assyria

Correlation is not a proof. Dever lists in a table what is explicitly proven by archaeology at the time of Josiah:

“

“Poly-yahwism”; Asherah cult; Yahu names; Philistia attacked (p. 609)

In the same table he lists as "Probable; Evidence Ambiguous"

“

Josiah's attempted reforms; consulted temple scroll; maintained Judah even if vassal; Josiah slain in battle, 609

So archaeology, according to his own analysis, does not confirm the historicity of the Joshua narrative. Nonetheless, he proceeds to set forth a list of correlations with the biblical account -- as if correlations can ever be anything more than correlations. (Compare the correlations with historical data of any historical novel.)

He begins on page 11:

“

It is the reign of Josiah (648-609) that is best correlated with the archaeological evidence that we now have. . . .

Numerous studies of these intriguing reform measures attributed to Josiah have been published, but few have paid any attention to possible archaeological correlates—that is, to a possible real-life context in the late seventh century. Most scholars have focused on whether the reform was successful, many assuming that the reforms claimed are simply too fantastic to be credible. The fact is, however, that **we have good archaeological explanations for most of the targets of Josiah's reforms**. For instance, we know what high places (bāmôt) are, and we have a number of examples of them, perhaps the most obvious example being the monumental one at Dan.

No-one denies the biblical authors were familiar with the various popular cults of the day. Simply finding evidence of these brings us no closer to finding any support for the historicity behind the narrative of Josiah and the discovery of Deuteronomy.

“

We have many altars in cult places and private homes, large and small. We even have an example of the altar on the roof in the debris of a building destroyed at Ashkelon in 604.

The sacred poles and pillars are easily explained, even in the Hebrew Bible, as wooden images or live trees used to represent the goddess Asherah symbolically. The tree iconography has now been connected conclusively with the old Canaanite female deity Asherah, whose cult was still widespread in Iron Age Israel, in both nonorthodox and conformist circles (above).

The weavings, or perhaps “garments” or even “curtains,” for Asherah (Hebrew *bāttīm*) remain a crux. Renderings by the Septuagint, the Targumim, and later Jewish commentaries suggest a corrupt Masoretic Text, but woven garments for deities and tent-like hangings for sacred pavilions are well known in both the ancient and modern Middle East.

The phrase “heavenly hosts” needs no archaeological explanation, since it clearly refers to the divine council well documented at Ugarit and in the Hebrew Bible. The reference to the “horses and chariots of the Sun” recalls examples that we have of terra-cotta horse-and-chariot models from the Late Bronze and Iron Ages. In the Ugaritic texts, Baal is the “Cloud Rider” who flies across the heavens daily as the great storm god, imagery that is even applied to Yahweh in Psalms.

The Topheth in the Kidron Valley (a rubbish dump and place of abomination in any case) is readily explained by the famous sanctuary of Tanit at Carthage, where infant sacrifice was the usual rite, and there the Phoenician god was indeed Molech.

Of the various “pagan” deities condemned—Baal, Asherah, Ashtoreth of Sidon, Kemosh of Moab, and Milkom of Ammon—all are well known, as is their iconography and to some degree their cult practices.

It is not only the description of the specifics of the religious situation in Josiah’s time that is realistic in the light of the current archaeological data. The general context of cultural and religious pluralism in the seventh century is an amalgam well illustrated by the archaeological data that we have summarized above, beginning already in the eighth century. That context helps to answer the question raised above about whether the Deuteronomistic Historians’ original version fits in the actual historical-cultural setting of the seventh century in Judah. It can be shown in many ways that it does but in other ways that it does not, even though the written version could have been almost contemporary (the question of an older oral tradition cannot be resolved).

It is instructive to set the central themes and ideals of the Deuteronomistic program as summarized above alongside a general description of the realities of life in seventh-century Judah as illuminated by the archaeological evidence here.

And that’s it. All Dever’s archaeological evidence has managed to do is to tell us that there is no evidence for Josiah’s reforms as per the biblical narrative. No-one has questioned the polytheistic/poly-Yahwist cult prevalent throughout Judah/Samaria/Negev/Syria. The biblical narrative assumes that most of the population did not practice “biblical Yahwism”. The whole point of the narrative is to give some historical context to the book of Deuteronomy.

One may reply that the biblical narrative exaggerated and the reforms were not so successful after all, but it won’t really do to imagine all sorts of reasons why we still do not have the evidence for the historicity of the narrative. We will always need independent evidence to confirm the narrative. Until we have it we cannot validly work on the assumption that we will one day find the evidence we know “must be there somewhere” to justify our dating of the sources.

Dever's words above are a classic instance of the very problem Davies was addressing. The archaeological evidence is interpreted through the assumption that there is a historical core in the biblical narrative. Without the biblical narrative there is simply no grounds in any of the evidence cited by Dever that would lead anyone to suspect the event of Josiah's reforms.



Re: Why the Hellenistic era for ALL "Old Testament" books should be taken seriously



StephenGoranson

Posts: 2192

Joined: Thu Apr 02, 2015 8:10 pm

Contact:

by **StephenGoranson** » Tue Feb 20, 2024 5:11 am

There are reasons to consider some TaNaK texts to be older than third century, some of which have been discussed here.

Qumran texts, safely considered to be copies rather than autographs, show developments over time.

And some may themselves may be older; at least, so Michael Langlois (name searchable here) has argued concerning some paleo-Hebrew mss. Few have been radiocarbon dated (more to be published). Statistically it is unlikely that the oldest one has yet been tested and published.

Deir 'Alla inscription.

Silver amulets.

Both searchable.

It is not plausible that temple priests, before third century, were illiterate and had nothing to read.

Semitic language history. A recent--Feb. 14, 2024--observation, for example:

"A marginal linguistic difference between the Pentateuch and the rest of the Hebrew Bible"

by Benjamin Suchard

<https://bnuyaminim.wordpress.com/2024/0...rew-bible/>



Re: Why the Hellenistic era for ALL "Old Testament" books should be taken seriously



neilgodfrey

Posts: 6154

Joined: Sun Oct 06, 2013 10:08 am

Contact:

by **neilgodfrey** » Tue Feb 20, 2024 6:41 am

StephenGoranson wrote: ↑Tue Feb 20, 2024 5:11 am

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[https://bnuyaminim.wordpress.com/2024/0 ... rew-bible/](https://bnuyaminim.wordpress.com/2024/0...rew-bible/)

My understanding of an academic discussion is that one engages with the arguments presented by others but I do not see that happening here. If you are going to respond to my posts, can you kindly respond to the central point I make about circularity of the conventional dating of the biblical books -- as I have illustrated in publications by Wellhausen, Dever and Davies.

But as for your points here:

Michael Langlois has the scholarly professionalism to acknowledge when others have interpretations that differ from his own, noting what is possible outside his own preferences and where another specialist has disagreed with him. He writes in relation to 4Q46 (p. 270):

“

4Q46 would thus be at home in the fifth or fourth centuries BCE; an earlier date is not impossible but lacks clear parallels, whereas a date in the third century is possible but unnecessary.

In relation to 4Q12: (p. 271):

“

would also be at home in the fifth or fourth centuries BCE, perhaps in the third century should the development of the script be slow. McLean dates 4Q12 to the “middle of the second century” BCE; 64 such a late date is unnecessary.

On 2Q5 (p. 271)

“

this manuscript could be at home in the fourth or third centuries. McLean dates it to ca. “150 to 75 BCE” 65 which seems unnecessarily late.

Om 6Q2 (p. 271)

“

Overall, 6Q2 may also have been copied around the fourth or third centuries BCE. McLean acknowledges the affinities between 6Q2 and 2Q5 and ascribes them both the same unnecessarily late date between 150 and 75 BCE.

On the 1Q3 fragments (p. 272)

“

Although a date in the fourth century is possible, 1Q3 is probably more at home in the third century, like 4Q11. McLean’s dating between “150 to 75 BCE” 67 is, once again, probably late, while Birnbaum’s dating “ca. 440 B.C.E.” 68 is too early, flawed by his methodology

And on the 6Q1 fragments (p. 272)

“

... may have been copied around the third century BCE. McLean dates 4Q101 “between 225 and 150 BCE,” 69 and 6Q1 and 4Q123 to the “last half of the second century” BCE 70 ; these ranges are possible but too narrow and a bit late.

- Langlois, Michael. “Dead Sea Scrolls Palaeography and the Samaritan Pentateuch.” In *The Samaritan Pentateuch and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, edited by Michaël Langlois, 255–85. Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 94. Leuven; Bristol, CT: Peeters, 2019.

As has been noted elsewhere, Langlois “does not point to any palaeographic feature that positively indicates a 5th or 4th century as opposed to third century BCE date”.

“

StephenGoranson wrote: ↑ Tue Feb 20, 2024 5:11 am

It is not plausible that temple priests, before third century, were illiterate and had nothing to read.

This is an unfortunate caricature of the proposal for a Hellenistic dating of the biblical works. I don't see it as an appropriate comment in this discussion.

“

StephenGoranson wrote: ↑ Tue Feb 20, 2024 5:11 am

Deir 'Alla inscription.

Silver amulets.....

"A marginal linguistic difference between the Pentateuch and the rest of the Hebrew Bible"

by Benjamin Suchard

<https://bnuyanimim.wordpress.com/2024/0...rew-bible/>

etc

My OP pointed out that there are differences in terms used in the biblical books and also that Hellenism by definition means a blending of local and Greek cultures so that one would expect to find evidence of Canaanite/Syrian sources in a Hellenistic era hypothesis. Simply repeating references to articles and discussions that have failed to address these central points of the argument is not helpful. Especially when it was noted in those earlier discussions that those very same points listed here are indeed addressed in some detail in specific arguments for a Hellenistic dating. It would be more productive to address and not ignore the arguments that have been presented before and that I am attempting to make with a new start here.

The Hellenistic era hypothesis is not a denial of such data but an alternative explanation for that data. It arises because the conventional dating of the data has been circular. The Hellenistic hypothesis attempts to offer a simpler explanation that is not circular but independently verifiable -- unlike the conventional dating.

So listing data points without addressing the methods for dating them (including interpretations that assume long periods of evolution rather

than a potentially less problematic alternative) simply avoids discussion.

I would greatly appreciate it if you could address the arguments I have been making rather than responding with blanket contradictions and references to material that fails to take account of the argument being made in the OP.



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Re: Why the Hellenistic era for ALL "Old Testament" books



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