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neilgodfrey

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Academic Discussion

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 StephenGoranson

» Tue Feb 20, 2024 9:15 am

Offered non-Josiah-reliant examples, you them fundamentally unwelcomed.


Maybe P. R. Davies described some views, not mine.

Paleo-Hebrew date ranges you (circularilly?) chose the conceivably latest...a priori.




StephenGoranson

Posts: 2192

Joined: Thu Apr 02, 2015 8:10 pm


Contact: 

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



by neilgodfrey

» Tue Feb 20, 2024 10:14 am


 StephenGoranson wrote: ↑Tue Feb 20, 2024 9:15 am

Offered non-Josiah-reliant examples, you them fundamentally unwelcomed.

What I did was to "welcome" the reference of Langois by engaging in detail with what he has written, and thus demonstrate with multiple instances that what he wrote allows for the possibility of a Hellenistic provenance. I cited what he said more completely than your own reference to his writing.

I also pointed out that the other data points you listed contribute nothing to the discussion about dating. You did not explain how they contradict the circularity of conventional dating. Merely presenting them as if they are self-evident disproofs of a possibility of a Hellenistic provenance is simply assuming the dating methods that I have questioned.


I have to conclude that you have no argument to counter my own rebuttal of your post re the "non-Josiah-reliant examples". Nor have you any argument to counter the points raised by Davies.



neilgodfrey

Posts: 6154

Joined: Sun Oct 06, 2013 10:08 am

Contact: 

“ **StephenGoranson** wrote: ↑ Tue Feb 20, 2024 9:15 am
Maybe P. R. Davies described some views, not mine.

My discussion is not interested in "your views" (though I have attempted to reply to them with argument) but in the views of general scholarship. Davies was describing the views and methods of the mainstream. The Hellenistic provenance thesis needs to engage with the arguments in the literature, among the conventional wisdoms of the scholarly majority.

Are you meaning to imply that you are not interested in discussing the mainstream views?

“ **StephenGoranson** wrote: ↑ Tue Feb 20, 2024 9:15 am
Paleo-Hebrew date ranges you (circularily?) chose the conceivably latest...a priori.

You've lost me. I have not yet even mentioned "paleo-Hebrew".

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

by **neilgodfrey** » Tue Feb 20, 2024 10:25 am

“ **StephenGoranson** wrote: ↑ Tue Feb 20, 2024 9:15 am
Paleo-Hebrew date ranges you (circularily?) chose the conceivably latest...a priori.

Sorry -- on reflection I think I see why you wrote the above. Were you referring to my list of quotations from Langlois?

If so, I have to point out that you have misunderstood what I wrote. I at no point said that one end of a date range "proves" or "establishes" the Hellenistic thesis. Not at all. What I quoted demonstrates that Langlois acknowledges the possibility of third century dating of the DSS but that he prefers earlier dating, and he gives his reasons. That is entirely fair and legitimate. It is equally fair and legitimate to note that Langlois cites no evidence that denies the possibility of a Hellenistic dating for any of the DSS -- though obviously he makes it clear that he does not agree with that late dating at all.

To be fair we need to accept that nothing Langlois has published has denied the possibility of third century origins of the DSS. I am not "circularily" choosing the latest: I am accepting the full date range the evidence allows.

I am sure no-one would do the opposite of what I think you are suggesting and choose the earliest dates and reject the latest possible ones just to support a pre-Hellenistic thesis! 😊



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 **StephenGoranson** » Tue Feb 20, 2024 10:54 am



StephenGoranson

Posts: 2192

Joined: Thu Apr 02, 2015 8:10 pm

Contact:

In this case, if (big if) his paleo-Hebrew analysis is valid, I would not assume the earliest possible date range of the oldest proposed ms, but consider the most probable, i.e., before your unnamed (Gmirkin) asserted date.



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



by [neilgodfrey](#) » Tue Feb 20, 2024 11:12 am

“ StephenGoranson wrote: ↑ Tue Feb 20, 2024 10:54 am

In this case, if (big if) his paleo-Hebrew analysis is valid, I would not assume the earliest possible date range of the oldest proposed ms, but consider the most probable, i.e., before your unnamed (Gmirkin) asserted date.



[neilgodfrey](#)

Posts: 6154

Joined: Sun Oct 06, 2013 10:08 am

Contact:

Please be fair and respond to what I have written. Not to what you seem to assume I am thinking. Gmirkin's dates are only one of a number of dates and date ranges that I am open to discussing. I would like us to be honest and open with each other and not assume with mind-reading the "unnamed" arguments of the other.

But those dates, Gmirkin's included, are essentially irrelevant to the point I am arguing here. The particular date Gmirkin has proposed is not on my agenda any more than any other specific date is (Gmirkin is not the only proponent of a Hellenistic hypothesis.)

The OP Is Hellenistic era. I used that term because that's exactly what I meant. I hope we can read each other in good faith.

(By the way, simply declaring your preference to a most probable date is not a discussion. A discussion involves setting out reasons and arguments and engaging with opposing interpretations and evidence. I'd really like to see you do that.)



Re: Why the Hellenistic era Part 2



by [neilgodfrey](#) » Tue Feb 20, 2024 11:24 am

There is more to the Hellenistic provenance thesis than the simple fact of the circularity of the methods of dating the OT books by the past conventional scholarship -- something that so far not even SG has denied. Given that SG's reference to Langlois (when read in full) also allows at least for the possibility of a Hellenistic provenance, we have room to continue.

Archaeology reveals

1. The archaeological evidence of pre-Hellenistic Judea-Samaria has demonstrated that major moments of biblical history are fictions. The "invasion" of Canaan by an "Israelite" ethnic group never happened. The most that can be said about the "Kingdom" of David and Solomon is that it was little more than a village incapable of extending dominance over any area of note. (Jamieson-Drake saw evidence of development from a "lower-order society" to a "chiefdom" in Jerusalem, which falls far from the level of "a state".)



[neilgodfrey](#)

Posts: 6154

Joined: Sun Oct 06, 2013 10:08 am

Contact:

Why write fiction?

2. The question must arise, then, why such stories were told? Were the stories derived from historical memories? Archaeology has suggested that is unlikely. A fundamental and inescapable fact of any literature is that it must reflect the ideas and beliefs and understandings that are part of its cultural matrix. One specific ideological feature of the narrative of David is that it shares manners, customs, assumptions that we find in the Persian kingdom. One might therefore wonder if the stories were told as part of ideological hopes for an imminent greatness, or at least as an attempt to identify with other great powers, whether of the past and/or present.

But what kind of fiction?

3. The literary structure and style of the Primary History (Genesis–2 Kings), as other scholars (not those arguing for a Hellenistic origin, by the way) have shown, is comparable to the Histories of Herodotus. The closest genre to the Primary History is found in the Greek world. Another comparable genre is the autobiographical narrative. Some scholars have attempted to explain this observation by speculating that Greek works were well known to the subjects of the Persian empire or that even the biblical books were known to the Greeks and influenced the Greeks. One needs to look for the explanation that raises fewest difficulties or questions.

Nothing uniform -- why?

4. There are vastly different styles among the biblical books. One can explain this fact by positing a long period of evolution and various cultural influences over centuries. One can also explain the same fact by positing contemporary regional differences. As one scholar noted, imagine if all we had about Socrates were the writings of Plato and Xenophon. Would we have to assume that there was a vast time gap between the two accounts since they are so at odds in so many ways?

What kind of society?

5. One ought also to look at the kind of socio-cultural-economic society that would be required to produce the biblical literature. Here again the archaeological evidence can be interpreted in favour of the Hellenistic period. But this is a vast topic of its own.

The argument emerges from other hypotheses

The scholars I have had in mind while setting out the above points have, with one exception, not been advocates of the Hellenistic origin of the biblical literature. The archaeological evidence that discounts the historicity of "biblical history", the comparisons with Greek literature and Persian royal ideologies, -- all of these are found in works of scholars who never entertained a Hellenistic time setting, as far as I am aware. Philip Davies himself (with whom I began in the OP) always argued for the Persian era for the Primary History and Prophets.

But there are also problems with a Persian era setting that disappear if we move the compositions of the books to the third century.



Re: Why the Hellenistic era Part 2a

by [neilgodfrey](#) » Tue Feb 20, 2024 4:29 pm



[neilgodfrey](#)

Posts: [6154](#)

Joined: Sun Oct 06, 2013 10:08 am

Contact:

In this post I will explain "my personal reason" for strongly suspecting a Hellenistic origin of the biblical literature -- though I am sure I have come across the same ideas throughout different books and articles over the years. It follows on from #5 in the preceding post. When I wrote that I was expecting to follow up with detailed discussions from interpretations of the archaeological finds but have decided now to put that off for later.

My "personal vibe" that is in sync with the Hellenistic era is reflection on "the nature of the biblical literature itself". The Primary History is not the kind of literature that arises *sui generis* from a vacuum. One expects to see antecedents over time that lead to that kind of work. And the closest antecedents we find are in the Greek literature, not in that of the Syria-Mesopotamian regions. Assyrian vassal treaties, the epics of Gilgamesh, of Baal, and so forth, simply fall short by comparison.

But what kind of society produces that kind of literature? It takes more than a scribal elite responsible for administrative and trade records, or even engaged in cultic verses and prayers and spells for cures, etc. The kind of literature in our Bibles required reasonably prosperous and complex societies with a literate class that engaged with the kinds of stories and ideas that had relevance to their class, ethnic and regional identities. They had to have a reasonably widespread audience to engage with those ideas and stories and whose interest or vulnerabilities or needs encouraged their literary development. The social groups must have been somewhat extensive and complex because of the various competing and related ideas found in that literature.

In other words we are talking about fairly advanced societies in economic growth and social complexity, and who also have comparable antecedent literature.

The archaeological record does point to some kind of growth of Jerusalem and surrounds in the eighth and seventh centuries, but I am not sure it really reaches the kind of level that Finkelstein and Silberman seemed to think was adequate for a "renaissance literary activity". Besides, what kinds of antecedents were available at or up to that time to mushroom into what we find in the Bible?

The Persian era is by all accounts that I have seen in relative decline. Persian "liberal" rule that allowed Judeans and Samaritans to do their own thing is more easily understood as administrative neglect, not caring at all about their development -- only collecting levees for the army and taxes for the king. (Witness the Xenophon's ability to march his Greek army untouched through the empire!)

The economic revival, with its related social growth in complexity and size, came with the arrival of the Greeks. So did the antecedent literature.

Herodotus's *Histories* has a remarkably similar structure to the Primary History: opening with world history, having a close look at Egypt as a follow up, and finally getting down to the narrow view of the conflict between two powers --- AND all told within the framework of a theological interest: **the lesson of the deciding hand of the god**

through his earthly sanctuary. And all told in a series of books in prose, both frequently with competing accounts of the same event.

I am not denying the obvious differences when saying that. What I'm trying to do is to draw attention to the "equally obvious" similarities. Did those similarities really emerge independently? Did the Hebrew literature really inspire that of the Greeks? Were the Judeans and Samaritans in the poverty-stricken, underdeveloped Persian era really hosting a literate class devouring Greek literature? (I am on record as deploring argument by rhetorical questions so I will hasten to add that those questions are more than rhetorical: they represent a series of expectations that we must propose with hypotheses other than the Hellenistic era one.)

And then we have the ideological content of the literature. How do we explain the sudden introduction of stories of Exodus, Joshua's Conquest, Judges, David and Solomon's united kingdom and empire, if those -- as the archaeological record tells us -- never happened?

At this point it is worth looking at the propaganda use the biblical works were put to in the Hasmonean period. Were not the Hasmoneans seeking to justify their conquests by appeals to a historical heritage? In a time of Greek conquest do we not expect indigenous populations to at least sometimes seek redress by counter-narratives that put themselves in the positions of the god-blessed and ultimately greater powers? Again, these are more than rhetorical questions.

As for the divisions found even within the literature -- the Samaritan/Mount Gerizim point of view versus that of Jerusalem -- have not scholars long since identified these differences underlying the multiple points of view (and sometimes outright conflict) within the biblical literature?

Mention has been made of Gmirkin in this thread. Before I read Gmirkin's book I was prompted to read Plato's *Laws* (as well as, again, *Timaeus* and *Crito*) by another scholar and was completely thrown back in my chair when I saw (and wondered how I had not seen it before) the striking similarities between Plato and the Pentateuch's laws. Oh of course all those sacrifices and cultic rituals are of Levantine/Syrian/Canaanite origin, but the Pentateuch is a lot more than those.

The creation, the merging of humans and gods, the flood and annihilation, the wandering of the new generation, the coming together and so forth. And then the laws about holiness, godliness, sacred feasts, marriage and sexuality, the judges and tribes, etc etc etc etc : Did Plato really twig to all of that from his reading of the Pentateuch? (At least one scholar has addressed the relationship of a scene in Plato's *Symposium* with the temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.)

And further yet -- how many scholars have noticed the similarities between the biblical Yahweh and the Greek Dionysus? I have read the comparisons a number of times. Surely pre-Hellenistic Yahwism was distinctively Levantine, with no appreciable differences between the Yahwism of Samaria, Judea, Negev, Canaan, Syria.... So what gave him the Greek overlay in the Bible?

Okay -- these are my generally subjective responses to how I read the literature of the OT with my knowledge of Greek literature in mind. I have

not presented a systematic argument, I know. But for what it's worth, I thought it might be of some point to note how I have come to read the literatures of the Hebrews and Greeks and the conclusions that seem to present themselves to me as a result.



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** » Wed Feb 21, 2024 12:24 am

I was surprised to read the following sentence:

"by neilgodfrey » Mon Feb 19, 2024 5:24 pm

There is more to the Hellenistic provenance thesis than the simple fact of the circularity of the methods of dating the OT books by the past conventional scholarship -- something that so far not even SG has denied."

~~~~~

I have repeatedly denied validity to the "Hellenistic provenance thesis." I, here, today, deny it again.

(That is, deny that claim for "ALL" OT texts. Some OT text, different matter.)

There is some ambiguity in the "more to [it] than" claim. More what? According to whom? If, for example, more grievance, such would not be credit to dating rationale. Plus, I don't even recall affirming the offered "fact," as described (by PRD or NG), of circularity, as accurate--much less my own way.

Anyway, I have given multiple reasons why some TaNaK portions predate the Hellenistic era.

So the quoted sentence appears to be, concerning my views, a misrepresentation.

NG is free to give his views. But not mine.

Dating "ALL" OT books as Hellenistic can be "taken seriously" as an assertion that is false, a mistake.

It I do deny.



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



by **neilgodfrey** » Wed Feb 21, 2024 6:19 am

**StephenGoranson** wrote: ↑Wed Feb 21, 2024 12:24 am

I was surprised to read the following sentence:

"by neilgodfrey » Mon Feb 19, 2024 5:24 pm

There is more to the Hellenistic provenance thesis than the simple fact of the circularity of the methods of dating the OT books by the past



**neilgodfrey**

Posts: 6154

Joined: Sun Oct 06, 2013 10:08 am

Contact:

conventional scholarship -- something that so far not even SG has denied."

~~~~~

I have repeatedly denied validity to the "Hellenistic provenance thesis." I, here, today, deny it again.
(That is, deny that claim for "ALL" OT texts. Some OT text, different matter.)

And I have never denied you deny it and I am quite sure anyone following our exchange will not suspect me of saying anything otherwise--- especially since they can read your denials quite openly here.

Anyway, I do take your point that there is some unintentional ambiguity in my sentence in that it can be interpreted as saying you yourself do not deny that there is more to circularity in the arguments for the Hellenistic hypothesis. I meant of course that you do not deny the circularity in the conventional scholarship. I trust you will agree that my OP was about the conventional scholarly datings.

My point was that you have not denied the circularity at the heart of the mainstream dating of the biblical material. Rather, I have respected your insistence that you do not personally argue the same as the mainstream and have consistently responded to your points.

“ StephenGoranson wrote: ↑Wed Feb 21, 2024 12:24 am

Anyway, I have given multiple reasons why some TaNaK portions predate the Hellenistic era.

I have not read any reasons set forth that I have not engaged with fully here.

Example:

- I demonstrated that Langlois does not exclude the possibility of a third century date for the DSS.
- I have pointed out that merely listing various artefacts on the assumption that we should believe they are reasons to date biblical works prior to the third century is misguided in that they can as easily be used as further examples
 - of the arguments related to circularity
 - and also to a failure to appreciate that Hellenism means by definition a blending of cultures.

“ StephenGoranson wrote: ↑Wed Feb 21, 2024 12:24 am

NG is free to give his views. But not mine.

I really have been bending over backwards to address the mainstream views here, something I have found difficult given the various responses that have attempted to raise personal views of the poster, not the mainstream ones.

“ StephenGoranson wrote: ↑Wed Feb 21, 2024 12:24 am

Dating "ALL" OT books as Hellenistic can be "taken seriously" as an assertion that is false, a mistake.

I believe anyone looking at the OP and other posts I have made here will see that it is by no means an assertion but a reasoned argument. I was hoping for critical engagement with the argument, with its logic and evidence.

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



by **neilgodfrey** » Wed Feb 21, 2024 6:31 am



neilgodfrey

Posts: 6154

Joined: Sun Oct 06, 2013 10:08 am

Contact:

“ **StephenGoranson** wrote: ↑Wed Feb 21, 2024 12:24 am

Anyway, I have given multiple reasons why some TaNaK portions predate the Hellenistic era.

Here are those multiple reasons:

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

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

True and never denied. Always understood. But what is the argument that they cannot belong to the third century? I have not seen that argument.

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

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.

True, but where is the argument that they cannot be dated to the third century. I do not see that argument here.

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

Deir 'Alla inscription.
Silver amulets.

What is the argument that these two items falsify a third century date for the biblical books?

“ **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.

What does this assertion have to do with the argument for a Hellenistic date?

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

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

Posting another example of circular reasoning to date something is not an argument against a third century date.

Do you have an argument that demonstrates why a Hellenistic era provenance for the OT books should not be taken seriously?

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