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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 .... Part 2b



by neilgodfrey » Wed Feb 21, 2024 7:28 am

To follow on from my Part 2a comment .....

The biblical works have traditionally been understood as the product of an evolution over centuries, usually said to be from the ninth or eighth to the third centuries, under the influence of Mesopotamian, Hittite, Syrian, Ugaritic, Egyptian cultures.

There is a serious problem with that view, however. The absence of evidence prior to the third century for either the biblical works themselves or for the major events that the Bible narrates.

The advantage of the Hellenistic era hypothesis for the "OT" is that explains

- all of the cultural influences we find in the Bible

AND ALSO explains

- why we would not expect to find any evidence for either the books themselves or the major events they write about before the third century.

Notice this observation from a conference paper by Jonathan Ben-Dov (I am not suggesting Ben-Dov himself has anything to do with the Hellenistic era hypothesis):

“

As argued above, the metaphor of influence dictates that the source culture remains unaffected by the act of the contact. Like a candle, which can light other candles without diminishing its own flame, so the great source culture is not changed by the nation which received its cultural capital. . . .

This image, however, is not necessarily true. **I would like to suggest an example from the field of Hellenism**, which is close in its geographical scope and not too far away in time. People often talk of



neilgodfrey

Posts: 6154

Joined: Sun Oct 06, 2013 10:08 am

Contact:

**'Hellenistic Influence' on Judea, Syria or Egypt. However, the very essence of Hellenism is its being an amalgam of Greek culture with the rich and ancient cultures of the East. The Hellenistic kingdoms in Syria and Egypt were by no means Greek; they combined Greek cultural elements with the ancient traditions of the hosting countries. Hellenism was a cultural entity in constant progression.**

Ben-Dov, Jonathan. "The Inadequacy of the Term 'Influence' in Biblical Studies." Tel -Aviv University,. Accessed February 21, 2024.  
[https://www.academia.edu/7499569/The\\_In ... al\\_Studies](https://www.academia.edu/7499569/The_In ... al_Studies).

That's also the essence of what the Hellenistic era hypothesis for the Primary History in particular (Genesis to 2 Kings) is all about.

In another sub-forum in earlywritings someone used to object that the Hellenistic era hypothesis "degraded" Judeans and Samaritans by suggesting they were mindless pawns who could not have their own culture. But that criticism misunderstands Hellenism -- as I have attempted to make clear from the start and as we see spelled out above by Ben-Dov.

The Pentateuch and Primary History are as unique as Hellenistic era Egypt and Hellenistic era Syria. None is "Greek". Nor are any of them traditional "Egyptian" or traditional "Syrian". They are each distinctive cultures that have been created by the Egyptians and Syrians themselves. Ditto for the Judeans and Samaritans, I suggest. The Pentateuch is not Greek, but nor is it a product of the pre-Hellenistic Syrian Yahwist cult. What we find in the Pentateuch, however, are many echoes of Greek literature and ideologies and many references to the Yahwist ideas found throughout Syria-Negev, etc.

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



by **neilgodfrey** » Wed Feb 21, 2024 5:08 pm

**StephenGoranson** wrote: ↑ 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.

...

Silver amulets.

...



**neilgodfrey**

Posts: 6154

Joined: Sun Oct 06, 2013 10:08 am

Contact:

It is easy to tire of responding to data that has already been responded to several times up to now. But one must never tire.

Here is Ada Yardeni's remarks on the relevance of the silver amulets to the existence of the Pentateuch as early as the 6th century:

**“**

As the verses on the plaques appear outside a biblical context they cannot prove that the blessing was already incorporated into the Pentateuch in the early 6th century B.C.E. They also cannot prove the existence of a written Pentateuch in the pre-exilic period. Only a discovery of biblical scrolls or even a fragment of a biblical scroll could

serve as such a proof. The plaques can prove only that the priestly blessing was already crystallized at that time and probably in current use.

- Yardeni, Ada. "Remarks On the Priestly Blessing On Two Ancient Amulets From Jerusalem." *Vetus Testamentum* 41, no. 2 (1991): 176-85. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853391X00450>.

The Hellenistic hypothesis, as has been noted now several times in this thread, leads one to expect to find both Greek ideas and local information/traditions in the one work of literature. That would mean accepting the actual meaning of the word "Hellenization".



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



**andrewcriddle**

Posts: 2793

Joined: Sat Oct 05, 2013 6:36 pm

Contact:

by **andrewcriddle** » Fri Feb 23, 2024 9:54 pm

This is a comment on Neil's original post in this thread and the issues it raises about general historical methodology.

It may not be a response to Neil's position as developed in later posts.

In later posts Neil has referred to arguments that the author of the Pentateuch knew Plato et al.

I'm going to leave this aside.

a/ I am not at all convinced for reasons discussed in earlier threads and don't really want to rehash those arguments.

b/ Right or wrong this is a rather different argument that the earlier ones about general methodology. If we have solid evidence of links between Plato's works and the Pentateuch then, accepting that Plato did not know the Pentateuch, there are straightforward implications for dating the Pentateuch whatever ones general methodology.

There is an argument that the Hebrew of the Pentateuch requires a pre-Hellenistic date.

I'm going to leave this aside.

It is agreed that prima-facie the Hebrew of the Pentateuch is much earlier than say the Hebrew of Daniel Chronicles Ben Sira but Hebrew scholars dispute how conclusive this sort of evidence is and my personal opinion is pretty much worthless.

The post is about ALL Old Testament books but I'm afraid I can't take it seriously in this form. It may be my narrow mindedness but I'm sure Nahum for example is a pre-Hellenistic work. The same goes for Deutero-Isaiah which has real implications for tradition found in the Pentateuch. I'm going to concentrate on the idea of the Pentateuch in anything remotely like its present form being a Hellenistic work.

On the one hand we have no unambiguous pre-Hellenistic evidence for the Pentateuch. (I regard Hecataeus on the Jews according to Diodorus Siculus as authentic but this is technically extremely early Hellenistic rather than pre-Hellenistic.) On the other hand things like the Elephantine papyri suggest that the Pentateuch was not central to Jewish religion in the early Persian period. This means that prima-facie we should take seriously the idea that the Pentateuch was not only redacted in the Persian or later period but effectively created then. I have serious difficulties with a Persian origin of the Pentateuch but it prima-facie

should be taken seriously.

The difficulty is that neither Neil or I regard the Persian period as plausibly creative in this way, hence 'Persian or later period' becomes Hellenistic period. I am unable to regard this as prima-facie plausible. Apart from anything else the creation of a work that has all the signs of a long process of development and combination of different sources almost immediately before our earliest external evidence for its existence is IMO just not how things happen. I have similar problems with the idea of the NT being created around the time of Marcion. This may be a prejudice on my part, but if so then so be it.

Andrew Criddle

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



by [neilgodfrey](#) » Sat Feb 24, 2024 11:36 am

Hi Andrew. As you note, the this thread is not about Gmirkin's thesis nor about any of the biblical authors' knowledge of Plato. It is exclusively about the more basic question: the view that the biblical literature was the product of the Hellenistic era.

May I respond to some minor points and then one major one?

You write:

“

On the one hand we have no unambiguous pre-Hellenistic evidence for the Pentateuch.

My question: Do we have any evidence at all, even ambiguous evidence, for a pre-Hellenistic existence of the Pentateuch? I am, of course, referring to independent evidence (not the Pentateuch itself).

More to the point, what circumstances -- political/structural, economic and cultural -- do we find in any era prior to the Hellenistic one that would explain the narrative content and genres of the literature we see in the OT? (I am aware of Silberman and Finkelstein's view about Josiah's time -- they describe a great literary flourishing but fail to explain its antecedents or origins, iirc. -- though I'm open to further discussion.)

You write:

“

On the other hand things like the Elephantine papyri suggest that the Pentateuch was not central to Jewish religion in the early Persian period. This means that prima-facie we should take seriously the idea that the Pentateuch was not only redacted in the Persian or later period but effectively created then. I have serious difficulties with a Persian origin of the Penateuch but it prima-facie should be taken seriously.

You conclude that logically "Persian or later period" must embrace the Hellenistic era.

I liked your point about the apparent non-creative environment of the



[neilgodfrey](#)

Posts: 6154

Joined: Sun Oct 06, 2013 10:08 am

Contact:

Persian era. If Elephantine declares that there is no evidence for a Pentateuch in any form or stage of development, then what change of circumstances in the Persian period can we point to that might account for the emergence of the creation of the Pentateuch? -- It's a question you rightly raise.

It appears that your major sticking point is expressed here:

“

Apart from anything else the creation of a work that has all the signs of a long process of development and combination of different sources almost immediately before our earliest external evidence for its existence is IMO just not how things happen.

Yes, understood entirely. That has long been the one major sticking point. It was even addressed back in the early 1900s by a few brave souls who even then were suggesting a Hellenistic provenance for major sections of the biblical literature (not just Ecclesiastes or Daniel).

We have become so habituated to conceptualizing the OT as having "all the signs of a long process of development and a combination of different sources". The Hellenistic hypothesis does not dispute the "combination of different sources" but, as you know, proposes a different explanation for the data that has long been assumed to have had a gradual accretion over centuries.

In another thread I attempted to address, as one example, lengthy arguments relating to the evolution of the story of Noah's flood. As I saw it, our differences came down to our inability to move beyond the idea that differences implied long time of adaptation. My impression was that my interlocutor could not imagine any explanation other than long-term development. The notion of a collaborative effort of different schools appeared to be incomprehensible (that was my interpretation -- he may differ.) In a recent conference I was interested to hear one specialist repeat his observation that there was a time when Samaritans and Judeans did write a common text cooperatively, maintaining their differences within the one narrative.

Even the nature of Old Hebrew has been called into question. Yes, there was an Old Hebrew, but we also know that Hebrews were not the only ancient peoples who chose for certain literature to write in archaic styles to give an aura of antiquity. That's not a conspiracy theory -- it's how ancient peoples sometimes worked (scholars notice major periods of widespread love of antiquity in antiquity!). Old languages have been preserved for various types of texts even into relatively modern times, e.g. Latin.

One other point I have not addressed in any serious way so far is thinking through historical changes. The conquests of Alexander the Great dramatically changed the peoples he conquered dramatically -- economically, socially, politically, culturally, in the world of literature and ideas and ideologies.

We have seen even in "modern" times how histories and traditions are invented wholesale when major changes take place to the status of a people. And these false histories are embraced and win out despite the contemporary critics who try to alert their peers and others to the fact



that they are forgeries. Where manuscripts are controlled under archival authorities it is hard for those naysayers to win the day. If recent history did not look promising for providing material that could be glorified to magnify one's identity or authorize a new power elite, then distant past events and characters are invented, and enthusiastically embraced. I'm thinking in particular of references in Hobsbawm's *Invention of Tradition*. In that light, here is an interesting remark found in an introduction to Geoffrey of Monmouth's History of King Arthur and co:

“

In some ways the *History of the Kings of Britain*, this strange, uneven and yet extraordinarily influential book written in Latin by Geoffrey of Monmouth and finished c.1136, may be said to bear the same relationship to the story of the early British inhabitants of our own island as do the seventeen historical books in the Old Testament, from Genesis to Esther, to the early history of the Israelites in Palestine.

- Geoffrey, of Monmouth. *The History of the Kings of Britain*. Translated by Lewis Thorpe. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966. p. 9

We should not be surprised to see some unprecedented flourishing of a new historical consciousness among certain priests or elites in particular in Egypt, Syria (as we do), nor elsewhere.

The creation story in Genesis, even the prose history of Genesis to Judges, is an anomaly when set against other "Near Eastern" literature of 1000–500 BCE. The circumstances that arose in the wake of the 330 BCE conquests do open up plausible explanations that place the Pentateuch and following books in a more explicable matrix.

One can understand being overwhelmed with incredulity at the suggestion of such a late provenance of the OT, but if we consider the extant evidence (and absence of it), even if we don't like the idea, can we not say that "logically" it is plausible, even a "technically reasonable" hypothesis on the basis of the extant evidence alone -- but not if we give more weight to traditions of scholarship that have given us an entirely different concept of the Bible?



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



by [neilgodfrey](#) » Sat Feb 24, 2024 1:46 pm

I suggest that the strongest argument against the view that the OT literature was composed over a long period of time is that that view depends upon some core historicity to the larger historical narrative within the OT itself. If there is no migration of "Hebrews" into Canaan, if there is no united kingdom of Israel, if we only catch glimpses of Jerusalem emerging as a significant power after about 700 BCE when the Kingdom of Israel has been taken out of the picture by the Assyrians, and if there is no independent evidence for any distinctive biblical motive prior to the Hellenistic period, then on what basis can one justify what would surely be an alien kind of literature (alien as to ideology and genre and narrative motifs) being composed and developed throughout those centuries?



[neilgodfrey](#)

Posts: 6154

Joined: Sun Oct 06, 2013 10:08 am

Contact:



[StephenGoranson](#)

## 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** » Sun Feb 25, 2024 3:04 am

The late, great Ada Yardeni wrote (above) that the silver plaques do not prove the existence then of the Pentateuch. (Nor disprove of course.) Oddly, she wrote that "Only a discovery of biblical scrolls or even a fragment of a biblical scroll could serve as such a proof." So writing on parchment or papyrus would count, but not writing on silver? (Or on Deir 'Alla wall?) Obviously, very old books, such as Iliad, the Vedas, Avesta, etc., are older than the oldest currently extant copy. There are other types of proof.

I'm guessing that she died before commenting on Michael Langlois' dating Qumran paleo-Hebrew Bible copies to probably earlier than what NG claims we "should" think. "Should," here, btw, is oddly prescriptive for what, even he allowed, is the very latest ML-proposed and said-unlikely date ranges. Please correct me if Yardeni did comment on ML dating. Speaking of paleo-Hebrew, I recall that PR Davies (and Rogerson) proposed redating the Siloam inscription. Can you guess in which direction? Later. Many critiques included

"The Date of the Siloam Inscription: A Rejoinder to Rogerson and Davies," Ronald S. Hendel

The Biblical Archaeologist,

Vol. 59, No. 4 (Dec., 1996), pp. 233-237



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

by **neilgodfrey** » Sun Feb 25, 2024 8:36 am

**StephenGoranson** wrote: ↑ Sun Feb 25, 2024 3:04 am

The late, great Ada Yardeni wrote (above) that the silver plaques do not prove the existence then of the Pentateuch. (Nor disprove of course.) Oddly, she wrote that "Only a discovery of biblical scrolls or even a fragment of a biblical scroll could serve as such a proof." So writing on parchment or papyrus would count, but not writing on silver? (Or on Deir 'Alla wall?)

I may have missed your explanation for how the silver amulets and the Deir Alla inscription verify a pre-Hellenistic date for the Pentateuch? (Original question posted [here](#))

----- Silver plaque words: Independently dated ca 600 BCE

----- Same words appear in another work independently dated ca 300 BCE.

----- Should we assume that the document dated 300 BCE MUST have therefore have existed AT OR PRIOR to 600 BCE and that the silver plaque words were copied from it?

----- Or should we assume that the document dated 300 BCE copied the words known and extant since 600 BCE?

----- Which is the simpler of the two explanations?

**neilgodfrey**

Posts: 6154

Joined: Sun Oct 06, 2013 10:08 am

Contact:

Similarly, can you explain how the Deir Alla inscription testifies to the existence of the Pentateuch ca 800 BCE, if that is what you are proposing?

Silver amulets and the Deir 'Alla inscription are dated by reference to independent data. **What I have proposed is that we should begin by dating the biblical books by the same method -- independent data.** From that starting point we can examine whether other studies and analyses should require an earlier dating.

“ StephenGoranson wrote: ↑Sun Feb 25, 2024 3:04 am

Speaking of paleo-Hebrew, I recall that PR Davies (and Rogerson) proposed redating the Siloam inscription. Can you guess in which direction? Later. Many critiques included "The Date of the Siloam Inscription: A Rejoinder to Rogerson and Davies," Ronald S. Hendel The Biblical Archaeologist, Vol. 59, No. 4 (Dec., 1996), pp. 233-237

How is the dating of this inscription or the script used in it evidence for the date of composition of any of the OT works?

Thanks

## Re: Why the Hellenistic era .... Part 2

by AdamKvanta » Sun Feb 25, 2024 5:01 pm



AdamKvanta

Posts: 13

Joined: Tue Aug 15, 2023 6:54 pm

Contact:

“ neilgodfrey wrote: ↑Tue Feb 20, 2024 11:24 am

### 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.

Titus Kennedy argued in 2023 that

“

... archaeological excavations and analysis at Jericho appear to place the destruction of the final Bronze Age city ca. 1400 BC in a manner consistent with the account in the book of Joshua.

<https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/14/6/796>

## Re: Why the Hellenistic era .... Part 2

by neilgodfrey » Sun Feb 25, 2024 6:41 pm



“ AdamKvanta wrote: ↑Sun Feb 25, 2024 5:01 pm

“ neilgodfrey wrote: ↑Tue Feb 20, 2024 11:24 am

### Archaeology reveals

1. The archaeological evidence of pre-Hellenistic Judea-Samaria



neilgodfrey

Posts: 6154

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Contact:



has demonstrated that major moments of biblical history are fictions. The "invasion" of Canaan by an "Israelite" ethnic group never happened.

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<https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/14/6/796>

Most non apologist scholars addressing the question of the origin of the Israelites cite that 1400 BCE destruction of Jericho as evidence that there was no Jericho in existence at the widely agreed time the Israelites were supposed to have entered Canaan (ca 1200 BCE).

There are readily available books by scholars such as I. Finkelstein and W. Dever that give up to date overviews of the archaeological evidence, including many other sources for related reading.

“

In the case of Jericho, there was no trace of a settlement of any kind in the thirteenth century BeE, and the earlier Late Bronze settlement', dating to the fourteenth century BeE, was small and poor, almost insignificant, and unfortified. There was also no sign of a destruction. Thus the famous scene of the Israelite forces marching around the walled town with the Ark of the Covenant, causing Jericho's mighty walls to collapse by the blowing of their war trumpets was, to put it simply, a romantic mirage. . . .

**Only recently has the consensus finally abandoned the conquest story.**

- Silberman, Neil Asher, and Israel Finkelstein. *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts*. Reprint edition. New York: Touchstone, 2002. pp 81–83

“

There is no way out of archaeology's argument from silence, which is deafening when taken seriously. **There was no statistically significant destruction of Canaan or mass slaughter of its inhabitants** at the end of the Late Bronze Age, even with Philistine invasions. That disposes of the first model to be discussed, the traditional conquest model.

. . . .

There is now overwhelming support in favor of a new model for early Israel. The traditional conquest, peaceful infiltration, and peasant revolt models have all been overturned in the light of the archaeological data presented here. **There is now a universal consensus among not only archaeologists but also biblical scholars that a new ethnic group called "Israelites" came from**

**among the indigenous peoples of the region** (even Transjordan is part of Canaan).

- Dever, William G. *Beyond the Texts: An Archaeological Portrait of Ancient Israel and Judah*. SBL Press, 2017. pp 189, 222



## Re: Why the Hellenistic era .... Part 2

by **AdamKvanta** » Mon Feb 26, 2024 6:14 pm



**AdamKvanta**

Posts: 13

Joined: Tue Aug 15, 2023 6:54 pm

Contact:

**neilgodfrey** wrote: ↑Sun Feb 25, 2024 6:41 pm

... In the case of Jericho, there was no trace of a settlement of any kind in **the thirteenth century BeE**, and **the earlier Late Bronze** settlement', dating to **the fourteenth century BeE** ...

... There was no statistically significant destruction of Canaan or mass slaughter of its inhabitants[/b] at the end of **the Late Bronze Age** ...

Just to clarify, the claim of Titus Kennedy is that the exodus happened in the 15th century, not in the 13th century.

I'm no expert but I think the mainstream scholars based the 13th century hypothesis of exodus on the mention of the Pi-Ramesses city in the Bible. But I think one of the arguments is that this can be explained by the process of updating names of the locations by later editors of the Torah.

And it seems to me that the other main argument of the mainstream scholars for denying the historicity of the exodus is that there should be some archaeological evidence in the Sinai. Some scholars claim that the Bible no doubt says there were 2 million Israelites who left Egypt. But Kennedy and others say that the Hebrew word translated as "thousand" has been probably mistranslated and should have been translated as "family", "group", or "troop". So the overall number of Israelites might have been just up to 100,000. Then some other scholars claim that even this smaller number should have some archaeological evidence, for example, swords. But I think swords were valuable so why would they leave them in the desert?

Titus Kennedy made this interview in 2022 when he presented his arguments for the historicity of the exodus in the 15th century:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d\\_3Plj2e7FY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_3Plj2e7FY)

Bart Ehrman critically responded to Kennedy's claims in this video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1h0Gf61xWLk>

And to be honest, unlike Ehrman, I found the arguments of Kennedy quite solid, even though I am an atheist.



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

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