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Ancient Stones

Tablets, Inscriptions and Monuments of the Biblical World

Translations, Photographs and Commentary
on Seventy-One Artifacts from Sumer to the Early Church

Scripture Analysis
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2026

Ancient Stones: Tablets, Inscriptions and Monuments of the Biblical World

Scripture Analysis · scriptureanalysis.com · First compiled edition, November 2026.

Translations. Long translations are taken from editions in the public domain in the United States and are named in each entry. Passages marked “translation by the author of this study” are fresh renderings from the published original-language editions. Biblical passages are cited by reference; where wording is compared, the witnesses used are the Masoretic Text (MT), the Septuagint (LXX) and the Greek critical text of the New Testament (NA28).

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Dates follow standard scholarly chronology and are approximate. Museum locations and readings reflect the scholarly literature cited in each entry.

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Introduction

This book gathers into one volume the studies prepared for the Ancient Stones collection of Scripture Analysis. It covers seventy-one written artifacts, from Sumerian king lists of the third millennium BC to Greek and Latin inscriptions of the first century AD, that bear on the world, the language or the text of the Bible.

How the book is arranged. The artifacts are grouped in seven parts by region and type: Mesopotamian myth, lament and wisdom; Mesopotamian royal and historical records (with the Hittite treaties); archives and everyday documents; Egyptian texts and monuments; Hebrew, Moabite and Aramaic inscriptions; the Dead Sea Scrolls; and inscriptions of the New Testament period. The entries are numbered in one sequence from 1 to 71.

How each entry is arranged. Each entry opens with a photograph and a short identification table (object, museum, date, provenance, language and script, and principal editions). A technical summary for specialists is followed by a plain-language explanation for general readers. The text itself is then given, complete where practical and in representative excerpts for long compositions and large archives, followed by notes on modern readings where an older translation is used. Each entry closes with its points of contact with the Bible and a short list of further reading.

Conventions. In translations, square brackets [ ] mark restorations where the original is broken, parentheses ( ) mark words added for sense, and an ellipsis (…) marks a gap or an omission. Transliterations follow the conventions of the editions cited. The complete text of Enūma eliš Tablet III, with notes, is given in Appendix A. A consolidated bibliography and a list of illustration credits close the book.

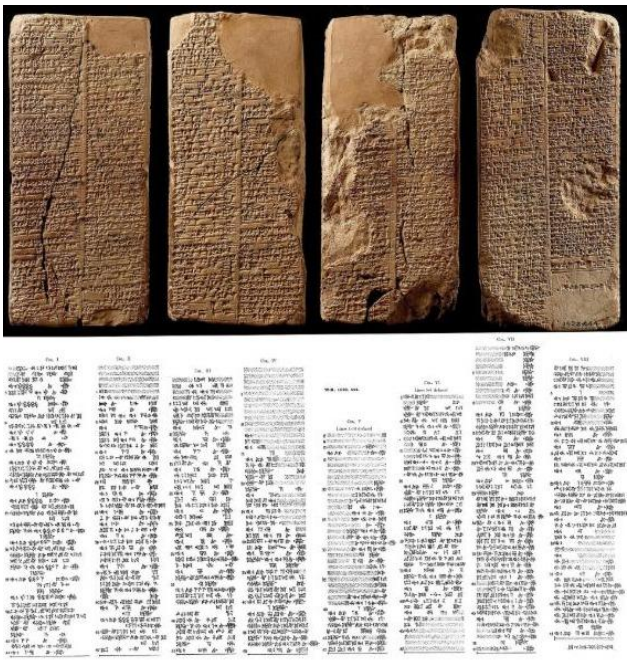
Part One: Mesopotamian Myth, Lament & Wisdom

❧

This part covers the eight Mesopotamian literary objects in the Ancient Stones collection of Scripture Analysis: the Sumerian King List, the Atra-ḫasīs Epic, Tablet XI of the Epic of Gilgamesh, Enūma eliš, Ludlul bēl nēmeqi, the Lament for Ur, the cylinder seal of the winged Ištar, and the Sumerian Flood Story (Eridu Genesis). Each entry gives a photograph of the object (or of the best-preserved manuscript), an identification table, an explanation in both technical and plain terms, a translation or key excerpts, notes where modern scholarship has corrected older readings, the main points of contact with the Hebrew Bible, and further reading.

About the translations. Translations quoted at length come from editions that are in the public domain in the United States (published before 1931), so they can be reproduced here. They are named in each entry. Because these older translations are often superseded, each is followed by notes giving the modern reading, summarized from the current critical editions. Short passages marked "translation by the author of this study" are fresh renderings made from the published Akkadian or Sumerian text. Long works and whole archives are represented by key excerpts and a summary, with links to complete modern translations.

1. The Sumerian King List (Weld-Blundell Prism)



The Weld-Blundell Prism (WB 444) with S. H. Langdon's 1923 hand copy of its eight columns.
Image: Photograph: unknown; transcription: Stephen Herbert Langdon (1876–1937). Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Four-sided clay prism, the most complete copy of the Sumerian King List
Museum	Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, AN1923.444 ("WB 444")
Date	c. 1800 BC (its last entry is a king of the Isin dynasty, c. 1817 BC)
Provenance	Probably Larsa, southern Iraq; acquired by Herbert Weld-Blundell in 1922
Language / script	Sumerian, Old Babylonian cuneiform
Principal editions	Langdon, OECT 2 (1923); Jacobsen, *The Sumerian King List* (1939); ETCSL 2.1.1 (online)

What it is

Technical summary. The Sumerian King List (SKL) is a chronographic composition known from about twenty manuscripts. WB 444 is the fullest. It presents southern Mesopotamia as a single kingdom whose "kingship" passes from city to city: it descends from heaven to Eridu, moves through five cities before a flood, and then moves among Kish, Uruk, Ur, Awan, Hamazi, Mari, Akshak, Akkad, the Gutians, Isin and others. The list places as consecutive several dynasties that in reality ruled at the same time, so it is political ideology as much as history. It was probably composed under the Ur III or early Isin kings to justify one-city hegemony. The antediluvian section (lines 1–39) is absent from some manuscripts and may be a secondary addition.

In plain terms. It is an official list of every king who, according to the scribes, had ever ruled Sumer, with how long each reigned. The earliest kings are given impossibly long reigns of tens of

thousands of years. Then “the flood swept over,” and reigns gradually shrink to normal human lengths.

The text: the kings before the Flood (complete)

The following is a line-by-line English rendering of the opening section of WB 444, prepared by the author of this study from the published Sumerian text. Royal names follow the ETCSL normalization.

1–3. After kingship had descended from heaven, the kingship was in Eridu.

4–5. In Eridu, Alulim became king; he ruled for 28,800 years.

6. Alalĝar ruled for 36,000 years.

7. Two kings; they ruled for 64,800 years.

8–10. Then Eridu fell, and the kingship was taken to Bad-tibira.

11. In Bad-tibira, En-men-lu-ana ruled for 43,200 years.

12. En-mel-gal-ana ruled for 28,800 years.

13. Dumuzid, the shepherd, ruled for 36,000 years.

14. Three kings; they ruled for 108,000 years.

15–17. Then Bad-tibira fell, and the kingship was taken to Larak.

18. In Larak, En-sipad-zid-ana ruled for 28,800 years.

19. One king; he ruled for 28,800 years.

20–22. Then Larak fell, and the kingship was taken to Sippar.

23. In Sippar, En-men-dur-ana became king; he ruled for 21,000 years.

24. One king; he ruled for 21,000 years.

25–27. Then Sippar fell, and the kingship was taken to Šuruppak.

28. In Šuruppak, Ubara-Tutu became king; he ruled for 18,600 years.

29. One king; he ruled for 18,600 years.

30–35. In five cities, eight kings; they ruled for 241,200 years.

36–39. Then the flood swept over. After the flood had swept over, and the kingship had descended from heaven, the kingship was in Kish.

Selected entries after the Flood

Dynasty	Entry in the list (summary)	Reign given
Kish I	Etana, “the shepherd, who ascended to heaven, who made firm all the foreign lands”	1,500 years
Kish I	En-men-barage-si, “who destroyed the weapons of Elam” (the first king also attested in contemporary inscriptions)	900 years
Kish I	Aga, son of En-men-barage-si (Gilgamesh’s opponent in the Sumerian tale *Gilgamesh and Aga*)	625 years

Dynasty	Entry in the list (summary)	Reign given
Uruk I	Enmerkar, “who built Uruk”	420 years
Uruk I	Lugalbanda, the shepherd	1,200 years
Uruk I	Gilgamesh, “whose father was a phantom, lord of Kullab”	126 years
Kish III	Ku-Baba, “a woman tavern-keeper, who made firm the foundations of Kish” (the only queen regnant in the list)	100 years
Akkad	Sargon, “whose father was a gardener, the cupbearer of Ur-Zababa”	56 years

Notes

- **The sexagesimal numbers.** The antediluvian reigns are round multiples of the Babylonian *šār* (3,600): 28,800 = 8 šār and 36,000 = 10 šār. They are symbolic, not chronological.
- **Ten kings in Berossus.** The later Babylonian priest Berossus (3rd century BC) preserves a version with ten kings before the flood, the last of whom (Xisouthros = Ziusudra) survives it. Some SKL manuscripts likewise end the list before the flood with Ziusudra of Šuruppak.
- **Older translations.** Barton (1916) translated a different, Nippur manuscript published by Poebel in 1914. His speculation that “Etana … to heaven” lies behind the name Enoch is not accepted today.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Genesis 5 and 11.** Both the SKL and Genesis divide early history into a long-lived pre-flood age and a post-flood age of shortening lifespans. Genesis 5 lists ten generations from Adam to Noah; the SKL lists eight (in some versions ten) kings, ending with the hero of the flood. The Genesis ages (hundreds of years) are far smaller than the SKL reigns (tens of thousands), and Genesis traces a family line rather than a succession of cities.
- **En-men-dur-ana and Enoch.** The seventh antediluvian king, En-men-dur-ana of Sippar, was remembered in later tradition as the man to whom the gods revealed divination. The parallel with Enoch, the seventh from Adam who “walked with God” (Gen 5:24), was argued by R. Borger and J. C. VanderKam; it is suggestive but debated.
- **Genre.** Comparative work by T. Jacobsen, W. W. Hallo and R. S. Hess treats the genealogies of Genesis as a distinct form, a lineage rather than a king list, using some of the same chronological conventions.

Further reading

- Jacobsen, Thorkild. *The Sumerian King List*. Assyriological Studies 11. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939 (free PDF from the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures, University of Chicago).

- Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature, "The Sumerian King List," ETCSL 2.1.1. etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk
- Hess, Richard S. "The Genealogies of Genesis 1–11 and Comparative Literature." *Biblica* 70 (1989): 241–254.
- Steinkeller, Piotr. *History, Texts and Art in Early Babylonia*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017, ch. 1.

2. The Atra-ḫasīs Epic



A fragment of the Atra-ḫasīs flood myth in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Image: The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Licence: CC0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Clay tablets (three-tablet poem); principal copy by the scribe Ipiq-Aya
Museum	Principal Old Babylonian copy (the Sippar tablets written by Ipiq-Aya) in the British Museum; further fragments in many collections
Date	Old Babylonian copy dated to the reign of Ammi-ṣaduqa (c. 1640 BC); composition probably c. 1800 BC; later Assyrian and Babylonian versions to the 7th century BC
Provenance	Sippar (Old Babylonian copy); Nineveh (Assyrian version)
Language / script	Akkadian (Old Babylonian dialect), cuneiform
Principal editions	Lambert & Millard, *Atra-ḫasīs: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (1969); Wasserman, *The Flood: The Akkadian Sources* (2020)

What it is

Technical summary. *Inūma ilū awīlum*, "When the gods were man," is a three-tablet epic of about 1,245 lines. It runs from the gods' labour, through the creation of humankind to take that labour over, to the threat humans pose by their "noise" (*rigmu*). The gods respond with plague, then drought and famine, and finally a flood. Each time Atra-ḫasīs ("Exceedingly Wise") is warned by the god Enki/Ea. Before the flood he is told to build a boat, and he survives. The poem ends with new limits placed on human fertility. It is the oldest substantial Mesopotamian flood narrative and the direct source of the flood story in Gilgamesh XI, which even calls its hero Atra-ḫasīs (XI 197).

In plain terms. This is the Babylonian "primeval history." The gods make people to do their work. People multiply and become too loud. The gods try to thin them out three times, and finally they send a flood. One wise man, tipped off by a friendly god, builds a boat and saves life.

Key excerpts

The opening lines (Tablet I 1–4). Translation by the author of this study from the Old Babylonian text (Lambert & Millard 1969):

> 1. When the gods were (like) man,
> 2. they bore the work, they carried the toil-basket.
> 3. The toil-basket of the great gods was large;
> 4. the work was heavy, the distress was great.

The famine (Assyrian version). Translation of R. W. Rogers, *Cuneiform Parallels to the Old Testament* (1912), pp. 115–116 (public domain):

> Above Adad diminished his rain,
> Below it was restrained, so that the stream rose not in the sources.
> The field diminished its produce …
> The wide plain bore salt;
> The plant came not forth, the lambs fattened not.
> Calamity was placed upon men,
> The womb was closed, no child came forth.
> When the fifth year came, the daughter looked for the entering of the mother,
> The mother opens not the door to her daughter …
> When the sixth year came, they prepared the daughter for a repast,
> They prepared the child for food; … one house devoured another.

Notes

- Rogers (1912) knew only fragments and called the poem "Ea and Atrakhasis." The complete order of the three tablets was established by Lambert and Millard in 1969, after the joins made by W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard among the British Museum fragments.
- **The creation of humankind (I 204–243).** The god We-ila (or Geštu-e), "who had intelligence," is slaughtered in the divine assembly. The birth-goddess Nintu mixes clay with his flesh and blood, and the Igigi gods spit upon the clay. Humankind therefore carries a divine "spirit" (*eṭemmu*), a wordplay on *ṭēmu*, "intelligence."
- **The "noise."** The meaning of the people's *rigmu* is debated. Older readings took it as rebellion or sin. Most scholars now see it as overpopulation (Kilmer 1972; Frymer-Kensky 1977), which explains the post-flood measures: barren women, stillbirth, and celibate priestesses.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Genesis 1–9 as a whole.** Atra-ḫasīs is the closest ancient parallel to the shape of Genesis 1–9: creation of humans, a crisis of human multiplication, a flood with a single survivor in a boat, and a new order afterward. Tikva Frymer-Kensky (*Biblical Archaeologist* 40, 1977) argued that Genesis reworks this same plot to new ends. In Genesis the flood answers moral corruption (Gen 6:5, 11–13) rather than noise, and the post-flood blessing commands fertility (Gen 9:1, 7) rather than restricting it.
- **Clay and divine life.** Humanity made from clay mixed with a divine element invites comparison with Gen 2:7, where the LORD God forms man from the dust and breathes into him the breath of life.

Further reading

- Lambert, W. G., and A. R. Millard. *Atra-ḫasīs: The Babylonian Story of the Flood*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1969 (reprinted Eisenbrauns, 1999).
- Wasserman, Nathan. *The Flood: The Akkadian Sources*. OBO 290. Leuven: Peeters, 2020 (open access).
- Frymer-Kensky, Tikva. “The Atrahasis Epic and Its Significance for Our Understanding of Genesis 1–9.” *Biblical Archaeologist* 40 (1977): 147–155.
- Rogers, R. W. *Cuneiform Parallels to the Old Testament*. New York: Eaton & Mains, 1912. Internet Archive

3. The Epic of Gilgamesh, Tablet XI (“The Flood Tablet”)



The “Flood Tablet,” Tablet XI of the Standard Babylonian Gilgamesh epic, from Ashurbanipal’s library at Nineveh (British Museum K 3375).

Image: Wikimedia Commons contributor. Licence: CC0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Clay tablet, Tablet XI of the eleven-tablet Standard Babylonian epic (plus Tablet XII appendix)
Museum	British Museum, K 3375
Date	7th century BC copy; Standard Babylonian version attributed to Sîn-lēqi-unninni (c. 1200 BC); flood episode drawn from Atra-ḫasīs
Provenance	Library of Ashurbanipal, Nineveh (Kuyunjik)
Language / script	Akkadian (Standard Babylonian), Neo-Assyrian cuneiform
Principal editions	George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* (2003); Smith, “The Chaldean Account of the Deluge” (1872)

What it is

Technical summary. In Tablet XI, Gilgameš reaches Ūta-napišti (Utnapishtim), the one man granted eternal life, and asks how he obtained it. Ūta-napišti narrates the flood (lines 8–206). It is a close adaptation of the Atra-ḫasīs account and is put in the first person. The tablet continues with Gilgameš’s failed test of staying awake for seven days, and with the plant of rejuvenation that a serpent steals. George Smith’s recognition of this tablet in 1872 began modern comparative study of Genesis.

In plain terms. This is the famous Babylonian "Noah" story. A god warns a man to build a boat and load it with his family and animals. A seven-day storm destroys humankind. The boat grounds on a mountain, and the survivor sends out birds and offers a sacrifice that the gods "smell."

Key excerpt: the flood narrative

Translation of R. Campbell Thompson, *The Epic of Gilgamish* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1928), Tablet XI, in public domain. Thompson cast the epic in English hexameters. Words in parentheses are his additions; "…" marks gaps in the tablet or in the scan.

> Gilgamish unto him spake, to Uta-Napishtim the Distant: "Uta-Napishtim, upon thee I gaze, (yet) in no wise thy presence strange is, (for) thou art like me … O tell me, how couldst thou stand in th' Assemblage of Gods to petition for life (everlasting)?"
>
> Uta-Napishtim unto Gilgamish answer'd: "Gilgamish, I unto thee will discover the (whole) hidden story, aye, and the rede of the Gods will I tell thee.
>
> The City Shurippak — (O 'tis) a city thou knowest! — is set on the marge of Euphrates; old is this city, with gods in its midst. (Now), the great gods a deluge purposed to bring … Nin-igi-azag — 'tis Ea — (albeit) conspirator with them, unto a reed-hut their counsel betray'd he: 'O Reed-hut, O Reed-hut! Wall, wall! Hearken, O Reed-hut, consider, O Wall! O thou Mortal, thou of Shurippak, thou scion of Ubara-Tutu, a dwelling pull down, (and) fashion a vessel (therewith); abandon possessions, life do thou seek, (and) thy hoard disregard, and save life; every creature make to embark in the vessel. The vessel, which thou art to fashion, apt be its measure; its beam and its length be in due correspondence.' …
>
> All I possess'd I laded aboard her; the silver I laded, all I possess'd; gold, all I possess'd I laded aboard her, all I possess'd of the seed of all living I laded aboard her. Into the ship I embark'd all my kindred and family (with me), cattle (and) beasts of the field (and) all handicraftsmen embarking …
>
> (Then), when something of dawn had appear'd, from out the horizon rose a cloud darkling; (lo), Adad (the storm-god) was rumbling within it … desolation from Adad stretch'd to (high) Heaven, (and) all that was bright was turn'd into darkness …
>
> O, were stricken with terror the gods at the Deluge, fleeing, they rose to the Heaven of Anu, and crouch'd in the outskirts, cow'ring like curs were the gods, (while) like to a woman in travail Ishtar did cry … 'Sooth, then, am I to give birth unto (these) mine own people only to glut (with their bodies) the Sea as though they were fish-spawn?'
>
> Six days, a se'nnight the hurricane, deluge, (and) tempest continued sweeping the land: when the seventh day came, were quelléd the warfare, tempest (and) deluge which like to an army embattail'd were fighting. Lull'd was the sea, (all) spent was the gale, assuaged was the deluge … and all human back to (its) clay was return'd …
>
> Land was uprear'd at twelve (points), and the Ark on the Mountain of Nisir grounded; the Mountain of Nisir held fast, nor gave lease to her shifting …
>
> (Then), when the seventh day dawn'd, I put forth a dove, and released (her), (but) to and fro went the dove, and return'd (for) a resting-place was not. (Then) I a swallow put forth and released; to and fro went the swallow, she (too) return'd, (for) a resting-place was not; I put forth a raven, her, (too,) releasing; the raven went, too, and th' abating of waters saw; and she ate as she waded (and) splash'd, (unto me) not returning. Unto the four winds (of heaven) I freed (all the beasts), and an off'ring sacrificed, and a libation I pour'd on the peak of the mountain …

> The gods smelt the savour, the gods the sweet savour smelt; (aye,) the gods did assemble like flies o'er him making the off'ring …
>
> Whereat Ea answer'd and spake unto Enlil, the warrior, saying: 'O chieftain thou of the gods, thou warrior! How, forsooth, how (all) uncounsell'd couldst thou a deluge bring on? (Aye,) visit his sin on the sinner, visit his guilt on the guilty, (but) O, have mercy, that (thereby) he shall not be cut off …'
>
> (Then) to the Ark came up Enlil; my hand did he grasp, and uplifted me, even me, and my wife, too, he raised … Blessing us: 'Uta-Napishtim hath hitherto only been mortal, now, indeed, Uta-Napishtim and (also) his wife shall be equal like to us gods; in the distance afar at the mouth of the rivers Uta-Napishtim shall dwell.'"

Notes on modern readings

- **Mount Nisir** is now read **Mount Niṣir** or **Nimuš** (George 2003). It is located in the Zagros, not at Ararat.
- **"Land was uprear'd at twelve (points)"**: the line is now understood as "at (a distance of) twelve [leagues] there emerged a region (of land)" (George 2003).
- **"Every creature"**: the Akkadian *zēr napšāti kalāma*, "the seed of all living creatures," is the same phrase used of the cargo in line 84.
- The boat is a cube of 10 × 10 × 10 rods (*nindanu*), about 60 m on each side, with six decks and seven storeys inside. Genesis's ark is a long box of 300 × 50 × 30 cubits (Gen 6:15).

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

Element	Gilgamesh XI	Genesis 6–9
Divine warning	Ea speaks to a reed wall	God speaks directly to Noah (6:13–21)
Vessel	Cube, six decks, sealed with bitumen	Box 300 × 50 × 30 cubits, three decks, covered with pitch (*kōper*)
Passengers	Family, craftsmen, animals, "seed of all living"	Noah's family and pairs (and sevens) of animals
Duration	Six days and seven nights of storm	40 days of rain; waters prevail 150 days
Landing	Mount Niṣir	Mountains of Ararat (8:4)
Birds	Dove, swallow, raven	Raven, then dove three times (8:6–12)
Sacrifice	Gods "smell the sweet savour" and gather "like flies"	The LORD smells the soothing aroma (8:21)
Outcome	Survivor and wife made immortal	Covenant with all flesh; rainbow sign (9:8–17)

Scholars across the spectrum accept that the two accounts are related. They differ on how. A. Heidel (*The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, 1946) argued for a shared memory transmitted

independently. Most critical scholars hold that Genesis consciously reworks a Mesopotamian tradition in a monotheistic and moral frame.

Further reading

- George, Andrew R. *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*. 2 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Thompson, R. Campbell. *The Epic of Gilgamish*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1928. Internet Archive
- Heidel, Alexander. *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946.
- Tigay, Jeffrey H. *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982.

4. Enūma eliš (The Babylonian Epic of Creation)



K.3473 + Rm.615 + 1879,0708.296, the principal Nineveh manuscript of Enūma eliš Tablet III, British Museum.
Image: Zunkir. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Seven clay tablets, c. 1,100 lines in all; known from well over a hundred manuscripts
Museum	Chiefly the British Museum (Nineveh and Babylonian copies); others from Aššur, Kish, Sultantepe and Uruk
Date	Composition probably 12th century BC (reign of Nebuchadnezzar I) or somewhat earlier; manuscripts 9th–2nd century BC
Provenance	Nineveh, Aššur, Babylon, Kish, Sippar, Sultantepe, Uruk
Language / script	Akkadian (Standard Babylonian), cuneiform
Principal editions	King, *The Seven Tablets of Creation* (1902); Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths* (2013); Heinrich et al., eBL edition (2021)

What it is

Technical summary. Enūma eliš ("When on high") is a hymn to Marduk in narrative form. Its centre is a theogony and a theomachy: the primeval waters Apsû (fresh) and Tiāmat (salt) beget the gods. Ea kills Apsû. Tiāmat raises an army of eleven monsters under Qingu. Marduk defeats her, splits her body to make heaven and earth, organizes the cosmos, and creates humankind from Qingu's blood. The gods build Babylon and proclaim Marduk's fifty names. The poem was recited at the Babylonian New Year (*akītu*) festival.

In plain terms. It is Babylon's official account of how its god Marduk became king of the gods and made the world out of the body of the defeated sea-monster Tiamat.

The seven tablets at a glance

Tablet	Content
I	Theogony; Apsû's plot; Ea kills Apsû; birth of Marduk; Tiāmat creates eleven monsters and exalts Qingu
II	Ea and Anu fail to oppose Tiāmat; Marduk volunteers on condition of supreme authority
III	Anšar's envoy Kakka summons the gods; banquet; the gods decree Marduk's destiny
IV	Marduk enthroned; battle; Tiāmat split; heaven fashioned from half of her
V	Ordering of stars, moon and calendar; earth formed from Tiāmat's body (Tigris and Euphrates from her eyes)
VI	Humankind created from Qingu's blood to serve the gods; Babylon and Esagil built; first fifty names
VII	Remaining names of Marduk; epilogue commending the poem to be taught

Key excerpts

Translation of L. W. King, *The Seven Tablets of Creation* (London: Luzac, 1902), public domain.

Tablet I 1–10: the beginning

1. When in the height heaven was not named,
2. And the earth beneath did not yet bear a name,
3. And the primeval Apsû, who begat them,
4. And chaos, Tiamat, the mother of them both,—
5. Their waters were mingled together,
6. And no field was formed, no marsh was to be seen;
7. When of the gods none had been called into being,
8. And none bore a name, and no destinies [were ordained];
9. Then were created the gods in the midst of [heaven],
10. Lahmu and Lahamu were called into being [...].

Tablet IV 93–104 and 135–140: the battle and the making of heaven

93. Then advanced Tiamat and Marduk, the counsellor of the gods;
94. To the fight they came on, to the battle they drew nigh.
95. The lord spread out his net and caught her,
96. And the evil wind that was behind (him) he let loose in her face.
97. As Tiamat opened her mouth to its full extent,
98. He drove in the evil wind, while as yet she had not shut her lips.
99. The terrible winds filled her belly,
100. And her courage was taken from her, and her mouth she opened wide.
101. He seized the spear and burst her belly,

102. He severed her inward parts, he pierced (her) heart.
103. He overcame her and cut off her life;
104. He cast down her body and stood upon it.
…
135. Then the lord rested, gazing upon her dead body,
136. While he divided the flesh of the ..., and devised a cunning plan.
137. He split her up like a flat fish into two halves;
138. One half of her he stablished as a covering for heaven.
139. He fixed a bolt, he stationed a watchman,
140. And bade them not to let her waters come forth.

Tablet VI 1–8: the decision to create humankind

1. When Marduk heard the word of the gods,
2. His heart prompted him and he devised [a cunning plan].
3. He opened his mouth and unto Ea [he spake],
4. [That which] he had conceived in his heart he imparted [unto him]:
5. “My blood will I take and bone will I [fashion],
6. “I will make man, that man may ... [...].
7. “I will create man who shall inhabit [the earth],”
8. “That the service of the gods may be established, and that [their] shrines [may be built].”

> The complete text of Tablet III, with a manuscript study and line-by-line notes, is given in **Appendix A** at the end of this book.

Notes on modern readings

- **I 4.** King’s “chaos, Tiamat” reads *mummu Tiāmat*. Modern editors take *mummu* as an epithet, “Tiāmat the creatrix” (Lambert) or “matrix,” not “chaos.”
- **I 10.** Laḫmu and Laḫāmu are the first divine pair. They are not “created in the midst of heaven”; they are born “within” the mingled waters (*ina qerbišun*).
- **IV 137.** King’s “flat fish” renders *nūnu mašṭê*, “a fish for drying.” Marduk splits Tiāmat like a fish being prepared for drying.
- **VI 5.** The modern reading is “Blood I will mass and cause bones to be” (*dāmī lukṣur-ma eṣemta lušabši*). It is not Marduk’s own blood. Lines 31–33, unknown to King, specify that humankind is made from the blood of the executed Qingu.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Tiāmat and tĕhôm.** Hebrew *tĕhôm*, “the deep” (Gen 1:2), and Akkadian *tiāmtu*, “sea,” are cognates. A. Heidel (*The Babylonian Genesis*, 1951) and D. T. Tsumura (*Creation and*

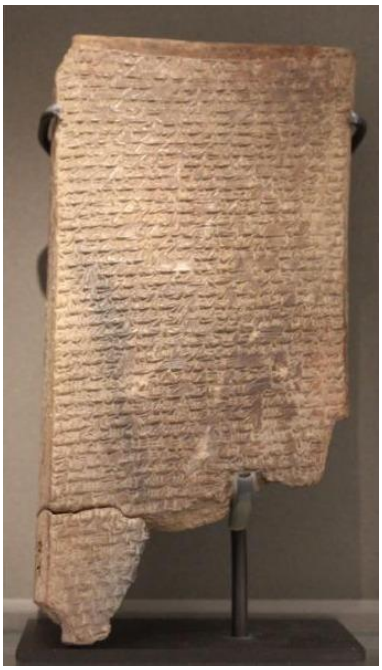
Destruction, 2005) argued that *tĕhôm* is not borrowed from Tiāmat and is not personified in Genesis.

- **Separation of waters.** Marduk halves Tiāmat to set waters above and below a barrier (IV 137–140). Genesis 1:6–8 has God separate the waters above and below an expanse (*rāqîaʿ*). The parallel is widely noted. The contrast, creation by word with no combat, is equally emphasized.
- **The Chaoskampf debate.** H. Gunkel's *Schöpfung und Chaos* (1895) traced biblical imagery of God defeating the sea and its monsters (Ps 74:13–14; 89:9–10; Isa 51:9; Job 26:12–13) to Enūma eliš. Most scholars now see the nearer background in West Semitic (Ugaritic) Baal–Yamm traditions (see no. 31, The Ugaritic Tablets).

Further reading

- Lambert, W. G. *Babylonian Creation Myths*. Mesopotamian Civilizations 16. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013.
- Heinrich, A. C., et al. "Poem of Creation (Enūma eliš)." Translated by B. R. Foster. *electronic Babylonian Library*, 2021. ebl.lmu.de
- King, L. W. *The Seven Tablets of Creation*. London: Luzac, 1902. sacred-texts.com
- Heidel, Alexander. *The Babylonian Genesis*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951.
- Tsumura, David T. *Creation and Destruction*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005.

5. Ludlul bēl nēmeqi (“I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom”)



A Neo-Assyrian tablet of Ludlul bēl nēmeqi from Nineveh (7th century BC).
Image: Zunkir. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Poem in four (some argue five) tablets, c. 480 lines
Museum	Principal manuscripts in the British Museum (Nineveh), with others from Aššur, Sultantepe, Babylon and Sippar
Date	Composed in the Kassite period (c. 1300–1100 BC); manuscripts 8th–2nd century BC
Provenance	Nineveh (Library of Ashurbanipal) and other sites
Language / script	Akkadian (Standard Babylonian), cuneiform
Principal editions	Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (1960); Annus & Lenzi, *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* (SAACT 7, 2010); Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers* (2014)

What it is

Technical summary. Ludlul is a first-person thanksgiving poem by Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan, a Kassite-period official, who praises Marduk for having first afflicted and then restored him. Tablet I describes his abandonment by god and king and his loss of social standing. Tablet II catalogues his illness and the failure of every ritual expert. Tablet III recounts dreams in which Marduk’s envoys announce his healing. Tablet IV (V in some editions) describes his restoration and procession through the gates of Esagil.

In plain terms. A good and pious man falls from favour, loses his health and friends, and cannot understand why the gods are against him. Then his god heals him, and he writes this poem in praise.

Key excerpts

Translation of G. A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1916), pp. 392–395 (public domain). Barton translated Tablet II and part of Tablet III, the portions then known.

Tablet II: the sufferer's piety and bewilderment

I advanced in life, I attained to the allotted span;
Wherever I turned there was evil, evil —
Oppression is increased, uprightness I see not.
I cried unto god, but he showed not his face.
I prayed to my goddess, but she raised not her head …
But I myself thought of prayers and supplications;
Prayer was my wisdom, sacrifice, my dignity …
For I knew that with god these things are in favor.
What is innocent of itself, to god is evil!
What in one's heart is contemptible, to one's god is good!
Who can understand the thoughts of the gods in heaven?
The counsel of god is full of destruction; who can understand?
Where may human beings learn the ways of god?
He who lives at evening is dead in the morning …
In prosperity they speak of climbing to Heaven;
Trouble overtakes them and they speak of going down to Sheol.

Tablet II, reverse: the illness

My sickness baffled the conjurers,
And the seer left dark my omens.
The diviner has not improved the condition of my sickness …
The god helped me not, my hand he took not;
The goddess pitied me not, she came not to my side;
The coffin yawned; they [the heirs] took my possessions;
While I was not yet dead, the death wail was ready.

Tablet III: the healing

My ears, which were stopped, were deaf as a deaf man's —
He removed their deafness and restored their hearing …
The tongue, which had stiffened so that it could not be raised —
[He relieved] its thickness, so its words could be understood.

Notes on modern readings

- **The sufferer's name.** Barton calls him "Tabu-utul-Bel" of Nippur. The name is now read **Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan**, a Kassite official also attested in documents of Nazi-Maruttaš (c. 1307–1282 BC).
- **Order of tablets.** Barton's "Second Tablet" is the modern Tablet II. The poem's opening hymn to Marduk (Tablet I 1–40), which shows from the outset that the sufferer's ordeal ends in praise, was recovered only in the 1990s and 2000s.
- **II 36–38.** Barton's rendering of the famous lines on the inscrutability of the gods is close to modern translations (Lambert: "Who knows the will of the gods in heaven? Who understands the plans of the underworld gods?").

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Job.** Ludlul has been called "the Babylonian Job" since the 19th century. Both feature a pious sufferer, failed consultations, social abandonment, physical torment, and restoration. The differences are as significant as the likenesses. Ludlul is a thanksgiving hymn whose question is answered by healing. Job is a dialogue that interrogates divine justice itself, and its answer (Job 38–41) is not a cure but a theophany.
- **The psalms of thanksgiving.** The pattern of distress, plea and deliverance recounted in praise is that of the individual thanksgiving psalms (e.g., Ps 30; 116).

Further reading

- Lambert, W. G. *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1960.
- Annus, Amar, and Alan Lenzi. *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi: The Standard Babylonian Poem of the Righteous Sufferer*. SAACT 7. Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2010.
- Oshima, Takayoshi. *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*. ORA 14. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014.
- Barton, G. A. *Archaeology and the Bible*. Philadelphia, 1916. Internet Archive

6. The Lament for Ur



Tablet with a lament over the ruin of Ur, Louvre AO 6446.
Image: Rama. Licence: CC BY-SA 3.0 FR. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Sumerian poem of 436 lines in eleven sections (*kirugu*); known from about 20 Old Babylonian tablets
Museum	Manuscripts in the Penn Museum (Nippur), British Museum, Louvre and elsewhere
Date	Composed soon after the fall of Ur in 2004 BC; copies c. 1800 BC
Provenance	Nippur, Ur and other Old Babylonian school sites
Language / script	Sumerian, Old Babylonian cuneiform
Principal editions	Kramer, *Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur* (AS 12, 1940); ETCSL 2.2.2

What it is

Technical summary. The Lament for Ur belongs to the Sumerian city-lament genre, alongside the Lament for Sumer and Ur, the Nippur Lament, the Eridu Lament and the Uruk Lament. It mourns the destruction of Ur by the Elamites and the people of Šimaški at the end of the Third Dynasty of Ur. The city goddess Ningal pleads before the divine assembly, An and Enlil decree the destruction regardless, and the city is overwhelmed by a divine "storm" (*u₄*). The poem closes with a prayer for restoration. The city laments were probably composed for rituals at the rebuilding of temples under the Isin dynasty.

In plain terms. It is a long funeral song for a city. Ur's patron goddess watches her city being destroyed, begs the high gods to stop it, fails, and weeps over the ruins.

Content summary

No public-domain English translation exists, so the poem is summarized here in the author's own words. A complete modern translation is freely available from the ETCSL (link below).

- **Songs 1–2.** A litany of the gods who have "abandoned" their sheepfolds: Enlil leaves Nippur, Ningal leaves Ur, and so through the cities of Sumer. The refrain calls on the city to raise a bitter lament.
- **Songs 3–5.** Ningal tells how she foresaw the "storm," wept before An and Enlil, and was refused. The decree was unalterable.
- **Songs 6–7.** The storm is described as a cosmic flood. Corpses lie in the streets and gates, "like fat in the sun," and the dead fill the city's broad ways.
- **Songs 8–10.** Ningal weeps for her ruined house and asks how long she must mourn. The poet addresses her in sympathy.
- **Song 11.** A prayer to Nanna, the city's god, that the destruction not recur and that the people may again bring him offerings.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Lamentations.** F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp (*Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 1993) identified a shared city-lament genre. Its features include divine abandonment, the destruction decreed by the deity, the city personified as a weeping woman, the reversal of festival into mourning, and a closing appeal for restoration. Lamentations shares all of these (e.g., Lam 1:1–2, 16; 2:1–9; 5:19–22). Direct dependence is not claimed; the comparison is of genre.
- **Divine abandonment.** The motif of a god leaving his temple before its fall also appears in Ezekiel's vision of the glory departing from Jerusalem (Ezek 10:18–19; 11:22–23).

Further reading

- Kramer, S. N. *Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur*. Assyriological Studies 12. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940 (free PDF from the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures, University of Chicago).
- ETCSL 2.2.2, "The Lament for Urim." etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk
- Dobbs-Allsopp, F. W. *Weep, O Daughter of Zion: A Study of the City-Lament Genre in the Hebrew Bible*. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1993.
- Michalowski, Piotr. *The Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1989.

7. Cylinder Seal Impression of the Winged Ištar



Modern impression of an Akkadian-period cylinder seal: the winged, armed Ištar (Inanna) with one foot on a lion, facing her minister Ninšubur. A star (the planet Venus) appears above.

Image: Photograph of an Akkadian-period seal impression. Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Cylinder seal (shown as a modern impression rolled in clay)
Museum	Usually identified as the Oriental Institute (now ISAC) Museum, Chicago, A27903
Date	Akkadian period, c. 2334–2154 BC
Provenance	Southern Mesopotamia (purchased)
Language / script	No inscription visible on this impression
Principal discussion	Collon, *First Impressions* (1987); Black & Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia* (1992)

What it is

Technical summary. The seal shows Ištar (Sumerian Inanna) in her martial aspect. She is winged, wears a horned crown (the mark of divinity), and has weapons, maces and possibly scimitars, rising from her shoulders. She holds a lion by a leash and rests her foot on its back; the lion was her attribute animal. The figure before her, with raised hand, is her vizier (*sukkal*) Ninšubur. The eight-pointed star is her astral symbol as the planet Venus. Akkadian-period glyptic was the first to depict gods in narrative scenes, and this seal is a classic example.

In plain terms. A cylinder seal was a small carved stone rolled across wet clay to “sign” documents. This one shows the goddess Ishtar as a warrior, with wings and weapons and her lion, being approached by her servant.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **"The queen of heaven."** Jeremiah 7:18 and 44:17–19, 25 condemn the worship of "the queen of heaven" (*malkat haššāmayim*), with cakes, libations and incense, by the people of Judah before and after 586 BC. Most commentators identify her with Ištar (or a West Semitic counterpart, Astarte or ʿAnat). Ištar's titles include "queen of heaven" (Akkadian *šarrat šamê*; Sumerian *nin-an-na*).
- **Astral worship.** The star symbol bears on biblical condemnations of worship of "the host of heaven" (Deut 4:19; 2 Kgs 23:4–5; Zeph 1:5).

Further reading

- Collon, Dominique. *First Impressions: Cylinder Seals in the Ancient Near East*. London: British Museum Press, 1987.
- Black, Jeremy, and Anthony Green. *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*. London: British Museum Press, 1992.
- Ackerman, Susan. "'And the Women Knead Dough': The Worship of the Queen of Heaven in Sixth-Century Judah." In *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. P. L. Day, 109–124. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989.

8. The Eridu Genesis (The Sumerian Flood Story)



The Sumerian Flood Story ("Eridu Genesis"), Penn Museum CBS 10673, from Nippur.
Image: Onceinawhile. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Clay tablet, three columns on each side; only about one-third of the text survives
Museum	Penn Museum, Philadelphia, CBS 10673
Date	c. 1600 BC (Old Babylonian copy); composition probably early second millennium BC
Provenance	Nippur, Iraq
Language / script	Sumerian, cuneiform
Principal editions	Poebel, *Historical Texts* (1914); Jacobsen, "The Eridu Genesis," *JBL* 100 (1981); Civil in Lambert & Millard, *Atra-ḫasīs* (1969); ETCSL 1.7.4

What it is

Technical summary. The tablet preserves a Sumerian primeval history in which the gods create humankind and animals, kingship descends from heaven, the first five cities are founded (Eridu, Bad-tibira, Larak, Sippar, Šuruppak), and the gods decide to send a flood. The pious king Ziusudra ("life of long days") is warned by Enki through a wall, rides out a seven-day storm in a great boat, sacrifices to the sun-god Utu on emerging, and is granted eternal life and settled in Dilmun. Thorkild Jacobsen named the composition "Eridu Genesis" because its sequence of creation, antediluvian cities and flood parallels Genesis 1–9.

In plain terms. This is the oldest known written flood story, in Sumerian. A king named Ziusudra is warned by a god, survives a seven-day flood in a boat, and is rewarded with eternal life.

Key excerpt: the creation of humankind (column I)

Translation of G. A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (1916), p. 278, from Poebel's edition, public domain.

> "My human-kind from its destruction I will [raise up];
> With the aid of Nintu my creation … I will raise up;
> The people in their settlements I will establish;
> The city, wherever man creates one — indeed its protection — therein I will give him rest …"
> After Anu, Enlil, Enki, and Ninkharsag
> The black-headed race had created,
> All that is from the earth, from the earth they caused to spring,
> Cattle and beasts of the field suitably they brought into being.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Genesis 1–9.** The sequence of creation of humans and animals, the founding of the first cities, and the flood with a single righteous survivor is the same as the outline of Genesis 1–9. Jacobsen (1981) argued that both texts share a "chronographic" frame in which history begins with creation and is divided by the flood.
- **The righteous survivor.** Ziusudra, like Noah, is singled out for his piety (Gen 6:9), and he offers sacrifice after leaving the boat (Gen 8:20). Unlike Noah, he becomes immortal. Ziusudra is the Sumerian counterpart of Akkadian Atra-ḫasīs and Ūta-napišti, and of Berossus's Xisouthros.

Further reading

- Jacobsen, Thorkild. "The Eridu Genesis." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 100 (1981): 513–529.
- ETCSL 1.7.4, "The Flood Story." etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk
- Day, John. *From Creation to Babel: Studies in Genesis 1–11*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013.

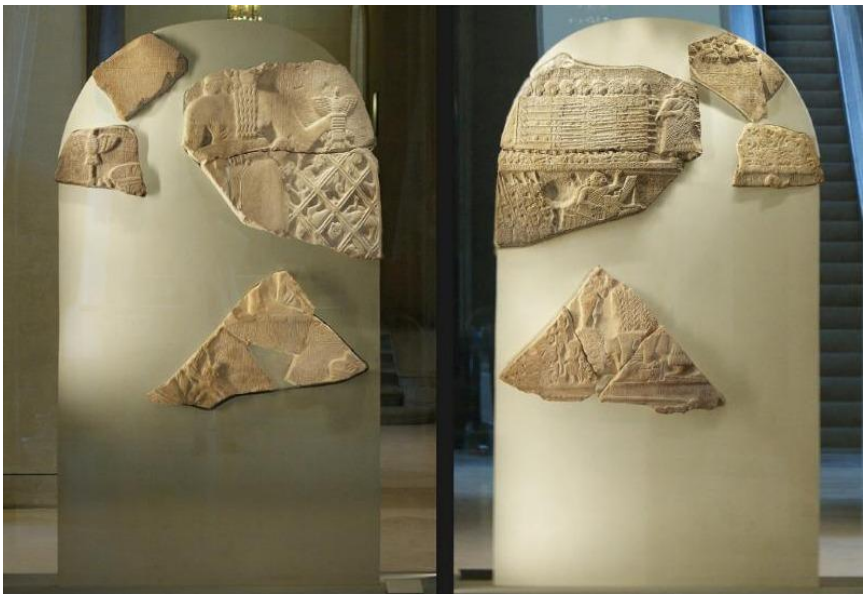
Part Two: Mesopotamian Royal & Historical Records



This part covers the royal and historical records from Mesopotamia and Anatolia in the Ancient Stones collection. The first eight are the Stele of the Vultures, the Legend of Sargon, the Code of Hammurabi, the Jehu panel of the Black Obelisk, a building inscription of Nebuchadnezzar II, the Jehoiachin ration tablets, the Nabonidus Chronicle and the Cyrus Cylinder. They are followed by the Assyrian and Babylonian annals that name the kings of Israel and Judah (the Kurkh Monolith, Tiglath-pileser III, Sargon II, the Sennacherib Prism and the Lachish Reliefs, Esarhaddon, and the Babylonian Chronicle of 597 BC), and by the earlier law collections and the Hittite and Assyrian treaties that are compared with biblical law and covenant.

About the translations. Translations quoted at length come from editions in the public domain in the United States, chiefly G. A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (1916), and Barton, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sumer and Akkad* (1929). Each is followed by notes giving the modern reading. Passages marked “translation by the author of this study” are fresh renderings from the published cuneiform text.

9. The Stele of the Vultures



The surviving fragments of the Stele of the Vultures as displayed in the Louvre: the "mythological" face (left) and the "historical" face (right).

Image: Kikuyu3, Eric Gaba (Sting) and पाटलिपुत्र (composite). Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Limestone victory stele, reconstructed from seven fragments; originally c. 1.8 m high
Museum	Louvre, Paris (AO 50, AO 2346–2348, AO 16109)
Date	c. 2450 BC (Early Dynastic IIIb)
Provenance	Girsu (Tello), Iraq; excavated by Ernest de Sarzec, 1881–1900
Language / script	Sumerian, archaic cuneiform
Principal editions	Thureau-Dangin (1905, 1907); Barton, *Royal Inscriptions of Sumer and Akkad* (1929); Cooper, *Reconstructing History from Ancient Inscriptions* (1983)

What it is

Technical summary. The stele commemorates the victory of Eannatum, ruler (*ensi*) of Lagash, over the neighbouring city-state of Umma in a long-running border dispute over the fertile Gu'edena plain. The "mythological" face shows the god Ningirsu holding a giant net full of captured Ummaite soldiers. The "historical" face shows Eannatum leading a phalanx of helmeted spearmen over the bodies of the enemy, with vultures carrying off heads (the source of the modern name). The long Sumerian text records the history of the dispute, the battle, and a series of oaths. The men of Umma swear by six deities not to cross the boundary again, and each oath invokes that god's "great net" against oath-breakers.

In plain terms. It is the oldest known war memorial with a written history attached: a king of Lagash shows himself beating a rival city and making its people swear, by their gods, never to cross the border again.

Key excerpt: the oaths of Umma

Translation of G. A. Barton, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sumer and Akkad* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929), pp. 29–31, public domain. Roman numerals give the columns of the stele.

> (XVI) Over the men of Umma I, Eannatum, the great net of Enlil threw. An oath the men of Umma to Eannatum swore by the life of Enlil, king of heaven and earth. The field of Ningirsu, its whole extent, by a deep canal he surrounded …
>
> (XX) The great net of the god Enzu, the younger child of Enlil, over the men of Umma I cast; an oath the men of Umma to Eannatum swore by the life of Enzu, the younger child of Enlil. The field of Ningirsu, its whole extent, by a deep canal I surrounded. Unto remote eternity the boundary of Ningirsu let no one change, and this canal let no one change. This stele let no one break. When they make a change, may the great net of Enzu, the younger child of Enlil, by whom they swore, on Umma from heaven descend!
>
> (Reverse I) I, Eannatum, the great net of Utu, king of abundant brilliance, over the men of Umma cast; an oath the men of Umma to Eannatum swore by the life of Utu … The boundary of Ningirsu let no one change. This canal let no one make a change. This stele let no one break. When they make a change, may the great net of Utu, king of abundant brilliance, by whom they swore, on Umma from heaven descend.

Notes on modern readings

- **Enzu** is the moon-god Suen (Sîn). **Utu** is the sun-god (Akkadian Šamaš). Barton's "younger child of Enlil" is now understood as one of Suen's epithets, "the impetuous calf of Enlil."
- Modern editions (Steible 1982; Cooper 1983) reconstruct six oaths, by Enlil, Ninḫursag, Enki, Suen, Utu and Ninki. Each is sealed with a sacrifice of doves.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Boundary oaths.** The stele is the earliest witness to a treaty and boundary sworn by the gods with curses on transgressors. The pattern appears in Laban and Jacob's boundary cairn, guarded by an oath before God (Gen 31:44–53), and in the biblical prohibitions on moving a neighbour's boundary stone (Deut 19:14; 27:17; Prov 22:28).
- **The divine net.** The image of God catching the wicked in his net recurs in Ezek 12:13; 17:20; 32:3 and Hos 7:12.

Further reading

- Cooper, Jerrold S. *Reconstructing History from Ancient Inscriptions: The Lagash–Umma Border Conflict*. Malibu: Undena, 1983.
- Winter, Irene J. "After the Battle Is Over: The Stele of the Vultures and the Beginning of Historical Narrative in the Art of the Ancient Near East." *Studies in the History of Art* 16 (1985): 11–32.
- Barton, G. A. *The Royal Inscriptions of Sumer and Akkad*. New Haven, 1929. Internet Archive

10. The Legend of Sargon of Akkad



British Museum K.3401, a Neo-Assyrian tablet containing the "Birth Legend" of Sargon of Akkad.
Image: Marie-Lan Nguyen. Licence: CC BY 2.5. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Clay tablet (several fragmentary copies)
Museum	British Museum, K.3401 and other copies
Date	Neo-Assyrian copies, 7th century BC; composition probably late 8th century BC (time of Sargon II) or earlier
Provenance	Nineveh (Library of Ashurbanipal)
Language / script	Akkadian (Standard Babylonian), cuneiform
Principal editions	King, *Chronicles Concerning Early Babylonian Kings* II (1907); Westenholz, *Legends of the Kings of Akkade* (1997), no. 1; Lewis, *The Sargon Legend* (1980)

What it is

Technical summary. The text is a pseudo-autobiography (*narû*-style) placed in the mouth of Sargon, founder of the Akkadian dynasty (c. 2334–2279 BC). It tells of his secret birth to a priestess mother, his exposure in a pitch-sealed reed basket on the Euphrates, his rescue and upbringing by Akki the water-drawer, Ištar's love for him, and his conquests. It closes with a challenge to future kings to equal his deeds. Most scholars date the composition to the reign of Sargon II of Assyria (721–705 BC), who took the ancient king's name and may have sponsored the legend.

In plain terms. The great king Sargon tells how he was born in secret, set adrift in a basket on the river, rescued and adopted, and rose to rule the world.

The text (complete as preserved)

Translation of G. A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (1916), p. 310, public domain.

1. Sargon, the mighty king, king of Agade am I,
2. My mother was lowly; my father I did not know;
3. The brother of my father dwelt in the mountain.
4. My city is Azupiranu, which is situated on the bank of the Euphrates.
5. My lowly mother conceived me, in secret she brought me forth.
6. She placed me in a basket of reeds, she closed my entrance with bitumen,
7. She cast me upon the river, which did not overflow me.
8. The river carried me, it brought me to Akki, the irrigator.
9. Akki, the irrigator, in the goodness of his heart lifted me out,
10. Akki, the irrigator, as his own son brought me up;
11. Akki, the irrigator, as his gardener appointed me.
12. When I was a gardener the goddess Ishtar loved me,
13. And for four years I ruled the kingdom.
14. The black-headed peoples I ruled, I governed;
15. Mighty mountains with axes of bronze I destroyed (?).
16. I ascended the upper mountains;
17. I burst through the lower mountains.
18. The country of the sea I besieged three times;
19. Dilmun I captured (?).
20. Unto the great Dur-ilu I went up …
22. Whatsoever king shall be exalted after me, …
24. Let him rule, let him govern the black-headed peoples;
25. Mighty mountains with axes of bronze let him destroy;
26. Let him ascend the upper mountains,
27. Let him break through the lower mountains;
28. The country of the sea let him besiege three times;
29. Dilmun let him capture;
30. To great Dur-ilu let him go up.

Notes on modern readings

- **Line 2.** “My mother was lowly” translates *ēnetu*, now understood as “high priestess” (Sumerian *en*), a woman forbidden to bear children. That explains the secret birth. Westenholz renders the line “My mother was a high priestess, my father I knew not.”
- **Line 13.** The numeral is damaged. Barton read “four years,” but modern editions restore a larger number, in line with the 55 or 56 years the Sumerian King List assigns to Sargon.

- **Akki** is a *dālû*, a "water-drawer" who irrigated with a bucket, rather than an "irrigator" in the modern sense.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

The parallel with Moses (Exod 2:1–10) is the best known in comparative literature. Both infants are hidden at birth, placed in a basket (Hebrew *tēḇâ*, the same word as Noah's "ark") sealed with bitumen and pitch, set on a river, rescued and adopted. B. Lewis (1980) collected over seventy exposed-hero tales from many cultures. Scholars debate whether Exodus 2 draws on the Sargon legend directly, on a common Near Eastern motif, or neither. If the legend was composed under Sargon II, its date also bears on that question.

Further reading

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- Lewis, Brian. *The Sargon Legend: A Study of the Akkadian Text and the Tale of the Hero Who Was Exposed at Birth*. Cambridge, MA: ASOR, 1980.
- Barton, G. A. *Archaeology and the Bible*. Philadelphia, 1916. Internet Archive

11. The Code of Hammurabi



The basalt stele of Hammurabi's laws, Louvre Sb 8. In the relief, Hammurabi stands before the enthroned sun-god Šamaš, god of justice.

Image: Mbzt. Licence: CC BY 3.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Basalt stele, 2.25 m high; prologue, about 282 laws (several columns erased in antiquity), and epilogue
Museum	Louvre, Paris, Sb 8
Date	c. 1755–1750 BC (late in the reign of Hammurabi of Babylon, 1792–1750 BC)
Provenance	Found at Susa, Iran, in 1901–1902, where the Elamite king Šutruk-Naḫḫunte had taken it as booty in the 12th century BC; originally set up probably at Sippar
Language / script	Akkadian (Old Babylonian), monumental archaizing cuneiform
Principal editions	Scheil (1902); Harper (1904); Driver & Miles, *The Babylonian Laws* (1952–55); Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (1997)

What it is

Technical summary. The "Code" is not a code in the modern sense of exhaustive legislation. It is a royal inscription presenting the king as the just shepherd appointed by the gods, illustrated by a collection of model legal decisions in casuistic form ("If a man …, then …"). The laws cover false accusation, theft, military service, agriculture, commerce and debt, marriage and family, adoption, assault, professional liability, and slaves. The penalties vary by the social class of the victim: *awīlum* (free man), *muškēnum* (dependant) and *wardum* (slave). It drew on earlier collections, the laws of Ur-Namma (c. 2100 BC) and Lipit-Ištar (c. 1930 BC), and was copied in scribal schools for over a thousand years.

In plain terms. Hammurabi had a list of about 280 just rulings carved on a tall stone so that anyone wronged could "hear his words" and see what justice required. Many of its rulings resemble laws of Moses, especially in Exodus 21–23.

Selected laws

Translation of G. A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (1916), pp. 313–341, public domain.

> §1. If a man brings an accusation against a man, that he has laid a death-spell upon him, and has not proved it, the accuser shall be put to death.
>
> §8. If a man has stolen ox, or sheep, or ass, or pig, or a boat, either from a god (temple) or a palace, he shall pay thirtyfold. If he is a poor man, he shall restore tenfold. If the thief has nothing to pay, he shall be put to death.
>
> §14. If a man steals the son of a man who is a minor, he shall be put to death.
>
> §21. If a man breaks into a house, before that breach he shall be put to death and walled in.
>
> §146. If a man takes a priestess and she gives to her husband a maid-servant and she bears children, and afterward that maid-servant would take rank with her mistress; because she has borne children her mistress may not sell her for money, but she may reduce her to bondage and count her among the female slaves.
>
> §170. If a man's wife bears him children and a slave-girl bears him children, and the father during his lifetime says to the children which the slave-girl bore him: "My children," and counts them with the children of the wife, after the father dies the children of the wife and the children of the slave-girl shall divide equally the goods of their father's house. The sons that are sons of the wife shall at the sharing divide and take.
>
> §195. If a son strikes his father, they shall cut off his hand.
>
> §196. If a man destroys the eye of the son of a patrician, they shall destroy his eye.
>
> §197. If he breaks a man's bone, they shall break his bone.
>
> §198. If one destroys the eye of a workingman or breaks the bone of a workingman, he shall pay 1 mana of silver.
>
> §199. If one destroys the eye of a man's slave or breaks the bone of a man's slave, he shall pay half his value.
>
> §200. If a man knocks out the tooth of a man of his own rank, they shall knock his tooth out.
>
> §209. If a man strikes a man's daughter and causes a miscarriage, he shall pay 10 shekels of silver for her miscarriage.
>
> §210. If that woman dies, they shall put his daughter to death.
>
> §250. If an ox when passing along the street gores a man and causes his death, there is no penalty in that case.
>
> §251. If the ox of a man has the habit of goring and they have informed him of his fault and his horns he has not protected nor kept his ox in, and that ox gores a man and causes his death, the owner of the ox shall pay ½ mana of money.

Notes on modern readings

- **§1.** The charge is now understood as an accusation of homicide (*nērtum*) that the accuser cannot prove, not specifically a "death-spell."
- **§21.** The burglar is "killed and hung (or walled up) before that breach," at the hole he made (Roth 1997).
- **§196 and following.** Barton's "son of a patrician" and "workingman" render *mār awīlim* ("a member of the *awīlum* class") and *muškēnum* ("a commoner," a dependant of the palace). Talion ("eye for eye") applies only between equals.
- **Laws not shown.** §117 limits debt-servitude of a man's wife or children to three years. The penalty for adultery caught in the act (§129) is drowning, unless the husband pardons his wife and the king pardons the man.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

Topic	Hammurabi	Torah
Kidnapping	§14 death	Exod 21:16; Deut 24:7 death
Night burglary	§21 burglar killed at the breach	Exod 22:2–3 no bloodguilt if a burglar is struck down at night
Debt-servitude	§117 release after three years	Exod 21:2; Deut 15:12 release in the seventh year
Talion	§§196–200, between equals	Exod 21:23–25; Lev 24:19–20; Deut 19:21
Striking a parent	§195 hand cut off	Exod 21:15 death
Miscarriage caused in a fight	§§209–214 graded fines	Exod 21:22–25
Goring ox	§§250–252 liability only if warned	Exod 21:28–32, the same distinction
Surrogate wife	§146 slave-wife who rivals her mistress	Gen 16:1–6 (Sarah and Hagar)

The goring-ox laws are the closest verbal parallel in the ancient Near East. Most scholars (e.g., D. P. Wright, *Inventing God's Law*, 2009) see literary knowledge of the Mesopotamian legal tradition behind the Covenant Code of Exodus 21–23. Others (e.g., R. Westbrook) speak of a common legal culture. The differences are as instructive as the parallels. The Torah sets its laws in a covenant given by God rather than proclaimed by a king. It gives no reduced protection to the poor in cases of bodily injury, and it makes religious obligations and the protection of the stranger, widow and orphan central.

Further reading

- Roth, Martha T. *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*. 2nd ed. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997.

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- Wright, David P. *Inventing God's Law: How the Covenant Code of the Bible Used and Revised the Laws of Hammurabi*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
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12. The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III: the Jehu Panel



Second register of the Black Obelisk: a figure bows to the ground before Shalmaneser III. The epigraph above names him as the tribute-bearer of "Jehu, son of Omri."

Image: Wikimedia Commons contributor. Licence: CC BY-SA 3.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Black limestone obelisk, 1.98 m high, with five registers of relief on each of four sides and a 190-line annals inscription
Museum	British Museum, London, BM 118885
Date	c. 827 BC (Shalmaneser III's 31st regnal year); Jehu's tribute is dated 841 BC
Provenance	Nimrud (Kalḫu), central palace; excavated by A. H. Layard, 1846
Language / script	Akkadian (Neo-Assyrian), cuneiform
Principal editions	Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC II* (RIMA 3, 1996)

What it is

Technical summary. The obelisk celebrates thirty-one years of Shalmaneser III's campaigns. Its five registers of relief each show tribute from a different land, each with an epigraph naming the giver. The second register shows a man bowing to the ground before the king, followed by Israelite porters carrying metal vessels. The epigraph identifies the tribute as that of *Ia-ú-a mār Ḫu-um-ri-i*, "Jehu son of Omri." This is the only known contemporary depiction of an Israelite (or Judahite) king or his representative.

In plain terms. A carved stone column records that in 841 BC Jehu, king of Israel, paid tribute to the king of Assyria. One panel shows Jehu, or his envoy, kneeling before the Assyrian king.

The text: the Jehu epigraph (complete)

Translation of G. A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (1916), p. 363, public domain.

> Tribute of Jehu, son of Omri: silver, gold, a bowl (?) of gold, a basin (?) of gold, cups of gold, pails (?) of gold, bars of lead, scepters (?) for the hand of the king and balsam wood I received from him.

The same event is recorded in Shalmaneser's annals for his eighteenth year (841 BC), also translated by Barton:

> In the 18th year of my reign, I crossed the river Euphrates for the sixteenth time. Hazael of Damascus trusted to the great numbers of his forces … I pursued him and in Damascus, his capital city, shut him up … At that time the tribute of the Tyrian, the Sidonian, and of Jehu, son of Omri, I received.

Notes on modern readings

- **The commodities.** Grayson renders them "silver, gold, a gold bowl, a gold tureen, gold vessels, gold pails, tin, a staff for the hand of the king, (and) spears." Barton's "bars of lead" is now read **tin** (*annaku*). The last item (*puašḫāti*) is of uncertain meaning, perhaps javelins or wooden objects, but not balsam wood.
- **"Son of Omri."** Jehu was not Omri's descendant; he overthrew Omri's dynasty (2 Kgs 9–10). Assyrian usage called Israel *Bīt-Ḫumri*, "House of Omri," so *mār Ḫumri* means "an Israelite (king)."
- **Jehu or envoy?** Most scholars identify the bowing figure as Jehu himself. P. K. McCarter (1974) proposed reading the name as Joram (*Ia-ú-ra-am*), and others think the figure is an envoy; neither view has gained wide acceptance.

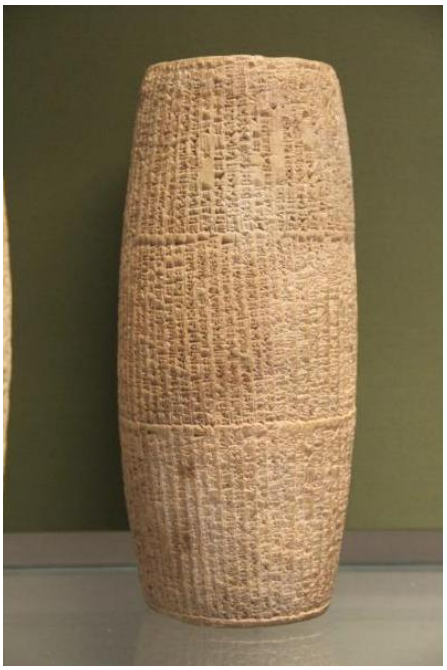
Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

The Bible does not mention Jehu's submission to Assyria. 2 Kings 10:32–33, however, records that in Jehu's day Hazael of Damascus began to cut off parts of Israel, which fits the annals' picture of Assyrian pressure on Damascus in 841 BC. The obelisk is one of the fixed points of biblical chronology. Assyrian eponym dating places Jehu's accession in 841 BC, which anchors the synchronisms of 1–2 Kings for the ninth century.

Further reading

- Grayson, A. Kirk. *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC II (858–745 BC)*. RIMA 3. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996.
- Schneider, Tammi J. "Did King Jehu Kill His Own Family?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 21.1 (1995): 26–33, 80.
- Hallo, W. W., and K. L. Younger, Jr., eds. *The Context of Scripture*, vol. 2. Leiden: Brill, 2000.

13. Building Inscription of Nebuchadnezzar II



Terracotta cylinder recording the building works of Nebuchadnezzar II, British Museum.
Image: Gary Todd. Licence: CC0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Barrel-shaped clay cylinder, one of many hundreds of foundation deposits of Nebuchadnezzar II
Museum	British Museum (the cylinder shown); others in many collections
Date	604–562 BC
Provenance	Babylon and other Babylonian cities
Language / script	Akkadian (Neo-Babylonian), often in archaizing script
Principal editions	Langdon, *Die neubabylonischen Königsinschriften* (1912); Da Riva, *The Inscriptions of Nabopolassar, Amēl-Marduk and Neriglissar* (2013) and related volumes

What it is

Technical summary. Nebuchadnezzar II's royal inscriptions are overwhelmingly building texts. Barrel cylinders were buried in temple and palace foundations to record construction and restoration: Babylon's walls and Ištar Gate, the Esagil temple of Marduk and its ziggurat Etemenanki, the processional way, palaces, and temples throughout Babylonia. They seldom narrate military campaigns. The one illustrated here records rebuilding works; the individual cylinder in the photograph has not been identified by number, so the excerpt below comes from a closely comparable Nebuchadnezzar inscription that also mentions the Lebanon.

In plain terms. Nebuchadnezzar, the king who destroyed Jerusalem, left hundreds of clay "time capsules" in his buildings boasting of what he had built for his god Marduk and for the city of Babylon.

Key excerpt

From Nebuchadnezzar inscriptions translated by G. A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (1916), pp. 379–380, public domain.

> In exalted trust in him (Marduk) distant countries, remote mountains from the upper sea (Mediterranean) to the lower sea (Persian Gulf), steep paths, blockaded roads, where the step is impeded, [where] was no footing, difficult roads, desert paths, I traversed, and the disobedient I destroyed; I captured the enemies, established justice in the lands; the people I exalted; the bad and evil I separated from the people …
>
> From the upper sea to the lower sea, [which] Marduk, my lord, had entrusted to me, in [all] lands, the totality [of dwelling-places] I [exalted] the city of Babylon to the first place …
>
> I did what no former king had done; I cleft high mountains, stones of the mountain I quarried, I opened passes. I made a straight road for the cedars. Mighty cedars they were, tall and strong, of wonderful beauty … the mighty products of mount Lebanon … That none might do harm I set up my royal image forever.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Daniel 4:30.** Nebuchadnezzar's boast, "Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built …?" (LSB), matches precisely the self-presentation of his building inscriptions, in which he is overwhelmingly a builder of Babylon.
- **Cedars of Lebanon.** His exploitation of Lebanon's cedars for Marduk's temple is mirrored in the taunt of Isa 14:8, where the cedars of Lebanon rejoice at the fall of the king of Babylon.
- The campaigns against Judah (597 and 586 BC; 2 Kgs 24–25) are recorded not in these inscriptions but in the Babylonian Chronicle (ABC 5, BM 21946), which dates the first capture of Jerusalem to 2 Adar, year 7 (16 March 597 BC).

Further reading

- Da Riva, Rocío. *The Neo-Babylonian Royal Inscriptions: An Introduction*. GMTR 4. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2008.
- Wiseman, D. J. *Nebuchadrezzar and Babylon*. Schweich Lectures 1983. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Langdon, Stephen. *Building Inscriptions of the Neo-Babylonian Empire*. Paris: Leroux, 1905.

14. The Jehoiachin Ration Tablets



One of the Jehoiachin ration tablets on display in the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin, with the museum's explanatory label.

Image: Scallaham. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Four clay administrative tablets listing monthly oil rations
Museum	Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin (Babylon excavation numbers 28122, 28178, 28186, 28232)
Date	595–570 BC (10th–35th years of Nebuchadnezzar II); the Jehoiachin entries date to c. 592 BC
Provenance	Babylon, a vaulted building near the Ištar Gate (once thought to be the "Hanging Gardens"); excavated by R. Koldewey, 1899–1917
Language / script	Akkadian (Neo-Babylonian), cuneiform
Principal editions	Weidner, "Jojachin, König von Juda, in babylonischen Keilschrifttexten" (1939); Pedersén, *Archive und Bibliotheken in Babylon* (2005)

What it is

Technical summary. The tablets come from a palace archive recording distributions of oil, barley, dates and spices to foreigners maintained at the Babylonian court: Egyptians, Philistines from Ashkelon, Phoenicians from Tyre and Byblos, Elamites, Medes, Ionians, and Judeans. Jehoiachin, king of Judah, deported in 597 BC (2 Kgs 24:10–16), appears as *Ia-ʾ-ú-kinu* (or *Ia-ku-ú-ki-nu*) *šar māt Ia-a-ḫu-du*, "king of the land of Judah," alongside his five sons and other Judeans.

In plain terms. These are Babylonian palace pay-slips. They show that the exiled king of Judah and his sons were on the royal ration list in Babylon, just as 2 Kings 25:29–30 says.

The text (the Judean entries)

Translation by the author of this study, following Weidner's edition and the label displayed with the tablet in Berlin (visible in the photograph). The measure given to the king differs between tablets.

> … for Yaʾu-kīnu, king of the land of Yaḫudu;
>
> 2½ *sila* for the five sons of the king of the land of Yaḫudu;
>
> 4 *sila* for eight men of the land of Yaḫudu, ½ *sila* each.

On another of the tablets, the entry reads "10 *sila* (of oil) for Yaʾu-kīnu, king of [the land of Yaḫudu]." A *sila* is about 0.84 litre. One tablet is dated to the 13th year of Nebuchadnezzar (592 BC).

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **2 Kings 25:27–30 and Jeremiah 52:31–34** report that in the 37th year of exile Evil-merodach (Amēl-Marduk) released Jehoiachin from prison, gave him a seat above the other kings in Babylon, and granted him a regular allowance from the king for the rest of his life. The ration tablets, about thirty years earlier, show that he already received rations at court. Weidner and most later scholars took the tablets as showing that he was not in close confinement at that date. Others argue that the rations are compatible with detention.
- **The five sons.** 1 Chronicles 3:17–18 lists seven sons of Jehoiachin (Jeconiah). Five sons in 592 BC fits a family still growing in exile.
- **Amēl-Marduk.** An alabaster vase from Susa inscribed "Palace of Amēl-Marduk, king of Babylon, son of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon" confirms the name of the king who released Jehoiachin (Barton 1916, p. 381).

Further reading

- Weidner, Ernst F. "Jojachin, König von Juda, in babylonischen Keilschrifttexten." In *Mélanges syriens offerts à M. René Dussaud*, vol. 2, 923–935. Paris: Geuthner, 1939.
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15. The Nabonidus Chronicle



The Nabonidus Chronicle, British Museum BM 35382 (ABC 7). This is the tablet shown in the Ancient Stones collection as "Enuma Elish."

Image: Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin FRCP(Glasg). Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Clay tablet, c. 14 × 14 cm, four columns (two on each face), much damaged
Museum	British Museum, BM 35382
Date	Copy probably from the Achaemenid period (late 6th–5th century BC); covers 556–539 BC
Provenance	Babylon; acquired 1879
Language / script	Akkadian (Late Babylonian), cuneiform
Principal editions	Smith, *Babylonian Historical Texts* (1924); Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (ABC 7, 1975); Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles* (2004), no. 26

What it is

Technical summary. The Babylonian Chronicles are a series of terse, year-by-year records of political and military events, probably compiled from astronomical diaries. The Nabonidus Chronicle covers the reign of Nabonidus (556–539 BC), the last native king of Babylon. It records his long residence at Tema in Arabia, the repeated cancellation of the New Year festival in his absence, the presence of "the son of the king" (Belshazzar) with the army in Akkad, Cyrus's defeat of Astyages and rise, and finally the fall of Babylon to Cyrus in 539 BC.

In plain terms. It is an official year-by-year diary of the last king of Babylon. It says that the king was away in Arabia for years, that his son ran things at home, and that Babylon opened its gates to the Persians in 539 BC without a fight.

Key excerpts

Translation of G. A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (1916), pp. 382–384, public domain.

Year 9 (547 BC)

> In the 9th year Nabuna'id was at Tema. The son of the king, the princes, and soldiers were in Akkad. The king did not come to Babylon in Nisan, Nebo did not go to Babylon. Bel did not go out. The festival sacrifice was omitted. They offered sacrifices in Esagila and Ezida on account of Babylon and Borsippa, that the land might prosper. On the 5th of the month, Nisan, the mother of the king died in Dur-karashu on the bank of the Euphrates above Sippar. The son of the king and the soldiers mourned three days. In the month Sivan there was mourning for the king's mother in Akkad.

Year 17 (539 BC): the fall of Babylon

> In the month Tammuz Cyrus, when he made battle in Opis, on the banks of the river Zalzallat, with the soldiers of Akkad, conquered the inhabitants of Akkad. When they assembled the people were killed. On the 14th Sippar was taken without a battle. Nabuna'id fled. On the 16th Gobryas, governor of the land of Gutium, and the soldiers of Cyrus entered Babylon without a battle. Later Nabuna'id was captured because he remained in Babylon. To the end of the month the shield-bearers of the land of Gutium assembled at the gates of Esagila. No weapon of any kind was taken into Esagila or the temples; nor was the standard raised. On the third day of Marcheswan Cyrus entered Babylon. The walls (?) were broken down before him. Cyrus proclaimed peace to all of Babylon. He appointed Gobryas his satrap, and also prefects in Babylon. From Kisleu unto Adar, the gods of Akkad, whom Nabuna'id had brought to Babylon, returned to their cities.

Notes on modern readings

- **The month of Opis.** Barton's "Tammuz" is now read **Tašrītu** (September–October). Sippar fell on 14 Tašrītu and Babylon on 16 Tašrītu (12 October 539 BC). Cyrus entered on 3 Araḫsamnu (29 October 539 BC).
- **"The walls were broken down."** The phrase is now read differently. Grayson takes it as "green twigs (*ḫarīnu*) were spread before him," a ceremonial welcome, not a breach.
- **Opis.** The battle was fought at Opis on the Tigris. The river name read by Barton as "Zalzallat" is uncertain; the reading is disputed.
- **Ugbaru and Gubaru.** Modern editions distinguish **Ugbaru**, governor of Gutium, who took Babylon and died soon after, from **Gubaru**, whom Cyrus appointed to govern Babylon.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Belshazzar.** The chronicle never names Belshazzar, but it repeatedly says that "the son of the king" was in Akkad with the army while Nabonidus stayed in Tema. Other Babylonian texts name him (*Bēl-šarra-uṣur*) as crown prince entrusted with the kingship. This explains why in Daniel 5 he is "king" in Babylon and can offer to make Daniel only "third ruler in the kingdom" (Dan 5:7, 16, 29). Before these texts were found, Belshazzar was unknown outside Daniel and Baruch.

- **Darius the Mede.** Some conservative scholars (e.g., J. C. Whitcomb) have identified "Darius the Mede" (Dan 5:31; 6:1) with Gubaru or Ugbaru. Critical scholars regard the figure as a literary construct. The chronicle supplies the data for both arguments but settles neither.
- **Isaiah 44:28–45:1.** The chronicle confirms Cyrus's bloodless entry into Babylon, the event celebrated in Isaiah's oracle to Cyrus, the LORD's "anointed."

Further reading

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16. The Cyrus Cylinder



The Cyrus Cylinder, British Museum BM 90920.

Image: Mike Peel (www.mikepeel.net), modified by مانفی. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Barrel-shaped clay cylinder, 22.5 × 10 cm, 45 lines (lines 36–45 partly on a fragment in Yale, NBC 2504)
Museum	British Museum, BM 90920; Yale Babylonian Collection, NBC 2504
Date	Shortly after Cyrus's conquest of Babylon in October 539 BC
Provenance	Babylon, foundation deposit in the Esagila temple; excavated by Hormuzd Rassam, 1879
Language / script	Akkadian (Late Babylonian), cuneiform
Principal editions	Rawlinson (1880); Schaudig (2001); Finkel, *The Cyrus Cylinder* (2013)

What it is

Technical summary. The Cylinder is a Babylonian building inscription written in the name of Cyrus II. It denounces Nabonidus for neglecting Marduk's cult, presents Cyrus as chosen by Marduk to restore order, describes the peaceful entry into Babylon, and lists Cyrus's titles and genealogy. It then records his returning displaced gods to their shrines and resettling their peoples, and his repair of Babylon's defences. It is Babylonian royal propaganda in traditional form, not a declaration of human rights, but it documents the Persian policy of restoring cults and returning deportees.

In plain terms. Cyrus the Great had his conquest of Babylon written up the way Babylonian kings always wrote: the city's god chose him, he entered peacefully, and he sent captive gods and peoples back home.

The text

Translation of G. A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (1916), pp. 385–386, public domain. The opening lines are badly broken.

> … On account of their lamentation the lord of the gods was exceedingly angry and [left] their territory; the gods who dwelt among them left their dwellings … Through all lands he made his way, he looked, he sought a righteous prince, a being whom he loved, whom he took by the hand. Cyrus, King of Anshan, he called by name and designated him to rule over all the lands … Marduk, the great lord, looked joyfully upon the return of his people, his kindly deeds and upright heart. To his city, Babylon, he commanded him to go; he caused him to take the road to Babylon, going as a friend and companion at his side … He caused him to enter Babylon without war or battle. He preserved his city, Babylon, from tribulation; he filled his (Cyrus's) hand with Nabuna'id, the king who did not fear him …
>
> I am Cyrus, king of the world, the great king, the mighty king, king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four quarters of the world, son of Cambyses, the great king, king of Anshan, grandson of Cyrus, the great king, king of Anshan, great-grandson of Teispes, the great king, king of Anshan; an everlasting seed of royalty, whose government Bel and Nabu love, whose reign in the goodness of their hearts they desire. When I entered in peace into Babylon, with joy and rejoicing I took up my lordly dwelling in the royal palace … My numerous troops dwelt peacefully in Babylon; in all Sumer and Akkad no terrorizer did I permit …
>
> From … to Ashur and Susa, Agade, Eshnunak, Zamban, Metumu, Deri, to the border of Gutium, the cities [beyond] the Tigris, whose sites had been founded of old, — the gods who dwelt in them I returned to their places, and caused them to settle in their eternal shrines. All their people I assembled and returned them to their dwellings. And the gods of Sumer and Akkad, whom Nabuna'id, to the anger of the lord of the gods, had brought into Babylon, at the command of Marduk, the great lord, I caused in peace to dwell in their abodes … May all the gods, whom I have returned to their cities, pray before Marduk and Nabu for the prolonging of my days …

Notes on modern readings

- **Lines 36–45.** These were unknown to Barton. They were identified in 1970 by P.-R. Berger on a Yale fragment (NBC 2504). They record Cyrus's offerings, his repair of Babylon's wall Imgur-Enlil, and a reference to an inscription of Ashurbanipal found in the foundations.
- **Shared wording.** Two clay tablets found in 2010 in the British Museum's collection carry parts of the same text, which shows the proclamation circulated in copies (Finkel 2013).
- **"King of the world"** renders *šar kiššati*, "king of the universe," a traditional Mesopotamian title.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Ezra 1:1–4 and 6:3–5; 2 Chronicles 36:22–23.** The Cylinder does not mention Judah or Jerusalem. Its general policy, returning gods and peoples to their homes and restoring sanctuaries, is the context in which the decree of Cyrus for rebuilding the Jerusalem temple makes historical sense. Most scholars accept the substance of the Aramaic memorandum in Ezra 6:3–5 as authentic.

- **Isaiah 44:28–45:4.** Marduk "called Cyrus by name" and "took him by the hand" to go before him. The LORD likewise calls Cyrus by name and grasps his right hand (Isa 45:1–4). The closeness of the court language has been discussed since the Cylinder's publication. Whatever the explanation, it shows that both texts speak in the idiom of Near Eastern royal election.

Further reading

- Finkel, Irving, ed. *The Cyrus Cylinder: The King of Persia's Proclamation from Ancient Babylon*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2013.
- British Museum. "The Cyrus Cylinder" (translation by I. Finkel). britishmuseum.org
- Kuhrt, Amélie. "The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 25 (1983): 83–97.

17. The Kurkh Monolith of Shalmaneser III



The Kurkh Monolith of Shalmaneser III, British Museum (BM 118884). The king stands before symbols of his gods; the annals are carved over the relief.

Image: Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin FRCP(Glasg). Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Limestone stele, 2.2 m high, carved in relief and inscribed on all faces
Museum	British Museum, BM 118884
Date	c. 852 BC; records the battle of Qarqar (853 BC)
Provenance	Kurkh (Üçtepe), near Diyarbakır, Turkey; found by J. E. Taylor in 1861
Language / script	Akkadian (Neo-Assyrian), cuneiform
Principal editions	Grayson, RIMA 3 (1996), A.0.102.2; Younger in *Context of Scripture* 2.113A

What it is

Technical summary. The monolith records Shalmaneser III's campaigns up to his sixth year, culminating in the battle of Qarqar on the Orontes (853 BC). There he faced a western coalition of twelve kings led by Hadadezer of Damascus and Irhuleni of Hamath. The inscription lists each ally's contribution. The largest chariot force, 2,000 chariots, belongs to "Ahab the Israelite" (*A-ḫa-ab-bu māt Sir-ʾi-la-a-a*). This is the earliest mention of an Israelite king in a foreign text, and one of only four inscriptions before 800 BC that name Israel.

In plain terms. An Assyrian king records a great battle in Syria in 853 BC. One of the kings who fought against him was Ahab of Israel, who brought more chariots than anyone else.

Key excerpt

Translation of G. A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (1916), p. 361, public domain.

> In the eponym year of Dan-Ashur, month Aru, 14th day, I departed from the city of Nineveh; I crossed the river Tigris … to the city Qarqar I approached. Qarqar, his royal city, I destroyed, I devastated, I burned with fire. 1,200 chariots, 1,200 horsemen, 20,000 men of Hadadidri (Benhadad) of Damascus; 700 chariots, 700 horsemen, 10,000 men of Irhulina, the Hamathite; 2,000 chariots, 10,000 men of Ahab, the Israelite; 500 men of the Quean (i.e., Que, in Cilicia); 1,000 men of the Musraean …

Notes

- **Date.** Barton's 854 BC follows an older chronology. The eponym of Dayyān-Aššur is now fixed at **853 BC**.
- **"Hadadidri"** is Hadad-ezer of Damascus. The Bible calls the contemporary king of Damascus Ben-hadad (1 Kgs 20).
- Shalmaneser claims a crushing victory, but he had to campaign against the same coalition again in 849, 848 and 845 BC, which suggests the battle was indecisive.

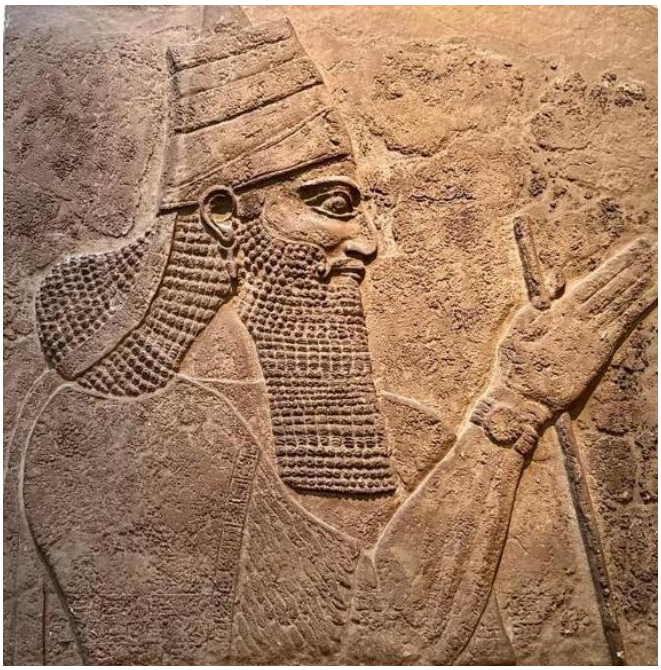
Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

The Bible does not mention Qarqar. It does describe Ahab's wealth and military strength (1 Kgs 16–22), his treaty with Ben-hadad of Damascus after the battle of Aphek (1 Kgs 20:34), and his death fighting Aram at Ramoth-gilead (1 Kgs 22), all of which fit a brief Israelite–Aramean alliance against Assyria in 853 BC. The monolith anchors the chronology of the divided monarchy: Ahab was alive in 853 BC, and Jehu was paying tribute by 841 BC (see the Black Obelisk).

Further reading

- Grayson, A. Kirk. *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC II (858–745 BC)*. RIMA 3. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996.
- Yamada, Shigeo. *The Construction of the Assyrian Empire: A Historical Study of the Inscriptions of Shalmaneser III*. Leiden: Brill, 2000.

18. The Annals of Tiglath-pileser III



Tiglath-pileser III in his chariot: relief from the Central Palace at Nimrud, 728 BC (British Museum).

Image: SpeakingArch. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Annals carved on palace wall slabs, and "summary inscriptions" on stone slabs and clay tablets
Museum	British Museum; Iraq Museum; others
Date	Reign of Tiglath-pileser III, 745–727 BC
Provenance	Central Palace, Nimrud (Kalḫu)
Language / script	Akkadian (Neo-Assyrian), cuneiform
Principal editions	Tadmor & Yamada, *The Royal Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III and Shalmaneser V* (RINAP 1, 2011)

What it is

Technical summary. Tiglath-pileser III (Pul in 2 Kgs 15:19 and 1 Chr 5:26) turned Assyria into an empire of provinces. His inscriptions name more biblical kings than those of any other Assyrian ruler. They include Menahem of Samaria and Rezin of Damascus among his tributaries in 738 BC; Ahaz (written Jehoahaz, *Ia-u-ḫa-zi*) of Judah among the western tributaries; and the overthrow of Pekah of Israel and the installation of Hoshea in 732 BC.

In plain terms. The Assyrian king the Bible calls "Pul" records that Menahem of Israel paid him tribute, that Ahaz of Judah submitted to him, and that he replaced Pekah with Hoshea as Israel's king.

Key excerpts

Translation of G. A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (1916), pp. 367–369, public domain.

Tribute of 738 BC

> Tribute of Kushtashpi, the Kummukhite, Rezin, the Damascene, Menahem, the Samaritan, Hiram, the Tyrian, Sibitti-baal, the Gebalite … gold, silver, lead, iron, elephant-hide, ivory, variegated garments, linen cloths, purple and red wool … horses, mules, oxen and sheep, camels, she-camels, together with their foals, I received.

The overthrow of Pekah (c. 732 BC)

> The country of the house of Omri … all its people, [and their possessions] I carried away unto Assyria. Pekah, their king, they had overthrown. Hoshea [as king] over them I placed. 10 talents of gold, … talents of silver I received as tribute from them.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **2 Kings 15:19–20.** Menahem pays Pul 1,000 talents of silver to secure his throne.
- **2 Kings 15:29–30.** Tiglath-pileser takes Galilee and deports its people; Hoshea conspires against Pekah and kills him. The Assyrian text agrees that Pekah was overthrown and Hoshea installed, and claims the installation as the king's own act.
- **2 Kings 16:7–9.** Ahaz appeals to Tiglath-pileser against Rezin and Pekah (the Syro-Ephraimite war; Isa 7). Ahaz's name in the tribute lists confirms his vassalage.

Further reading

- Tadmor, Hayim, and Shigeo Yamada. *The Royal Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BC) and Shalmaneser V (726–722 BC), Kings of Assyria*. RINAP 1. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011. Open-access edition (Oracc RINAP)

19. The Annals of Sargon II: The Fall of Samaria



A fragment of the annals of Sargon II from Khorsabad (Museo di Antichità, Turin).
Image: Marie-Lan Taÿ Pamart. Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Annals on palace wall reliefs, prisms and display inscriptions (the Nimrud Prism, the Great Display Inscription)
Museum	Louvre; Iraq Museum; Turin; British Museum
Date	Reign of Sargon II, 721–705 BC
Provenance	Khorsabad (Dur-Šarrukin) and Nimrud
Language / script	Akkadian (Neo-Assyrian), cuneiform
Principal editions	Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad* (1994); Gadd, "Inscribed Prisms of Sargon II from Nimrud," *Iraq* 16 (1954)

What it is

Technical summary. Sargon II claims the conquest of Samaria at the start of his reign and the deportation of its population. His annals and display inscriptions give the number of deportees as 27,290 (some versions 27,280) and describe the resettlement of foreigners in Samaria, which became an Assyrian province. The Bible attributes the siege to Shalmaneser V (2 Kgs 17:3–6; 18:9–10). Most historians reconstruct a capture under Shalmaneser V in 722 BC and a second subjugation by Sargon after a revolt in 720 BC.

In plain terms. The Assyrian king Sargon boasts that he conquered Samaria, Israel's capital, carried off 27,290 people, and settled foreigners in their place. This was the end of the northern kingdom.

Key excerpt

Translation of G. A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (1916), p. 369, public domain.

> At the beginning of my reign, in my first year Samaria I besieged, I captured. 27,290 people from its midst I carried captive. 50 chariots I took there as an addition to my royal force … I returned and made more than formerly to dwell. People from lands which my hands had captured I settled in the midst. My officers over them as governors I appointed. Tribute and taxes I imposed upon them after the Assyrian manner.

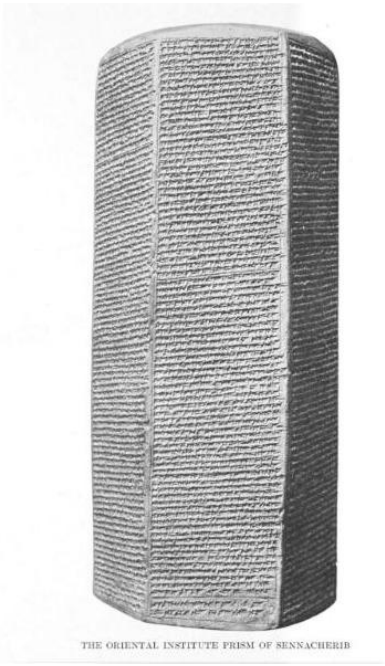
Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **2 Kings 17:5–6, 24.** The fall of Samaria, the deportation of Israel to Assyria, and the settlement of peoples from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim in Samaria.
- **Isaiah 20:1** is the only biblical mention of Sargon by name, in connection with his capture of Ashdod (711 BC). Before Sargon's palace was found at Khorsabad in 1843, his existence was known only from this verse.

Further reading

- Becking, Bob. *The Fall of Samaria: An Historical and Archaeological Study*. Leiden: Brill, 1992.
- Younger, K. Lawson, Jr. "The Deportations of the Israelites." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117 (1998): 201–227.

20. The Sennacherib Prism



The Oriental Institute Prism of Sennacherib (ISAC Museum, Chicago, A2793), a duplicate of the Taylor Prism.
Image: Photographer unknown. Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Hexagonal clay prism, c. 38 cm high (three main copies: the Taylor Prism, the Oriental Institute Prism and the Jerusalem Prism)
Museum	British Museum, BM 91032 (Taylor Prism); ISAC Museum, Chicago, A2793; Israel Museum
Date	691–689 BC; records the third campaign of 701 BC
Provenance	Nineveh
Language / script	Akkadian (Neo-Assyrian), cuneiform
Principal editions	Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib* (1924); Grayson & Novotny, RINAP 3/1 (2012), no. 22

What it is

Technical summary. The prisms present Sennacherib's annals through his eighth campaign. The account of the third campaign (701 BC) describes the submission of Phoenician and Philistine cities, the battle of Eltekeh against an Egyptian and Kushite force, the restoration of Padi to the throne of Ekron, and the siege of Judah. Forty-six of Hezekiah's fortified cities are captured and 200,150 people deported. Hezekiah himself is shut up in Jerusalem "like a bird in a cage" and later sends heavy tribute to Nineveh. Significantly, the annals do not claim the capture of Jerusalem.

In plain terms. Sennacherib's own record of his invasion of Judah: he destroyed dozens of towns and besieged King Hezekiah in Jerusalem, but he took tribute and went home without taking the city.

Key excerpt: the campaign against Judah

Translation of G. A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (1916), pp. 372–373, public domain.

> And as to Hezekiah, the Judaean, who had not submitted to my yoke, 46 of his strongholds, fortified cities, and smaller cities of their environs without number, with the onset of battering rams and the attack of engines, mines, breaches, and axes (?), I besieged, I captured. 200,150 people, small and great, male and female, horses, mules, asses, camels, oxen, and sheep without number I brought out of their midst and counted as booty. He himself I shut up like a caged bird in Jerusalem, his capital city; I erected beleaguering works against him, and turned back by command every one who came out of his city gate. The cities, which I had captured, from his country I cut off and gave them to Mitinti, King of Ashdod, Padi, King of Ekron, and Sillibaal, King of Gaza, and diminished his land … As to Hezekiah himself, the fear of the luster of my lordship overcame him and the Urbi and his favorite soldiers, whom he had brought in to strengthen Jerusalem, his capital city, deserted. With 30 talents of gold, 800 talents of silver, precious stones, … beds of ivory, … his daughters, the women of his palace, male and female musicians he sent after me to Nineveh, my capital city, and sent his messenger to present the gift and to do homage.

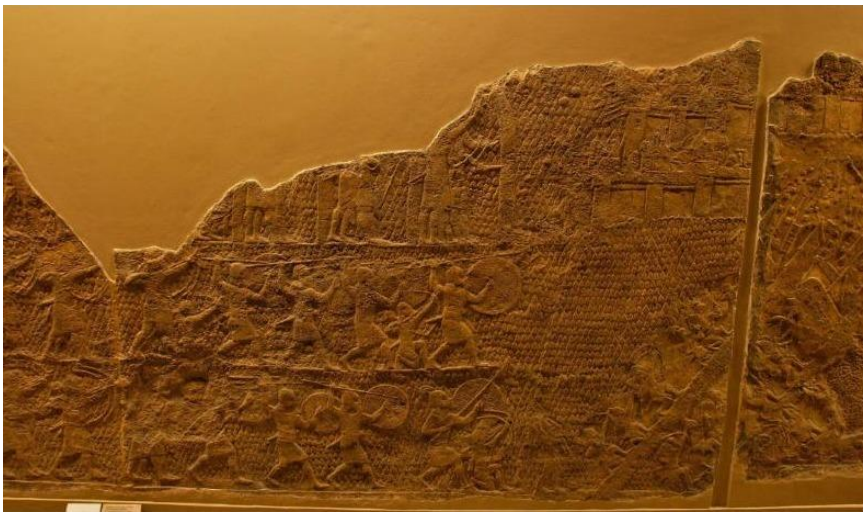
Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **2 Kings 18:13–16** agrees remarkably: Sennacherib takes all the fortified cities of Judah, and Hezekiah sends tribute to Lachish. The Bible gives 300 talents of silver and 30 talents of gold, matching the gold figure exactly.
- **2 Kings 18:17–19:37; Isaiah 36–37; 2 Chronicles 32.** The Bible adds the embassy of the Rabshakeh, Isaiah's oracle, the death of 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, and Sennacherib's withdrawal and later assassination by his sons. The silence of the annals about the capture of Jerusalem, unusual in Assyrian royal rhetoric, is consistent with the city's survival. Historians differ on how to reconcile the biblical account of a sudden withdrawal with the Assyrian account of tribute.

Further reading

- Grayson, A. Kirk, and Jamie Novotny. *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704–681 BC), Part 1*. RINAP 3/1. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2012. Open-access edition (Oracc RINAP)
- Grabbe, Lester L., ed. *"Like a Bird in a Cage": The Invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BCE*. JSOTSup 363. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003.
- Luckenbill, D. D. *The Annals of Sennacherib*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924.

21. The Lachish Reliefs



Part of the Lachish Reliefs from Sennacherib's Southwest Palace at Nineveh: Assyrian archers and slingers assault the walls of Lachish (British Museum).

Image: Mike Peel (www.mikepeel.net). Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Series of gypsum wall reliefs that lined room XXXVI of the Southwest Palace
Museum	British Museum, BM 124904–124915
Date	c. 700–690 BC; depicts the siege of 701 BC
Provenance	Nineveh (Kuyunjik), Southwest Palace; excavated by A. H. Layard, 1847–1849
Language / script	Relief with an Akkadian epigraph
Principal editions	Ussishkin, *The Conquest of Lachish by Sennacherib* (1982); Barnett, Bleibtreu & Turner, *Sculptures from the Southwest Palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh* (1998)

What it is

Technical summary. The reliefs are the most detailed Assyrian depiction of a siege. They show the double walls of Lachish, the Assyrian siege ramp and battering rams, archers and slingers, defenders hurling torches, the impalement of prisoners, the deportation of Judean families with their goods, and Sennacherib enthroned receiving the spoil. Excavations at Tel Lachish by D. Ussishkin uncovered the actual Assyrian siege ramp, the Judean counter-ramp, arrowheads and sling stones, and the burnt destruction layer (Level III) of 701 BC, so the reliefs can be compared directly with the site.

In plain terms. Huge carved panels from the Assyrian king's palace show, step by step, how his army stormed the Judean city of Lachish in 701 BC and led its people away captive. Archaeologists later found the same siege ramp on the ground.

The epigraph (complete)

Translation of G. A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (1916), p. 373, public domain.

> Sennacherib, king of the world, King of Assyria, sat on his throne, and the spoil of the city of Lachish passed before him.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **2 Kings 18:14, 17; 19:8.** Sennacherib is at Lachish when Hezekiah sends his tribute, and he sends the Rabshakeh from Lachish to Jerusalem. The reliefs show why the capture of Lachish, Judah's second city, was the centrepiece of the campaign in Assyrian eyes.
- **Micah 1:13** calls on Lachish to harness the chariot horses, addressing it as "the beginning of sin" for the daughter of Zion.
- The Judean men and women shown in the reliefs give the most detailed contemporary picture of Judean dress and appearance.

Further reading

- Ussishkin, David. *The Conquest of Lachish by Sennacherib*. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1982.
- Ussishkin, David. *Biblical Lachish: A Tale of Construction, Destruction, Excavation and Restoration*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2014.

22. The Prisms of Esarhaddon: Manasseh of Judah



A seven-sided clay prism of Esarhaddon recording his restoration of Babylon (British Museum). Esarhaddon's list of western vassals, including Manasseh, appears on other prisms of the same type from Nineveh.

Image: Zunkir. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Clay prisms (Nineveh Prisms A and B and others)
Museum	British Museum and other collections (Nineveh Prisms A and B)
Date	c. 673–672 BC
Provenance	Nineveh
Language / script	Akkadian (Neo-Assyrian), cuneiform
Principal editions	Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons* (1956); Leichty, RINAP 4 (2011), no. 1

What it is

Technical summary. In building accounts for his armoury at Nineveh, Esarhaddon (681–669 BC) lists twenty-two vassal kings "of the Hittite land, of the sea-coast and of the midst of the sea" who were made to transport building materials. They include Manasseh king of Judah, Qaus-gabri of Edom, Musuri of Moab, Ikausu of Ekron and Puduilu of Beth-Ammon. Ashurbanipal repeats the list for his Egyptian campaign of 667 BC, with Manasseh again among the tributaries.

In plain terms. The Assyrian king Esarhaddon lists King Manasseh of Judah as one of the vassals who had to send building materials for his palace.

Key excerpt

Translation of G. A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (1916), p. 378, public domain.

> I overthrew the kings of the Hittite country and those beyond the sea; Baal, King of Tyre, Manasseh, King of Judah, Kaushgabri, King of Edom, Musuri, King of Moab, Silbaal, King of Gaza, Mitinti, King of Askelon, Ikausu, King of Ekron, Milkiashapa, King of Gebal, Matanbaal, King of Arvad, Abibaal, King of Shamsimuruna, Puduel, King of Beth-Ammon, Ahi-milku, King of Ashdod, 12 kings of the sea-coast … altogether 22 kings of the Hittite land, of the sea-coast and the midst of the sea — I sent to them and great cedar beams, etc. [they sent].

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **2 Kings 21; 2 Chronicles 33.** Manasseh's long reign (c. 697–642 BC) was a period of loyal vassalage to Assyria, which matches his position in the Assyrian lists. 2 Chronicles 33:11 says Assyrian commanders took Manasseh to Babylon in chains. No Assyrian text records this, but Babylon was under Assyrian rule in Esarhaddon's and Ashurbanipal's reigns, so the setting is plausible.
- **Ezra 4:2** refers to Esarhaddon settling foreigners in Samaria.
- **Ikausu of Ekron** is the king named in the Ekron royal inscription (Part 5).

Further reading

- Leichty, Erle. *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680–669 BC)*. RINAP 4. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011. Open-access edition (Oracc RINAP)

23. The Babylonian Chronicle of 605–594 BC (ABC 5): The Capture of Jerusalem



The Babylonian Chronicle for 605–594 BC, British Museum BM 21946. The reverse records the capture of "the city of Judah" in 597 BC.

Image: Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin FRCP(Glasg). Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Clay tablet
Museum	British Museum, BM 21946
Date	Achaemenid-period copy; covers 605–594 BC
Provenance	Babylon
Language / script	Akkadian (Late Babylonian), cuneiform
Principal editions	Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings* (1956); Grayson, *ABC* (1975), Chronicle 5

What it is

Technical summary. This chronicle covers the end of Nabopolassar's reign and the first eleven years of Nebuchadnezzar II. It records the battle of Carchemish against Egypt (605 BC), Nebuchadnezzar's accession, his annual campaigns in Ḫatti (Syria-Palestine), an indecisive battle with Egypt in 601 BC, and, in year 7, the capture of Jerusalem. Its precise date makes it one of the most exact synchronisms between biblical and extra-biblical history.

In plain terms. The official Babylonian year-book records the exact day Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem: the second of Adar in his seventh year, which is 16 March 597 BC.

The text: year 7 (reverse, lines 11–13)

Translation by the author of this study from the Akkadian text (Grayson 1975).

> Year 7: In the month of Kislev the king of Akkad mustered his troops and marched to Ḫatti. He encamped against the city of Judah (*āl Ia-a-ḫu-du*), and on the second day of the month of Adar he took the city and seized the king. A king of his own choosing he appointed in it; he took its heavy tribute and brought it to Babylon.

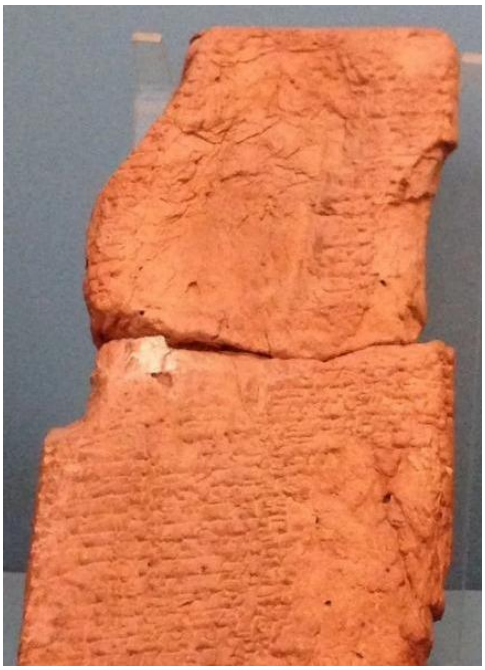
Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **2 Kings 24:10–17; 2 Chronicles 36:9–10.** Nebuchadnezzar besieges Jerusalem, takes Jehoiachin captive with the treasures of temple and palace, and makes Mattaniah (Zedekiah), Jehoiachin's uncle, king in his place. The chronicle's "king of his own choosing" is Zedekiah, and "the king" seized is Jehoiachin (see the ration tablets above).
- **Jeremiah 46:2** dates the battle of Carchemish to the fourth year of Jehoiakim. The chronicle confirms the battle and Egypt's defeat in 605 BC.
- **Chronology.** The date 2 Adar, year 7 (16 March 597 BC) is the fixed point for the chronology of Judah's last kings and of Ezekiel, who dates his prophecies from "our exile" (Ezek 1:2; 33:21).

Further reading

- Wiseman, D. J. *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings (626–556 B.C.) in the British Museum*. London: British Museum, 1956.
- Grayson, A. K. *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*. Locust Valley: J. J. Augustin, 1975, Chronicle 5.

24. The Earlier Mesopotamian Law Collections: Ur-Namma, Lipit-Ištar and Ešnunna



A tablet of the Laws of Ur-Namma (Istanbul Archaeology Museums, Ni 3191).
Image: Wikimedia Commons contributor. Licence: CC0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Clay tablets (no monumental stelae survive except fragments)
Museum	Istanbul Archaeology Museums (Ur-Namma, Lipit-Ištar); Iraq Museum (Ešnunna, from Tell Harmal)
Date	Ur-Namma c. 2100 BC; Lipit-Ištar c. 1930 BC; Ešnunna c. 1770 BC
Provenance	Nippur, Ur and Sippar; Tell Harmal (ancient Šaduppûm), near Baghdad, for Ešnunna
Language / script	Sumerian (Ur-Namma, Lipit-Ištar); Akkadian (Ešnunna)
Principal editions	Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (2nd ed., 1997); Yaron, *The Laws of Eshnunna* (2nd ed., 1988)

What it is

Technical summary. Hammurabi's laws stand at the end of a tradition. The Laws of Ur-Namma (Ur III) are the oldest known law collection, with a prologue presenting the king as protector of the orphan and widow and about 40 legible provisions. The Laws of Lipit-Ištar of Isin (Sumerian) and the Laws of Ešnunna (Akkadian, about 60 provisions) share the casuistic form, many topics and the prologue–laws–epilogue frame. A notable feature of the Ur-Namma laws is monetary compensation for bodily injury, where Hammurabi applies talion.

In plain terms. These are older law lists than Hammurabi's, some of them three hundred years older. They show that Hammurabi, and later the laws in Exodus, drew on a long legal tradition in the ancient Near East.

Key provisions

Translations by the author of this study from the Sumerian and Akkadian texts (Roth 1997).

> Ur-Namma §1: If a man commits a homicide, they shall kill that man.
>
> Ur-Namma §18: If a man cuts off the foot of another man …, he shall weigh and deliver 10 shekels of silver.
>
> Ešnunna §53: If an ox gores another ox and causes its death, the two ox-owners shall divide the value of the living ox and the carcass of the dead ox.
>
> Ešnunna §54: If an ox is a gorer and the ward authorities have notified its owner, but he does not keep his ox in check, and it gores a man and causes his death, the owner of the ox shall weigh and deliver 40 shekels of silver.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Exodus 21:35** prescribes that when one man's ox kills another's, the owners sell the live ox and divide the price, and divide the dead animal as well. This is the closest verbal parallel between biblical and Mesopotamian law, almost identical to Ešnunna §53.
- **Exodus 21:28–32 and Ešnunna §54 / Hammurabi §251** share the legal distinction between an ox with no history of goring and one whose owner has been warned.
- **Protection of the weak.** Ur-Namma's prologue, which boasts that the orphan was not delivered to the rich nor the widow to the mighty, anticipates a central theme of biblical law (Exod 22:22–24; Deut 10:18; 24:17).

Further reading

- Roth, Martha T. *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*. 2nd ed. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997.
- Yaron, Reuven. *The Laws of Eshnunna*. 2nd ed. Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988.
- Westbrook, Raymond, ed. *A History of Ancient Near Eastern Law*. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2003.

25. Hittite Vassal Treaties



Clay tablet of a Hittite state treaty in Akkadian (Neues Museum, Berlin).
Image: Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin FRCP(Glasg). Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Clay tablets (archive copies); the originals were often on silver or bronze tablets
Museum	Istanbul and Ankara (Museum of Anatolian Civilizations); Berlin; others
Date	c. 1400–1200 BC (Hittite Empire)
Provenance	Ḫattuša (Boğazköy), Ugarit and other sites
Language / script	Hittite and Akkadian, cuneiform
Principal editions	Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts* (2nd ed., 1999); Kitchen & Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East* (2012)

What it is

Technical summary. The Hittite kings bound their vassals with treaties that follow a recognizable form: a preamble naming the great king; a historical prologue recounting his past kindness to the vassal; stipulations, above all exclusive loyalty; provision for depositing the treaty in a temple and reading it publicly; a list of divine witnesses; and blessings and curses. The Bronze Age bronze tablet of Tudḫaliya IV with Kurunta of Tarḫuntašša (found 1986) shows the format of an original.

In plain terms. When a Hittite emperor made a smaller king his vassal, he wrote a formal treaty: “here is what I did for you, here is what you must do, here are the gods who witness it, and here are the blessings and curses that follow.”

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **The covenant form.** George E. Mendenhall (*Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, 1955) and K. A. Kitchen argued that the Sinai covenant in Exodus 20–24, and the book of Deuteronomy as a whole, follows the Late Bronze Age Hittite treaty form. Examples include the historical prologue (Exod 20:2; Deut 1–4), the demand for exclusive loyalty (Exod 20:3), deposit and public reading (Deut 10:1–5; 31:9–13, 26), witnesses (Deut 30:19; 31:28), and blessings and curses (Lev 26; Deut 27–28).
- **The debate.** Kitchen argues that the presence of a historical prologue matches the second-millennium Hittite treaties and not the first-millennium Assyrian ones, which bears on the date of the covenant tradition. Others (e.g., D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*, 1978) see Deuteronomy as closer to the Neo-Assyrian treaties (see the next entry).

Further reading

- Beckman, Gary. *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*. 2nd ed. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999.
- Kitchen, K. A., and Paul J. N. Lawrence. *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East*. 3 vols. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012.
- Mendenhall, George E. *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East*. Pittsburgh: Biblical Colloquium, 1955.

26. The Esarhaddon Succession Treaties

Image. No openly licensed photograph of the Esarhaddon Succession Treaty tablets was found. Images of the Nimrud tablets are published in Parpola & Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths* (1988), and of the Tell Tayinat tablet in Lauinger, *JCS* 64 (2012).

Object	Large clay tablets (about 46 × 30 cm), sealed with three seals of the god Aššur
Museum	Iraq Museum and British Museum (Nimrud copies); the Tell Tayinat copy is in Turkey
Date	672 BC
Provenance	Nimrud, temple of Nabû (found 1955); Tell Tayinat, Turkey (found 2009)
Language / script	Akkadian (Neo-Assyrian), cuneiform
Principal editions	Wiseman, "The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon," *Iraq* 20 (1958); Parpola & Watanabe, SAA 2 (1988), no. 6; Lauinger (2012)

What it is

Technical summary. In 672 BC Esarhaddon imposed an oath of loyalty to his designated successor, Ashurbanipal, on the peoples of the empire and their rulers. The text binds the oath-takers to love Ashurbanipal "as yourselves," to report any word of sedition even from a brother or a prophet, and to teach the oath to their children. It ends with a long series of curses. The Tayinat copy shows that such tablets were displayed in temples of western vassal states, where Judah's Manasseh, a vassal at the time, would have known the genre.

In plain terms. An Assyrian king forced his subjects to swear total loyalty to his chosen heir, with long lists of curses on anyone who broke the oath. The wording is remarkably like parts of Deuteronomy.

Key excerpt

Translation by the author of this study from the Akkadian text (SAA 2 6, §§63–64).

> May they make your ground like iron, so that nothing can sprout from it. Just as rain does not fall from a sky of bronze, so may rain and dew not come upon your fields and meadows.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Deuteronomy 28:23** has the same curse in reverse order: the sky over your head bronze, and the earth under you iron. H. U. Steymans (1995) showed that Deut 28:20–44 follows the sequence of EST §§39–42 and 56–64.
- **Deuteronomy 13.** The command to denounce and execute anyone, whether prophet, dreamer, brother, son or friend, who incites to disloyalty toward the LORD (Deut 13:1–11) closely parallels EST §§10 and 12, which demand the reporting of sedition by prophets, ecstatics and

relatives. B. M. Levinson, E. Otto and others argue that Deuteronomy deliberately transfers the loyalty owed to the Assyrian king to the LORD.

- **"Love."** The demand to "love" the overlord with all one's heart is the political background often proposed for the command to love the LORD with all one's heart, soul and might (Deut 6:5).

Further reading

- Parpola, Simo, and Kazuko Watanabe. *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*. SAA 2. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1988. Open-access edition (Oracc SAAo)
- Steymans, Hans Ulrich. *Deuteronomium 28 und die adê zur Thronfolgeregelung Asarhaddons*. OBO 145. Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1995.
- Lauinger, Jacob. "Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty at Tell Tayinat: Text and Commentary." *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 64 (2012): 87–123.
- Levinson, Bernard M., and Jeffrey Stackert. "Between the Covenant Code and Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty." *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 3 (2012): 123–140.

Part Three: Archives & Everyday Documents

❧

This part covers the eight archives and documentary finds in the Ancient Stones collection: the Ebla tablets, the Mari archive, the Nuzi tablets, the Amarna Letters, the Ugaritic tablets, the Murašû archive, the Elephantine temple petition, and the Nabû-šarrussu-ukīn tablet. Unlike royal monuments, these are working documents: letters, contracts, ration lists, myths copied for temple use, and petitions. Their value for biblical studies lies in what they show of daily life, law, religion and language in the world of the Hebrew Bible.

About the translations. Most of these archives run to thousands of tablets, so each entry gives a summary and, where a representative public-domain translation exists, a key document in full. Translations quoted at length are from G. A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (1916), and A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (1923), both in the public domain. Passages marked “translation by the author of this study” are fresh renderings from the published text.

27. The Ebla Tablets



Cast of an administrative tablet from the royal archive of Ebla (Museo d'Arte Orientale, Rome). Ebla scribes wrote in neat ruled columns of cases.

Image: Davide Mauro. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Royal archive of c. 17,000 tablets and fragments (about 2,000 largely complete tablets)
Museum	National Museum of Idlib and National Museum of Aleppo, Syria (condition since the civil war uncertain)
Date	c. 2400–2300 BC (Early Bronze IVA); the palace was destroyed c. 2300 BC
Provenance	Tell Mardikh, Syria, Royal Palace G; excavated by the Italian mission of the University of Rome "La Sapienza" under Paolo Matthiae; archive found 1974–1976
Language / script	Eblaite (an early East Semitic language) and Sumerian, cuneiform
Principal editions	*Archivi Reali di Ebla, Testi* (ARET, 1985–); Matthiae, *Ebla: An Empire Rediscovered* (1980); Archi, *Ebla and Its Archives* (2015)

What it is

Technical summary. The Ebla archive is the oldest large archive from Syria and the first evidence that third-millennium Syria had a literate urban culture comparable to Sumer. About 80 per cent of the texts are administrative, recording textiles, metals, livestock and agricultural produce. The rest include royal letters, the treaty between Ebla and Abarsal (one of the oldest known treaties), incantations and literary texts, and lexical lists. Among the lists are the bilingual Sumerian–Eblaite vocabularies, the earliest known bilingual dictionaries. The tablets were stored on wooden shelves in a palace archive room and were baked when the palace burned.

In plain terms. Ebla was a powerful Syrian kingdom around 2400 BC. When its palace was burned, its whole filing room of clay tablets was baked hard and preserved: accounts, letters, a treaty, and the world's first two-language dictionary.

The Ebla–Bible controversy

When the archive was first announced (1975–1976), the epigrapher Giovanni Pettinato reported readings that seemed to bear on Genesis. They included the names of the five Cities of the Plain (Gen 14), including Sodom and Gomorrah, in the same order; a divine element "Ya" in personal names, compared with YHWH; and names such as Ebrium, compared with Eber (Gen 10:21–25). These claims attracted wide publicity. Later study, especially by Alfonso Archi and the Italian team, showed that the cities of the plain do not appear, that "-ya" in names is a hypocoristic ending rather than a divine name, and that the king Ibrium has no connection with Eber. Pettinato himself withdrew several readings.

The lasting significance of Ebla for biblical studies is more general. It reveals an early West-Semitic-speaking world in Syria with a tradition of treaties, prophetic and cultic personnel, and personal-name patterns that anticipate later Amorite and Israelite onomastics.

Further reading

- Archi, Alfonso. *Ebla and Its Archives: Texts, History, and Society*. Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Records 7. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015.
- Matthiae, Paolo. *Ebla: An Empire Rediscovered*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1980.
- Pettinato, Giovanni. *The Archives of Ebla: An Empire Inscribed in Clay*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1981.
- Biggs, Robert D. "The Ebla Tablets: An Interim Perspective." *Biblical Archaeologist* 43 (1980): 76–87.

28. Tablet from Mari



A tablet of Zimri-Lim, king of Mari, concerning the building of an ice-house at Terqa (Louvre AO 20161), c. 1780 BC.
Image: Unknown photographer. Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Palace archive of c. 20,000 clay tablets (letters, administrative and legal texts, ritual and prophetic texts)
Museum	Louvre, Paris; National Museum of Deir ez-Zor and Damascus; others
Date	c. 1810–1761 BC (reigns of Yasmaḫ-Addu and Zimri-Lim)
Provenance	Tell Hariri (ancient Mari), on the Middle Euphrates, Syria; excavated by André Parrot from 1933
Language / script	Akkadian (Old Babylonian with Amorite influence), cuneiform
Principal editions	*Archives Royales de Mari* (ARM, 1950–); Durand, *Archives épistolaires de Mari* (ARM 26/1, 1988); Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (2nd ed., 2019)

What it is

Technical summary. The archive of Zimri-Lim's palace is the richest documentation of the Amorite world of the early second millennium BC. It contains the correspondence of the king with his officials, provincial governors, vassals and fellow kings, including Hammurabi of Babylon, who destroyed Mari in 1761 BC. It describes tribal pastoral groups such as the Yaminites ("sons of the right hand/south") and Sim'alites, and their encampments and migrations. The archive also contains some fifty letters reporting oracles from prophets, the largest body of prophetic texts from the ancient Near East outside the Bible. These include the *āpilum* ("answerer"), the *muḫḫûm* ("ecstatic") and lay men and women who received dreams.

In plain terms. Mari's palace correspondence shows how an Amorite king ran his kingdom: tribes moving with their flocks, treaties sealed by killing a donkey, and prophets who brought the king messages from the gods and expected them passed on.

A representative document (summary)

The prophetic letters are known chiefly from modern copyrighted translations, so one is summarized here. In a typical letter (ARM 26 199), the official Sammetar reports to Zimri-Lim that an ecstatic of the god Dagan came to him with a message about the king's dealings with Ešnunna: the god warned against a treaty and promised to deliver the enemy into the king's hand. In letters of this kind, officials often send a lock of the prophet's hair and the hem of his garment with the report, so that the king's diviners can test whether the message is genuine.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Prophecy.** The Mari letters show that intermediaries delivered unsolicited divine messages to kings, often warnings or promises about war, and that their words were tested. The biblical parallels include Nathan and Gad at David's court, Elijah and Micaiah before Ahab, and the test of a prophet in Deut 18:21–22. The differences are as important: Mari oracles concern the king's interests and the god's temple, while the classical prophets of Israel indict king and people for injustice.
- **Covenant ritual.** At Mari, alliances were sealed by "killing a donkey foal" (*ḫayāram qaṭālum*). Compare the covenant "cut" with slaughtered animals in Gen 15:9–18 and Jer 34:18–20.
- **Tribal life.** The Yaminites (*DUMU.MEŠ-yamina*) and their pastoral migrations offer comparative data for patriarchal and tribal Israel. Their name is the linguistic equivalent of "Benjamin." Scholars agree there is no direct historical link.

Further reading

- Nissinen, Martti. *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*. 2nd ed. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2019.
- Fleming, Daniel E. *Democracy's Ancient Ancestors: Mari and Early Collective Governance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Malamat, Abraham. *Mari and the Bible*. Leiden: Brill, 1998.

29. The Nuzi Tablets



A Nuzi tablet recording a lawsuit over a field and the dimtu tower that stood on it.
Image: Daderot. Licence: CC0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Family and palace archives of several thousand tablets (c. 5,000 or more)
Museum	Semitic Museum, Harvard University; Oriental Institute (ISAC), Chicago; Iraq Museum, Baghdad
Date	c. 1450–1350 BC (Kingdom of Mittani)
Provenance	Yorgan Tepe (ancient Nuzi), near Kirkuk, Iraq; excavated 1925–1931 by the American Schools of Oriental Research, Harvard and the Iraq Museum (E. Chiera, R. H. Pfeiffer, R. F. S. Starr)
Language / script	Akkadian (Nuzi dialect, with Hurrian vocabulary), cuneiform
Principal editions	*Harvard Semitic Series* and *Excavations at Nuzi* volumes; Gadd, "Tablets from Kirkuk" (1926); *Studies on the Civilization and Culture of Nuzi and the Hurrians* (SCCNH, 1981–)

What it is

Technical summary. The Nuzi tablets document the private and public life of a provincial Hurrian town over about five generations. The best-known archive is that of the family of Teḫip-tilla. The tablets record unusual legal devices. In "sale-adoption" (*ṭuppi mārūti*), land was transferred by adopting the buyer as a son. In "sistership" adoption, a woman was adopted as a sister. There are marriage contracts in which a childless wife must supply a slave-woman to her husband, and wills in which possession of the household gods (*ilānū*) accompanies the principal inheritance.

In plain terms. Nuzi was an ordinary town whose families kept their contracts, wills, marriage agreements and court records. Some of these customs seemed to scholars to match stories in Genesis very closely.

The patriarchal-customs debate

From the 1930s to the 1960s, scholars such as C. H. Gordon and E. A. Speiser argued that Nuzi customs explained puzzling episodes in Genesis. Rachel's theft of Laban's household gods (Gen 31:19, 30–35) was explained as a claim to inheritance. The wife–sister episodes (Gen 12; 20; 26) were explained by Hurrian "sistership" status. Sarah's giving of Hagar (Gen 16:1–4) was compared with marriage contracts requiring a barren wife to provide a slave-woman. Eliezer as Abraham's heir (Gen 15:2–3) was linked to adoption of a servant. The parallels were taken as evidence that the patriarchal narratives preserve authentic second-millennium custom.

Critical reassessments by T. L. Thompson (*The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives*, 1974), J. Van Seters (*Abraham in History and Tradition*, 1975) and M. J. Selman (1980) showed that many of the alleged parallels rested on misreadings. Sistership adoption, for example, has nothing to do with wife–sister deception. Other parallels proved to be widespread in time and place rather than distinctive of Nuzi. A few close parallels remain widely accepted, notably the provision of a slave-wife by a childless wife and the legal weight of household gods. Their value for dating the patriarchs is now generally regarded as limited.

Further reading

- Morrison, M. A., and D. I. Owen, eds. *Studies on the Civilization and Culture of Nuzi and the Hurrians*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1981–.
- Selman, Martin J. "Comparative Customs and the Patriarchal Age." In *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*, ed. A. R. Millard and D. J. Wiseman, 93–138. Leicester: InterVarsity, 1980.
- Thompson, Thomas L. *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives*. BZAW 133. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1974.
- Speiser, E. A. *Genesis*. Anchor Bible 1. Garden City: Doubleday, 1964.

30. The Amarna Letters



A letter from Abdi-Ḫeba, ruler of Jerusalem, to the Egyptian king, from the Amarna archive (Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin).

Image: Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin FRCP(Glasg). Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Archive of 382 clay tablets (about 350 letters, plus school texts and myths)
Museum	Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin; British Museum; Egyptian Museum, Cairo; Louvre; others
Date	c. 1360–1332 BC (reigns of Amenhotep III, Akhenaten and briefly Tutankhamun)
Provenance	Tell el-Amarna (ancient Akhetaten), Egypt; found by local villagers in 1887
Language / script	Akkadian (the diplomatic lingua franca), often with Canaanite grammar and glosses; cuneiform
Principal editions	Knudtzon, *Die El-Amarna-Tafeln* (1915); Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (1992); Rainey, *The El-Amarna Correspondence* (2015)

What it is

Technical summary. The Amarna tablets are the foreign-office correspondence of the pharaohs. One group consists of letters between Egypt and the great powers (Babylon, Assyria, Mittani, Ḫatti, Alašiya), the "brother" kings. The larger group consists of letters from Egypt's vassal rulers in Canaan and Syria. These include Rib-Hadda of Byblos, Lab'ayu of Shechem, the kings of Gezer, Lachish, Ashkelon and Hazor, and six letters (EA 285–290) from Abdi-Ḫeba of Jerusalem. The vassals complain of one another and of the *ʿapiru* (Akkadian *ḫabiru*), uprooted groups outside the social order who served as mercenaries or raiders.

In plain terms. These are the pharaoh's letters from his "mayors" in Canaan about 1350 BC. The king of Jerusalem writes again and again that the land is being lost to raiders and begs Egypt to send troops.

The text: a letter of Abdi-Ḫeba of Jerusalem (EA 286, complete as preserved)

Translation of G. A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (1916), pp. 345–346, public domain. Barton spells the name "Ebed-Hepa."

> To the king, my lord, speak, saying, Ebed-Hepa, thy servant — at the feet of my lord, the king, seven times and seven times I prostrate myself. What have I done to the king, my lord? They slander and misrepresent me before the king, my lord, [saying]: Ebed-Hepa is disloyal to the king, his lord. Behold I — neither my father nor my mother set me in this place; the arm of the mighty king caused me to enter into the house of my father. Why should I commit rebellion against the king, my lord? As long as the king, my lord, lives I will say unto the governor of the king, my lord: "Why dost thou love the Habiri and hate the prefects?" But thus he misrepresents me before the king, my lord. Now I say, "Lost are the lands of the king, my lord." So he misrepresents me to the king, my lord. But let the king, my lord, know (that) after the king, my lord, set guards, Ienhamu took them all … Egypt of the king, my lord; [there are no] guards there. Then may the king care for his land! May the king care for his land! Separated are all the lands from the king. Ilimilku has destroyed all the country of the king; so may the king, my lord, care for his land! I say: "I will enter the presence of the king, my lord, and I will behold the eye of the king, my lord," but the enemy is more mighty than I, and I am not able to enter into the presence of the king, my lord. So may it seem right to the king … may he send guards, and I will enter in and will behold the eyes of the king, my lord! And so long as the king, my lord, lives, so long as the governors are withdrawn, I will say: "Perished are the lands of the king." Thou dost not hearken to me! All the prefects have perished; there is left no prefect to the king, my lord! May the king turn his face toward mercenaries, so that there may come forth mercenaries of the king, my lord. There are no lands left to the king, my lord. The Habiri plunder all the countries of the king. If there are mercenaries in this year, then there will be left countries of the king, my lord. If there are no mercenaries, the countries of the king will be lost.
>
> Unto the scribe of the king, my lord, saying: "Ebed-Hepa, thy servant. Take beautiful words to the king, my lord! Lost are all the lands of the king, my lord."

Notes on modern readings

- **Abdi-Ḫeba**, not Ebed-Hepa, is the standard modern reading. The name means "servant of Ḫebat," a Hurrian goddess.
- Barton's **"prefects"** are the local rulers (*ḫazannu*, "mayors"). His **"governor"** is the Egyptian commissioner (*rābiṣu*). His **"mercenaries"** are the Egyptian archer troops (*ṣābē piṭāti*).
- **"Neither my father nor my mother set me in this place"** is a formula of loyalty: Abdi-Ḫeba holds his throne by the pharaoh's appointment, not by inheritance.

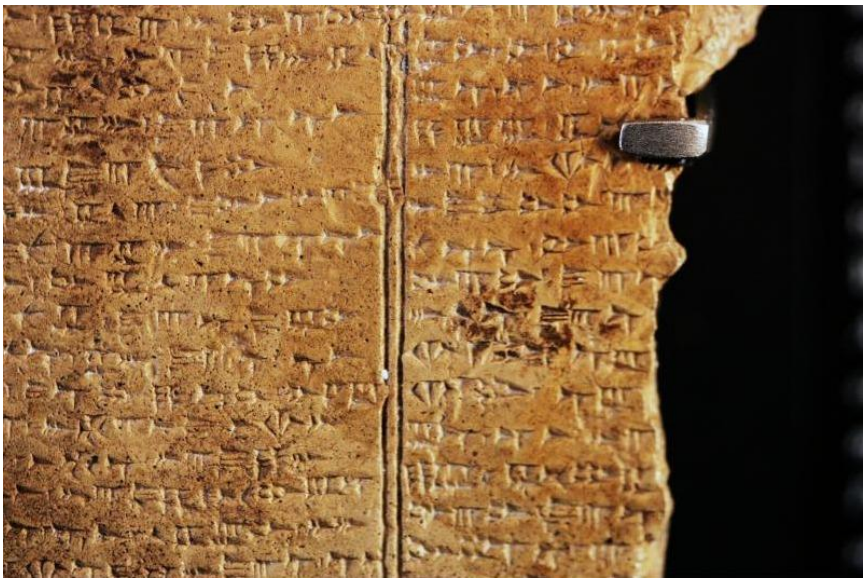
Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Jerusalem before David.** The letters prove that Jerusalem (*Urusalim*) was a fortified city-state ruled by a king in the 14th century BC, long before David's capture of the Jebusite city (2 Sam 5:6–9).
- **ʿApiru and Hebrews.** The *ḫabiru/ʿapiru* have been compared with the "Hebrews" (*ʿibrîm*) since the 1880s. Most scholars now regard *ʿapiru* as a social designation for displaced people found across the Near East from the 19th to the 12th century BC, not an ethnic name. Some biblical uses of "Hebrew" (e.g., 1 Sam 13:3, 19; 14:21) may preserve a similar social sense.
- **The world of Judges.** The fragmented city-states, their feuds, and Egyptian overlordship give the background against which Israel emerged in Canaan.

Further reading

- Moran, William L. *The Amarna Letters*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.
- Rainey, Anson F. *The El-Amarna Correspondence*. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2015.
- Na'aman, Nadav. "The Contribution of the Amarna Letters to the Debate on Jerusalem's Political Position in the Tenth Century B.C.E." *BASOR* 304 (1996): 17–27.

31. The Ugaritic Tablets



Detail of a Ugaritic tablet of the Baal Cycle (the death of Baal), alphabetic cuneiform; Louvre AO 16641 + AO 16642.
Image: Rama. Licence: CC BY-SA 2.0 FR. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Several thousand tablets in Ugaritic, Akkadian, Hurrian, Hittite and other languages, including the Baal Cycle, Aqhat and Kirta epics
Museum	National Museum of Damascus and Aleppo; Louvre, Paris
Date	c. 1400–1185 BC (most texts 13th century BC; the city was destroyed c. 1185 BC)
Provenance	Ras Shamra (ancient Ugarit) and Ras Ibn Hani, Syria; discovered 1928, excavated by Claude F.-A. Schaeffer from 1929
Language / script	Ugaritic (Northwest Semitic), in a 30-sign alphabetic cuneiform script; also Akkadian syllabic cuneiform
Principal editions	Dietrich, Loretz & Sanmartín, *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit* (KTU³, 2013); Smith & Pitard, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle* (1994, 2009)

What it is

Technical summary. The Ugaritic texts are the most important discovery for the study of Canaanite religion and of biblical Hebrew poetry. The Baal Cycle (KTU 1.1–1.6) narrates the storm-god Baal's battle with Yamm (Sea), the building of his palace, and his death at the hands of Mot (Death) and return to life. The epics of Kirta and Aqhat deal with kingship, heirs and justice for the widow and orphan. The pantheon includes El, the aged father of the gods, Athirat (Asherah), Baal, Anat and Astarte, who appear in the Hebrew Bible as names or as subjects of polemic.

In plain terms. Ugarit's scribes wrote down the myths of the Canaanite gods that the Bible's prophets argued against. They wrote them in a language very close to Hebrew and in a poetic style that sounds remarkably like the Psalms.

Key excerpt: the defeat of Litan (KTU 1.5 i 1–3)

Translation by the author of this study from the Ugaritic text, with the biblical parallel set beside it.

> When you struck Līt*ā*nu, the fleeing serpent,
> finished off the twisting serpent,
> the tyrant with seven heads …

Compare Isa 27:1, where the LORD will punish Leviathan, called in Hebrew "the fleeing serpent" and "the twisting serpent" (literal glosses). The Hebrew phrases (*nāḥāš bāriaḥ*, *nāḥāš ʿăqallātôn*) correspond word for word to the Ugaritic (*bṯn brḥ*, *bṯn ʿqltn*).

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Language and poetry.** Ugaritic has transformed the understanding of Hebrew vocabulary, grammar and poetic parallelism. M. Dahood's Anchor Bible *Psalms* (1966–1970) applied it maximally; later scholarship is more cautious.
- **Divine titles.** Baal is called *rkb ʿrpt*, "rider of the clouds," the title given to the LORD in Ps 68:4 (*rōḵēḇ bāʿărāḇôt*; cf. Deut 33:26; Ps 104:3; Isa 19:1). El is "father of years" and presides over a divine council of "the sons of El" (compare Ps 82:1, 6; Deut 32:8 in 4QDeut^{j} and the LXX).
- **Sea and dragon.** Baal's victory over Yamm and the seven-headed serpent stands behind biblical images of the LORD subduing the sea and its monsters (Ps 74:13–14; 89:9–10; Job 26:12–13). Ps 74:14 speaks of the "heads" of Leviathan.
- **Psalm 29** has often been described, since H. L. Ginsberg (1935), as an adapted Canaanite hymn to the storm-god. The "voice" of the LORD over the waters echoes Baal's thunder.

Further reading

- Smith, Mark S. *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.
- Smith, Mark S., and Wayne T. Pitard. *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle*. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994, 2009.
- Day, John. *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*. JSOTSup 265. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.
- Pardee, Dennis. *Ritual and Cult at Ugarit*. Atlanta: SBL, 2002.

32. The Murašû Archive



An Achaemenid-period Babylonian business tablet of the same type as the Murašû documents (Metropolitan Museum of Art; not from the Murašû archive itself).

Image: The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Licence: CC0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Business archive of c. 730 clay tablets of a Nippur family firm
Museum	Penn Museum, Philadelphia; Istanbul Archaeology Museums
Date	454–404 BC (reigns of Artaxerxes I and Darius II)
Provenance	Nippur, Iraq; excavated by the University of Pennsylvania expedition (J. H. Haynes) in 1893
Language / script	Akkadian (Late Babylonian), cuneiform, with Aramaic dockets
Principal editions	Hilprecht & Clay, *Business Documents of Murashû Sons of Nippur* (BE 9, 1898; BE 10, 1904); Stolper, *Entrepreneurs and Empire* (1985)

What it is

Technical summary. The archive documents three generations of the Murašû family, agents who managed land held under the Persian *ḫaṭru* system. In that system crown land was allotted to soldiers and dependants in return for military service and taxes. The Murašûs leased and sub-leased these allotments, advanced silver and seed, collected rents and taxes, and handled irrigation rights. The tablets name more than two thousand individuals, of many ethnic backgrounds.

In plain terms. It is the filing cabinet of a family business in Persian-era Babylonia that rented out farmland and collected taxes. Among its clients were Jews descended from the exiles.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **The Judean diaspora.** Several dozen individuals in the archive bear Yahwistic names, such as Ya-a-ḫu-ú-na-ta-nu (Jonathan), Ḫa-na-ni-ia-a-ma (Hananiah) and Ga-da-lia-a-ma (Gedaliah) (Coogan 1976). They appear as contracting parties, witnesses and officials on equal terms with Babylonians. The archive shows that by the 5th century many Judeans in Babylonia were settled, economically integrated landholders, which helps explain why many did not return under Cyrus (Ezra 1–2; Jer 29:4–7).
- **The canal Chebar.** The *nār Kabari*, "Kabaru canal," near Nippur appears in the archive. It is generally identified with the river Chebar beside which Ezekiel and the exiles lived (Ezek 1:1, 3; 3:15).
- The archive has since been complemented by the **Al-Yāḫūdu tablets** ("Judah-town"), published in 2014, which document a village of Judean exiles from 572 to 477 BC.

Further reading

- Stolper, Matthew W. *Entrepreneurs and Empire: The Murašû Archive, the Murašû Firm, and Persian Rule in Babylonia*. Leiden: NINO, 1985.
- Coogan, Michael D. *West Semitic Personal Names in the Murašû Documents*. HSM 7. Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976.
- Pearce, Laurie E., and Cornelia Wunsch. *Documents of Judean Exiles and West Semites in Babylonia in the Collection of David Sofer*. CUSAS 28. Bethesda: CDL Press, 2014.
- Hilprecht, H. V., and A. T. Clay. *Business Documents of Murashû Sons of Nippur*. Philadelphia, 1898. Internet Archive

33. The Elephantine Temple Petition



The petition of Yedaniah and the priests of Elephantine to Bagavahya, governor of Judah, 407 BC (Aramaic papyrus, Berlin).

Image: Photographer unknown. Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Papyrus letter, two drafts (TAD A4.7 and A4.8 = Cowley nos. 30 and 31)
Museum	Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Berlin (A4.7 is P. 13495)
Date	20 Marḥešwan, year 17 of Darius II (late November 407 BC)
Provenance	Elephantine Island (ancient Yeb), Aswan, Egypt; excavated by the German expedition of O. Rubensohn, 1906–1908
Language / script	Imperial Aramaic, Aramaic square script
Principal editions	Sachau (1907, 1911); Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (1923), no. 30; Porten & Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt* (TAD), vol. 1 (1986), A4.7

What it is

Technical summary. Elephantine was the home of a Jewish military colony in the service of Persia. It had its own temple of YHW (*Yahô*), founded before Cambyses' conquest of Egypt (525 BC). In 410 BC, during the absence of the satrap Arshama, priests of the ram-god Khnum, with the local commander Vidranga, had the temple destroyed. Three years later the community's leaders petitioned the Persian governor of Judah, Bagavahya (Bigvai), for authorization to rebuild. A memorandum from Bagavahya and Delaiah, son of Sanballat (Cowley 32), approved the rebuilding with meal-offerings and incense, pointedly omitting animal sacrifice.

In plain terms. A Jewish garrison in southern Egypt had its own temple to the God of Israel. When local Egyptian priests had it destroyed, the community wrote to the Persian governor in Jerusalem asking permission to rebuild. This is their letter.

The text (complete)

Translation of A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923), no. 30, pp. 113–114, public domain. Cowley's line numbers are given in parentheses.

> (1) To our lord Bigvai, governor of Judaea, your servants Yedoniah and his colleagues, the priests who are in Yeb the fortress. The health (2) of your lordship may the God of Heaven seek after exceedingly at all times, and give you favour before Darius the king (3) and the princes of the palace more than now a thousand times, and may he grant you long life, and may you be happy and prosperous at all times.
>
> (4) Now your servant Yedoniah and his colleagues depose as follows: In the month of Tammuz in the 14th year of Darius the king, when Arsames (5) departed and went to the king, the priests of the god Khnub, who is in the fortress of Yeb, (were) in league with Waidrang who was governor here, (6) saying: The temple of Ya'u the God, which is in the fortress of Yeb let them remove from there. Then that Waidrang, (7) the reprobate, sent a letter to his son Nephayan who was commander of the garrison in the fortress of Syene saying: The temple which is in Yeb (8) the fortress let them destroy. Then Nephayan led out the Egyptians with the other forces. They came to the fortress of Yeb with their weapons, (9) they entered that temple, they destroyed it to the ground, and the pillars of stone which were there they broke. Also it happened, 5 gate-ways (10) of stone, built with hewn blocks of stone, which were in that temple they destroyed, and their doors they lifted off (?), and the hinges (11) of those doors were bronze, and the roof of cedar wood, all of it with the rest of the furniture and other things which were there, (12) all of it they burnt with fire, and the basons of gold and silver and everything that was in that temple, all of it, they took (13) and made their own.
>
> Already in the days of the kings of Egypt our fathers had built that temple in the fortress of Yeb, and when Cambyses came into Egypt (14) he found that temple built, and the temples of the gods of Egypt all of them they overthrew, but no one did any harm to that temple. (15) When this was done, we with our wives and our children put on sack-cloth and fasted and prayed to Ya'u the Lord of Heaven, (16) who let us see (our desire) upon that Waidrang. The dogs tore off the anklet from his legs, and all the riches he had gained were destroyed, and all the men (17) who had sought to do evil to that temple, all of them, were killed and we saw (our desire) upon them.
>
> Also before this, at the time when this evil (18) was done to us, we sent a letter to your lordship and to Johanan the high priest and his colleagues the priests who are in Jerusalem, and to Ostanes the brother (19) of 'Anani, and the nobles of the Jews. They have not sent any letter to us. Also since the month of Tammuz in the 14th year of Darius the king (20) till this day we wear sack-cloth and fast. Our wives are made widow-like, we do not anoint ourselves with oil (21) and we drink no wine. Also from that (time) till (the present) day in the 17th year of Darius the king, neither meal-offering, incense, nor sacrifice (22) do they offer in that temple.
>
> Now your servants Yedoniah and his colleagues and the Jews, all of them inhabitants of Yeb, say as follows: (23) If it seem good to your lordship, take thought for that temple to build (it), since they do not allow us to build it. Look upon your (24) well-wishers and friends who are here in Egypt, (and) let a letter be sent from you to them concerning the temple of the God Ya'u (25) to build it in the fortress of Yeb as it was built before, and they shall offer the meal-offering and incense and sacrifice (26) on the altar of the God Ya'u on your behalf, and we will pray for you at all times, we, our wives, our children, and the Jews, (27) all who are here, if they do so that that temple be re-built, and it shall be a merit to you before Ya'u the God of (28) Heaven more than a man who offers to him sacrifice and burnt-offerings worth as much as the sum of a thousand talents. As to gold, about this (29) we have sent (and) given instructions. Also the whole matter we have set forth in a letter in our name to Delaiah and Shelemiah the sons of Sanballat governor of Samaria. (30) Also of

all this which was done to us Arsames knew nothing. On the 20th of Marheshwan the 17th year of Darius the king.

Notes on modern readings

- **Names.** Modern editions (Porten & Yardeni) give **Bagavahya** (Cowley's Bigvai), **Yedaniah** (Yedoniah), **Vidranga** (Waidrang), **Naphaina** (Nephayan), **Arshama** (Arsames) and **YHW** (Ya'u). The god of Elephantine is **Khnum** (Cowley's Khnub).
- **Line 16.** "The dogs tore off the anklet from his legs" is understood as a description of Vidranga's humiliation or death, though the precise sense is debated.
- **Dates.** Tammuz, year 14 of Darius II is July 410 BC. 20 Marḥešwan, year 17 is 25 November 407 BC.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Persons named in Nehemiah.** Johanan the high priest (Neh 12:22–23) and Sanballat, governor of Samaria (Neh 2:10, 19; 4:1–2), are mentioned. The letter therefore fixes Nehemiah's activity under Artaxerxes I, a generation before 407 BC.
- **Centralization of worship.** A Jewish temple with animal sacrifice outside Jerusalem stands in tension with Deuteronomy 12. The Jerusalem priests' silence, and the approval only of meal-offerings and incense in the reply (Cowley 32), may reflect that tension.
- **Religion of the colony.** Other Elephantine papyri show the community swearing by Anat-Yahu and Ḥerem-Bethel alongside YHW. They are invaluable evidence for Judaism outside Judah. The so-called Passover Letter (Cowley 21, 419 BC) shows Persian authority regulating the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Further reading

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- Porten, Bezalel. *Archives from Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968.
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- Rohrmoser, Angela. *Götter, Tempel und Kult der Judäo-Aramäer von Elephantine*. AOAT 396. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014.

34. The Nabû-šarrussu-ukīn Tablet (“Nebo-Sarsekim”)



Administrative tablet recording a gold delivery by Nabû-šarrussu-ukīn, chief eunuch of Nebuchadnezzar II (British Museum BM 114789).

Image: Zunkir. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Small clay administrative tablet (receipt)
Museum	British Museum, BM 114789
Date	Year 10 of Nebuchadnezzar II (595 BC)
Provenance	Probably Sippar (British Museum Sippar collection)
Language / script	Akkadian (Neo-Babylonian), cuneiform
Principal editions	Jursa, “Nabû-šarrūssu-ukīn, *rab ša-rēši*, und ‘Nebusarsekim’ (Jer. 39:3),” *NABU* 2008/5

What it is

Technical summary. The tablet is a temple receipt for gold sent to the Esagil temple by Nabû-šarrussu-ukīn, who held the office of *rab ša-rēši*, “chief eunuch,” at Nebuchadnezzar’s court. In 2007 Michael Jursa identified the name and title with “Nebo-sarsekim the Rab-saris” among the Babylonian officers who sat in the Middle Gate of Jerusalem after its capture in 586 BC (Jer 39:3).

In plain terms. A routine receipt from a Babylonian temple names a court official who appears in the book of Jeremiah: one of the Babylonian officers present when Jerusalem fell.

The text (complete)

Translation by the author of this study, following Jursa’s edition.

> (Regarding) 1½ minas of gold, the property of Nabû-šarrussu-ukīn, the chief eunuch, which he sent by the hand of Arad-Bānītu the eunuch to Esagil: Arad-Bānītu has delivered it to Esagil. In the

presence of Bēl-usāti, son of Alpāya, the royal bodyguard, (and) Nādin, son of Marduk-zēru-ibni. Month of Šabāṭu, day 18, year 10 of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Jeremiah 39:3.** The Hebrew lists Nergal-sharezer, Samgar-nebu, Sarsechim the Rab-saris, Nergal-sharezer the Rab-mag, and others. If the words are divided as "Samgar, Nebo-sarsekim the Rab-saris," the name and title match the tablet exactly (*Nabû-šarrussu-ukīn rab ša-rēši*). The tablet dates eleven years before the fall of Jerusalem, so the same man could easily have been in office in 586 BC.
- **Text-critical note.** The MT divides the words as *smgr-nbw śr-skym rb-srys* ("Samgar-nebo, Sarsechim the Rab-saris"). The LXX (Jer 46:3 in LXX numbering) transmits the names in garbled and divergent forms. The tablet supports reading *nbw-śr-skym* as a single name, a reading already proposed on philological grounds before 2007.

Further reading

- Jursa, Michael. "Nabû-šarrūssu-ukīn, rab ša-rēši, und 'Nebusarsekim' (Jer. 39:3)." *Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires* 2008/5.
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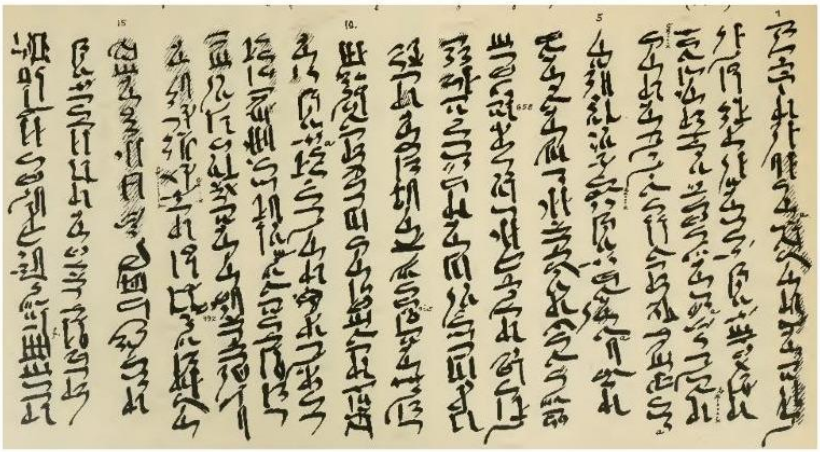
Part Four: Egyptian Texts & Monuments



This part covers the nine Egyptian items in the Ancient Stones collection: the Story of Sinuhe, Hatshepsut's barque shrine at Karnak, the Dream Stele of Thutmose IV, the Amarna stela of Akhenaten and Nefertiti (with the Great Hymn to the Aten), the Merneptah Stele, the Tale of Two Brothers, the Instruction of Amenemope, the Report of Wenamun and Shoshenq I's campaign relief. Four further entries cover the Beni Hasan procession of Asiatics, the Berlin Pedestal Relief, the "land of the Shasu of Yhw" in the Soleb lists, and Ramesses III's Sea Peoples reliefs at Medinet Habu. They span the Middle Kingdom to the Third Intermediate Period (c. 1900–925 BC). They include the earliest mention of Israel outside the Bible, the closest literary parallel to a biblical book (Proverbs), and the Egyptian record of the campaign of the pharaoh the Bible calls Shishak.

About the translations. Translations quoted at length come from editions in the public domain in the United States: W. M. Flinders Petrie, *Egyptian Tales* (1895); J. H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt* (1906–07) and *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt* (1912), as reprinted by Barton (1916); and E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Teaching of Amen-em-apt* (1924). These older translations are followed by notes giving the modern reading. Long literary works are represented by key excerpts and a summary, with links to complete modern translations.

35. The Story of Sinuhe



The opening of Papyrus Berlin P 3022, the principal manuscript of the Story of Sinuhe, in Georg Möller's facsimile of the hieratic.

Image: Facsimile by Georg Möller (1876–1921). Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Literary tale preserved on papyri and ostraca; c. 300 lines in the main manuscripts
Museum	Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin, P 3022 ("B") and P 10499 ("R," from the Ramesseum); many ostraca, including Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 1945.40
Date	Composed in the 12th Dynasty (c. 1900 BC); manuscripts c. 1800–1100 BC
Provenance	Thebes (Ramesseum papyrus and Deir el-Medina ostraca)
Language / script	Middle Egyptian, hieratic
Principal editions	Blackman, *Middle-Egyptian Stories* (1932); Koch, *Die Erzählung des Sinuhe* (1990); Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems* (1997)

What it is

Technical summary. Sinuhe is the masterpiece of Middle Egyptian literature, written as a funerary autobiography. On hearing of the assassination of Amenemhat I (c. 1962 BC), the courtier Sinuhe flees in panic across the Sinai to Syria-Palestine ("Upper Retjenu"). There the ruler Amunenshi gives him his eldest daughter and a fertile land called Yaa. Sinuhe becomes a tribal chieftain, defeats a champion of Retjenu in single combat, and grows old abroad. At last King Senusret I invites him home. He returns, is pardoned and receives a tomb, the ultimate Egyptian good. The tale explores loyalty, exile and the meaning of Egyptian identity.

In plain terms. An Egyptian official panics, runs away to Canaan, marries a chief's daughter, prospers, beats a giant in a duel, and finally comes home as an old man to be forgiven and buried in Egypt.

Key excerpt: the land of Yaa

Translation of W. M. Flinders Petrie, ed., *Egyptian Tales, Translated from the Papyri*, First Series (London: Methuen, 1895), public domain. Petrie calls the hero "Sanehat."

> And he replied to me, "Egypt is indeed happy and well settled; behold thou art far from it, but whilst thou art with me I will do good unto thee." And he placed me before his children, he married his eldest daughter to me, and gave me the choice of all his land, even among the best of that which he had on the border of the next land. It is a goodly land, Iaa is its name. There are figs and grapes; there is wine commoner than water; abundant is the honey, many are its olives; and all fruits are upon its trees; there is barley and wheat, and cattle of kinds without end. This was truly a great thing that he granted me, when the prince came to invest me, and establish me as prince of a tribe in the best of his land. I had my continual portion of bread and of wine each day, of cooked meat, of roasted fowl, as well as the wild game which I took, or which was brought to me, besides what my dogs captured. They made me much butter, and prepared milk of all kinds.

Notes on modern readings

- **Place names.** Petrie's "land of Adim," to which Sinuhe first fled, is now read **Qedem** ("the East"). Its ruler is **Amunenshi** (Petrie's "Ammuanshi"), and the land he gives Sinuhe is **Yaa**.
- **The champion.** The "mighty one of Retjenu" whom Sinuhe defeats with arrows and his own axe (B 109–147) has long been compared with Goliath (1 Sam 17). Petrie noted the parallel in 1895.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **The land of Canaan.** Yaa, with its figs, grapes, abundant wine and honey, olives, barley, wheat and cattle, closely recalls the biblical descriptions of the promised land (Num 13:23–27; Deut 8:7–9). Both use the conventional language of a fertile hill-country.
- **The "sons of the east."** Qedem is the biblical *qedem*, "the east," and its people the *bĕnê qedem* (Gen 29:1; Judg 6:3; 1 Kgs 4:30).
- **Exile and return.** The Egyptian who rises in a foreign land and longs to be buried at home inverts the Joseph story (Gen 37–50), in which a Hebrew rises in Egypt and asks to be buried in Canaan (Gen 50:24–25).
- **Single combat.** The duel with a champion of Retjenu parallels David and Goliath (1 Sam 17), including the boast, the exchange of weapons and the victor's triumph over the fallen enemy.

Further reading

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36. Hatshepsut's Barque Shrine at Karnak (the "Red Chapel")



Hatshepsut's Red Chapel (Chapelle Rouge), reassembled in the Open Air Museum at Karnak.
Image: Jon Bodsworth, edited by 83d40m. Licence: CC BY 3.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Barque sanctuary of red quartzite and black granite blocks, carved in relief on all faces
Museum	Karnak Open Air Museum, Luxor (reassembled 1997–2000 from blocks recovered from the Third Pylon)
Date	Reign of Hatshepsut, c. 1479–1458 BC
Provenance	Temple of Amun-Re, Karnak (Thebes)
Language / script	Middle Egyptian, hieroglyphic
Principal editions	Lacau & Chevrier, *Une chapelle d'Hatshepsout à Karnak* (1977–79); Burgos & Larché, *La chapelle Rouge* (2006–08)

What it is

Technical summary. The Red Chapel was built by Hatshepsut as the central "station" of Amun's portable barque, the boat-shaped shrine in which the god's cult image travelled in procession. Its reliefs show the barque carried on poles by priests during the festivals of Opet and the Valley. They also show offerings, purifications and the oracle by which Amun proclaimed Hatshepsut king. After her death the shrine was dismantled under Thutmose III and its blocks reused as fill in the Third Pylon of Amenhotep III, which preserved them.

In plain terms. This chapel housed the god Amun's sacred boat. On festival days priests carried the boat, with the god's image hidden inside, out of the temple on poles across their shoulders. The chapel's carvings show these processions.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **The ark and its poles.** The Egyptian barque was a portable chest-shrine carried on poles by priests, with winged figures and a veiled image. It is the closest visual parallel to the ark of the covenant, which was carried on poles by Levites and overshadowed by cherubim (Exod 25:10–22; Num 4:5–15; Josh 3:3–17; 2 Sam 6:2–17). The differences are equally significant. The ark contained the covenant tablets rather than an image, and it was said to be the footstool of the invisible God.
- **Oracular procession.** Egyptian barque oracles, in which the god "nodded" or moved while being carried, invite comparison with the role of the ark in Israel's wars and processions (Num 10:33–36; 1 Sam 4:3–11).

Further reading

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- Roehrig, Catharine H., ed. *Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005.

37. The Dream Stele of Thutmose IV



The Dream Stele of Thutmose IV standing between the forepaws of the Great Sphinx at Giza.
Image: Kurohito. Licence: CC BY-SA 3.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Red granite stele, 3.6 m high, reused from a door lintel
Museum	In situ, between the paws of the Great Sphinx, Giza
Date	Year 1 of Thutmose IV (c. 1401 BC)
Provenance	Giza plateau; excavated by G. B. Caviglia in 1818
Language / script	Middle Egyptian, hieroglyphic (lower part largely lost)
Principal editions	Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt* II §§810–815 (1906); Zivie, *Giza au deuxième millénaire* (1976)

What it is

Technical summary. The stele records how the young prince Thutmose, while hunting near Giza, fell asleep at noon in the shadow of the Sphinx. The god Harmakhis-Khepri-Re-Atum appeared to him in a dream and promised him the kingship if he would clear the sand that had engulfed the statue. The text legitimates Thutmose IV's accession, possibly irregular since he may not have been the designated heir, as the result of a direct divine promise. Its lower half is lost.

In plain terms. A young prince takes a nap by the Sphinx. In a dream the Sphinx-god promises to make him pharaoh if he digs the statue out of the sand. He did become king.

The text (complete as preserved from §813)

Translation of J. H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, vol. II (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906), §§813–815, public domain.

When his majesty was a stripling like Horus, the youth in Khemmis, his beauty was like the protector of his father, he seemed like the god himself. The army rejoiced because of love for him, the king's-children and all the nobles. Then his strength overflowed him, and he repeated the circuit of his might like the son of Nut!

Behold, he did a thing that gave him pleasure upon the highlands of the Memphite nome, upon its southern and northern road, shooting at a target with copper bolts, hunting lions and wild goats, coursing in his chariot, his horses being swifter than the wind; together with two of his followers, while not a soul knew it.

Now, when his hour came on for giving rest to his followers, (it was always) at the shoulder of Harmakhis, beside Sokar in Rosta … Now, the very great statue of Khepri rests in this place; the great in prowess, the splendid in strength; upon which the shadow of Re tarries. The quarters of Memphis and all the cities which are by him come to him, (raising) their hands for him in praise to his face, bearing great oblations for his ka.

One of those days it came to pass that the king's-son, Thutmose, came, coursing at the time of midday, and he rested in the shadow of this great god. A vision of sleep seized him at the hour (when) the sun was in the zenith, and he found the majesty of this revered god speaking with his own mouth, as a father speaks with his son, saying: "Behold thou me! See thou me! my son Thutmose. I am thy father, Harmakhis-Khepri-Re-Atum, who will give to thee my kingdom on earth at the head of the living. Thou shalt wear the white crown and the red crown upon the throne of Keb, the hereditary prince. The land shall be thine in its length and breadth, that which the eye of the All-Lord shines upon. The food of the Two Lands shall be thine, the great tribute of all countries, the duration of a long period of years. My face is thine, my desire is toward thee. Thou shalt be to me a protector, (for) my manner is as I were ailing in all my limbs … The sand of this desert upon which I am, has reached me; turn to me, to have that done which I have desired, knowing that thou art my son, my protector; come hither, behold, I am with thee, I am thy leader."

When he had finished this speech, this king's-son awoke hearing this …; he understood the words of this god, and he kept silent in his heart …

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Royal dream revelation.** A god appears in a dream to a young ruler, promises him a kingdom and asks something of him. The pattern resembles Solomon's dream at Gibeon (1 Kgs 3:5–15). Egypt is also the setting of Pharaoh's and Joseph's dreams (Gen 37; 40–41).
- **Legitimation by divine choice.** The Dream Stele is a classic "apology" of a ruler whose succession needed defending, a genre also proposed for the narrative of David's rise (1 Sam 16–2 Sam 5) by P. K. McCarter and others.

Further reading

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- Bryan, Betsy M. *The Reign of Thutmose IV*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.
- Zivie, Christiane. *Giza au deuxième millénaire*. Cairo: IFAO, 1976.

38. Stela of Akhenaten and Nefertiti, and the Great Hymn to the Aten



Limestone house altar from Amarna: Akhenaten and Nefertiti with three of their daughters beneath the rays of the Aten, whose rays end in hands (Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin, ÄM 14145).

Image: Gerbil (de.wikipedia). Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Limestone relief stela (house altar)
Museum	Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin, ÄM 14145
Date	Reign of Akhenaten (Amenhotep IV), c. 1350–1336 BC
Provenance	Tell el-Amarna (ancient Akhetaten), Egypt
Language / script	Middle/Late Egyptian, hieroglyphic (cartouches of the Aten and the royal couple)
Principal editions	Great Hymn: Davies, *The Rock Tombs of El Amarna* VI (1908); Breasted (1912); Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* II (1976)

What it is

Technical summary. Under Akhenaten, Egyptian religion was reorganized around the exclusive worship of the Aten, the sun-disc, depicted as a disc with rays ending in hands that offer the sign of life. Private houses at Amarna contained altars like this one, on which the royal family itself was the object of devotion as the Aten's intermediaries. The intimate, informal style of Amarna art is very clear here: the king kisses a daughter, the queen holds two others. The theology of the period is best expressed in the Great Hymn to the Aten, inscribed in the tomb of the official Ay at Amarna.

In plain terms. Akhenaten tried to make Egypt worship a single god, the sun-disc. Statues and pictures of the royal family under the sun's rays were set up in homes, and a long hymn praises the sun as creator of all life.

Key excerpt: the Great Hymn to the Aten

Translation of J. H. Breasted, *The Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt* (New York: Scribner, 1912), as reprinted by G. A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (1916), pp. 403–404, public domain.

> Thy dawning is beautiful in the horizon of the sky,
> O loving Aton, Beginning of life!
> When thou risest in the eastern horizon,
> Thou fillest every land with thy beauty …
> When thou settest in the western horizon of the sky,
> The earth is in darkness like the dead …
> Every lion cometh forth from his den,
> All serpents, they sting …
> Bright is the earth when thou risest in the horizon.
> When thou shinest as Aton by day
> Thou drivest away the darkness …
> (Then) in all the world they do their work.
> All cattle rest upon their pasturage,
> The trees and the plants flourish.
> The birds flutter in their marshes,
> Their wings uplifted in adoration to thee …
> The barques sail upstream and downstream alike …
> The fish in the river leap up before thee.
> Thy rays are in the midst of the great green sea.
> Creator of the germ in woman,
> Maker of seed in man,
> Giving life to the son in the body of his mother …

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Psalm 104.** Since Breasted (1912), the Great Hymn has been compared with Psalm 104. Both describe the darkness when lions prowl (Ps 104:20–21), people going out to work at sunrise (104:22–23), the creatures of land, air and sea (104:11–18, 25–26), ships on the sea (104:26), and all life dependent on the creator. Most scholars accept an indirect relationship through a tradition of creation hymnody. In the Psalm the sun is a creature that "knows its going down" (104:19), not the god.
- **Monotheism.** Whether Atenism was true monotheism, and whether it influenced Israel, has been debated since Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). Most Egyptologists see it as an exclusive solar cult centred on the king. Most biblical scholars see no historical link to Mosaic religion.

Further reading

- Assmann, Jan. *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001.
- Hornung, Erik. *Akhenaten and the Religion of Light*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999.
- Lichtheim, Miriam. *Ancient Egyptian Literature*. Vol. 2. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976, 96–100.
- Breasted, J. H. *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt*. New York: Scribner, 1912.

39. The Merneptah Stele ("Israel Stele")



The Merneptah Stele in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo (JE 31408). The name "Israel" occurs in line 27, near the bottom.

Image: Wikimedia Commons user ᚺᚾᚨᚱᚺ. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Black granite stele, 3.18 m high, 28 lines; carved on the back of a reused stele of Amenhotep III
Museum	Egyptian Museum, Cairo, JE 31408
Date	Year 5 of Merneptah (c. 1208 BC)
Provenance	Merneptah's mortuary temple, Western Thebes; discovered by W. M. Flinders Petrie in 1896
Language / script	Late Egyptian, hieroglyphic
Principal editions	Spiegelberg (1896); Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt* III §§602–617 (1906); Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions* IV (1982)

What it is

Technical summary. Most of the inscription celebrates Merneptah's victory over a Libyan invasion and its Sea Peoples allies in year 5. The closing hymn (lines 26–28) widens the scope to the whole Egyptian empire and lists conquered peoples in Canaan: Ashkelon, Gezer, Yenoam and Israel. In the hieroglyphs, Ashkelon, Gezer and Yenoam carry the determinative for a foreign land or city. "Israel" carries the determinative for a people (a seated man and woman over the plural strokes). This indicates a population group not tied to a city-state.

In plain terms. This is the oldest known mention of "Israel" outside the Bible, about 1208 BC. A pharaoh boasts that he wiped out Israel. That shows Israel already existed as a people in Canaan by then.

Key excerpt: the closing hymn (lines 26–28, complete)

Translation of J. H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, vol. III (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906), §617, public domain.

> The kings are overthrown, saying: "Salam!"
> Not one holds up his head among the Nine Bows.
> Wasted is Tehenu,
> Kheta is pacified,
> Plundered is Pekanan, with every evil,
> Carried off is Askalon,
> Seized upon is Gezer,
> Yenoam is made as a thing not existing.
> Israel is desolated, his seed is not;
> Palestine has become a widow for Egypt.
> All lands are united, they are pacified;
> Everyone that is turbulent is bound by King Merneptah, given life like Re, every day.

Notes on modern readings

- **"Salam!"** is the Semitic word for "peace" (*šalām*), used here as a plea for mercy.
- **Tehenu** is Libya. **Kheta** is the Hittite land. **Pekanan** is "the Canaan," probably Gaza. **Palestine** (Breasted) is **Ḫurru**, the Egyptian term for Syria-Palestine; "a widow for Egypt" is a pun on *ḫurru* and *ḫ3rt*, "widow."
- **"His seed is not."** *Prt* can mean grain or offspring. Most scholars take it as a conventional boast of annihilation ("his offspring is no more"). Some argue for "grain," which would imply that Israel was a settled agricultural people.
- **Karnak reliefs.** Frank Yurco (1986) argued that the battle reliefs on the Cour de la Cachette wall at Karnak, previously attributed to Ramesses II, depict Merneptah's campaign, including a scene of Israelites. This is debated.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

The stele is the only Egyptian text to name Israel. It sets a firm terminus: a group called Israel existed in Canaan by c. 1208 BC. It is therefore central to every reconstruction of Israel's origins and of the date of the exodus. Those who place the exodus in the 13th century (Ramesses II) and those who date it to the 15th century (1 Kgs 6:1) both have to account for it. It confirms that by the late 13th century Israel was a people distinct from the city-states of Canaan, which accords with the picture of tribal Israel in Judges.

Further reading

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

- Kitchen, K. A. *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.
- Yurco, Frank J. “Merenptah’s Canaanite Campaign.” *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 23 (1986): 189–215.
- Hjelm, Ingrid, and Thomas L. Thompson. “The Victory Song of Merneptah, Israel and the People of Palestine.” *JSOT* 27 (2002): 3–18.

40. The Tale of Two Brothers (Papyrus D'Orbiney)

Image. No openly licensed photograph of Papyrus D'Orbiney was found. The papyrus can be viewed on the British Museum's collection website (EA 10183).

Object	Papyrus roll, 19 pages of hieratic
Museum	British Museum, EA 10183 (acquired from Mme Élisabeth d'Orbiney, 1857)
Date	c. 1215 BC (reign of Seti II); copied by the scribe Ennana
Provenance	Probably Thebes
Language / script	Late Egyptian, hieratic
Principal editions	Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Stories* (1932); Wettengel, *Die Erzählung von den beiden Brüdern* (2003)

What it is

Technical summary. The tale opens as a realistic story of two brothers, the elder Anubis (Petrie's "Anpu") and the younger Bata, who live and farm together. When Anubis's wife tries to seduce Bata and is rejected, she accuses him of assault. Anubis tries to kill him, but Bata escapes when the sun-god places a crocodile-filled lake between them. The second half becomes a myth of transformations: Bata's heart in a cedar, his death, his rebirth as a bull and a tree, and his eventual kingship over Egypt. The two brothers bear the names of gods (Anubis and Bata) worshipped at Cynopolis.

In plain terms. A farmer's wife tries to seduce her husband's younger brother. When he refuses, she claims he attacked her. The angry husband nearly kills his innocent brother. Then the story turns into a fairy tale of magic and rebirth.

Key excerpt: the attempted seduction and false accusation

Translation of W. M. Flinders Petrie, ed., *Egyptian Tales, Translated from the Papyri*, Second Series (London: Methuen, 1895), public domain.

> Once there were two brethren, of one mother and one father; Anpu was the name of the elder, and Bata was the name of the younger. Now, as for Anpu he had a house, and he had a wife. But his little brother was to him as it were a son; he it was who made for him his clothes; he it was who followed behind his oxen to the fields; he it was who did the ploughing; he it was who harvested the corn … behold, the spirit of a god was in him …
>
> The youth went into the stable; he took a large measure, for he desired to take much corn; he loaded it with wheat and barley; and he went out carrying it. She said to him, "How much of the corn that is wanted, is that which is on thy shoulder?" He said to her, "Three bushels of barley, and two of wheat, in all five; these are what are upon my shoulder:" thus said he to her. And she conversed with him, saying, "There is great strength in thee, for I see thy might every day." And her heart knew him with the knowledge of youth. And she arose and came to him, and conversed with him, saying, "Come, stay with me, and it shall be well for thee, and I will make for thee beautiful garments." Then the youth became like a panther of the south with fury at the evil speech which she

had made to him; and she feared greatly. And he spake unto her, saying, "Behold thou art to me as a mother, thy husband is to me as a father, for he who is elder than I has brought me up. What is this wickedness that thou hast said to me? Say it not to me again. For I will not tell it to any man, for I will not let it be uttered by the mouth of any man." …

And behold the wife of the elder brother was afraid for the words which she had said. She took a parcel of fat, she became like one who is evilly beaten, desiring to say to her husband, "It is thy younger brother who has done this wrong." … Her husband said to her, "Who has spoken with thee?" Behold she said, "No one has spoken with me except thy younger brother. When he came to take for thee corn he found me sitting alone; he said to me, 'Come, let us stay together, tie up thy hair:' thus spake he to me. I did not listen to him, but thus spake I to him: 'Behold, am I not thy mother, is not thy elder brother to thee as a father?' And he feared, and he beat me to stop me from making report to thee, and if thou lettest him live I shall die."

And the elder brother became as a panther of the south; he sharpened his knife; he took it in his hand; he stood behind the door of his stable to slay his younger brother …

Notes on modern readings

- **The brothers' names.** The elder is **Anubis** (Petrie's Anpu). Petrie's "Come, stay with me" is more directly rendered "Come, let us spend an hour lying together" (Lichtheim).
- **"A parcel of fat."** She uses fat and grease to fake the marks of a beating.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

The first part of the tale is the classic parallel to Joseph and Potiphar's wife (Gen 39:6–20). In both, a married woman alone in the house propositions a young man in the household, he refuses out of loyalty to the master, and she accuses him with fabricated evidence. The "Potiphar's wife" motif is found worldwide (Stith Thompson, motif K2111). The Egyptian setting of both stories has led many scholars, including D. B. Redford, to treat the parallel as evidence for the Egyptian colour of the Joseph narrative rather than for literary borrowing.

Further reading

- Lichtheim, Miriam. *Ancient Egyptian Literature*. Vol. 2. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976, 203–211.
- Redford, Donald B. *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph (Genesis 37–50)*. VTSup 20. Leiden: Brill, 1970.
- Hollis, Susan Tower. *The Ancient Egyptian "Tale of Two Brothers"*. 2nd ed. Oakville, CT: Bannerstone, 2008.
- Petrie, W. M. Flinders, ed. *Egyptian Tales*. Second Series. London: Methuen, 1895. Project Gutenberg

41. The Instruction of Amenemope



Papyrus British Museum EA 10474, the only complete manuscript of the Instruction of Amenemope.
Image: British Museum papyrus EA 10474 (photograph). Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Papyrus roll, 27 columns; prologue and thirty numbered chapters
Museum	British Museum, EA 10474 (acquired 1888); fragments on other papyri, tablets and ostraca
Date	Composed in the Ramesside period (c. 1300–1075 BC); the BM papyrus is a later copy (c. 1000–600 BC)
Provenance	Thebes
Language / script	Late Egyptian, hieratic
Principal editions	Budge, *Facsimiles of Egyptian Hieratic Papyri* (1923) and *The Teaching of Amen-em-apt* (1924); Lange, *Das Weisheitsbuch des Amenemope* (1925); Laisney, *L'Enseignement d'Aménémopé* (2007)

What it is

Technical summary. Amenemope, son of Kanakht, a scribe of the land registry, wrote a wisdom instruction for his son in thirty chapters. Unlike earlier Egyptian instructions aimed at career success, it centres on the inner piety of the "silent man," who trusts the god, controls his tongue, is honest in measures and boundaries, and is content with little, in contrast to the "heated man." In 1924 Adolf Erman pointed out that Proverbs 22:17–24:22 corresponds closely to Amenemope, both in content and in the structure of "thirty" sayings. This became the most widely accepted case of direct literary dependence between a biblical book and an Egyptian text.

In plain terms. An Egyptian father's thirty chapters of advice to his son. Part of the book of Proverbs follows it so closely that most scholars believe the biblical writer knew it.

Key excerpts

Translation of E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Teaching of Amen-em-apt, Son of Kanekht* (London: Martin Hopkinson, 1924), public domain. Line numbers are Budge's.

Chapter 1 (lines 47–49)

47. I pray thee to lend me thine ears, hearken to the things that will be said [by me].

48. I pray thee to give thy mind (or, pay attention) to the difficult matters which will be unravelled [by me].

49. The setting of them in thy heart will be advantageous [to thee] …

On boundaries and the widow's field (from Budge's "Sixth Chapter")

Commit no robbery (i.e., filch not away land) by means of the cubit of the fields

When thou art assessing the bounds of the estate of the widow …

142. Take good heed concerning the treading down of the boundaries of the fields,

143. Lest horrible calamity be brought upon thee …

148. Drive not thy furrows through the lands of another.

Chapter 30 (lines 539–544)

539. Behold the Thirty Chapters!

540. They will give [thee] pleasure, they will teach [thee],

541. They will [serve as] a leader (or, guide) to every book.

542. They will give knowledge to (i.e., make to be wise) the ignorant man.

543. If they be read out in the presence of an ignorant man

544. Assuredly he will steer his course [through life] according to their mouth.

Notes on modern readings

- **Chapter division.** Budge's divisions differ from the scribe's numbered chapters as now printed. The boundary passage is Amenemope **chapter 6** (7.12–8.10) in Lichtheim's edition, which Budge also labels his "Sixth Chapter."
- **"Thirty."** Most modern editors read Proverbs 22:20 as "Have I not written for you **thirty** sayings?" (Hebrew *šlšwm*). The traditional text has "excellent things" or "formerly." The emendation is adopted by several modern translations.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

Amenemope	Proverbs
Prologue and ch. 1: the call to lend one's ears to the sayings and set them in one's heart	22:17–18
Ch. 30: the reader is pointed to "these thirty chapters"	22:20
Ch. 2: Do not rob the wretched or attack the cripple	22:22
Ch. 6: Do not move the boundary stone or encroach on the widow's field	22:28; 23:10
Ch. 7: ill-gotten riches sprout wings like geese and fly off to the sky	23:4–5

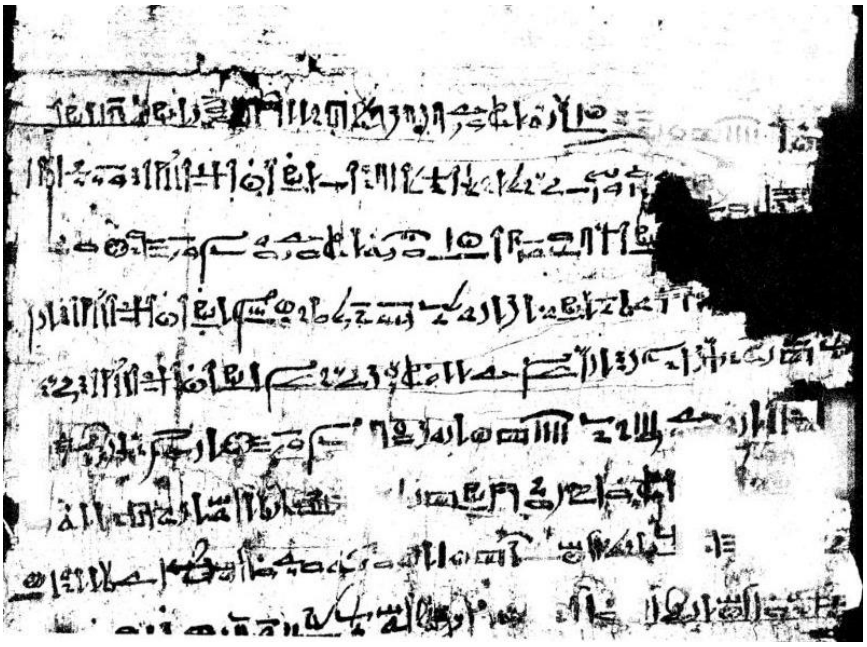
Amenemope	Proverbs
Ch. 9: Do not befriend the heated (hot-tempered) man	22:24–25
Ch. 23: Do not eat bread before a noble … look at what is before you	23:1–3
Ch. 30: A scribe skilled in his office is worthy to be a courtier	22:29

The direction of dependence was briefly debated (some proposed a Semitic original behind Amenemope), but most scholars hold that the Hebrew sage adapted Amenemope or a Semitic version of it. The adapter recast its Egyptian piety in the name of the LORD (Prov 22:19, 23; 23:11). Recent study (e.g., N. Shupak; M. V. Fox) emphasizes the creativity of the adaptation.

Further reading

- Fox, Michael V. *Proverbs 10–31*. Anchor Yale Bible 18B. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.
- Lichtheim, Miriam. *Ancient Egyptian Literature*. Vol. 2. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976, 146–163.
- Shupak, Nili. "The Instruction of Amenemope and Proverbs 22:17–24:22 from the Perspective of Contemporary Research." In *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients*, ed. R. L. Troxel et al. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005.
- Budge, E. A. Wallis. *The Teaching of Amen-em-apt, Son of Kanekht*. London: Martin Hopkinson, 1924. Internet Archive

42. Amun’s Sacred Barque and the Report of Wenamun



Part of the first page of Papyrus Moscow 120, the only manuscript of the Report of Wenamun (Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow).

Image: Photograph of Papyrus Moscow 120. Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Papyrus, two pages (the end is lost)
Museum	Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow, Papyrus Moscow 120
Date	Story set in year 5 of the “Renaissance” era of Ramesses XI (c. 1075 BC); the papyrus is probably early 21st Dynasty
Provenance	El-Hiba, Egypt; acquired by V. Golenishchev in 1890
Language / script	Late Egyptian, hieratic
Principal editions	Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Stories* (1932); Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt* IV §§557–591 (1906); Schipper, *Die Erzählung des Wenamun* (2005)

What it is

Technical summary. Wenamun, an elder of the temple of Amun at Karnak, is sent to Byblos to buy cedar for Amun’s great river barque, *Userhat-Amun*. His report is illustrated here by a relief of that barque. He is robbed at Dor, a harbour of the Tjeker (one of the Sea Peoples), and is coldly received by Zakar-Baal (Tjekerbaal), prince of Byblos, who keeps him waiting in harbour for weeks. A young man of the prince’s court goes into an ecstatic frenzy and demands that the envoy and his travelling idol, “Amun-of-the-Road,” be received. Zakar-Baal reminds Wenamun that Egypt no longer commands Byblos and must pay for timber. Whether a real report or a literary work, it vividly portrays Egypt’s decline at the end of the New Kingdom.

In plain terms. An Egyptian priest is sent to Lebanon to buy timber for the god's sacred boat. He is robbed on the way, insulted by the local king, and has to wait weeks for cedar, a sign that Egypt was no longer the great power it had been.

Key excerpt: at the harbour of Byblos

Translation of J. H. Breasted, as reprinted by G. A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (1916), pp. 353–354, public domain.

> [I] arrived the harbor of Byblos. [I made a place of concealment, I hid] "Amon-the-way," and I placed his things in it. The prince of Byblos sent to me, saying: "Betake thyself from my harbor." … I spent nineteen days in his harbor and he continually sent to me daily, saying: "Betake thyself from my harbor."
>
> Now, when he sacrificed to his gods …, the god seized one of his noble youths, making him frenzied, so that he said: "Bring [the god] hither! Bring the messenger of Amon who hath him. Send him and let him go."
>
> Now, while the frenzied youth continued in frenzy during this night, I found a ship bound for Egypt, and I loaded all my belongings into it …
>
> When morning came he sent and had me brought up … I found him sitting in his upper chamber, leaning his back against a window, while the waves of the great Syrian sea beat against the … behind him. I said to him: "Kindness of Amon!" He said to me: "How long is it until this day since thou camest away from the abode of Amon?" I said: "Five months and one day until now." He said to me: "Behold thou art true, where is the writing of Amon, which is in thy hand? Where is the letter of the High Priest of Amon, which is in thy hand?" …

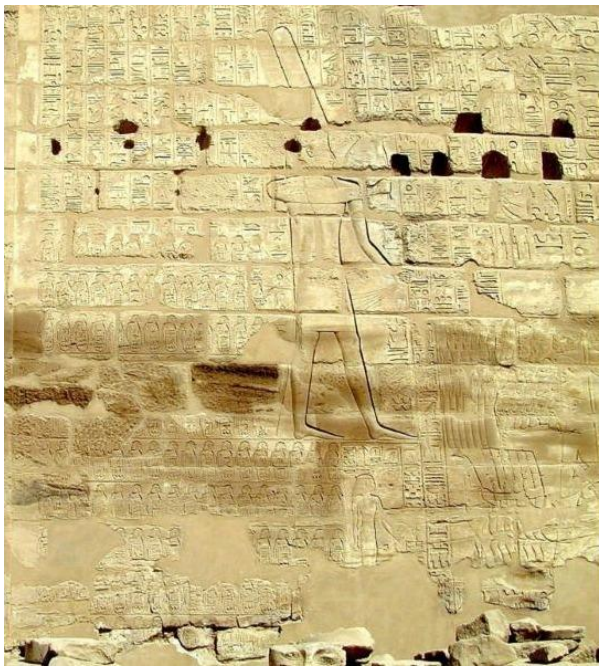
Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Prophetic ecstasy.** The frenzied youth at Byblos is the earliest Levantine example of ecstatic prophecy, comparable with the bands of prophets "prophesying" in 1 Sam 10:5–13 and 19:20–24, and with Baal's prophets in 1 Kgs 18:26–29.
- **Cedar trade.** Zakar-Baal's insistence on payment for Lebanese timber, recorded in the accounts of his fathers, illuminates the commercial treaty between Solomon and Hiram of Tyre for cedar from Lebanon (1 Kgs 5:1–12).
- **The Sea Peoples.** Wenamun shows the Tjeker established at Dor on the coast south of Carmel about 1075 BC, the same era in which the Philistines are settled on the southern coast in the books of Judges and Samuel.

Further reading

- Schipper, Bernd U. *Die Erzählung des Wenamun*. OBO 209. Fribourg: Academic Press, 2005.
- Lichtheim, Miriam. *Ancient Egyptian Literature*. Vol. 2. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976, 224–230.
- Sass, Benjamin. "Wenamun and His Levant—1075 BC or 925 BC?" *Ägypten und Levante* 12 (2002): 247–255.

43. Shoshenq I's (Shishak's) Campaign Relief at Karnak



Part of the triumphal relief of Shoshenq I on the Bubastite Portal at Karnak, with rows of name-rings listing conquered towns.

Image: Jack1956. Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Triumphal relief and topographical list of c. 150 name-rings
Museum	In situ, south outer wall near the Bubastite Portal, Temple of Amun, Karnak
Date	Reign of Shoshenq I (c. 945–924 BC); the campaign c. 925 BC
Provenance	Karnak (Thebes); a fragment of a victory stele of Shoshenq was also found at Megiddo
Language / script	Egyptian, hieroglyphic
Principal editions	Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt* IV §§709–722 (1906); Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt* (3rd ed., 1996); Wilson, *The Campaign of Pharaoh Shoshenq I into Palestine* (2005)

What it is

Technical summary. The relief shows Amun leading rows of bound captives to Shoshenq, founder of the 22nd (Libyan) Dynasty. Each captive's body is a fortified oval enclosing a place name. About 150 names survive, arranged in rows that seem to follow the routes of several army columns. They include towns in the northern kingdom of Israel (Gibeon, Beth-horon, Aijalon, Mahanaim, Penuel, Taanach, Shunem, Rehob, Beth-shean and Megiddo) and a long list of settlements in the Negev. Jerusalem is not preserved in the list. Whether it was in a lost section or deliberately omitted is debated.

In plain terms. Pharaoh Shishak carved a giant wall-picture at Karnak listing the towns he captured in a raid on Israel and Judah around 925 BC, the same raid the Bible describes in the reign of Rehoboam.

The list (selected names)

The following names are widely accepted identifications, from Kitchen (1996) and Wilson (2005). Numbers are those of the Karnak list.

No.	Place
13	Rubute (perhaps Rabbah of Judah, Josh 15:60)
14	Taanach (Josh 12:21)
16	Shunem (1 Sam 28:4)
17	Beth-shean (1 Sam 31:10)
22	Mahanaim (2 Sam 2:8)
23	Gibeon (Josh 9:3)
24	Beth-horon (Josh 10:10)
26	Aijalon (Josh 10:12)
27	Megiddo (1 Kgs 9:15)
53	Penuel (Gen 32:31; 1 Kgs 12:25)
71–72	"The field of Abram" (a much-discussed reading in the Negev list)

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **1 Kings 14:25–26; 2 Chronicles 12:2–9.** In the fifth year of Rehoboam, "Shishak king of Egypt" came up against Jerusalem and took the treasures of the temple and palace, including Solomon's gold shields. Chronicles adds that he took the fortified cities of Judah. The Karnak list, which centres on the northern kingdom and the Negev, complements the biblical account, which centres on Jerusalem. Most scholars believe Rehoboam bought off the pharaoh with tribute.
- **Chronology.** The synchronism between Shoshenq I and Rehoboam's fifth year is one of the key anchors linking biblical and Egyptian chronology in the 10th century BC.
- **Jeroboam.** Shishak had earlier given asylum to Jeroboam (1 Kgs 11:40). The campaign's focus on Israel, Jeroboam's kingdom, has prompted various historical explanations.

Further reading

- Kitchen, K. A. *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (1100–650 BC)*. 3rd ed. Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1996.
- Wilson, Kevin A. *The Campaign of Pharaoh Shoshenq I into Palestine*. FAT II/9. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005.

- Finkelstein, Israel. “The Campaign of Shoshenq I to Palestine: A Guide to the 10th Century BCE Polity.” *ZDPV* 118 (2002): 109–135.
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44. The Beni Hasan Procession of Asiatics



The procession of the ʿAamu (Asiatics) led by Abisha, wall painting in the tomb of Khnumhotep II at Beni Hasan (composite photograph).

Image: A. D. Riddle (photograph of a public-domain painting). Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Painted wall scene in a rock-cut tomb
Museum	In situ, Tomb BH 3 (Khnumhotep II), Beni Hasan, Middle Egypt
Date	Year 6 of Senusret II (c. 1890 BC), 12th Dynasty
Provenance	Beni Hasan, Egypt
Language / script	Middle Egyptian, hieroglyphic captions
Principal editions	Newberry, *Beni Hasan* I (1893); Kamrin, "The Aamu of Shu in the Tomb of Khnumhotep II," *JAEI* 1.3 (2009)

What it is

Technical summary. The north wall of Khnumhotep II's tomb shows a group of 37 ʿ*3mw* (Asiatics, i.e., people from Syria-Palestine) being presented to the nomarch. Their leader is labelled "the ruler of a foreign land (*ḥq3 ẖ3swt*), Abisha" (*Ibš3*). They bring *msdmt*, black eye-paint (galena). The men wear brightly patterned woollen garments and carry throw-sticks, bows and spears. The women wear coloured dresses. Donkeys carry children and equipment, including what appear to be bellows, which suggests travelling metal-workers. The phrase *ḥq3 ẖ3swt* is the origin of the later term "Hyksos."

In plain terms. An Egyptian tomb painting from about 1890 BC shows a family group of Semitic people from Canaan arriving in Egypt, with their donkeys, weapons and colourful clothes, led by a chief named Abisha.

The captions

Translation by the author of this study from the hieroglyphic text (Newberry 1893; Kamrin 2009).

> Arrival, bringing eye-paint, which 37 Asiatics brought to him.
>
> The ruler of a foreign land, Abisha.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **The patriarchs in Egypt.** The scene is the most vivid contemporary image of Semitic pastoralists entering Egypt in the Middle Bronze Age, the setting in which Genesis places Abraham's and Jacob's descent to Egypt (Gen 12:10; 46:5–7). It shows that such travel by family groups with donkeys was routine and officially recorded.

- **The name.** *Ibš3* (Abisha) is a West Semitic name of the same type as Abishai (1 Sam 26:6) and Abishua (1 Chr 6:4).
- **Garments.** The patterned garments have often been compared with Joseph's distinctive robe (Gen 37:3). The meaning of the Hebrew phrase is itself uncertain.

Further reading

- Kamrin, Janice. "The Aamu of Shu in the Tomb of Khnumhotep II at Beni Hassan." *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 1.3 (2009): 22–36.
- Newberry, Percy E. *Beni Hasan*. Part I. London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1893.
- Hoffmeier, James K. *Israel in Egypt*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

45. The Berlin Pedestal Relief (ÄM 21687)



Berlin Statue Pedestal Relief ÄM 21687, with three bound captives whose name-rings have been read as Ashkelon, Canaan and possibly Israel.

Image: Photographer unknown. Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Fragment of a grey granite statue pedestal
Museum	Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin, ÄM 21687
Date	18th Dynasty (c. 1400 BC) on stylistic grounds; some date the inscription later
Provenance	Unknown (purchased in Egypt)
Language / script	Egyptian, hieroglyphic
Principal editions	Görg, "Israel in Hieroglyphen," *Biblische Notizen* 106 (2001); van der Veen, Theis & Görg, *JAEI* 2.4 (2010)

What it is

Technical summary. The fragment shows three bound Asiatic captives above three name-rings. The first two read Ashkelon and Canaan. The third, damaged ring was read by Manfred Görg (2001) as *I-šr-il*, which he and later P. van der Veen, C. Theis and Görg (2010) identified with Israel. If correct, this would be about two centuries older than the Merneptah Stele. Critics note differences from the Merneptah spelling, the damaged sign forms, and the possibility of other readings (e.g., Ashur), and the dating of the inscription itself is debated.

In plain terms. A broken Egyptian statue base names three conquered places. Two are certainly Ashkelon and Canaan. Some scholars think the third is "Israel," which would make it the earliest mention of Israel, but this is disputed.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

The reading bears directly on the date of Israel's emergence in Canaan. If it is accepted, it would support the existence of a group called Israel in the 15th–14th century BC, which would fit the earlier date for the exodus and conquest suggested by 1 Kings 6:1. Most scholars currently treat the identification as possible but unproven.

Further reading

- van der Veen, Peter, Christoffer Theis and Manfred Görg. "Israel in Canaan (Long) Before Pharaoh Merenptah? A Fresh Look at Berlin Statue Pedestal Relief 21687." *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 2.4 (2010): 15–25.
- Hoffmeier, James K. "What Is the Biblical Date for the Exodus?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50 (2007): 225–247.

46. The “Land of the Shasu of Yhw” (Soleb and Amarah-West)

Image. No openly licensed photograph of the Soleb name-ring was found. The list is published in photographs and drawings by Giveon (1971) and Schiff Giorgini, *Soleb* V (1998).

Object	Topographical name-ring lists carved on temple columns and walls
Museum	In situ, temple of Amenhotep III at Soleb (Sudan); copy in the temple of Ramesses II at Amarah-West (Sudan)
Date	Soleb c. 1380 BC (Amenhotep III); Amarah-West c. 1250 BC (Ramesses II)
Provenance	Nubia (northern Sudan)
Language / script	Egyptian, hieroglyphic
Principal editions	Giveon, *Les bédouins Shosou des documents égyptiens* (1971); Fairman (1939)

What it is

Technical summary. Among lists of conquered peoples, Amenhotep III’s temple at Soleb names several “lands of the Shasu,” pastoral nomads of the southern Levant and Transjordan. One is *t3 š3sw yhw3*, “the land of the Shasu of Yhw.” The Ramesside copy at Amarah-West lists it alongside “the land of the Shasu of Seir.” Most scholars take *yhw3* as a place or tribal name that is linguistically identical with the divine name YHWH. It is the earliest occurrence of the name outside the Bible.

In plain terms. An Egyptian king’s list of conquered nomad territories, from about 1380 BC, includes “the land of the Shasu of Yahweh,” somewhere in the region of Edom. It is the oldest occurrence of the name of Israel’s God, there used for a place or people.

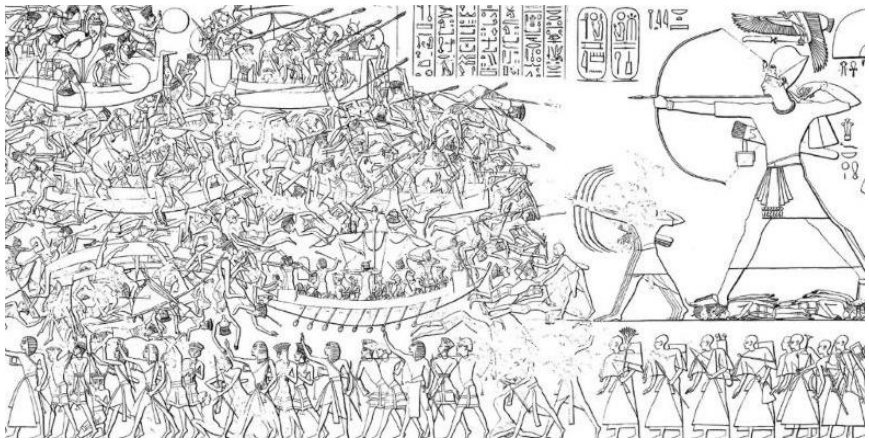
Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **YHWH from the south.** Several ancient poems describe the LORD coming from Seir, Edom, Teman or Paran (Deut 33:2; Judg 5:4–5; Hab 3:3). The Egyptian association of *Yhw* with Shasu lands near Seir is the main external evidence for the theory that YHWH worship originated among southern pastoral groups (the Midianite–Kenite hypothesis; cf. Moses and Jethro, Exod 3:1; 18:1–12).
- **Caution.** The Egyptian references concern a place or group name, not a deity, and do not show who worshipped YHWH or how.

Further reading

- Giveon, Raphael. *Les bédouins Shosou des documents égyptiens*. Leiden: Brill, 1971.
- Smith, Mark S. *The Early History of God*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.
- Blenkinsopp, Joseph. “The Midianite-Kenite Hypothesis Revisited and the Origins of Judah.” *JSOT* 33 (2008): 131–153.

47. The Sea Peoples Reliefs of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu



Drawing of the naval battle against the Sea Peoples on the north wall of the mortuary temple of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu. Ramesses (right) shoots from the shore.

Image: Drawing of the Medinet Habu relief. Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Monumental battle reliefs and inscriptions on the temple walls
Museum	In situ, mortuary temple of Ramesses III, Medinet Habu, Western Thebes
Date	Year 8 of Ramesses III (c. 1177 BC); temple completed c. 1175 BC
Provenance	Medinet Habu, Egypt
Language / script	Egyptian, hieroglyphic
Principal editions	Epigraphic Survey (Oriental Institute), *Medinet Habu* I–II (1930–1932); Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt* IV (1906)

What it is

Technical summary. The reliefs record Ramesses III's defeat of a confederation of migrating "Sea Peoples" by land and sea. The accompanying text names them as the Peleset, Tjeker, Shekelesh, Denyen and Weshesh. It says they had overrun Ḫatti, Qode, Carchemish, Arzawa and Alashiya (Cyprus) before setting up camp in Amurru. The Peleset are shown with distinctive feathered or reed headdresses, and the land battle shows their families in ox-carts. After their defeat, groups of the Peleset were settled on the southern coast of Canaan.

In plain terms. An Egyptian pharaoh shows on his temple walls how he beat back invaders from the sea about 1177 BC. One of those groups, the Peleset, are the Philistines of the Bible.

Summary of the year 8 inscription

Paraphrase by the author of this study. The foreign peoples made a conspiracy in their islands, and the lands were swept away all at once. No land could stand before them: Ḫatti, Qode, Carchemish, Arzawa and Alashiya were cut off, and they set up a camp in Amurru. Their confederation was the Peleset, Tjeker, Shekelesh, Denyen and Weshesh. Pharaoh prepared his frontier in Djahi (the

Levant), and closed the river-mouths with warships. Those who reached his border were destroyed, and those who entered the river-mouths were caught like birds in a net.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **The Philistines.** Egyptian *Prst* is the biblical *Pəlištîm*. Their arrival around 1175 BC agrees with the biblical tradition that they came from Caphtor (Crete or the Aegean; Amos 9:7; Jer 47:4; Deut 2:23) and with their prominence in Judges and 1 Samuel. Archaeology of the Philistine Pentapolis (Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, Gath, Gaza) shows Aegean-style pottery and practices from the early 12th century BC.
- **The Tjeker** settled at Dor, where Wenamun encountered them (Part 4).
- **The Denyen** have been compared, speculatively, with the tribe of Dan (Judg 5:17 places Dan "in ships").

Further reading

- Cline, Eric H. *1177 B.C.: The Year Civilization Collapsed*. Rev. ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021.
- Killebrew, Ann E., and Gunnar Lehmann, eds. *The Philistines and Other "Sea Peoples" in Text and Archaeology*. Atlanta: SBL, 2013.
- Epigraphic Survey. *Medinet Habu*. Vols. I–II. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930–1932 (free PDFs from the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures).

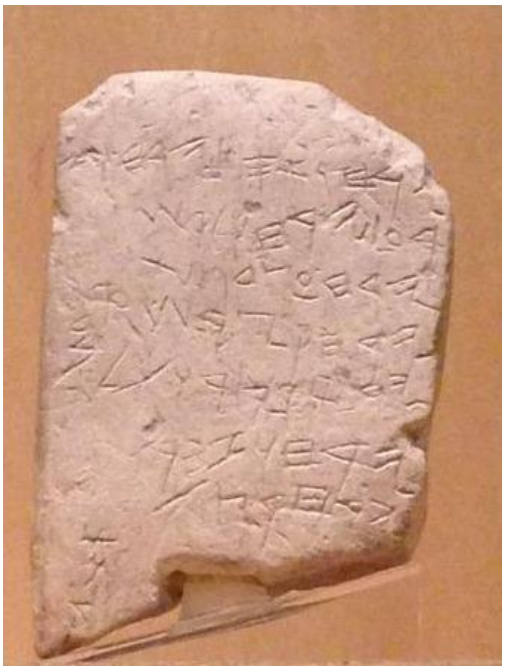
Part Five: Hebrew, Moabite & Aramaic Inscriptions

❧

This part covers the inscriptions from Iron Age Israel and its neighbours in the Ancient Stones collection: the Gezer Calendar, the Mesha Stele, the Siloam Inscription, the Lachish Letters, the Tel Dan Stele, the Ketef Hinnom amulets, Kuntillet ʿAjrud, Khirbet el-Qom, Deir ʿAlla, the Arad and Samaria ostraca, the Khirbet Qeiyafa ostracon, the Tel Zayit abecedary, the bulla of Hezekiah, the *lmlk* jar handles and the Ekron royal inscription. They are the primary epigraphic witnesses to the language, script and history of the kingdoms of Israel, Judah and Moab from the 10th to the 6th century BC. They are short enough to be given here complete or nearly complete.

About the translations. The Mesha Stele and the Siloam Inscription are given in the public-domain translations of G. A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (1916), followed by notes on modern readings. The Gezer Calendar and the Lachish Letters were published or fully read only after 1930, so the passages given are translations by the author of this study from the Hebrew text as edited in the standard modern corpora.

48. The Gezer Calendar



The Gezer Calendar, a small soft-limestone tablet inscribed in early alphabetic Hebrew script (Istanbul Archaeology Museums).

Image: Oncenawhile. Licence: CC BY-SA 3.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Soft limestone tablet, c. 11 × 7 cm, seven lines plus a marginal name; apparently reused (palimpsest)
Museum	Istanbul Archaeology Museums
Date	10th century BC (late 10th century by most palaeographers)
Provenance	Tel Gezer, Israel; found by R. A. S. Macalister in 1908
Language / script	Early Hebrew or South Canaanite (debated), Phoenician-type alphabetic script
Principal editions	Macalister (1909); Albright, *BASOR* 92 (1943); Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions* (2005), Gezer 1; Aḥituv, *Echoes from the Past* (2008)

What it is

Technical summary. The Gezer Calendar lists the agricultural year as a sequence of two-month and one-month periods, each named for its main task. It begins in the autumn with the ingathering of olives and fruit. Its simple, repetitive form and the evidence of erasure suggest a school exercise or memory text. Linguistically it is one of the earliest substantial inscriptions in a language that may be Hebrew. The forms *yrḥw* (“two months”?) are debated: they may be duals, or plurals with a third-person suffix. The marginal name *ʾbyw* or *ʾby[h]* (Abijah?) may be the writer’s.

In plain terms. A ten-line farmer’s almanac scratched on a palm-sized stone around 925 BC, possibly by a schoolboy practising his letters. It runs through the farming year month by month.

The text (complete)

Translation by the author of this study from the Hebrew text (Dobbs-Allsopp et al. 2005).

1. Two months of ingathering (*ʾsp*),
2. two months of sowing (*zrʿ*),
3. two months of late sowing (*lqš*),
4. a month of hoeing (or cutting) flax (*ʿṣd pšt*),
5. a month of barley harvest (*qṣr śʿrm*),
6. a month of harvest and measuring (or feasting) (*qṣr wkl*),
7. two months of vine-pruning (*zmr*),
8. a month of summer fruit (*qṣ*).

(Margin) Abiy[ah]

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **The agricultural year.** The calendar starts in the autumn, matching the older Israelite reckoning in which the year "goes out" with the ingathering (Exod 23:16; 34:22). Its sequence of flax and barley harvests fits Exod 9:31–32, where flax and barley are ruined by hail while the wheat, which ripens later, survives.
- **Vocabulary.** *Lqš*, "late sowing," occurs as a noun in Amos 7:1. *Qayiṣ*, "summer fruit," is the basis of the wordplay in Amos 8:1–2 between the "basket of summer fruit" (*qayiṣ*) and "the end" (*qēṣ*) of Israel.
- **Literacy.** As a possible school text, the calendar is part of the debate on the spread of literacy in 10th-century Israel and Judah.

Further reading

- Dobbs-Allsopp, F. W., J. J. M. Roberts, C. L. Seow and R. E. Whitaker. *Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.
- Aḥituv, Shmuel. *Echoes from the Past: Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period*. Jerusalem: Carta, 2008.
- Pardee, Dennis. "A Brief Case for the Language of the 'Gezer Calendar' as Phoenician." In *Linguistic Studies in Phoenician*, ed. R. D. Holmstedt and A. Schade. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013.

49. The Mesha Stele (The Moabite Stone)



The Mesha Stele in the Louvre (AO 5066), reconstructed from fragments; the smooth areas are restored from a squeeze taken before the stone was broken.

Image: Tangopaso. Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Black basalt stele, c. 1.15 m high, 34 lines (about two-thirds of the original surface preserved)
Museum	Louvre, Paris, AO 5066
Date	c. 840 BC
Provenance	Dhiban (ancient Dibon), Jordan; seen by F. A. Klein in 1868; a squeeze was taken for C. Clermont-Ganneau before the stone was broken by local villagers
Language / script	Moabite, Old Hebrew–Phoenician alphabetic script
Principal editions	Clermont-Ganneau (1870); Smend & Socin (1886); Dearman, ed., *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab* (1989); Aḥituv, *Echoes from the Past* (2008)

What it is

Technical summary. In this memorial inscription Mesha, king of Moab, celebrates his rebellion against Israel after the death of Ahab. He credits it to his god Chemosh, whose anger had allowed Omri and his son to oppress Moab for forty years. Mesha recounts the recapture of Medeba, Ataroth, Nebo and Jahaz, and the slaughter of Ataroth's Gadite population and of Nebo's 7,000 inhabitants, devoted (*ḥrm*) to Ashtar-Chemosh. He describes bringing the vessels of YHWH before Chemosh and his building works at his capital, Qarḥoh. It is the longest Iron Age inscription from the southern Levant and the earliest extra-biblical text to name YHWH.

In plain terms. The king of Moab boasts that his god Chemosh helped him throw off Israel's rule, retake his towns, and capture "the vessels of YHWH" from an Israelite shrine. It is the Moabite side of the story in 2 Kings 3.

The text (complete as preserved)

Translation of G. A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (1916), pp. 363–364, public domain.

> I am Mesha, son of Chemoshmelek, King of Moab, the Dibonite. My father ruled over Moab thirty years, and I ruled after my father. And I made this high place to Chemosh in Qarhah (?) because of the deliverance of Mesha, because he saved me from all the kings and because he caused me to see [my desire] upon all who hated me. Omri, king of Israel — he oppressed Moab many days, because Chemosh was angry with his land. And his son succeeded him, and he also said I will oppress Moab. In my day he spoke according to [this] word, but I saw [my desire] upon him and upon his house, and Israel utterly perished forever. Now Omri had possessed all the land of Medeba and dwelt in it his days and half the days of his son, forty years, but Chemosh restored it in my day.
>
> And I built Baal-meon and I made in it the reservoir (?), and I built Kiryathaim. And the men of Gad had dwelt in the land of Ataroth from of old and the king of Israel had built for himself Ataroth. And I fought against the city and took it, and I slew all the people of the city, a sight [pleasing] to Chemosh and to Moab. And I brought back from there the altar-hearth of Duda and I dragged it before Chemosh in Kerioth. And I caused to dwell in it the men of Sharon (?) and the men of Mehuroth (?).
>
> And Chemosh said to me: "Go take Nebo against Israel"; and I went by night and fought against it from break of dawn till noon, and I took it and slew all, seven thousand men, boys (?), and women, and girls, for I had devoted it to Ashtar-Chemosh. And I took from there the altar-hearths of Yahweh (Jehovah), and I dragged them before Chemosh.
>
> And the king of Israel built Jahaz and dwelt in it while he fought with me and Chemosh drove him out from before me. And I took from Moab two hundred men, all its chiefs, and I led them against Jahaz and took it to add unto Dibon.
>
> And I built Qarhah (?), the wall of the forests and the wall of the hill; and I built its gates and I built its towers, and I built the king's house, and I made the sluices (?) for the reservoir of water in the midst of the city. And there was no cistern in the midst of the city, in Qarhah (?); and I said to all the people: "Make you each a cistern in his house;" and I cut the cuttings for Qarhah (?) with the help of the prisoners of Israel. I built Aroer and I made the highway by the Arnon. And I built Beth-bamoth, for it had been destroyed. And I built Bezer, for it was in ruins … [Chi]efs of Dibon were fifty, for all Dibon was obedient. And I ruled a hundred …, in the cities which I had added to the land. And I built [Mede]ba and Beth-diblathan. And [as for] Beth-baal-meon, there I placed sheep-raisers … sheep of the land. And [as for] Horonaim there dwelt in it … and Chemosh said unto me: "Go down, fight against Horonaim," and I went down … and Chemosh … in my day, and … from there … and I …

Notes on modern readings

- **Line 3.** Barton's "Qarhah" is now generally vocalized **Qeriḥoh** or **Qarḥoh**, the royal quarter of Dibon.

- **Line 12.** The object brought from Ataroth is *ʾrʾl dwdh*. Its meaning is debated: "the altar-hearth of its beloved (or of its David)" or "its chieftain, Uriel."
- **Line 17.** Mesha devoted (*hḥrmth*) Nebo to Ashtar-Chemosh. The verb is the same as the Hebrew *ḥērem* of the conquest narratives.
- **Line 18.** The modern reading is "I took from there the **vessels** (*kly*) of YHWH." Barton's "altar-hearths" follows an older reading. This is the earliest datable occurrence of the divine name YHWH outside the Bible.
- **Line 31.** A. Lemaire (1994) read *bt[d]wd*, "the House of David," in a damaged passage about Horonaim. The reading is plausible but disputed. A clear "House of David" appears on the Tel Dan stele (c. 840 BC, found 1993).

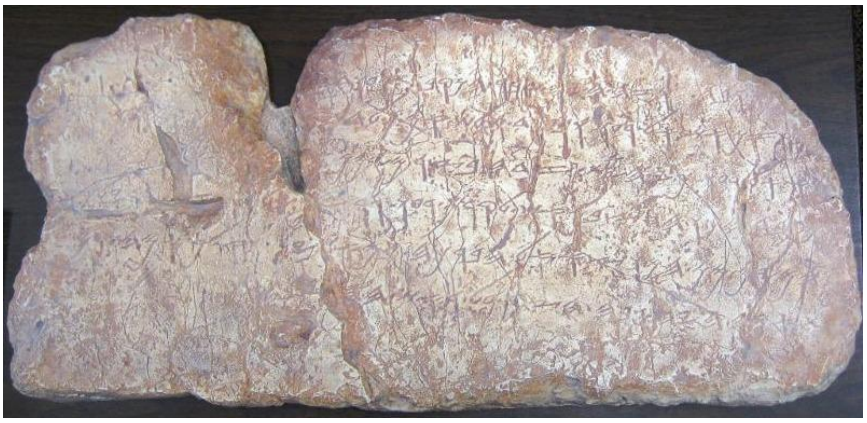
Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **2 Kings 1:1 and 3:4–27.** Mesha, "king of Moab, a sheep-breeder" (*nōqēd*, 2 Kgs 3:4), rebelled against Israel after Ahab's death. The Bible narrates the punitive campaign of Jehoram of Israel, Jehoshaphat of Judah and the king of Edom, which ended when Mesha sacrificed his firstborn son on the wall. The stele narrates Mesha's own successes and says nothing of that campaign. The two accounts are complementary rather than contradictory.
- **Omri's dynasty.** Omri and "his son" (Ahab, or possibly a later descendant) occupying Medeba for "forty years" agrees with the picture of Omride expansion in 1 Kings 16–22.
- **Theology of war.** Chemosh's anger causing Moab's subjugation, and his favour restoring it, closely parallels the Deuteronomistic theology of Judges and Kings, as does the *ḥērem* of a conquered city.
- **Language.** Moabite is very close to Hebrew. Waw-consecutive narrative verbs, the relative *ʾšr* and the *ḥrm* vocabulary are shared.

Further reading

- Dearman, J. Andrew, ed. *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989.
- Lemaire, André. "'House of David' Restored in Moabite Inscription." *Biblical Archaeology Review* 20.3 (1994): 30–37.
- Routledge, Bruce. *Moab in the Iron Age*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.
- Aḥituv, Shmuel. *Echoes from the Past*. Jerusalem: Carta, 2008.

50. The Siloam Inscription



A replica of the Siloam Inscription (the original is in the Istanbul Archaeology Museums).
Image: Wikikati. Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Limestone panel cut from the wall of the tunnel, six lines
Museum	Istanbul Archaeology Museums (removed from the tunnel in 1891)
Date	c. 700 BC (reign of Hezekiah)
Provenance	Hezekiah's Tunnel, City of David, Jerusalem; about 6 m from the Siloam end; discovered in 1880
Language / script	Hebrew, Old Hebrew (Paleo-Hebrew) script
Principal editions	Sayce (1881); Smend & Socin; Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions* (2005), Siloam 1

What it is

Technical summary. The inscription commemorates the moment when the two teams of tunnellers, cutting from either end of a 533-metre conduit from the Gihon spring to the Siloam pool, met under the hill of the City of David. It is a monumental Hebrew text with no royal name. Unusually, it celebrates the workmen's achievement rather than a king's. Its script and language are classical Judean of about 700 BC. Radiometric dating of plant material in the tunnel plaster and of speleothems (Frumkin, Shimron and Rosenbaum, *Nature* 425, 2003) supports a date of about 700 BC.

In plain terms. Workers digging a water tunnel from both ends under Jerusalem carved this note on the wall where they met: they heard each other's voices through the rock, broke through, and the water flowed.

The text (complete)

Translation of G. A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible* (1916), p. 377, public domain.

> The boring through [is completed]. And this is the story of the boring through: while yet [they plied] the drill, each toward his fellow, and while yet there were three cubits to be bored through, there was heard the voice of one calling unto another, for there was a crevice in the rock on the right

hand. And on the day of the boring through the stone-cutters struck, each to meet his fellow, drill upon drill; and the waters flowed from the source to the pool for a thousand and two hundred cubits, and a hundred cubits was the height of the rock above the heads of the stone-cutters.

Notes on modern readings

- **"Drill."** Hebrew *grzn* is the pick or axe of the stone-cutter (compare Deut 19:5; Isa 10:15).
- **"A crevice."** Hebrew *zdh* is of uncertain meaning: a fissure, an overlap, or a deviation in the rock.
- **The figures.** The 1,200 cubits are close to the measured 533 m if a cubit of about 44.5 cm is used.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **2 Kings 20:20** credits Hezekiah with making "the pool and the conduit" and bringing water into the city. **2 Chronicles 32:2–4, 30** adds that he stopped the upper outlet of the Gihon and channelled it down to the west side of the City of David. **Isaiah 22:9–11** and **Sirach 48:17** also refer to these works. Most scholars connect the tunnel with Hezekiah's preparations for Sennacherib's invasion of 701 BC.
- **Dating debate.** In 1996 J. Rogerson and P. R. Davies proposed a Hasmonean date for the inscription. Palaeographers (R. S. Hendel, J. A. Hackett, F. M. Cross and others) answered that the script and language fit only the late 8th century BC. The 2003 radiometric dates have largely settled the question.

Further reading

- Frumkin, Amos, Aryeh Shimron and Jeff Rosenbaum. "Radiometric Dating of the Siloam Tunnel, Jerusalem." *Nature* 425 (2003): 169–171.
- Hendel, Ronald S. "The Date of the Siloam Inscription: A Rejoinder to Rogerson and Davies." *Biblical Archaeologist* 59 (1996): 233–237.
- Dobbs-Allsopp, F. W., et al. *Hebrew Inscriptions*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.

51. The Lachish Letters

Image. The Ancient Stones page shows modern replicas. The only openly licensed photographs found on Wikimedia Commons are of a replica whose lettering does not match the original, so no image is reproduced here. The originals can be seen on the websites of the British Museum and the Israel Museum.

Object	21 inscribed pottery sherds (ostraca); 18 found in 1935, three more in 1938
Museum	Israel Museum, Jerusalem (Rockefeller Museum); British Museum, London
Date	c. 589–586 BC, during Nebuchadnezzar's final campaign against Judah
Provenance	Tel Lachish (Tell ed-Duweir), Israel; the guardroom of the outer city gate; excavated by J. L. Starkey
Language / script	Hebrew, Old Hebrew script in ink
Principal editions	Torczyner (Tur-Sinai), *Lachish I: The Lachish Letters* (1938); Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions* (2005); Aḥituv, *Echoes from the Past* (2008)

What it is

Technical summary. The ostraca are mostly letters, or drafts of letters, from a junior officer named Hoshayahu, at an outpost near Lachish, to his superior Yaush, commander at Lachish. They concern the receipt and reading of letters, the movements of officers, a prophet's warning, and the watch for fire-signals. Written in the last months of the kingdom of Judah, they are the most important body of classical Hebrew prose outside the Bible and a direct witness to the language of Jeremiah's time.

In plain terms. These are the last messages of soldiers in Judah's army as the Babylonians closed in. One officer reports that he is still watching for the signal-fires of Lachish but can no longer see those of Azekah.

Key excerpts

Translations by the author of this study from the Hebrew text (Dobbs-Allsopp et al. 2005).

Letter 4, reverse, lines 10–13

> And may (my lord) know that we are watching for the signal-fires of Lachish, according to all the signs that my lord has given, for we cannot see Azekah.

Letter 3, lines 13–21

> And it has been reported to your servant, saying: "The commander of the army, Coniah son of Elnathan, has gone down to go into Egypt; and Hodaviah son of Ahijah and his men he has sent to take (supplies) from here." And as for the letter of Tobiah, servant of the king, which came to Shallum son of Jaddua from the prophet, saying "Beware!", your servant has sent it to my lord.

The greeting formula (Letters 2, 3, 4 and others)

May YHWH cause my lord to hear tidings of peace (*šmʿt šlm*) …

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Jeremiah 34:6–7.** Jeremiah notes that, while the Babylonian army besieged Jerusalem, Lachish and Azekah were the only fortified cities of Judah still holding out. Letter 4's report that Azekah could no longer be seen, presumably because it had fallen, is the most frequently cited archaeological illustration of a biblical verse.
- **A prophet and an embassy to Egypt.** Letter 3's unnamed "prophet," whose warning circulated among officers, and a commander going down to Egypt fit the setting of Jer 26:20–23 (Uriah son of Shemaiah, who fled to Egypt and was extradited by Elnathan son of Achbor) and of Judah's reliance on Egypt (Jer 37:5–10; Ezek 17:15). Older proposals to identify the prophet as Jeremiah or Uriah are not provable.
- **Language and religion.** The letters use the divine name YHWH in oaths and greetings. Their many Yahwistic personal names (Hoshayahu, Yaush, Gemaryahu, Neriyahu, Jaazaniah) correspond to names in Jeremiah.

Further reading

- Torczyner, Harry. *Lachish I: The Lachish Letters*. London: Oxford University Press, 1938.
- Aḥituv, Shmuel. *Echoes from the Past*. Jerusalem: Carta, 2008.
- Dobbs-Allsopp, F. W., et al. *Hebrew Inscriptions*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.
- Ussishkin, David. *The Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish (1973–1994)*. 5 vols. Tel Aviv: Institute of Archaeology, 2004.

52. The Tel Dan Stele (“House of David” Inscription)



The Tel Dan Stele in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. The phrase bytdwd, “House of David,” is highlighted in white near the lower centre.

Image: Oren Rozen. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Three fragments (A, B1, B2) of a basalt victory stele; 13 partial lines
Museum	Israel Museum, Jerusalem (Israel Antiquities Authority collection)
Date	c. 840 BC (second half of the 9th century BC)
Provenance	Tel Dan, northern Israel; fragment A found in 1993 by Gila Cook of Avraham Biran’s excavation team, fragments B1 and B2 in 1994, all reused in later walls
Language / script	Old Aramaic, Phoenician-type alphabetic script
Principal editions	Biran & Naveh, *IEJ* 43 (1993): 81–98 and *IEJ* 45 (1995): 1–18; Schniedewind, *BASOR* 302 (1996)

What it is

Technical summary. An Aramean king, almost certainly Hazael of Damascus (c. 842–800 BC), commemorates his accession and his victories over Israel and Judah. He claims that Hadad made him king and that he killed seventy kings. Biran and Naveh’s reconstruction of the fragments names the defeated kings as [Jeho]ram son of [Ahab], king of Israel, and [Ahaz]iah son of [Jehoram], king of the *bytdwd*, the “House of David.” The phrase, written without a word-divider, is a dynastic name of the same type as Assyrian *Bīt-Ḫumri* (House of Omri). It is the earliest undisputed extra-biblical reference to David.

In plain terms. An enemy king of Damascus boasts that he defeated the king of Israel and the king of "the House of David," about 150 years after David. It shows that Judah's ruling dynasty was known by David's name.

The text (lines 3–9, as restored by Biran and Naveh)

Translation by the author of this study from the Aramaic text (Biran & Naveh 1995). Square brackets enclose restorations.

> 3. … and my father lay down; he went to his [fathers]. And the king of I[s]rael entered formerly into the land of my father.
>
> 4. [And] Hadad made me myself king, and Hadad went before me,
>
> 5. [and] I went forth from … of my kingdom, and I slew [seve]nty kin[gs],
>
> 6. who harnessed thou[sands of cha]riots and thousands of horsemen. [I killed Jeho]ram son of [Ahab],
>
> 7. king of Israel, and [I] killed [Ahaz]iahu son of [Jehoram, kin]g
>
> 8. of the House of David. And I set [their towns into ruins …]
>
> 9. … their land into [desolation …]

Notes

- **Authenticity and reading.** After a period of debate in the 1990s, the stele is accepted as genuine by almost all specialists. The reading *bytdwd* as "House of David" is accepted by the great majority. Alternatives ("house of the beloved," a place name) have found little support.
- **The joins.** The fit between fragment A and fragments B1/B2, and therefore the restoration of the names Jehoram and Ahaziah, is less certain than the reading "House of David," which is on fragment A alone.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **2 Kings 8:28–29; 9:14–28.** Joram of Israel and Ahaziah of Judah fought Hazael at Ramoth-gilead, and both were killed in 841 BC, in the Bible by Jehu. Hazael's claim to have killed them is often explained either as royal propaganda taking credit for Jehu's coup or as evidence that Jehu acted in league with Hazael. Either way, the stele independently confirms the two kings, their deaths in the same conflict, and Aramean domination of Israel in Hazael's day (2 Kgs 10:32–33; 13:3, 22).
- **The House of David.** The phrase matches the biblical "house of David" (e.g., 1 Kgs 12:19; Isa 7:2, 13) and confirms that a Judahite dynasty traced itself to a founder named David.

Further reading

- Biran, Avraham, and Joseph Naveh. "An Aramaic Stele Fragment from Tel Dan." *Israel Exploration Journal* 43 (1993): 81–98; "The Tel Dan Inscription: A New Fragment." *IEJ* 45 (1995): 1–18.

- Hagelia, Hallvard. *The Dan Debate: The Tel Dan Inscription in Recent Research*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009.
- Bible Odyssey. “The Tel Dan Inscription.” bibleodyssey.org

53. The Ketef Hinnom Silver Amulets



Ketef Hinnom amulet KH2 (the smaller silver scroll), unrolled. Israel Museum, Jerusalem.
Image: Scan of the Ketef Hinnom scroll KH2. Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Two rolled silver plaques (KH1, c. 9.7 × 2.7 cm; KH2, c. 3.9 × 1.1 cm), worn as amulets
Museum	Israel Museum, Jerusalem
Date	Late 7th or early 6th century BC (before the Babylonian destruction of 586 BC)
Provenance	Ketef Hinnom, Jerusalem, Cave 24, Repository 25; excavated by Gabriel Barkay, 1979
Language / script	Hebrew, Old Hebrew script incised with a fine stylus
Principal editions	Barkay, *Tel Aviv* 19 (1992); Barkay, Vaughn, Lundberg & Zuckerman, "The Amulets from Ketef Hinnom: A New Edition and Evaluation," *BASOR* 334 (2004): 41–71

What it is

Technical summary. The two amulets carry versions of the Priestly Blessing of Numbers 6:24–26 together with other liturgical phrases. KH1 also has a formula close to Deuteronomy 7:9, about God keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love him. They were found in a repository of a late Iron Age family tomb. High-resolution imaging by the West Semitic Research Project (University of Southern California) in 1994 allowed the 2004 re-edition. Palaeography dates them to around 600 BC. They are therefore the earliest known texts that correspond to passages of the Hebrew Bible, about four centuries older than the oldest Dead Sea Scrolls.

In plain terms. Two tiny rolled-up silver charms from a Jerusalem tomb, made about 600 BC, contain the blessing "May the LORD bless you and keep you …" from Numbers 6. They are the oldest surviving pieces of biblical text.

The text compared with the MT and the LXX

The amulet text follows Barkay et al. (2004). The glosses are literal renderings of each witness, prepared by the author of this study.

Line of the blessing	Masoretic Text (Num 6:24–26)	Ketef Hinnom KH2 (lines 5–12)	Septuagint (Num 6:24–26)
1	*yĕḇārekḵā YHWH wĕyišmĕreḵā*: “May YHWH bless you and keep you”	*ybrk yhwh yšmrk*: “May YHWH bless you, keep you”	Εὐλογήσαι σε κύριος καὶ φυλάξαι σε: “May the Lord bless you and keep you”
2	*yāʾēr YHWH pānāw ʾēleyḵā wîḥunneḵkā*: “May YHWH make his face shine on you and be gracious to you”	*yʾr yhwh pnyw [ʾlyk]*: “May YHWH make his face shine [on you]” (no “and be gracious”)	ἐπιφάναι κύριος τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ σὲ καὶ ἐλεήσαι σε: “… and have mercy on you”
3	*yiśśāʾ YHWH pānāw ʾēleyḵā wĕyāśēm lĕḵā šālôm*: “May YHWH lift up his face to you and give you peace”	*wyśm lk š[lw]m*: “and give you p[ea]ce” (no “lift up his face”)	ἐπάραι κύριος τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ σὲ καὶ δῴη σοι εἰρήνην: “… and give you peace”

Assessment. The MT and the LXX agree fully on the three-line blessing. The LXX’s ἐλεήσαι (“have mercy”) renders Hebrew *ḥnn* (“be gracious”) in the usual way. The LXX differs from the MT only in the order of the surrounding verses, placing verse 27 after verse 23. KH2 (and, where legible, KH1) gives a shorter, two-line form that joins the shining face directly to the gift of peace. Most scholars explain this as an abbreviation for amuletic use rather than as evidence of an earlier, shorter biblical text. The amulets show that the blessing’s wording was already fixed in its essentials before the exile, and that it agrees with the consonantal MT in every word it preserves.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

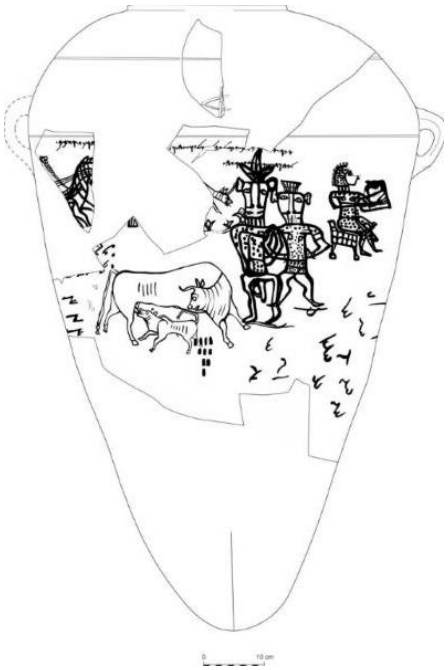
- **Numbers 6:22–27**, the Aaronic blessing, ends with the LORD’s promise to “put my name” upon Israel. The amulets literally put the divine name on the wearer.
- **Deuteronomy 7:9** (also Neh 1:5; Dan 9:4): KH1’s formula about the God who keeps covenant and steadfast love toward those who love him and keep his commandments.
- **Dating the Torah.** The amulets have been central to debates about the date of the Priestly material. They show only that this blessing was in use by about 600 BC; they do not by themselves date the book of Numbers.

Further reading

- Barkay, Gabriel, Andrew G. Vaughn, Marilyn J. Lundberg and Bruce Zuckerman. “The Amulets from Ketef Hinnom: A New Edition and Evaluation.” *BASOR* 334 (2004): 41–71.
- Naʾaman, Nadav. “A New Appraisal of the Silver Amulets from Ketef Hinnom.” *Israel Exploration Journal* 61 (2011): 184–195. Academia

- Smoak, Jeremy D. *The Priestly Blessing in Inscription and Scripture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

54. The Kuntillet ʿAjrud Inscriptions



Drawing of Pithos A from Kuntillet ʿAjrud, with the inscription "YHWH of Samaria and his asherah" above the painted figures.

Image: Drawing of the Kuntillet ʿAjrud pithos. Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Ink inscriptions and drawings on two large storage jars (pithoi), plaster wall inscriptions and incised stone vessels
Museum	The finds were returned to Egypt after the Israel–Egypt peace agreement; the pithoi were long displayed in the Israel Museum
Date	c. 800 BC
Provenance	Kuntillet ʿAjrud (Ḥorvat Teman), northeastern Sinai; excavated by Ze'ev Meshel, 1975–1976
Language / script	Hebrew, Old Hebrew and Phoenician script
Principal editions	Meshel, *Kuntillet ʿAjrud (Ḥorvat Teman): An Iron Age II Religious Site on the Judah–Sinai Border* (2012)

What it is

Technical summary. Kuntillet ʿAjrud was a small way-station on the desert route to Elath, used by travellers from both Israel and Judah. Its inscriptions include blessings in letter form. Pithos A reads: "I have blessed you by YHWH of Samaria and by his asherah." Pithos B has "YHWH of Teman and his asherah." A plaster inscription invokes El, Baal and "the name of YHWH." Whether "his asherah" refers to the goddess Asherah as YHWH's consort or to a cult object (a sacred pole or tree) associated with YHWH is one of the most debated questions in the study of Israelite religion.

In plain terms. Travellers at a desert stop around 800 BC wrote blessings "by YHWH of Samaria and his asherah" on storage jars. This suggests that some Israelites paired their God with the goddess Asherah or her symbol, as the prophets complained.

Key inscriptions

Translations by the author of this study from the Hebrew text (Meshel 2012).

> Pithos A: Thus says ʾAšyaw the king(?): Say to Yahalyaw and to Yawʿasa and to …: I have blessed you by YHWH of Samaria and by his asherah.
>
> Pithos B: … I have blessed you by YHWH of Teman and by his asherah. May he bless you and keep you, and may he be with my lord.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Asherah worship.** The Bible repeatedly condemns asherah poles and the goddess Asherah in Israel and Judah (Deut 16:21; 1 Kgs 15:13; 16:33; 2 Kgs 21:7; 23:4–7). Kuntillet ʿAjrud and Khirbet el-Qom (next entry) show what the prophets were opposing.
- **Regional forms of YHWH.** "YHWH of Samaria" and "YHWH of Teman" are comparable to local manifestations of a god, which Deuteronomy 6:4 ("YHWH is one") may be countering.
- **Blessing formula.** "May he bless you and keep you" echoes Num 6:24 (see the Ketef Hinnom entry).

Further reading

- Meshel, Ze'ev. *Kuntillet ʿAjrud (Ḥorvat Teman)*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2012.
- Hadley, Judith M. *The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel and Judah*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Dever, William G. *Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.

55. The Khirbet el-Qom Inscription



The burial inscription from Khirbet el-Qom, with an incised hand below the text.
Image: פעמי-עליון. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Inscription incised on a pillar in a tomb (Inscription 3)
Museum	Israel Museum, Jerusalem
Date	c. 750–700 BC
Provenance	Khirbet el-Qom (probably biblical Makkedah), west of Hebron; recovered by William G. Dever in 1967
Language / script	Hebrew, Old Hebrew script
Principal editions	Dever, *HUCA* 40–41 (1969–1970); Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions* (2005), Kom 3

What it is

Technical summary. The inscription, scratched beside an incised human hand, blesses a man named Uriyahu by YHWH and by "his asherah," the same phrase as at Kuntillet ʿAjrud. Its reading is difficult because of repeated incisions, but the key words *lyhwh* and *lʾšrth* are clear.

In plain terms. A Judean tomb from the 8th century BC carries a blessing for a man called Uriyahu "by YHWH and his asherah."

The text

Translation by the author of this study (Dobbs-Allsopp et al. 2005).

> Uriyahu the rich (?) has written it. Blessed be Uriyahu by YHWH; and from his enemies, by his asherah, he has saved him. (Written) by Oniyahu.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

Like Kuntillet ʿAjrud, the inscription documents a Judean belief in YHWH's asherah, the background to the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah (2 Kgs 18:4; 23:4–7). The incised hand may be an apotropaic sign, a protective "hand" motif known widely in the region.

Further reading

- Zevit, Ziony. *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches*. London: Continuum, 2001.
- Dobbs-Allsopp, F. W., et al. *Hebrew Inscriptions*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.

56. The Deir ʿAlla Inscription (Balaam Son of Beor)



Reconstruction drawing of Combination I of the Deir ʿAlla plaster inscription, written in black and red ink.
Image: Disdero. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Ink inscription on wall plaster, reconstructed from fragments into two "combinations"
Museum	Jordan Archaeological Museum, Amman
Date	c. 800 BC (mid-9th to mid-8th century BC)
Provenance	Tell Deir ʿAlla (biblical Succoth?), Jordan Valley; found in 1967 by H. J. Franken's Dutch expedition
Language / script	A local Northwest Semitic dialect (variously classed as Aramaic, Canaanite or "Gileadite"), Aramaic script
Principal editions	Hoftijzer & van der Kooij, *Aramaic Texts from Deir ʿAlla* (1976); Hackett, *The Balaam Text from Deir ʿAllā* (1984)

What it is

Technical summary. The inscription, written in red and black ink like a scroll on a plastered wall, is titled "The book of Balaam son of Beor, who was a seer of the gods." The gods come to Balaam at night. He weeps and reports to his people a vision of the divine council (the *šdyn*) ordering a goddess to darken the heavens. The second combination is more obscure and concerns death and the underworld. It is the earliest non-biblical text to name a figure known from the Bible, and the oldest known example of a "book" of a prophet's vision.

In plain terms. A wall painting of about 800 BC in Jordan tells a story of "Balaam son of Beor," the same prophet whose donkey speaks in the book of Numbers.

Key excerpt (Combination I, lines 1–5)

Translation by the author of this study (after Hackett 1984).

> The account of Balaam son of Beor, who was a seer of the gods. The gods came to him in the night, and he saw a vision like an oracle of El. They said to Balaam son of Beor: "Thus it will be done …" And Balaam rose in the morning … and he wept bitterly. And his people came up to him and said to Balaam son of Beor: "Why are you fasting, and why are you weeping?" And he said to them: "Sit down! I will tell you what the Shadday-gods have done …"

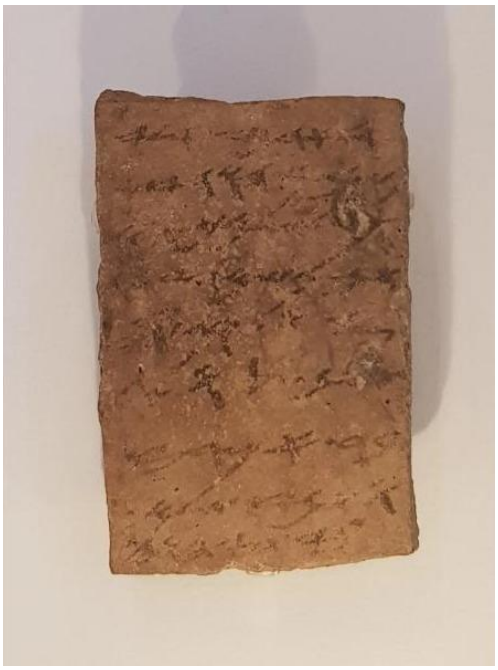
Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Numbers 22–24.** Balaam son of Beor is the seer hired by Balak of Moab to curse Israel. God comes to him at night (Num 22:9, 20), and his oracles include visions of the "Almighty" (*Šadday*, Num 24:4, 16). The Deir ʿAlla text shows that Balaam was a famous seer in Transjordanian tradition independent of the Bible.
- **Later tradition.** Balaam is remembered in Deut 23:4–5; Josh 13:22; Mic 6:5; and in the New Testament (2 Pet 2:15; Jude 11; Rev 2:14).
- **The* šdyn*. The council of* šdyn* gods connects with the divine name Šadday ("Almighty") in Genesis and Job.

Further reading

- Hoftijzer, J., and G. van der Kooij. *Aramaic Texts from Deir ʿAlla*. Leiden: Brill, 1976.
- Hackett, Jo Ann. *The Balaam Text from Deir ʿAllā*. HSM 31. Chico: Scholars Press, 1984.
- Hoftijzer, J., and G. van der Kooij, eds. *The Balaam Text from Deir ʿAlla Re-evaluated*. Leiden: Brill, 1991.

57. The Arad Ostraca



Arad Ostracon 18, a letter to Eliashib that mentions "the house of YHWH" (Israel Museum).
Image: פעמי-עליון. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Over 100 Hebrew ostraca (plus Aramaic and Greek ones from later periods)
Museum	Israel Museum, Jerusalem
Date	Mainly c. 600–587 BC (Stratum VI); some 8th century BC
Provenance	Tel Arad, Negev; excavated by Yohanan Aharoni, 1962–1967
Language / script	Hebrew, Old Hebrew script in ink
Principal editions	Aharoni, *Arad Inscriptions* (1981); Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions* (2005)

What it is

Technical summary. Most of the Arad ostraca belong to the archive of Eliashib son of Eshiyahu, quartermaster of the Judean fortress at Arad in its last years. They are orders to issue wine, bread and oil to troops and to the *Kittiyim* (probably Greek or Cypriot mercenaries), and letters about troop movements, including an urgent order to send men against an Edomite threat (Arad 24). The fortress also contained a small temple with an altar and standing stones, which seems to have gone out of use in the late 8th or 7th century BC.

In plain terms. The orders and letters of a Judean army supply officer from the last years before Jerusalem fell, written on broken pottery.

Arad 18 (complete)

Translation by the author of this study (Dobbs-Allsopp et al. 2005).

> To my lord Eliashib. May YHWH seek your welfare. And now, give Shemaryahu a … (of flour?), and to the Qerosite give a homer (?). And as for the matter about which you commanded me: it is well. He is staying in the house of YHWH.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **"The house of YHWH"** most likely refers to the Jerusalem temple. The **Qerosites** may be the "sons of Keros," a family of temple servants (Ezra 2:44; Neh 7:47).
- **Edom.** The threat from Edom in Arad 24 fits the hostility toward Edom in Obadiah and Ps 137:7 at the time of the Babylonian conquest.
- **The Arad temple.** A Judean sanctuary outside Jerusalem that apparently went out of use around the time of Hezekiah's reform (2 Kgs 18:4, 22) has been much discussed in connection with the centralization of worship (Deut 12).

Further reading

- Aharoni, Yohanan. *Arad Inscriptions*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981.
- Herzog, Ze'ev. "The Fortress Mound at Tel Arad: An Interim Report." *Tel Aviv* 29 (2002): 3–109.

58. The Samaria Ostraca



Drawings of Samaria ostraca with a comparative table of the Old Hebrew letters, from the publication of the Harvard excavations.

Image: Photographer unknown. Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	102 inscribed sherds (63 legible), shipping dockets for wine and oil
Museum	Istanbul Archaeology Museums; Harvard Semitic Museum
Date	Early 8th century BC (years 9, 10, 15 and 17 of a king, probably Jehoash or Jeroboam II)
Provenance	Samaria, royal acropolis (“Ostraca House”); excavated by G. A. Reisner, Harvard University, 1910
Language / script	Hebrew (northern dialect), Old Hebrew script in ink
Principal editions	Reisner, Fisher & Lyon, *Harvard Excavations at Samaria* (1924); Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions* (2005)

What it is

Technical summary. The ostraca record deliveries of “old wine” and “fine oil” from estates and clans in the hill country of Manasseh to officials at the royal court in Samaria. They give a regnal year, the clan district, the recipient and the commodity. The clan names include Abiezer, Helek, Shechem, Shemida, Noah and Hoglah, six of the clans of Manasseh named in the Bible. Personal names include both Yahwistic names (with *-yw*, e.g., Shemaryaw) and names compounded with Baal.

In plain terms. Delivery notes for wine and oil sent to the king’s palace at Samaria in the 8th century BC. They are written in the northern Hebrew dialect and name the same family clans as the book of Joshua.

A typical docket

Translation by the author of this study (Samaria 13).

> In the tenth year. From Abiezer, to Shemaryaw: a jar of fine oil.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **The clans of Manasseh.** Joshua 17:2–3 and Numbers 26:30–33 list the clans of Manasseh, including Abiezer, Helek, Shechem and Shemida, and the daughters of Zelophehad, including Noah and Hoglah. The ostraca show these names as real territorial districts of the northern kingdom.
- **Religion.** The mixture of Yahwistic and Baal names recalls the religious conflict of the Omride and Jehuite periods (1 Kgs 16–18; Hos 2:16–17).
- **Language.** The northern spelling *yn* for "wine" (southern *yyn*) and the theophoric ending *-yw* (southern *-yhw*) document dialect differences within Hebrew.

Further reading

- Reisner, G. A., C. S. Fisher and D. G. Lyon. *Harvard Excavations at Samaria, 1908–1910*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924.
- Kaufman, Ivan T. "The Samaria Ostraca: An Early Witness to Hebrew Writing." *Biblical Archaeologist* 45 (1982): 229–239.

59. The Khirbet Qeiyafa Ostracon



Illustrative drawing of the Khirbet Qeiyafa ostracon (by Michael Netzer). The original is in the Israel Museum.
Image: Michael Netzer. Licence: CC BY-SA 3.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Pottery sherd with five lines in ink, c. 15 × 16.5 cm
Museum	Israel Museum, Jerusalem
Date	Late 11th or early 10th century BC (radiocarbon dating of the site c. 1020–980 BC)
Provenance	Khirbet Qeiyafa, overlooking the Elah Valley; excavated by Yosef Garfinkel and Saar Ganor, found 2008
Language / script	Disputed (Hebrew or another Canaanite language); late Proto-Canaanite alphabetic script
Principal editions	Misgav, Garfinkel & Ganor in *Khirbet Qeiyafa* I (2009); Puech, *RB* 117 (2010); Rollston, *Tel Aviv* 38 (2011)

What it is

Technical summary. The ostracon is one of the longest early alphabetic texts from Canaan, but much of it is faded and the readings differ considerably between editors. Clear words include *ʿbd* ("serve" or "slave"), *špṭ* ("judge") and *mlk* ("king"). Some editors (e.g., G. Galil) read a social-justice text that mentions the widow, orphan and stranger. Others read a list of names or a letter. Whether the language is Hebrew is disputed. The site, a fortified town with a casemate wall and two gates, is central to the debate about whether a Judahite kingdom existed in the time of David.

In plain terms. A five-line inscription from a hilltop fortress dated to about 1000 BC. It is too faded for scholars to agree on what it says, but it is among the oldest alphabetic writings from the land of Judah.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **The Elah Valley** is the setting of David and Goliath (1 Sam 17). Qeiyafa overlooks it and has been identified, by its excavators, with biblical Shaaraim (1 Sam 17:52; Josh 15:36), a name that may mean "two gates."
- **Early monarchy and literacy.** The ostracon, with the Tel Zayit abecedary (next entry) and the Gezer Calendar (Part 5), is evidence for writing in Judah in the 10th century BC. That bears on whether royal administration and early written traditions existed in the time of David and Solomon.

Further reading

- Garfinkel, Yosef, Saar Ganor and Michael Hasel. *In the Footsteps of King David: Revelations from an Ancient Biblical City*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2018.
- Rollston, Christopher A. "The Khirbet Qeiyafa Ostracon: Methodological Musings and Caveats." *Tel Aviv* 38 (2011): 67–82.

60. The Tel Zayit Abecedary



Drawing of the letters and other markings on the Tel Zayit stone; the alphabet runs in the long central line.
Image: Funhistory (drawing). Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Limestone boulder (c. 38 lb / 17 kg) with an incised alphabet, reused in a wall
Museum	Tel Zayit excavation archive (Zeta Expedition)
Date	10th century BC
Provenance	Tel Zayit, Shephelah of Judah (perhaps biblical Libnah); found by Ron E. Tappy's team, 2005
Language / script	Alphabetic (Phoenician-type, transitional to Hebrew) script
Principal editions	Tappy, McCarter, Lundberg & Zuckerman, "An Abecedary of the Mid-Tenth Century B.C.E. from the Judaean Shephelah," *BASOR* 344 (2006): 5–46

What it is

Technical summary. The stone bears the 22 letters of the alphabet in sequence, with a few departures from the standard order (e.g., the order of *waw* and *he*, and of *kaph* and *lamed*). It was found built into a 10th-century wall. An abecedary is a scribal exercise or display of literacy. Its date and location show that the alphabet was being taught in the lowland region between Judah and Philistia in the 10th century BC.

In plain terms. Someone carved the alphabet, A to Z in Hebrew-style letters, into a large stone around 950 BC. It is one of the earliest known alphabets from the land of Judah.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Acrostic poems.** The order of the alphabet underlies the acrostic poems of the Bible (e.g., Ps 119; Lam 1–4; Prov 31:10–31). Lamentations 2–4 put *pe* before *ʿayin*, an order also found in some early abecedaries.

- **Literacy.** Like the Gezer Calendar and the Qeiyafa ostracon, it bears on scribal training in the early monarchy.

Further reading

- Tappy, Ron E., P. Kyle McCarter, Marilyn J. Lundberg and Bruce Zuckerman. “An Abecedary of the Mid-Tenth Century B.C.E. from the Judaean Shephelah.” *BASOR* 344 (2006): 5–46.
- Rollston, Christopher A. *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel*. Atlanta: SBL, 2010.

61. The Royal Bulla of King Hezekiah



The seal impression (bulla) of "Hezekiah [son of] Ahaz, king of Judah," found in the Ophel excavations, Jerusalem.
Image: Tamir Zegman. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Clay seal impression (bulla), c. 1 cm across
Museum	Ophel excavations, Hebrew University of Jerusalem (displayed at the Israel Museum)
Date	c. 727–698 BC (reign of Hezekiah)
Provenance	Ophel, Jerusalem, in a refuse dump near a royal building; excavated by Eilat Mazar, found 2009, published 2015
Language / script	Hebrew, Old Hebrew script
Principal editions	Mazar, *The Ophel Excavations to the South of the Temple Mount 2009–2013: Final Reports* I (2015)

What it is

Technical summary. The bulla was impressed by the personal seal of King Hezekiah. It reads *lḥzqyhw ʾḥz mlk yhdh*, "Belonging to Hezekiah [son of] Ahaz, king of Judah," arranged around a two-winged sun disk flanked by two *ankh* signs, Egyptian symbols of life. It is the first seal impression of an Israelite or Judahite king found in a scientific excavation. Previously known impressions of Hezekiah's seal came from the antiquities market.

In plain terms. A thumbnail-sized clay seal impression, stamped with King Hezekiah's personal seal, found in Jerusalem near the Temple Mount.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **2 Kings 18–20; Isaiah 36–39; 2 Chronicles 29–32.** Hezekiah son of Ahaz, king of Judah. The winged sun-disk motif, common in Judahite royal iconography of the late 8th century BC, shows Egyptian influence in the period when Judah looked to Egypt for help against Assyria (Isa 30:1–5; 31:1).
- A bulla found nearby, read by Mazar as possibly "belonging to Isaiah the prophet" (*lyšʿyhw nby[ʾ]*), is damaged and its reading is disputed.

Further reading

- Mazar, Eilat. *The Ophel Excavations to the South of the Temple Mount 2009–2013: Final Reports*. Vol. 1. Jerusalem: Shoham, 2015.
- Mykytiuk, Lawrence J. *Identifying Biblical Persons in Northwest Semitic Inscriptions of 1200–539 B.C.E.* Atlanta: SBL, 2004.

62. The *LMLK* Seal Impressions



A lmlk ("belonging to the king") seal impression on a jar handle, with a two-winged sun disk.
Image: Funhistory. Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Stamped handles of large storage jars; over 2,000 known
Museum	Israel Museum, Jerusalem; Israel Antiquities Authority; many collections
Date	Late 8th century BC (reign of Hezekiah)
Provenance	Throughout Judah, especially Lachish (Level III), Jerusalem and the Shephelah
Language / script	Hebrew, Old Hebrew script
Principal editions	Ussishkin, *The Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish* (2004); Vaughn, *Theology, History, and Archaeology in the Chronicler's Account of Hezekiah* (1999)

What it is

Technical summary. The handles of a standard type of storage jar were stamped before firing with *lmlk*, "(belonging) to the king," above a four-winged scarab or a two-winged sun disk, and below it one of four place names: Hebron, Socoh, Ziph or *Mmšt* (an unidentified site). Clay analysis shows all the jars were made in a single production centre in the Shephelah. Their destruction context at Lachish (701 BC) dates them to Hezekiah's reign. Most scholars connect them with a royal system of supplies organized in preparation for Sennacherib's invasion.

In plain terms. Thousands of royal storage jars from Hezekiah's kingdom were stamped "belonging to the king." They seem to have been part of his preparations for the Assyrian invasion of 701 BC.

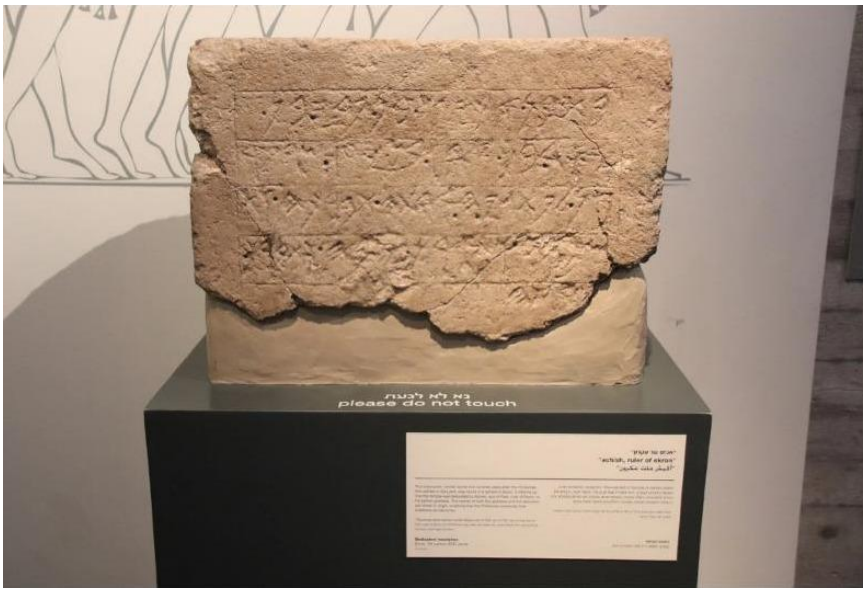
Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **2 Chronicles 32:27–29** describes Hezekiah's storehouses for grain, wine and oil and his fortified cities. The *lmlk* jars are generally taken as the archaeological trace of these preparations.
- **Hebron, Socoh and Ziph** are all listed among the towns of Judah (Josh 15:35, 48, 54–55).

Further reading

- Vaughn, Andrew G. *Theology, History, and Archaeology in the Chronicler's Account of Hezekiah*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999.
- Ussishkin, David. *The Renewed Archaeological Excavations at Lachish (1973–1994)*. Tel Aviv: Institute of Archaeology, 2004.

63. The Ekron Royal Dedicatory Inscription



The Ekron royal dedicatory inscription, naming Akhayush (Achish), ruler of Ekron (Israel Museum, Jerusalem).
Image: Gary Todd. Licence: CC0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Limestone block, five lines, found in situ in the sanctuary of a temple
Museum	Israel Museum, Jerusalem
Date	Early 7th century BC
Provenance	Tel Miqne (ancient Ekron), Philistia; excavated by Seymour Gitin and Trude Dothan, found 1996
Language / script	A Phoenician-type dialect with Philistine features, Phoenician script
Principal editions	Gitin, Dothan & Naveh, "A Royal Dedicatory Inscription from Ekron," *IEJ* 47 (1997): 1–16

What it is

Technical summary. The inscription records the building of a temple by Akhayush (*ʾkyš*), son of Padi, ruler of Ekron, for a goddess named *Ptgyh*, perhaps of Aegean origin. It lists five generations of Ekron's rulers. It established the identity of Tel Miqne as Ekron, and it links Philistine kings named in Assyrian annals with the city. Padi is the king of Ekron restored by Sennacherib after 701 BC (see the Sennacherib Prism). Akhayush is Ikausu, king of Ekron, in the inscriptions of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal.

In plain terms. A building inscription found in a Philistine temple names the king of Ekron and his father. Both kings are also mentioned in Assyrian records, and the king's name is the biblical name Achish.

The text (complete)

Translation by the author of this study (Gitin, Dothan & Naveh 1997).

> The temple which Akhayush, son of Padi, son of Ysd, son of Ada, son of Yaʿir, ruler of Ekron, built for Ptgyh his lady. May she bless him, and protect him, and prolong his days, and bless his land.

Points of contact with the Hebrew Bible

- **Achish.** *ʾkyš* is the same name as Achish, king of Gath, with whom David took refuge (1 Sam 21:10–15; 27:2–12). The name, probably Aegean in origin, remained in use among Philistine kings for centuries.
- **Ekron** is one of the five Philistine cities (Josh 13:3; 1 Sam 6:16–17). Its god Baal-zebub appears in 2 Kgs 1:2–16.
- **The title* śr** *("ruler," used of Akhayush) corresponds to the biblical* sĕrānîm*, the "lords" of the Philistines (Judg 3:3; 1 Sam 6:4), if the two terms are related, as many suppose.

Further reading

- Gitin, Seymour, Trude Dothan and Joseph Naveh. "A Royal Dedicatory Inscription from Ekron." *Israel Exploration Journal* 47 (1997): 1–16.
- Dothan, Trude, and Moshe Dothan. *People of the Sea: The Search for the Philistines*. New York: Macmillan, 1992.

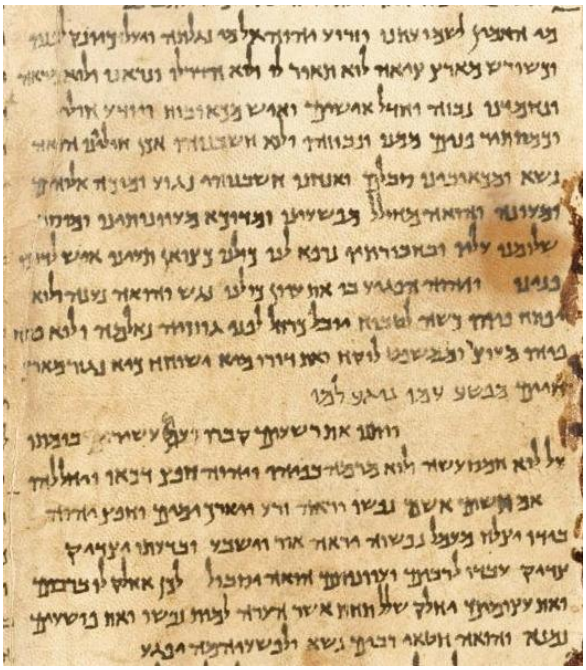
Part Six: The Dead Sea Scrolls

❧

This part covers the Dead Sea Scrolls. Unlike the other entries, the Scrolls are not a single object but a library of some 930 manuscripts. The entry therefore gives an overview of the discovery and contents, then focuses on what the biblical scrolls mean for the text of the Old Testament, comparing selected readings with the Masoretic Text (MT) and the Septuagint (LXX).

About the translations. No complete public-domain English translation of the Scrolls exists, and the biblical readings discussed here are given as literal glosses of the Hebrew and Greek prepared by the author of this study, so that each witness can be compared directly. Readers are referred to the critical editions and the free online images listed under Further Reading.

64. The Dead Sea Scrolls



Columns of the Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa[a]) showing Isaiah 52–53, Shrine of the Book, Israel Museum, Jerusalem.
Image: Ardon Bar-Hama (photograph). Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	About 930 manuscripts (some 25,000 fragments) from eleven caves near Khirbet Qumran, plus finds from other Judean Desert sites
Museum	Israel Museum (Shrine of the Book) and Israel Antiquities Authority, Jerusalem; Jordan Museum, Amman (Copper Scroll and others)
Date	c. 250 BC – AD 68 (palaeography and radiocarbon); the Qumran settlement was destroyed by Rome in AD 68
Provenance	Qumran Caves 1–11, northwest shore of the Dead Sea; found 1947–1956 by Bedouin and by excavators led by R. de Vaux and G. L. Harding
Language / script	Hebrew (about 80 per cent), Aramaic and Greek; square (Jewish) script, with some Paleo-Hebrew and cryptic scripts
Principal editions	*Discoveries in the Judaean Desert* (DJD), 40 vols. (1955–2011); Ulrich, *The Biblical Qumran Scrolls* (2010); Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (3rd ed., 2012)

What it is

Technical summary. The Scrolls fall into three broad groups.

- **Biblical manuscripts.** About 230 manuscripts cover every book of the Hebrew Bible except Esther. They are about a thousand years older than the earliest complete Masoretic codices (Aleppo, c. 925; Leningrad, 1008/9).
- **Parabiblical and apocryphal works.** These include *Jubilees*, *1 Enoch*, the *Genesis Apocryphon*, Tobit, Sirach and the *Temple Scroll*.

- **Sectarian compositions.** These include the *Community Rule* (1QS), the *Damascus Document*, the *War Scroll*, the *Thanksgiving Hymns* (*Hodayot*), and the *pesharim*, commentaries applying the prophets to the sect's own history.

Most scholars still associate the sectarian texts with the Essenes described by Josephus, Philo and Pliny. Alternative views (a Sadducean, priestly or Jerusalem-library origin) continue to be debated.

In plain terms. Between 1947 and 1956, shepherds and archaeologists found jars and fragments of nearly a thousand ancient Jewish scrolls in caves by the Dead Sea. A quarter of them are copies of Old Testament books, a thousand years older than any Hebrew Bible known before. The rest are the religious writings of a Jewish community of Jesus' era.

The Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa[a])

The best-preserved biblical scroll is 7.34 m long, with 54 columns containing all 66 chapters of Isaiah. It is dated palaeographically to about 125 BC, and radiocarbon dating supports a 2nd-century BC date. It agrees with the consonantal Masoretic Text in the great majority of its readings. Most differences are orthographic (fuller spelling with *matres lectionis*) or minor grammatical variants. This general agreement over a thousand years is the scroll's most important lesson for textual criticism. Its genuine variants, a few of them significant, show that the text of Isaiah was not yet absolutely fixed.

Selected readings compared with the MT and the LXX

The glosses below are literal renderings of each witness.

Passage	Masoretic Text (MT)	Qumran	Septuagint (LXX)	Comment
Isa 53:11	"From the anguish of his soul he will see; he will be satisfied"	1QIsa[a], 1QIsa[b], 4QIsa[d]: "he will see **light** (*ʾwr*)"	ὄψεται **φῶς**, "he will see **light**"	Three Qumran copies and the LXX agree against the MT. Several modern translations adopt "light."
Deut 32:8	"according to the number of the **sons of Israel**"	4QDeut[j]: "the **sons of God** (*bny ʾlwhym*)"	ἀγγέλων θεοῦ / υἱῶν θεοῦ, "angels / sons of God"	Qumran supports the LXX tradition. The reading underlies the "divine council" interpretation of the verse.
1 Sam 10:27–11:1	Nahash besieges Jabesh-gilead without introduction	4QSam[a]: an additional paragraph on Nahash's oppression of Gad and Reuben, gouging out right eyes	Lacks the paragraph (like the MT)	Josephus (*Ant.* 6.68–71) knew it. Some modern translations print it. Whether the MT lost it or 4QSam[a] added it is debated.
1 Sam 17:4	Goliath's height "**six** cubits and a span" (c. 2.9 m)	4QSam[a]: "**four** cubits and a span" (c. 2 m)	τεσσάρων πηχῶν, "**four** cubits"	Qumran and the LXX agree against the MT.

Passage	Masoretic Text (MT)	Qumran	Septuagint (LXX)	Comment
Jeremiah (whole book)	Long edition	4QJer[a],[c]: long (MT-like); 4QJer[b],[d]: short edition, ordered as in the LXX	Short edition, about one-seventh shorter	Both literary editions circulated in Hebrew. The LXX was translated from a different Hebrew text, not freely abridged.
Ps 145:13	No verse for the letter *nun* in the acrostic	11QPs[a]: includes a *nun* line ("Faithful is God in his words …")	Includes the line	Qumran and the LXX supply the missing acrostic line, which is adopted in several modern translations.

Assessment. E. Tov groups the Qumran biblical texts into proto-Masoretic texts (the largest group, especially for the Torah), texts close to the Hebrew source of the LXX, pre-Samaritan texts, texts written in "Qumran scribal practice," and non-aligned texts. The overall result is to confirm the antiquity and careful transmission of the proto-Masoretic tradition. At the same time the Scrolls rehabilitate the LXX as a witness to genuine Hebrew variants, and they show that in the Second Temple period several editions of some books (Jeremiah, Samuel, Exodus, Psalms) circulated side by side.

Points of contact with the New Testament

- **Messianic expectation.** The Scrolls attest expectations of two messiahs, "of Aaron and of Israel" (1QS IX 11). They also show a messianic reading of Isa 61:1 in the *Messianic Apocalypse* (4Q521), which lists healing the wounded, raising the dead and bringing good news to the poor. Compare Jesus' answer to John the Baptist (Matt 11:4–5; Luke 7:22).
- **"Son of God."** The Aramaic *Son of God* text (4Q246) speaks of a figure who will be called "son of God" and "son of the Most High." Compare Luke 1:32, 35.
- **Language of light and darkness.** The dualism of the "sons of light" and the "sons of darkness" (1QS III–IV; 1QM) has often been compared with John's Gospel and Paul (e.g., John 12:36; 2 Cor 6:14–15; 1 Thess 5:5).

Further reading

- Tov, Emanuel. *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*. 3rd ed. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012.
- Ulrich, Eugene, ed. *The Biblical Qumran Scrolls: Transcriptions and Textual Variants*. VTSup 134. Leiden: Brill, 2010.
- VanderKam, James C. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010.
- Abegg, Martin, Jr., Peter Flint and Eugene Ulrich. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999.
- Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library (Israel Antiquities Authority), free high-resolution images of all fragments. deadseascrolls.org.il

- The Digital Dead Sea Scrolls (Israel Museum), including the complete Great Isaiah Scroll. dss.collections.imj.org.il

Part Seven: New Testament Period Inscriptions



This part covers seven inscriptions from the Roman period that name people, places or institutions known from the Gospels, Acts and the letters of Paul: the Pilate Stone, the Caiaphas ossuary, the Temple Warning inscription, the Theodotus synagogue inscription, the Gallio inscription from Delphi, the Erastus inscription from Corinth and the Nazareth Inscription.

About the translations. These inscriptions are short, so each is given complete or nearly so in a fresh translation from the Latin or Greek by the author of this study, following the standard editions named in each entry. New Testament passages are cited by reference. Where the inscriptions bear on the Greek text of the New Testament, the wording of the Greek critical text (NA28) is noted.

65. The Pilate Stone



The Pilate Stone at Caesarea Maritima. The stone shown on site is a replica; the original is in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

Image: Fallaner. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Limestone block, 82 × 65 cm, reused as a step in a later rebuilding of the theatre
Museum	Israel Museum, Jerusalem (original); replica at Caesarea
Date	AD 26–36 (prefecture of Pontius Pilate)
Provenance	Theatre of Caesarea Maritima, Israel; excavated by Antonio Frova's Italian expedition, 1961
Language / script	Latin, capitals
Principal editions	Frova, *Rendiconti dell'Istituto Lombardo* 95 (1961); Alföldy, *Scripta Classica Israelica* 18 (1999); *CIIP* II 1277

What it is

Technical summary. The partially preserved four-line inscription records a dedication by Pontius Pilate of a building called the *Tiberieum*, probably a structure honouring the emperor Tiberius (G. Alföldy proposed a lighthouse). It gives Pilate's official title as *praefectus Iudaeae*, "prefect of Judaea." It is the only inscription contemporary with Pilate that names him.

In plain terms. A stone block from Caesarea carries the name and title of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor who sentenced Jesus.

The text

Translation by the author of this study, following Alföldy's restoration.

[To the divine Augusti (?)] this Tiberieum

[… Po]ntius Pilatus,

[… pref]ect of Judaea,

[… made and dedicated (?)].

Points of contact with the New Testament

- **Pilate's title.** The Gospels call Pilate *hēgemōn*, "governor" (e.g., Matt 27:2, 11; Luke 3:1 uses the participle *hēgemoneuontos*). Tacitus (*Annals* 15.44) calls him *procurator*, the title used for governors of Judaea from Claudius onward. The inscription shows that in Pilate's time the official title was **prefect**. The Gospels' general term is accurate for either.
- Pilate also appears in Josephus (*Ant.* 18.35, 55–64, 85–89; *War* 2.169–177) and Philo (*Legatio* 299–305).

Further reading

- Alföldy, Géza. "Pontius Pilatus und das Tiberieum von Caesarea Maritima." *Scripta Classica Israelica* 18 (1999): 85–108.
- Taylor, Joan E. "Pontius Pilate and the Imperial Cult in Roman Judaea." *New Testament Studies* 52 (2006): 555–582.

66. The Caiaphas Ossuary



The ornate ossuary inscribed "Yehosef bar Qayafa," from a family tomb in Jerusalem (Israel Museum).
Image: deror_avi. Licence: CC BY-SA 3.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Decorated limestone ossuary (bone box), one of about twelve in the tomb
Museum	Israel Museum, Jerusalem
Date	Early 1st century AD
Provenance	A burial cave in the Peace Forest, south Jerusalem; discovered in 1990 during construction, excavated by Zvi Greenhut
Language / script	Aramaic, Jewish script, incised
Principal editions	Greenhut, "The 'Caiaphas' Tomb in North Talpiyot," *ʿAtiqot* 21 (1992); Reich, *ʿAtiqot* 21 (1992)

What it is

Technical summary. The most elaborately decorated ossuary in the tomb is inscribed twice: *yhwsp br qypʾ* ("Yehosef son of Qayafa") and *yhwsp br qpʾ*. It held the bones of six people, including a man of about sixty. Most scholars identify this man with the high priest Joseph Caiaphas (in office AD 18–36), whom Josephus calls "Joseph who was called Caiaphas." The identification rests on the name, the family-name form, and the quality of the ossuary. Some (e.g., É. Puech, W. Horbury) have questioned it, noting that the spelling may reflect *Qopha* rather than *Qayapha*.

In plain terms. A bone box from a Jerusalem tomb carries the name "Joseph son of Caiaphas." It very probably held the remains of the high priest who presided at the trial of Jesus.

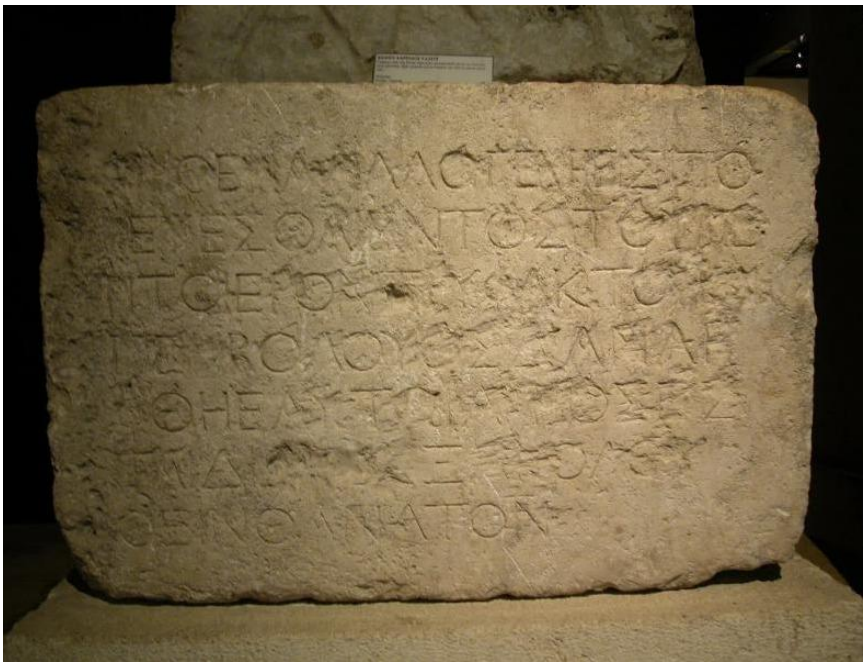
Points of contact with the New Testament

- **Matt 26:3, 57; John 11:49–53; 18:13–14, 24, 28; Luke 3:2; Acts 4:6.** Caiaphas the high priest, son-in-law of Annas, presides over the council that hands Jesus to Pilate.
- **Josephus,* Ant. *18.35, 95** names him "Joseph who was called Caiaphas," the form that matches the ossuary.
- **NA28 text.** The Greek of the New Testament spells the name Καϊάφας in all occurrences, consistent with the Aramaic *Qayyāpā*.

Further reading

- Greenhut, Zvi. "Burial Cave of the Caiaphas Family." *Biblical Archaeology Review* 18.5 (1992): 28–36, 76.
- Evans, Craig A. *Jesus and the Ossuaries*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2003.

67. The Temple Warning Inscription



The complete Temple Warning inscription, found in 1871 (Istanbul Archaeology Museums).
Image: Yong Woo Park. Licence: CC0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Limestone blocks; one complete example and one fragment
Museum	Istanbul Archaeology Museums (complete stone); Israel Museum (fragment found 1935)
Date	Late 1st century BC to AD 70 (Herod's temple)
Provenance	Jerusalem, near the Temple Mount; complete stone found by Charles Clermont-Ganneau in 1871
Language / script	Greek, capitals (the fragment retains traces of red paint)
Principal editions	Clermont-Ganneau (1872); *OGIS* 598; *CIIP* I.1 2

What it is

Technical summary. The inscription was one of the notices set at intervals along the stone balustrade (*soreg*) that separated the outer Court of the Gentiles from the inner courts of Herod's temple. Josephus describes these notices, in Greek and Latin, warning foreigners not to enter on pain of death (*War* 5.193–194; 6.124–126; *Ant.* 15.417).

In plain terms. A warning sign from the temple in Jerusalem in the time of Jesus: no non-Jew may go beyond this barrier, and anyone who does will be responsible for his own death.

The text (complete)

Translation by the author of this study from the Greek.

> No foreigner is to enter within the balustrade and enclosure around the temple. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for the death that follows.

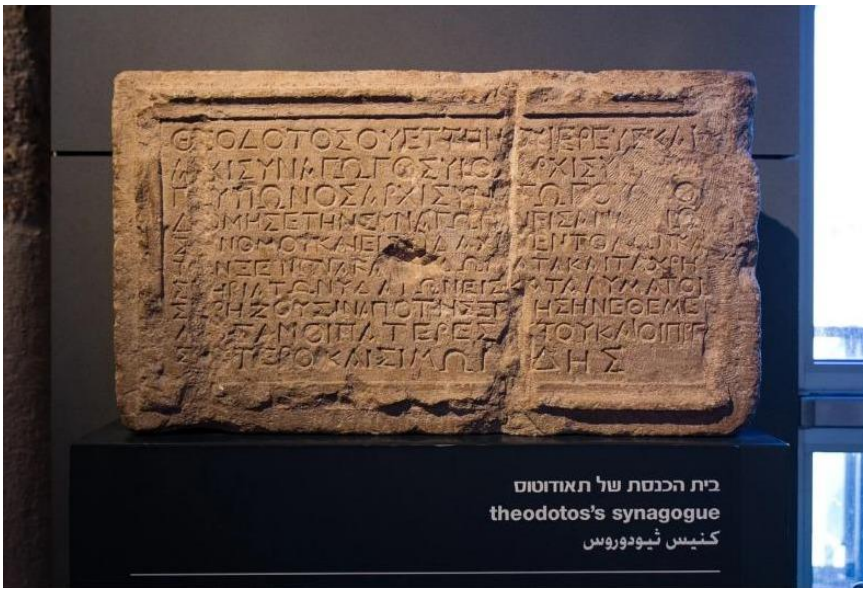
Points of contact with the New Testament

- **Acts 21:27–36.** Paul is seized in the temple on the accusation that he had brought Greeks, including Trophimus the Ephesian, into the inner courts and "defiled this holy place." The inscription shows why the charge was so dangerous.
- **Ephesians 2:14.** Christ "has broken down the dividing wall of hostility" (Greek τὸ μεσότοιχον τοῦ φραγμοῦ). Many commentators see an allusion to the temple balustrade, although the vocabulary differs from the inscription's τρύφακτος.

Further reading

- Bickerman, Elias J. "The Warning Inscriptions of Herod's Temple." *Jewish Quarterly Review* 37 (1946–1947): 387–405.
- Cotton, Hannah M., et al., eds. *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae*. Vol. I.1. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010, no. 2.

68. The Theodotus Synagogue Inscription



The Theodotus inscription in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.
Image: Oren Rozen. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Limestone plaque, ten lines of Greek
Museum	Israel Museum, Jerusalem (Rockefeller collection)
Date	Before AD 70 (most date it to the early 1st century AD)
Provenance	Ophel (City of David), Jerusalem, in a cistern; excavated by Raymond Weill, 1913–1914
Language / script	Greek, capitals
Principal editions	Clermont-Ganneau, *Syria* 1 (1920); *CIJ* II 1404; *CIIP* I.1 9; Kloppenborg, *JJS* 51 (2000)

What it is

Technical summary. The inscription commemorates the building of a synagogue in Jerusalem by Theodotus son of Vettenus, a priest and *archisynagōgos* (synagogue leader), the third generation of his family to hold the office. It describes the synagogue's purpose as reading the Law and teaching the commandments, and it mentions a guest house with rooms and water installations for visitors from abroad. Its date before AD 70 was challenged in the 1990s but has been defended on archaeological and palaeographic grounds (J. Kloppenborg, 2000).

In plain terms. A building plaque from a synagogue in Jerusalem from the time of Jesus. It says the synagogue was built for reading the Torah and had a hostel for Jewish pilgrims from other lands.

The text (complete)

Translation by the author of this study from the Greek.

> Theodotus son of Vettenus, priest and synagogue-leader, son of a synagogue-leader, grandson of a synagogue-leader, built the synagogue for the reading of the Law and for the teaching of the

commandments, and the guest house and the rooms and the water installations, as lodging for those in need from abroad. Its foundations were laid by his fathers and the elders and Simonides.

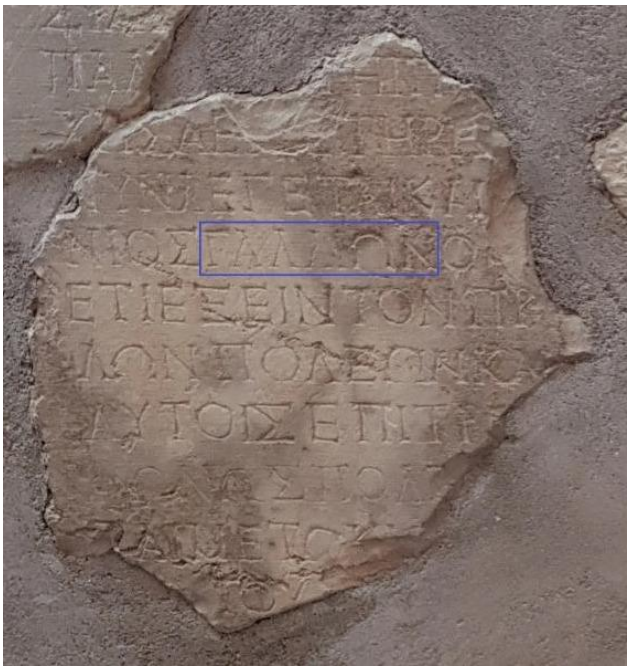
Points of contact with the New Testament

- **Synagogues in Jerusalem.** Acts 6:9 mentions the "synagogue of the Freedmen" and of Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and people from Cilicia and Asia. The Latin name Vettenus suggests that Theodotus's family may have been freedmen of a Roman family named Vettenus. Some have connected the building with the Synagogue of the Freedmen, though this cannot be proved.
- **Synagogue-leaders and reading.** The office of *archisynagōgos* appears in Mark 5:22; Luke 8:49; 13:14; Acts 13:15; 18:8, 17. The reading of the Law in the synagogue is described in Luke 4:16–21 and Acts 13:15; 15:21.

Further reading

- Kloppenborg, John S. "Dating Theodotos (CIJ II 1404)." *Journal of Jewish Studies* 51 (2000): 243–280.
- Levine, Lee I. *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years*. 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.

69. The Gallio Inscription (Delphi)



Fragment of the Delphi inscription with the name of Gallio, Delphi Archaeological Museum.
Image: Gérard. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Nine fragments of a letter of the emperor Claudius inscribed on the wall of the temple of Apollo
Museum	Delphi Archaeological Museum, Greece
Date	First half of AD 52 (Claudius's 26th acclamation as *imperator*)
Provenance	Delphi; fragments published from 1905, fully reconstructed by A. Plassart (1970)
Language / script	Greek, capitals
Principal editions	Plassart, *Fouilles de Delphes* III.4 (1970), no. 286; *SIG*³ 801

What it is

Technical summary. The emperor Claudius writes to the city of Delphi (or to Gallio's successor) about repopulating the declining city. He refers to a recent report from "Lucius Junius Gallio, my friend and [pro]consul [of Achaia]." Claudius's titulature dates the letter between January and August AD 52. Senatorial proconsuls governed for a year, usually from early summer, so Gallio's proconsulship is placed in AD 51–52 (some argue 52–53).

In plain terms. A letter from the emperor Claudius, carved at Delphi, mentions Gallio as governor of Achaia. That lets historians date Paul's stay in Corinth to about AD 50–52, the most secure date in Paul's life.

Key lines

Translation by the author of this study (Plassart 1970).

> Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, holder of the tribunician power for the 12th time, acclaimed imperator for the 26th time, father of the fatherland … sends greetings … as Lucius Junius Gallio, my friend and [pro]consul, recently reported to me …

Points of contact with the New Testament

- **Acts 18:12–17.** "When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia," the Jews of Corinth brought Paul before his tribunal, and Gallio dismissed the case. Paul had already been in Corinth for some time (Acts 18:11 says eighteen months in all). The inscription therefore dates Paul's founding mission in Corinth to about AD 50–52. It is the anchor for the whole chronology of Paul's letters and journeys.
- **NA28 text.** Acts 18:12 uses the precise title ἀνθυπάτου ὄντος τῆς Ἀχαΐας, "being proconsul of Achaia," which matches the inscription and the status of Achaia as a senatorial province after AD 44.

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70. The Erastus Inscription (Corinth)



The Erastus inscription in situ near the theatre of Corinth; the letters were originally filled with bronze.
Image: Rduncan2. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Limestone paving slab with letters once inlaid with bronze (the bronze is lost)
Museum	In situ, Corinth, northeast of the theatre
Date	Mid-1st century AD (most); some scholars argue for the 2nd century AD
Provenance	Corinth, Greece; found by the American School of Classical Studies, 1929
Language / script	Latin, capitals
Principal editions	Kent, *Corinth* VIII.3: *The Inscriptions 1926–1950* (1966), no. 232

What it is

Technical summary. The inscription reads [...] *ERASTVS PRO AEDILITATE S(VA) P(ECVNIA) STRAVIT*: "Erastus, in return for his aedileship, laid (this pavement) at his own expense." The aedile was one of the elected magistrates of the Roman colony of Corinth, responsible for public works and markets. Whether this Erastus is the Erastus of Romans 16:23 is debated. S. J. Friesen (2010) argued for a later date and a different man. Others (e.g., A. D. Clarke; J. K. Goodrich) defend the identification.

In plain terms. A paving stone in Corinth records that a man named Erastus paid for the pavement in thanks for being elected a city official. He may be the Erastus whom Paul mentions as Corinth's city treasurer.

The text (complete as preserved)

Translation by the author of this study from the Latin.

… Erastus, in return for his aedileship, laid (this pavement) at his own expense.

Points of contact with the New Testament

- **Romans 16:23.** Paul, writing from Corinth, sends greetings from "Erastus, the city treasurer" (NA28: Ἔραστος ὁ οἰκονόμος τῆς πόλεως). Whether *oikonomos tēs poleōs* is the Greek equivalent of the Latin *aedilis*, or a lower office held before it, is part of the debate.
- **Acts 19:22; 2 Timothy 4:20.** An Erastus is among Paul's co-workers who "remained at Corinth."

Further reading

- Friesen, Steven J. "The Wrong Erastus: Ideology, Archaeology, and Exegesis." In *Corinth in Context*, ed. S. J. Friesen, D. N. Schowalter and J. C. Walters, 231–256. Leiden: Brill, 2010.
- Goodrich, John K. "Erastus, Quaestor of Corinth: The Administrative Rank of ὁ οἰκονόμος τῆς πόλεως (Rom 16.23) in an Achaean Colony." *New Testament Studies* 56 (2010): 90–115.

71. The Nazareth Inscription



The Nazareth Inscription, a Greek imperial edict against the violation of tombs (photograph from F. Cumont's 1930 publication).

Image: F. Cumont (photograph, 1930). Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons, file page.

Object	Marble slab, 22 lines
Museum	Bibliothèque nationale de France, Cabinet des Médailles, Paris (Froehner collection)
Date	Early 1st century AD (from Augustus to Claudius; the emperor is not named)
Provenance	Sent from Nazareth to Paris in 1878, according to Wilhelm Froehner's inventory note; its original location is uncertain
Language / script	Greek, capitals
Principal editions	Cumont, "Un rescrit impérial sur la violation de sépulture," *Revue historique* 163 (1930); *SEG* 8.13

What it is

Technical summary. The text is a Greek translation of an imperial decision (*diatagma Kaisaros*, "ordinance of Caesar"). It orders that tombs remain undisturbed forever and that anyone who destroys them, removes the dead, or transfers the bodies "with wicked intent" be tried as for offences against the gods, with capital punishment for violation of a tomb. Because it was reportedly sent from Nazareth, it was long connected with the resurrection of Jesus. In 2020, a geochemical study of the marble by K. Harper and colleagues (*Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports* 30) traced the stone to the island of Kos. The study suggests the edict may have been set up there and reached Nazareth only later, if at all.

In plain terms. A Roman emperor's edict carved in marble threatens the death penalty for anyone who robs a grave or moves a body. It was long thought to come from Nazareth and to be connected to the story of Jesus' empty tomb, but recent tests suggest the stone came from the Greek island of Kos.

The text (complete)

Translation by the author of this study from the Greek (Cumont 1930).

> Ordinance of Caesar. It is my decision that graves and tombs, which people have made for the worship of their ancestors or children or members of their household, remain undisturbed forever. But if anyone lays information that another has either destroyed them, or in any other way cast out the buried, or with wicked intent transferred them to other places to the injury of the buried, or removed the sealing or other stones, against such a person I order that a trial be held, as in respect of the gods, so also in regard to the honours paid to mortals. For it shall be much more obligatory to honour the buried. Let it be absolutely forbidden for anyone to disturb them. In the case of violation, I wish the offender to suffer capital punishment on the charge of tomb-robbery.

Points of contact with the New Testament

- **Matthew 27:62–66; 28:11–15.** The chief priests seal the tomb and later spread the claim that the disciples stole Jesus' body. Earlier scholars (e.g., F. de Zulueta) suggested the edict was a Roman reaction to that claim. Since the inscription can be dated anywhere from Augustus to Claudius, and its place of display is now uncertain, most scholars regard such a direct link as unprovable. It remains valuable evidence for the seriousness of tomb violation in Roman law at the time.

Further reading

- Cumont, Franz. "Un rescrit impérial sur la violation de sépulture." *Revue historique* 163 (1930): 241–266.
- Harper, Kyle, et al. "The Nazareth Inscription: A Stable Isotope Analysis of the Marble." *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports* 30 (2020): 102228.
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Appendix A. Enūma eliš Tablet III: Complete Translation and Notes

This appendix gives the complete text of Enūma eliš Tablet III (138 lines) in the public-domain translation of L. W. King, *The Seven Tablets of Creation* (London: Luzac, 1902), with notes on the modern readings of W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths* (2013), and the electronic Babylonian Library edition by A. C. Heinrich et al. (2021, translated by B. R. Foster). The principal manuscript, K.3473 + Rm.615 + 1879,0708.296 from Nineveh, is shown in entry 4 (Enūma eliš). Full-resolution photographs are available from the eBL record.

Square brackets [ ] mark text restored by King where the tablets were broken; parentheses ( ) mark words added for sense; an ellipsis (…) marks a gap. Section headings are editorial.

Lines 1ff. — Anšar commissions his vizier

1. Anshar opened his mouth, and
2. [Unto Gaga], his [minister], spake the word:
3. "[O Gaga, thou minis]ter that rejoicest my spirit,
4. "[Unto Lahmu and Lah]amu will I send thee.
5. "[…] thou canst attain,
6. "[…] thou shalt cause to be brought before thee.
7. "[… let] the gods, all of them,
8. "[Make ready for a feast], at a banquet let them sit,
9. "[Let them eat bread], let them mix wine,
10. "[That for Marduk], their avenger, they may decree the fate.
11. "[Go,] Gaga, stand before them,
12. "[And all that] I tell thee, repeat unto them, (and say):

Lines 13ff. — Anšar's message (first statement)

13. "[Anshar], your son, hath sent me,
14. "[The purpose] of his heart he hath made known unto me.
15. "[He saith that Tia]mat our mother hath conceived a hatred for us,
16. "[With all] her force she rageth, full of wrath.
17. "All the gods have turned to her,
18. "With those, whom ye created, they go at her side.
19. "They are banded together, and at the side of Tiamat they advance;
20. "They are furious, they devise mischief without resting night and day.
21. "They prepare for battle, fuming and raging;
22. "They have joined their forces and are making war.
23. "Ummu-Hubur, who formed all things,
24. "Hath made in addition weapons invincible, she hath spawned monster-serpents,
25. "Sharp of tooth and merciless of fang.
26. "With poison instead of blood she hath filled their bodies.
27. "Fierce monster-vipers she hath clothed with terror,
28. "With splendour she hath decked them, she hath made them of lofty stature.
29. "Whoever beholdeth them, terror overcometh him,

"Their bodies rear up and none can withstand their attack.
"She hath set up vipers, and dragons, and the (monster) Lahamu,
"And hurricanes, and raging hounds, and scorpion-men,
"And mighty tempests, and fish-men, and rams;
"They bear merciless weapons, without fear of the fight.
"Her commands are mighty, none can resist them;
"After this fashion, huge of stature, hath she made eleven (monsters).
"Among the gods who are her sons, inasmuch as he hath given her [support],
"She hath exalted Kingu; in their midst she hath raised [him] to power.
"To march before the forces, [to lead the host],
"[To] give the battle-signal, to advance [to the attack],
"[To direct] the battle, to control the [fight],
"Unto him [hath she entrusted; in costly raiment] she hath made him sit, (saying):
"'[I have] uttered thy spell, in the assembly of the gods [I have raised thee to power],
"'[The] dominion over all the gods [have I entrusted unto thee].
"'[Be] thou exalted, [thou] my chosen spouse,
"'May they magnify thy name over all of [them … the Anunnaki].'
"She hath given him the Tablets of Destiny, on his breast she laid them, (saying):
"'Thy command shall not be without avail, and the word of [thy] mouth shall be established.'
"Now Kingu, (thus) exalted, having received [the power of Anu],
"Decreed the fate for the gods, her sons, (saying):
"'Let the opening of your mouth quench the Fire-god;
"'Whoso is exalted in the battle, let him display (his) might!'
"I sent Anu, but he could not withstand her;
"Nudimmud was afraid and turned back.
"But Marduk hath set out, the director of the gods, your son;
"To set out against Tiamat his heart hath prompted (him).
"He opened his mouth and spake unto me, (saying):
"'If I, your avenger,
"'Conquer Tiamat and give you life,
"'Appoint an assembly, make my fate preeminent and proclaim it.
"'In Upshukkinaku seat yourselves joyfully together;
"'With my word in place of you will I decree fate.
"'May whatsoever I do remain unaltered,
"'May the word of my lips never be changed nor made of no avail.'
"Hasten, therefore, and swiftly decree for him the fate which you bestow,
"That he may go and fight your strong enemy!"

Lines 67ff. — Kakka travels to Laḫmu and Laḫāmu

Gaga went, he took his way and
Humbly before Lahmu and Lahamu, the gods, his fathers,
He made obeisance, and he kissed the ground at their feet.
He humbled himself; then he stood up and spake unto them, (saying):

Lines 71ff. — The message delivered (verbatim repetition)

"Anshar, your son, hath sent me,
"The purpose of his heart he hath made known unto me.
"He saith that Tiamat our mother hath conceived a hatred for us,
"With all her force she rageth, full of wrath.
"All the gods have turned to her,
"With those, whom ye created, they go at her side.
"They are banded together and at the side of Tiamat they advance;
"They are furious, they devise mischief without resting night and day.
"They prepare for battle, fuming and raging;
"They have joined their forces and are making war.
"Ummu-Hubur, who formed all things,
"Hath made in addition weapons invincible, she hath spawned monster-serpents,
"Sharp of tooth and merciless of fang.
"With poison instead of blood she hath filled their bodies.
"Fierce monster-vipers she hath clothed with terror,
"With splendour she hath decked them, she hath made them of lofty stature.
"Whoever beholdeth them, terror overcometh him,
"Their bodies rear up and none can withstand their attack.
"She hath set up vipers, and dragons, and the (monster) Lahamu,
"And hurricanes, and raging hounds, and scorpion-men,
"And mighty tempests, and fish-men, and [rams];
"They bear merciless weapons, without fear of the fight.
"Her commands are mighty, none can resist them;
"After this fashion, huge of stature, hath she made eleven (monsters).
"Among the gods who are her sons, inasmuch as he hath given her support,
"She hath exalted Kingu; in their midst she hath raised him to power.
"To march before the forces, to lead the host,
"To give the battle-signal, to advance to the attack,
"To direct the battle, to control the fight,
"Unto him hath she entrusted; in costly raiment she hath made him sit, (saying):
"'I have uttered thy spell, in the assembly of the gods I have raised thee to power,
"'The dominion over all the gods have I entrusted unto thee.
"'Be thou exalted, thou my chosen spouse,
"'May they magnify thy name over all of them … the Anunna[ki].'
"She hath given him the Tablets of Destiny, on [his] breast [she laid them], (saying):
"'Thy command shall not be without avail, [and the word of thy mouth shall be established].'
"Now Kingu, (thus) exalted, [having received the power of Anu],
"[Decreed the fate] for the gods, her sons, (saying):
"'Let the opening of your mouth [quench] the Fire-god;
"'Whoso is exalted in the battle, [let him display] (his) might!'
"I sent Anu, but he could not [withstand her];
"Nudimmud was afraid and [turned back].
"But Marduk hath set out, the director of the [gods, your son];
"To set out against Tiamat [his heart hath prompted (him)].

"He opened his mouth [and spake unto me], (saying):
"'If I, [your avenger],
"'Conquer Tiamat and [give you life],
"'Appoint an assembly, [make my fate preeminent and proclaim it].
"'In Upshukkinaku [seat yourselves joyfully together];
"'With my word in place of [you will I decree fate].
"'May whatsoever [I] do remain unaltered,
"'May the word of [my lips] never be changed nor made of no avail.'
"Hasten, therefore, and swiftly [decree for him] the fate which you bestow,
"That he may go and fight your strong enemy!"

Lines 125ff. — The gods' reaction

Lahmu and Lahamu heard and cried aloud,
All of the Igigi wailed bitterly, (saying):
"What has been altered so that they should … […]
"We do not understand the d[eed] of Tiamat!"

Lines 129ff. — The assembly, the banquet, and the decree for Marduk

Then did they collect and go,
The great gods, all of them, who decree [fate].
They entered in before Anshar, they filled […];
They kissed one another, in the assembly […].
They made ready for the feast, at the banquet [they sat];
They ate bread, they mixed [sesame-wine].
The sweet drink, the mead, confused their […],
They were drunk with drinking, their bodies were filled.
They were wholly at ease, their spirit was exalted;
Then for Marduk, their avenger, did they decree the fate.

Notes on modern readings (Tablet III)

Line(s)	Note
2, 11, 67	King read the vizier's name as "Gaga." Modern editions (Lambert 2013; eBL 2021) read it as Kakka (Akk. kaka), Anšar's sukkallu (vizier, chief minister).
4, 68, 125	Laḫmu and Laḫāmu are the first divine pair born from Apsû and Tiāmat (Tablet I.10), so they are Anšar's own ancestors. This is why Anšar sends a formal envoy rather than summoning them.
8–9, 133–134	The feast formula. In the Akkadian, the gods eat ašnan (the grain-goddess's name, used for cereal produce) and drink kurunnu, a high-grade beer or wine. King's "sesame-wine" in line 134 is an outdated rendering.
15–52 = 73–110	Tiāmat's preparations. The same block appears in Tablet I, again in Tablet II, and twice here (once as Anšar dictates it and once as Kakka repeats it). Verbatim repetition like this is a normal feature of Akkadian epic messenger scenes (compare the Atra-ḫasīs and Gilgameš epics).
23, 81	Ummu-Ḫubur, "Mother Ḫubur," is an epithet of Tiāmat as the one who "forms everything." Ḫubur is also a name for the river of the netherworld.

Line(s)	Note
24–33	The eleven creatures. In Akkadian they are: mušmaḫḫū (monster-serpents, l. 24); ušumgallū (great dragons, l. 27); bašmu (horned viper); mušḫuššu (the "furious snake," the dragon on Babylon's Ištar Gate); laḫmu (the "hairy one," a protective hero-figure, not the god Laḫmu as King thought); ugallu (lion-demon); uridimmu ("mad lion/dog"; King's "raging hounds"); girtablullû (scorpion-man); ūmū dabrūtu (fierce storm-demons; King's "mighty tempests"); kulullû (fish-man); and kusarikku (bull-man or bison; King's "rams" is now abandoned). That is eleven, matching l. 36.
36, 94	ištēn-ešret, "eleven," the canonical number of Tiāmat's brood. Marduk later captures them and sets up their images (Tablet V).
38, 96	King's "Kingu" is now normalized Qingu. He becomes Tiāmat's consort and commander. In Tablet VI his blood is used to create humankind.
47, 105	ṭuppi šīmāti, "the Tablet of Destinies," is singular in Akkadian; King's plural "Tablets" reflects older usage. Holding it gives the right to decree fate. Marduk seizes it from Qingu in Tablet IV.
49, 107	King's "the power of Anu" translates ānūtu, literally "Anu-ship," that is, supreme divine authority. Modern translators render it as supremacy or sovereignty.
51–52, 109–110	These are Qingu's decrees to his troops. Line 51 (epšu pīkunu girra liniḫḫa) means roughly "let your utterance quell fire (Girra)": their command will be strong enough to put out the fire-god. King's line 52 is a guess at a damaged text. The modern reading (imtuk kitmuru magšara lišrabbib) has Qingu promise that their massed venom will force the mighty one to yield. Some manuscripts read ina kitmuri.
53–54, 111–112	This refers back to Tablet II, where Anu and Nudimmud (= Ea/Enki) were each sent against Tiāmat and turned back.
55, 113	apkal ilī, "sage of the gods" (King: "director"). Apkallu is the term for the antediluvian sages of Mesopotamian tradition.
58, 116	mutīr gimilli, literally "the one who returns the favor," i.e. avenger or champion. The same title for Marduk closes the tablet (l. 138).
60–64, 118–122	Marduk's conditions. He asks the assembly to name his destiny supreme and to let him decree fate in their place, with his word never to be revoked. This is the political heart of the poem, and the gods grant it in Tablet IV.
61, 119	Ubšukkinakku (King: "Upshukkinaku") is the gods' assembly hall.
126	The Igigi here are the great gods of heaven as a body.
127–128	King could not read l. 127. Modern editions take both lines as the gods' dismay: they ask what has turned hostile, that she has acted against them, and say they cannot understand what Tiāmat is doing.
131	Modern editions restore ḫidûta, "joy": the gods are filled with joy on entering before Anšar.
135–136	arsu matqu is a sweet beer-mash or porridge, and šikru is beer. King's "mead" is anachronistic. The gods grow pleasantly drunk.
137–138	The gods are carefree (egû) and their spirits rise. In that mood they decree the destiny of Marduk, which is formally carried out at the start of Tablet IV.

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