in this volume appear forty-three essays (plus a substantial preface) centered on the myriad different facets of Israel's exodus narrative. The book has its genesis in a conference held at the University of California, San Diego, in 2013. The sixty contributors—many of whom are listed as authors on more than one article—represent a diverse array of fields and specializations, and the collection itself comprises a lively interplay of viewpoints and methods ranging from tradition-critical and reception-critical study of the Bible to cyber-archaeology, and from Egyptology to geophysics.

The editors have organized the volume into seven thematic clusters, each of which deals specifically with the narratives of Israel's exodus from Egypt: science-based approaches to the natural phenomena, "cyber-archaeological" approaches to designing museum content, the biblical account within its ancient Near Eastern context, the formation history of the biblical account, reception history of the biblical account, Eastern context, the formation history of the biblical account, reception history of the biblical account, museum content, the biblical account within its ancient Near Eastern context, the formation history of the biblical account, and the "cultural memory," and the emergence of Israel in Canaan.

These seven sections are bookended by a lengthy opening section of the keynote papers and a conclusion. This organization is sometimes difficult to understand, since the keynote papers, written by longtime students of Israel's exodus traditions (Assmann, Bétak, Finkelstein, Geraty, and Hendel) anticipate many of the themes that emerge in the remainder of the book. Likewise, the conclusion (by Schneider) does not reflect on the proceedings of the conference so much as it proposes a new—and quite beneficial—correlate between Israel's exodus traditions and the endemic Egyptian ones from which the biblical author apparently drew their inspiration. Schneider finds thematic consonance between Egyptian rituals for protecting the Pharaoh at night and the apotropaic smearing of blood on the lintels of Israelite houses in Exodus 12. 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Israel’s Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, and Geoscience


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The keynote papers, written by longtime students of Israel’s exodus (Assmann, Hendel, Dever, Maeir, Matthews, Propp, Redford) and the section describing Jewish, Christian, and Muslim recollections of the exodus event will probably be less familiar. With few exceptions, the authors collected in this volume display a genuine interest in evaluating the biblical and archaeological data with historical sophistication and literarily-sensitive nuance. Only occasionally do qualitative disputes emerge, often these disputes are largely attributable to the scientists’ apparent unfamiliarity with the literary approaches necessary for unpacking the biblical accounts of the exodus. The balance, most of the authors seem to have reached the consensus that Israel’s exodus was primarily (or even exclusively) a literary event, engineered by knowledge— but not necessarily the experience—of Egyptian culture and literature. Its mythological scope likewise may have been informed by naturally-occurring geophysical phenomena, but there is absolutely no possibility of correlating any specific event (e.g., a purported eruption of Thera) with any putative movement of a West Asian population out of Egypt— an event (or, better, congeries of events) which was always occurring. In a field dominated by monographs and widely-dispersed articles, this book collects an impressive array of scholars exhibiting a plethora of approaches. It is a volume not to be missed.

Jeremy M. Hutton
University of Wisconsin – Madison

Figure 1. A depiction of laborers on the walls of the tomb of Rekhmire, Egyptian vizier in the 15th century B.C.E. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons via The Yorck Project: A Facsimile Edition of the Kammerer-Rib-Addi-Louvre AO7093.jpg. One of the Late Bronze Age Amarna letters (Louvre AO7093). This archive of diplomatic correspondence offers a portal of Egyptian power in the southern Levant immediately prior to the emergence of Israel. Image © Marie-Lan Nguyen / Wikimedia Commons / CC-BY 2.5, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Amarna_letter_AO_7093#/media/File:Letter_Rib_Addi_Louvre_AO7093.jpg.
Tell es-Sultan 2015: A Pilot Project for Archaeology in Palestine
~ Lorenzo Nigro

Sapienza University of Rome and the Palestinian MoTA-DACH have been committed since 1997 to the protection, scientific re-evaluation, and tourist rehabilitation of Tell es-Sultan, ancient Jericho. Excavations, surveys, and restorations over 14 excavation areas have allowed us to update our knowledge on the history of this long-lived site in the ancient Near East, and made it possible to match data collected by three previous expeditions in a comprehensive picture. From the Pre-Pottery Neolithic to the Bronze and Iron Ages, across ten millennia, Tell es-Sultan provides a lens through which to thoroughly investigate the Southern Levantine culture, its interconnections and achievements, and to test archaeological methods and the potential for a shared and respectful study of the past.

Beyond the River Jordan: A Late Iron Age Sanctuary at Tell Damiyah
~ Lucas Petit and Zeidan Kafafi

Tell Damiyah, located in the Central Jordan Valley, is identified by most scholars with the historical city of Adama, an important town destroyed by Pharaoh Shoshenq I in the late tenth century B.C.E. It is mentioned in the Old Testament along with sites like Sodom and Gomorra, and was ruled by a king. However, the minute dimensions of Tell Damiyah – only a few hectares at the most – makes this identification and description, at least at first sight, not very likely. A joint team of the Dutch National Museum of Antiquities and the Jordanian Yarmouk University has recently discovered the remains of a late Iron Age sanctuary built on the summit of Tell Damiyah. The objects under study offer an alternative explanation for the important international role the site must have played during the Iron Age.

Understanding the Land of the Bible – Gustaf Dalman and the Emergence of the German Exploration of Palestine
~ Marcel Serr

Gustaf Dalman (1855–1941) was the first director of the German Protestant Institute of Archaeology in Jerusalem (GPIA), Germany’s equivalent to the French École Biblique et Archéologique Française and the American School of Oriental Research (today, the Albright Institute). A theologian by trade, he followed very wide research interests that included the topography, the ethnology, the languages, the history and archaeology of the land of Israel. Dalman’s approach was based on his belief that one has to study the Holy Land in order to understand the Bible. In combining various research perspectives on the land of the Bible, he established the German “Palästinawissenschaft” – the scientific exploration of Palestine. His work culminated in his magnum opus “Work and Customs in Palestine.” Unfortunately, politics interfered with his research work.

Imagining Mari: Jean-Claude Margueron and the Archaeology of Tell Hariri
— Elizabeth Knott

Mari has been known to the modern world for over eighty years, yet familiarity with the city itself – its layout and history – has been limited. Early excavations unearthed important structures and sensational finds that came to dominate discussions of the city and created particular kinds of lenses through which the city was seen. Several decades ago French excavations under the direction of Jean-Claude Margueron began investigating the anatomy and development of the city, but Mari’s finds continued to provide the main basis for modern knowledge of the site. Margueron’s research, newly published in English, creates the potential for a watershed moment in the history of Mari scholarship, allowing those outside the circle of specialists to better understand the famous buildings, monuments, and texts, and promoting the inclusion of Mari’s archaeological data and material into other syntheses, histories, and studies.

The Epigraphic Digital Lab: Teaching Epigraphy in the Twenty-First Century C.E.
— Heather Dana Davis Parker and Christopher A. Rollston

The dictum “nothing ever stays the same” is certainly true of academics. Fields of knowledge are always in transition, and the field of Northwest Semitic epigraphy is no exception to this. Data continue to accumulate, methods of data analysis are constantly being refined, analyses of data are continually nuancing previous understandings and conclusions, and ways of presenting such conclusions often change. This paper focuses on the technological innovations that are impacting the study of inscriptions. A primary focus will be the use of digital technology in drawing ancient texts and palaeographic script charts and how to teach this technology in an epigraphic digital lab. Emphasis will be placed on the linear alphabetic Northwest Semitic corpus; however, the technologies, techniques, and methodologies discussed can be applied to other epigraphic fields.

Books to Dig into

Book Review
Israel’s Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspective: Text, Archaeology, Culture, and Geoscience
— Editors: Thomas E. Levy, Thomas Schneider, and William H. C. Propp
— Reviewer: Jeremy M. Hutton

Book Review
Cultural Expression in the Old Kingdom Elite Tomb
— Author: Sasha Verma
— Reviewer: Leslie Anne Warden