

# Archaeology and the Bible:

Ten Illuminations of  
Selected Biblical Texts

Patrick Hunt



STONE TOWER PRESS

Archaeology and the Bible: Ten Illuminations of Selected Biblical Texts  
Copyright © 2019 Patrick Hunt  
All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV®  
Copyright © 1973 1978 1984 2011 by Biblica, Inc. TM  
Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the author. The only exception is by a reviewer, who may quote short excerpts in a review.

Stone Tower Press  
7 Ellen Rd.  
Middletown, RI 02842  
stonetowerpress.com

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-7345859-0-2

Formatting and cover design by Amy Cole, JPL Design Solutions

Maps by A. D. Riddle, RiddleMaps.com

The cover image contains a detail of Sennacherib's Prism, British Museum, photo P. Hunt, 2019.

*Printed in the United States of America*

# Table of Contents



<b>PREFACE</b> .....	5
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	
An Archaeology of Words: Hebrew Poetry and Word Play in Genesis 1:1-2 .....	17
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	
Genesis 41, Joseph in Egypt, and Pharaoh's Dream of Seven Cows .....	25
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	
Joshua 5:2-3 and Flint Knives: No Anachronism .....	39
<b>CHAPTER 4</b>	
Why Solomon's Legendary Gold is Gone: I Kings 10 .....	51
<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	
Paleopathology and the Destruction of Sennacherib's Army Besieging Jerusalem in II Chronicles 32 and II Kings 19 .....	75
<b>CHAPTER 6</b>	
<i>Gebenna</i> : Hell as Metaphor? What and Where was It? .....	85
<b>CHAPTER 7</b>	
Translating <i>Alabastron</i> in Mark 14:3: an Archaeological Solution to a Philological Problem? .....	95
<b>CHAPTER 8</b>	
Corinthian Bronze, Demeter, and <i>Glossalalia</i> in I Corinthians 8, 13, 14 .....	107
<b>CHAPTER 9</b>	
The Throne of Charlemagne: Carolingian and Biblical Symbolism and Archaeology .....	129

**CHAPTER 10**

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse in Revelation 6 and History .....	145
--	-----

<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	159
---------------------------	-----

<b>ABOUT THE AUTHOR</b> .....	187
-------------------------------	-----

# Preface



“...Neither was there such a person as Ninus...but that Ninus should have erected on the Tigris at the distance of only forty leagues from Babylon a city named Nineveh, of so great an extent, this has but very little the air of probability...The imaginary empire of Assyria was not yet in existence at the time Jonah is introduced.”

Voltaire, *The Philosophy of History*, 1765<sup>1</sup>

Archaeology as an increasingly formal discipline since the 18th century owes much to curious inquiry about the literal, physical places of the Bible, which was widely read and followed at the time publicly and privately as well as in academic circles. Some adventurers such as the Swiss explorer Johann Burckhardt (1784-1817), most famous as the discoverer of lost and forgotten Petra in 1812, traveled for a decade around Palestine, Jordan, and Syria examining biblical sites and was intent on finding more about Edom, Moab, and Ammon. As W. M. Leake in the subsequent Editor’s Preface to Burckhardt’s 1822 *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land* states posthumously about Burckhardt’s discoveries: “He has greatly improved our knowledge of Sacred Geography, by ascertaining many of the Hebrew sites in the once populous but now deserted region, formerly known by the names of Edom, Moab, Ammon and the country of the Amorites.”<sup>2</sup>

Despite the above skepticism of Voltaire, other early practitioners such as British pioneer archaeologist Austen Henry Layard (1817-1894) intensively searched for Nineveh and proved its location at Kyunjik along with finding there some of the archives of Ashurbanipal’s Library.<sup>3</sup> Layard’s interest was partly due to Nineveh as a famous toponym from prophetic texts and stories in the books of Jonah, Isaiah and Nahum when the Enlightenment and Voltaire had relegated Nineveh to near mythological status.

To a certain extent, many early archaeology discoveries coincided with a fascination for materially documenting biblical and other ancient texts once it was understood soil and related decomposed organic material covered ancient cities—often covered by broken pottery fragments—and these could be partly revealed underneath by subsurface investigation. Such archaeological research gradually became followed more systematically and scientifically.

Although this is necessarily only the briefest of summaries, Greece, Egypt, and Mesopotamia naturally guaranteed a fair share of the focus in pioneering archaeology with great Classical, Egyptian and Near Eastern collections assembled worldwide since Johann Joachim Winckelmann's (1717-1768) time studying and collecting at the Vatican Museums. The Napoleonic Expeditions to Egypt in 1798, filling much of the Louvre Musuem in Paris, coincided with the shrinking Ottoman Empire, facilitating many Mesopotamian and Greek forays such as Layard's and those of Paul-Émile Botta (1802-1870), among others like Jean-François Champollion (1790-1832) translating hieroglyphs via the Rosetta Stone with the help of polymath Thomas Young (1773-1829) and followed by Henry Creswicke Rawlinson (1810-1895) resolving cuneiform inscriptions.<sup>4</sup>

Earlier, Pompeii and Herculaneum, discoveries from the 18th century onward certainly fueled the passion for understanding and collecting remains of Roman urban antiquities in Naples as well as other places.<sup>5</sup> Some of the great museums filled with antiquities collections from these seminal, mainly 19<sup>th</sup>-century expeditions, include the National Archaeology Museum in Naples assembled from early Bourbon royal collections, the Louvre in Paris, the British Museum in London, Berlin's Pergamon Museum along with its Altes and Neues Museums, and Munich's Glyptotek, as well as the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, the Egyptian Museum in Torino, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. By the mid- to late 19th century, earlier royal, princely and prelate collectors gave way to private industrialists and other wealthy collectors whose bequests filled these and other museums such as the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles.

The German Archaeological Institute (Deutsche Archäologisches Institut) began in 1832 and was followed by the French School at Athens (École française d'Athènes) in 1846. American pioneer scholar Edward Robinson (1794-1863), often termed the founder of "Biblical Geography," initiated Jerusalem explorations around the Temple area and his work there was followed by British officers Charles W. Wilson (1836-1905) and Charles Warren (1840-1927). The Palestine Exploration Fund began in 1865 with Queen Victoria's patronage. The Archaeological Institute of America consortium was founded in 1879 and the American School of Classical Studies at Athens began in 1881, both founded by Harvard University's Charles Eliot Norton (1827-1908), followed by the British School at Athens in 1886; most of these institutions having a focus on Classical Archaeology of Ancient Greece and Rome. The American Academy in Rome was founded in 1894. The American Schools of Oriental Research was founded in 1900. Heinrich Schliemann's startling visionary yet misguided forays at Troy and Mycenae in the last third of the 19th century were followed by more scientific expeditions as archaeology became a formal discipline with input from architects and surveyors. Even Schliemann's 1875 title *Troy and Its Remains* deliberately echoed Layard's Nineveh volume's title with the same publisher, John Murray in London. Pioneering Egyptologist William Matthew Flinders Petrie (1853-1942), originally trained as a surveyor, established a more rigorous approach to archaeology and ceramic studies among other notable contributions in archaeological methodology.

Yet, even into the early 20th century museums, universities, and seminaries concentrated enormous resources toward what became known as "Biblical Archaeology" as a discipline by itself and eventually several publications were published catering to that demand for archaeological knowledge about biblical places. William Foxwell Albright (1891-1971) at Johns Hopkins University helped establish the American Schools of Oriental Research Center in Jerusalem. One of his valued students was George Ernest Wright (1909-1974), an ordained minister who also taught at Harvard Divinity School from 1958 until his death, where he also helped curate the Harvard Semitic Museum from 1961

onward. Nelson Glueck (1900-1971) was another seminal archaeologist in the Jordan area (however his interpretations have fared since). Yigael Yadin, born Yigael Sukenik (1917-1984), and the son of Hebrew scholar Eleazar Sukenik (1889-1953), is one of the most famous names of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Israeli archaeologists (also military leader). Yadin was vital for the 1954 acquisition by Israel of some of the most important Dead Sea Scrolls—a huge stimulus for archaeology and Biblical studies since 1948; arguably one of the most important biblical discoveries of the 20th century and possibly of all time.<sup>6</sup> He was a principal excavator of Masada, among other sites including Qumran and Hazor. Yadin's pioneering counterpart in Israeli archaeology was Yohanon Aharoni (1919-1976) at Tel Aviv University. Gabriel Barkay (1945- ) and David Ussishkian (1935- ) are other eminent Israeli archaeologists whose legacies and work continue to be important.

Catering to insatiable appetites for an archaeology especially of the Bible, the American Society for Oriental Research began publishing *Biblical Archaeologist* in 1938, continuing until 1997, when it became the journal *Near Eastern Archaeology*. The Biblical Archaeological Society under visionary Hershel Shanks began publishing *Biblical Archaeology Review* in 1975 as a popular forum focusing on the dialogue between archaeologists and a hungry public.

While Albright's presuppositions as a "maximalist" supporting biblical historicity were never universally held, he is nonetheless acknowledged as the pioneer of "Biblical Archaeology"<sup>7</sup> Today, the term "Biblical Archaeology" à la Albright and his followers is a misnomer for many who may find it a possible oxymoron. Coupling a religious adjective in "Biblical" to a noun in "Archaeology" that aims for scientific precision is understandably problematic. Especially of concern is the precarious historicity of the biblical texts, compounded by narratives that are unquestionably supernatural. This mixing of documented history and the supernatural is too much for many, so they throw out the proverbial "baby with the bathwater," which is no doubt excessive. William Dever (1933- ) has been one of the advocates for the clarification of the nomenclature in defining (and also excising) what the word



“biblical” as a religious descriptor for what this branch of “archaeology” might entail.

There remain today “maximalists” in the vein of Albright, respected emeritus scholars such as Alan Millard at University of Liverpool, who along with Egyptologist colleague Kenneth Kitchen, maintains biblical historicity. Maximalist predecessors following Albright include Donald J. Wiseman (1918-2010) and Edwin Yamauchi (1937- ). There are also, however, in needed counterbalance, equally-respected “minimalist” scholars like Israel Finkelstein of Tel Aviv University, co-director of the Megiddo Excavations since 1994. Although, many would see Finkelstein as more centrist than radical minimalists like Thomas L. Thompson (1939- ) and Jon Van Seters (1935- ), who in general, rejected any biblical historicity.

If it is possible to get through the gauntlet of Finkelstein’s razor-sharp critical logic, biblical scholarship in archaeology survives fairly intact pending ultimate verification. Finkelstein teamed with co-author Neil Asher Silberman in the iconoclastic and groundbreaking *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology’s New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Sacred Texts* (2001), which has remained a provocative critical “minimalist” text (although now slightly dated and followed by other volumes published by the Free Press and Society for Biblical Literature in 2006 and 2007 respectively). Finkelstein is the primary exponent of the “Low Chronology” that assumes a later Iron Age sequence for the formation of Israel as a national entity from the 10th century BCE onward and, while acknowledging the historicity of David and his family, finds much of the biblical narrative of David and the United Kingdom ideological and after the fact.

Not all agree with Finkelstein and notable critics have included Amnon Ben-Tor and William Dever.<sup>8</sup> Although at times a co-author, Amihai Mazar often took issue with Finkelstein, believing the truth lay somewhere in the middle between minimalism and maximalism about biblical historicity.<sup>9</sup> Naturally, the pendulum continues to swing back and forth between minimalist and maximalist interpretations as Eilat Mazar in Jerusalem (daughter of Amihai Mazar) and others like Yosef Garfinkel and Saar Ganor at Khirbet Qeiyafa continue archaeological

investigations supporting biblical historicity for the Davidic Period. Time will tell if this possible biblical historicity holds up and what will be its reception.

Many archaeological texts of biblical relevance deserve mention but only a few are noted here. Israeli eminent archaeologist Amihai Mazar's *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible* (1990) remains a pillar text of archaeology for several generations with frequent revisions out of his Hebrew University, Jerusalem projects. Eric Cline, certainly among the most prominent American archaeologists along with Jodi Magness and Eric Meyer, has worked decades in Israel at Megiddo and Tel Kabri, among many other projects. His books include both popular and academic tomes. Cline's *Biblical Archaeology: A Very Short Introduction* (2009) is a succinct 168-page treasure. In that work's Epilogue, Cline notes: "Having overcome the sabotaging nihilism of the 1990s and the early part of the new millennium, and notwithstanding the ongoing debates regarding David and Solomon...biblical archaeology continues to benefit from new discoveries, especially ancient writing."<sup>10</sup> Cline then enumerates a few new philological discoveries, including a Philistine inscription from Gath that approximates Goliath's name, the oldest Hebrew abecedary from Tel Zayit, Khirbet Qeiyafa's proto-Hebrew from the 10th century, as well as a few material discoveries including the Jordanian Edomite copper industry at Khirbat en-Nahas that has Solomonic possibilities, and ongoing Jerusalem excavations on the Temple Mount and in the Iron Age Ophel. More than a few others could be enumerated that came after Cline's 2009 publication where the jury is still out on chronology and significance.

On the other hand, Cline's earlier 2007 book, *From Eden to Exile*, justifiably lampoons the credulous behavior of gullible persons who either look to "prove the Bible true"—an impossible task and intellectually suspect as well as having the obvious demerit of lacking faith—in chapters covering biblical mysteries such as Eden, Noah's Ark, the Ark of the Covenant, among other topics. His voice rings clarion:

While doing research for this book, I became amazed and, frankly, appalled by the amount of pseudoscientific

nonsense that has been published on these topics...These enthusiasts...all work outside academia. As such, they are not held to the same standards of rigor, peer review, and scrutiny as professional scholars...<sup>11</sup>

Now, about this little book. While I try to be patient often pointing out that Genesis 8:4 doesn't claim "Noah's Ark" landed on Mt. Ararat but on the mountains (plural) associated with what could be read as the region of Ancient Urartu and its Southern Transcaucasus empire until collapse in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE<sup>12</sup>, I often refer such Ark queries to my dear friend Irving Finkel at the British Museum, who authored *The Ark Before Noah: Decoding the Story of the Flood* (2014). Two other highly recommended books on Biblical Archaeology are by Jonathan Tubb (another British Museum friend) and Rupert Chapman, *Archaeology and the Bible* (1990) and T. C. Mitchell's *The Bible in the British Museum: Interpreting the Evidence* (2004). Tubb and Chapman remind readers how important reading of the Bible was in the early 16th century onward due to its growing availability, which went in tandem with scientific antiquarianism.<sup>13</sup> Although seriously dated, Donald Wiseman and Edwin Yamauchi's *Archaeology and the Bible: An Introductory Study* (1979) is still useful, as have been Yamauchi's caveats about vain attempts to prove the Bible true by a misuse of archaeology.<sup>14</sup>

Influences and possible outright borrowings from other cultures are a given in biblical texts, as attested in the resemblance of more than a few of the Mosaic-Sinaitic Law texts in the *Torah* (especially the *lex talionis* texts) to Hammurabi's Babylonian Law Code of the 19th century BCE, as well as Irving Finkel's studies of Exilic Jews influenced by Mesopotamian narratives such as Gilgamesh and Atrahasis texts, partly surveyed in his book *The Ark before Noah*.<sup>15</sup> In this vein, as previously with my publishing on the borrowing of Phoenician texts in Psalm 48:2-3,<sup>16</sup> we can contemplate the Egyptian long tradition of dream interpretation and the Seven Cows of Heaven roles in chapter/spell 148 of the so-called "Egyptian Book of the Dead" (*Book of the Coming Forth by Day*) and suggested parallels in Genesis 40-41 in the Joseph narratives as raised here in chapter 2 of this book.

Translations are, of course, the primary textual window to understanding the Bible, with archaeology remaining a secondary window based on materials and their contexts that may illuminate biblical texts. Among common biblical misreadings, it is important to understand the difficulties of translating ancient languages and the four barriers (at least) between us and biblical texts. We are far removed in time, place, language and culture from the biblical authors, so there is likely more than a modicum of problems from “lost in translation” such that some translations need revising almost every other decade due to the volume of research. Mathematicians may be correct in assuming there is no such thing as direct translation since (language) A does not equal (language) B; even linguists might agree. Whether or not some of these textual conundrums are insurmountable obstacles is arguable, but offered here in the following pages are ten selected biblical passages where archaeology can in fact illuminate text. Is it unlikely that archaeology can illuminate every biblical text, but these are just a very few that deserve further attention. If, as happens frequently, these few readings of text and materials together are either premature or wrong, I take full responsibility since archaeology is being updated constantly.

My own background may be relevant. I have published on some biblical texts relative to the Near East (including Phoenician) and lived in Jerusalem as well as Athens during graduate work and beyond. My double undergraduate degree was in Communication Linguistics and Biblical Studies (minoring in physical sciences), my first master’s degree was in Biblical Studies, and my Ph.D. in 1991 was in Archaeology (e.g., Archaeological Science), the latter from the Institute of Archaeology, London, now UCL. I was a graduate intern at the U.S. Geological Survey in Menlo Park and a graduate student in 1984 at the American School of Classical Studies, Athens. I did studies at the Institute of Classical Studies, London in papyrology in 1989, and at the Institute of Archaeology, London in ceramic technology, stone technology and weathering, geoarchaeology (and palynology, metallography of ancient metals, nautical archaeology, and other courses in materials studies between 1986-1988).

I have presented biblical papers at the Organization for the Study of the Old Testament (KUL Leuven 1989 College de France/Sorbonne 1992) and presented related conference lectures at many universities including Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KUL), Alexander von Humboldt University in Berlin, and at Oxford, U.C. Berkeley, Università ca' Foscari in Venice, among others. A few of my topical biblical publications were by Peeters in Leuven and Peter Lang Verlag in Frankfurt. In 1993 I was listed in *Who's Who in Biblical Studies and Archaeology* by the Biblical Archaeology Society. I was a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at University of California, Berkeley, in Near Eastern Studies under David Stronach. I continue archaeological research and while teaching since 1993 at Stanford University, I also work for National Geographic, grant sponsor of my research 2007-08, in various capacities including as a National Geographic Expeditions Expert since 2016.

As an archaeologist, I am all too aware of my limitations in biblical languages and the lacunae in my graduate and professional training despite covering a small range of archaeological disciplines including stone technology and deterioration, ceramic technology, and metallography studies. I also hold an appointment as Research Associate at the Institute for EthnoMedicine in Archaeoethnobotany, for which I study ancient plant texts such as Theophrastus, Pliny, and Dioscorides, among others, and recently published in the *Blackwell Cultural History of Plants* on ancient plant materials and technologies. Thus, the range of topics and materials in this brief book on biblical archaeology and a few selected texts across several millennia therein broadly reflects my professional interests, training, and fascination with the possible role of archaeology to illuminate selected biblical texts.

Patrick Hunt  
Stanford University & National Geographic  
2019

## Endnotes

- 1   Voltaire, *Philosophy of History*, X, Of the Chaldees, 1765.
- 2   John Lewis (Johann Ludwig) Burckhardt, *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land*. ed. W. M Leake. London: Association Promoting the Discovery of the Inner Parts of Africa, 1822, v.
- 3   Austen Henry Layard, *Nineveh and its Remains*. London: John Murray, 1849; Austen Henry Layard, *The Monuments of Nineveh: From Drawings Made on the Spot, First Series*. London: John Murray, 1849; Patrick Hunt, *Ten Discoveries That Rewrote History*. New York: Penguin Group, 2007, ch 3, 45-62.
- 4   Patrick Hunt, *Ten Discoveries That Rewrote History*. New York: Penguin Group, 2007, ch 1&2, 1-20, 21-44.
- 5   Hunt, 2007, ch. 6, 109-34; Eric Cline. *Three Stones Make a Wall: The Story of Archaeology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017, 13ff.
- 6   Francine Lelièvre, James Snyder, Joel King, eds., *Archaeology from King David to the Dead Sea Scrolls. Collaborative Exhibition in the Montréal Museum of Archaeology and History and the Israel Museum*, Jerusalem, 2003, 21; Hunt, 2007, ch. 7, 135-60, esp. 136, 159-60.
- 7   Peter D. Feinman, *William Foxwell Albright and the Origins of Biblical Archaeology*. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2004.
- 8   Amnon Ben-Tor, "Hazor and the Chronology of Northern Israel: A Reply to Israel Finkelstein." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research (BASOR)* 317 (2000) 9-15; William G. Dever, "Excavating the Hebrew Bible or Burying It Again?" (Review of *The Bible Unearthed*). *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research (BASOR)* 322 (2001) 67-77.

- 9 Amihai Mazar, "Does Amihai Mazar Agree with Finkelstein's Low Chronology?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 29.2 (2003); Jennifer Wallace, "Shifting Ground in the Holy Land" *Smithsonian*, May, 2006 where Mazar claims Finkelstein's anti-Solomon dating is "a huge distortion." Also see "Biblical Archaeology," *PBS Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*, Feb. 6, 2004, with interviews of Finkelstein and Mazar, among others (<https://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2004/02/06/february-6-2004-biblical-archaeology/12501/>).
- 10 Eric Cline, *Biblical Archaeology: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, 2009, 131.
- 11 Eric Cline, *From Eden to Exile: Unraveling Mysteries of the Bible*. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2007, ix.
- 12 Paul Zimansky, "Xenophon and the Urartian Legacy." *Pallas* 43 (1995) 255-68, esp. 255 where he equates "Ararat" and "Urartu"; Adam T. Smith. "The Making of an Urartian Landscape in Southern Transcaucasia: A Study of Political Architectonics." *American Journal of Archaeology* 103.1 (1999), 45-71.
- 13 Jonathan Tubb and Rupert Chapman, *Archaeology and the Bible*. London: British Museum Press, 1990, 9ff.
- 14 Edwin Yamauchi, *The Stones and the Scriptures*. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Company, 1972, introduction.
- 15 Irving Finkel, *The Ark before Noah: Decoding the Story of the Flood*. New York: Doubleday, 2014, 226ff.
- 16 Patrick N. Hunt, "Mt. Saphon in Myth and Fact" in E. Lipinski, ed., *Phoenicia and the Bible. Studia Phoenicia XI. Orientalia Lovanensia Analecta* 44, Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1991, 103-15.





# 1

## An Archaeology of Words: Hebrew Poetry and Word Play in Genesis 1:1-2



*Bereishit “In the beginning” opening word in  
Hebrew Torah scripture or Old Testament Genesis.*

**A**n archaeology of words alludes to the original meaning of *archaeologia* from the 18th century before the material discipline of archaeology formally began: it meant a study of ancient words. The richness of word plays in Hebrew illustrates how important ancient words were to those who thoughtfully crafted the scriptures. Although this is not in any way comprehensive, some of my favorite word plays from Hebrew literature show a deliberate use of language for suggesting multiple ambiguities, sometimes even steganographic (hiding things in plain sight), and often paronomasic (having connections

in both sound and meaning) ones. Genesis 1:1-2 is one such passage rich in poetic nuances.

Because we have no autograph manuscripts of the oldest biblical texts, we can only guess at the ways in which oral and written texts accumulated together. Sometimes older oral texts are embedded in later texts during the codification process. Before historiography even considered various stages of authorship, acknowledging prior sources would not have mattered, as Herodotus inferred in the beginning of his *History* 1.1, making an effort to distinguish *mythos* (= prehistory) from *historia* when events could be documented. While rather late in biblical history in terms of time lag, the oldest biblical text we have is from a Jerusalem tomb, ca. 600 BCE, and is from Numbers 6. It is the so-called “Priestly Benediction” or “Priestly Blessing” and is discussed at the end of this chapter.

One of the most subtle Hebrew word plays opens up the biblical text. Genesis 1:1 starts out “In the beginning God created....” In the Hebrew word order, the prepositional phrase “in beginning” comes first, followed by the verb “created” where the subject noun “God” comes third. The Hebrew preposition is *be-* (בְּ) for “in” and this is compounded with the word *rei’shit* (רֵאשִׁית) for “beginning” to create *berei’shit* (בְּרֵאשִׁית). The first three Hebrew consonant letters for “in beginning” are *beit* (בּ), *reish* (ר), *aleph* (א), exactly the same first three letters of *bārā’* (בָּרָא) for “created” with repeated *beit* (בּ), *reish* (ר), *aleph* (א), so when one examines these first two words “In the beginning created” in the Hebrew scriptures, they start out exactly the same. This is highly unlikely to be coincidental and forms a clever paronomasia (sharing sound and meaning<sup>1</sup>) as well as likely being a mnemonic device for the poetic opening of scripture. One of the first to notice this particular opening biblical paronomasia in the Anglophone world was Gary Rendsburg.<sup>2</sup> One could even poetically suggest here that “in beginning” has “created” embedded in it as a form of steganography.

That this phrase is paronomasic with “In the beginning created...” may not be as important as some of its possible purposes such as memorability and the use of poetry to make a theology manifest even nobler by rendering it poetically where the genre of poetry

further elevates the register of ideas more than prose for already elevated thought. Other poetic devices embedded in Genesis 1 include the assonance of *tōhû wābōhû* (תהו וְבוהו) for “formless and empty”,<sup>3</sup> along with the repetitions and shared patterns throughout (“And God said”, “...Let there be...”, “And God saw that it was good”, etc.). Another example of assonance in this Genesis 1:1-2 passage, likely also paronomasic given the parallels between sky and water, may be in the euphonic and semantic connection of *shāmayim* (שָׁמַיִם) “heavens” to *māyīm* (מַיִם) for “water.”

Furthermore, there is a lovely extended poetic figure that functions eidetically (multiple sensory evocation or dramatic intensification as an image<sup>4</sup>) in the imagery of Genesis 1:2b, where “the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the water.” Since the word for “spirit” *rûach* (רוּחַ) can also be used for “breath or wind,”<sup>5</sup> one might be able to visually imagine this by noting, for example, how on a bright day when sunlight shines across a lake, suddenly the wind comes up.

Blowing gently across the sunlit water, the wind breaks up the light into a kaleidoscope of bright fragments with its ripples. One cannot see the wind but one can see what it does, possibly even feel it on the face and hands so that close up it can also be a multi-sensory experience. Like steganography, or hiding things (in this case invisible God?) in otherwise plain sight, the image becomes all the more mysteriously profound because wind itself cannot be seen, only felt, and that instead its effects can be seen in a sensory paradox. Because it also implies movement, this can also be an image of kinesis. Even if this eidetic word picture is not a primary meaning in the passage,<sup>6</sup> it is nonetheless a possible intended ambiguity.

Then, there is the prior image that “darkness was on the face of the deep” in Genesis 1:2a. One more very tentative idea is that the word for “deep” in *tehôm* (תְּהוֹם) might refer not to sea, its customary meaning and primary domain in its other biblical uses. Of course this is not the normal context for this word given the already noted water imagery<sup>7</sup>—although as also mentioned above with *shāmayim*—*māyīm* there is a strong connection between sea and sky—but perhaps it can also suggest here not only a looking down but rather also a looking up to the

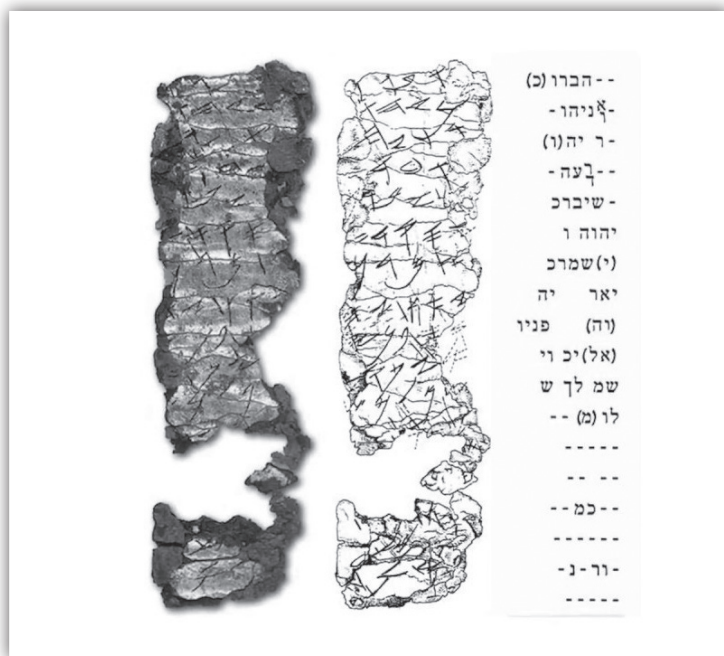
huge *abyss* of night sky? Could this be another possible intended multiple ambiguity, often a feature of great poetry?

Summarizing, what if the original material for this prose text was in fact poetry and orally transmitted for some time before written down? It could have been originally all the more memorable—possibly intended to be memorized—as hinted in the few poetic fragments that may remain. What better trope than poetry to express such profound ideas such as “in the beginning” already having “creation” embedded in it and a sensory subtlety of invisible divine wind hovering across water to gently stir it, especially if light can be seen but not wind, which can only be felt but its effects seen? This is a glimpse into something ineffable.

### Oldest Hebrew Inscription

Although unrelated, except as an example of the vagaries of archaeological survival and affirming how difficult it is for both artifact and textual survival from several millennia past, the apparently oldest Hebrew scriptural fragments ever found ca. 600 BCE—thus predating the oldest Dead Sea Scrolls material by at least 400 years—are from Ketef Hinnom, Jerusalem, excavated by Gabriel Barkay in 1979.<sup>8</sup> The Hebrew text was inscribed on rolled up tiny pure silver sheets; one is 10 cm by 2.5 cm (~4 by 1 in.). These must have been part of a necklace and function like *tefillin/phylacteries*. The text is called the “Priestly Blessing” or “Priestly Benediction” from Numbers 6: 24-26:

“The Lord will bless you and keep you. The Lord will make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord will turn His face to you and give you peace.”



*Ketef Hinnom Silver roll, ca. 600 BCE*  
 (Photo courtesy of Gabriel Barkay)

The importance of this archaeological find is underscored by the fidelity of the text with all subsequent texts. It must be remembered that texts are redacted to update language changes, a normal process that most cultures do when dealing with archaized language and subsequent change. Most 21st-century English readers cannot always easily follow Shakespeare, let alone Chaucer, in their original texts; even the King James Bible reflects archaic language needing to be updated, which is why new translations are needed every few generations.

If the original language of the Genesis text is considerably older than the Iron Age (its cultural background is clearly Bronze Age), which is moot—where possible archaic oral poetic elements exist in the above Genesis 1:1-3 word play-rich passage—then it could also be clear from Genesis that it has been edited about the same date as the Ketef Hinnom textual find: peoples like the Philistines do not yet exist but are mentioned

for an updated audience in places such as Genesis 21:32-34: “And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time” (vs. 34).

Of course the date of the biblical text of Genesis, likely an amalgam of different materials, oral and written, is controversial, so this last paragraph is speculative at best. Yet the Ketef Hinnom silver find of Numbers 6:24-26 easily demonstrates a literate audience ostensibly before the Babylonian Captivity, as do the Arad Letters on clay ostraka—potsherds written by very low-level soldiers,<sup>9</sup> and this Ketef Hinnom silver find evidences a biblical text that is virtually unchanged since, showing long-term textual continuity.



## Endnotes Chapter 1

- 1 Patrick Hunt, "Subtle Paronomasia in the *Canticum Canticorum*: Hidden Treasures of the Superlative Poet" in K.-D. Schunck and M. Augustin, eds. *Goldene Äpfel in silbernen Schalen. Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des Antiken Judentums* 20. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 1992, 147-54.
- 2 Gary Rendsburg, "Word Play in Biblical Hebrew" in Scott Noegel, ed. *Puns and Pundits: Word Play in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature*. Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2000.
- 3 Also identified as a Hebrew wordplay, cf. Everett Fox et al. *Encyclopedia Judaica* 3, 2007, 2nd ed., 572ff.
- 4 Patrick Hunt, "Sensory Images in Song of Songs 1:2-2:16," in M. Augustin and K.-D. Schunck, eds. "*Dort ziehen Schiffe dahin...*" *Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des Antiken Judentums* 28. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 1996, 69-78, esp. 70-1.
- 5 F. Brown, S. R. Driver, C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, (1951) 1994 repr., 924.
- 6 Note Harry Orlinsky, "The Plain Meaning of RUACH in Gen. 1:2," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 48.2 (1957), 174-82, esp. where he makes the case for interpreting this word as "wind," esp. 177-9.
- 7 Its earlier Akkadian cognate is *tâmtum* where it is also associated with the chaos of Tiamat. While Tiamat is not so likely intended here, yet neither is it a negation of Tiamat according to D. F. Tsumura, *The Earth and The Waters in Genesis 1 and 2: A Linguistic Investigation*. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989.
- 8 Ketef Hinnom, from Chamber 25, Cave 24. G. Barkay, A.G. Vaughn, M.J. Lundberg and B. Zuckerman, "The Amulets from Ketef Hinnom: A New Edition and Evaluation," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* [BASOR] 334 (2004): 41-71.

- 9 Shira Faigenbaum-Golovin, Arie Shaus, Barak Sober, David Levin, Nadav Na'aman, Benjamin Sass, Eli Turkel, Eli Piasetzky, and Israel Finkelstein, "Algorithmic handwriting analysis of Judah's military correspondence sheds light on composition of biblical texts," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, April, 2016; Shmuel Ahituv, "Arad Letters," *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2019 ([http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2212-4241\\_ehll\\_EHLL\\_COM\\_00000006](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2212-4241_ehll_EHLL_COM_00000006)); "Arad Ostraca, c. 600 BCE" *Center for Online Judaic Studies* ([http://cojs.org/arad\\_ostraca-\\_c-\\_600\\_bce/](http://cojs.org/arad_ostraca-_c-_600_bce/)).