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From the Desert to the Sown: Israel's Encounter with the Land of Canaan

Gary A. Rendsburg

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In the year 1908 BCE, an Egyptian courtier named Sinuhe, fearful of palace unrest upon the death of Amenemhet I (the founder of the Twelfth Dynasty), fled his native land into the Sinai Desert and beyond.¹ And while a peaceful succession brought Senwesret I (the son of Amenemhet I) to the throne,² by this point Sinuhe was miles from home and on his way to the land of Canaan. Upon his arrival in the land (called the "land of Yaa" in the text), Sinuhe marveled at the produce to be found there:

It was a good land, its name was Yaa.
Figs were in it, together with grapes,
Wine was more abundant than water,
Honey was great, plentiful was its plant-oil,
All kinds of fruit on its trees,
There was barley, together with wheat,
Without limit cattle of every kind.³

We will return to these lines in a moment, but first let me say more about the story of Sinuhe, from which the above summary and the direct quotation are taken. The story is known to us from two major manuscripts, both housed in the Berlin Museum, along with almost thirty other fragmentary copies in assorted collections around the world.⁴ The number of copies found, dating from both the Middle Kingdom and New Kingdom periods, informs us that the story of Sinuhe was the most popular piece of literature in ancient Egypt. The composition is a work of literary fiction, though it is based on the reality of the (short-lived) political unrest during the transition from Amenemhet I to Senwesret I (c. 1908 BCE). If I have introduced the story as if there were a real Sinuhe whose actual words are recorded in the manuscript, it is for the dramatic effect that is produced thereby. In truth, of course, all we have is the account in Sinuhe's first-person voice, written by a master storyteller sometime during the reign of Senwesret I (1918-1875 BCE). The text that he produced, as noted above, became the most popular story narrated by ancient Egyptian bards.

To set this tale within the greater context of ancient literature, let me note

that the Egyptians were the first to create literature for the sake of literary enjoyment.⁵ And while Sinuhe presents a paean to the Pharaoh—so that the text includes an element of political propaganda—in the main the story is to be seen as one of a number of adventure narratives created by the ancient Egyptian literati to entertain their audiences.⁶ Analogous tales include the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor (also dated to the Twelfth Dynasty) and the Story of Wenamon (dated to the Twentieth Dynasty).⁷ I highlight these three stories (Sinuhe, Shipwrecked Sailor, and Wenamon) because they all center on heroes who left Egypt, traveled to distant lands, and then successfully returned home to report their adventures.⁸ As such, these stories are part and parcel of a much larger ancient Near Eastern tradition (see most importantly the Gilgamesh epic), which comes to full fruition in the *Odyssey*, in which the traveling hero at long last returns home—that is, the well-known nostos motif.⁹ And while this is not the main focus of the present article, I hasten to add that the main narrative of the Torah, along with the subsequent book of Joshua, transfers the nostos motif from the individual to the nation, as the reader follows the national experience of corporate Israel, including the migration from Canaan to Egypt, the sojourning in Egypt, the exodus from Egypt, the episodic wandering through the Sinai region, and finally the return home.¹⁰

We stray too far, however, and thus I return to the Sinuhe passage quoted earlier, which provides a remarkable view of the land of Canaan (Yaa in the Egyptian) through the eyes of an outsider.¹¹ Most enjoyable, to my mind, is the statement that “wine was more abundant than water.” An Egyptian knew the constant flow of fresh water supplied by the Nile, while in Canaan there was no major river. By contrast, vineyards are to be found throughout Canaan, whereas in Egypt viticulture was a relatively rare activity, limited mainly to the Delta region.¹² Indeed, grapes are not native to Egypt; rather, they were imported from Canaan, albeit at an early stage in Egyptian history.¹³ In light of these circumstances, we can understand Sinuhe’s amazement upon reaching the Levant, where wine is abundant and where water is scarce.

Now, anyone familiar with the Torah will read the Sinuhe passage and immediately recall the strikingly comparable passage in Deuteronomy 8:8.¹⁴ There we read the following description of the land of Canaan (this verse serves as the basis for the *šiv’at ha-minim* [seven species] in Jewish tradition): “a land of wheat and barley, and vine and fig and pomegranate; a land of olive oil and honey.”¹⁵ The match between the Sinuhe and Deuteronomy passages is essentially identical, as the following chart reveals. I have placed the listed

items as they appear in the two descriptions:

<i>Deuteronomy</i>	<i>Sinuhe</i>
wheat	figs
barley	grapes / wine
vine	honey
fig	plant-oil
pomegranate	fruit
olive oil	barley
honey	wheat

If we retain the order of the Deuteronomy list and scramble the order of the Sinuhe passage, in order to have the items truly match one another, we produce the following scheme:

<i>Deuteronomy</i>	<i>Sinuhe</i>
wheat	wheat
barley	barley
vine	grapes / wine
fig	figs
pomegranate	fruit
olive oil	plant-oil
honey	honey

We note three very slight differences in wording: (a) the Hebrew text uses the word *gefen* [vine], while the Egyptian text uses the terms *i3rrt* [grapes] and *irp* [wine]; (b) the Hebrew text refers specifically to the *rimmôn* [pomegranate], while the Egyptian passage refers in general to “all kinds of fruit (*dgrw*) on its trees”; and (c) the Hebrew text mentions *zêt semen* [olive oil] (lit. “olives [for] oil”), while the Egyptian text uses *b3q*, referring to “plant-oil” in general, though also “olive-oil” specifically.¹⁶

We now raise the question of the identity of the “honey” in both texts. The Egyptian word *bit* bears the “bee” ideogram, so at first glance it appears that the “honey” intended here is bee honey. The Coptic derivative of this word, however, namely *EBIW*, is used both for “bee honey” and for the sweet substances extracted from various fruits,¹⁷ so it is very possible that this was the case with earlier stages of the Egyptian language as well.¹⁸ As is well known in biblical studies, the Hebrew word *devaš* [honey] refers to all kinds of honey, both that derived from bees and that derived from sweet fruits, such as dates and figs. The former meaning may be seen in Judges 14:8-9, while the latter connotation is determined from the following: (a) the

Arabic cognate *dibs* (which refers only to fruit extract); (b) the description in Josephus, *War*, 4.8.3, regarding the honey derived from palm trees;¹⁹ (c) the reference in M. Terumot 11:2 to *devaš temarîm* [date honey]; (d) the reference in B. Ketubbot 111b to *devaš šel te'ênîm* [fig honey]; and (e) the medieval exegetical tradition reflected in Rashi on Leviticus 2:11-12, for example. In short, both the Egyptian and Hebrew words can refer both to bee honey and date honey (*inter alia*, for example, fig honey).

In fact, one could argue that the last word in the expression *'erec zavat xalav ûdevaš* [a land flowing with milk and honey] (used twenty times in the Bible) refers not to bee honey but rather to date honey.²⁰ As far as I have been able to determine, Israel does not have a larger amount of bees than neighboring countries (and certainly not vis-à-vis the globe generally).²¹ Moreover, the Zenon papyri (third century BCE) inform us that bee honey was imported to the land of Israel from as far as away as Attica.²² By contrast, as travelers to Israel (from antiquity to the present) have noticed, the land supports an unusually high number of date palms.²³ Furthermore, the mature *Phoenix dactylifera* can produce approximately 100 kilos of dates each season.²⁴

The second element in the biblical expression, namely *xalav* [milk], refers to the large flocks of sheep and goats in the land of Israel. (Cattle would be less present, especially in the hill country, which comprised the core settlement area of the ancient Israelites.)²⁵ And while this aspect of the land of Canaan is not mentioned in Deuteronomy 8:8, which limits itself to food products that are grown (this would be another reason to interpret *devaš* as “date honey”), the expression *'erec zavat xalav ûdevaš* [a land flowing with milk and honey] occurs more times in Deuteronomy than in any other biblical book.²⁶ The repeated use of this phrase—along with the statement appearing a few verses later in verse 13: *ûveqareka wecõ'neka yirbeyûn* [and your herds and your flocks will multiply]—indicates that animal husbandry, a crucial feature of ancient Israelite domestic life, is within the purview of the Deuteronomic author. In fact, this last phrase is interposed between references to “fine houses” (v. 12) and “silver and gold” (latter half of v. 13) as indications of personal wealth. Finally, we note that the major presence of herds and flocks among the Israelites, as in Canaan in general, is noted by Sinuhe in the final line of his portrayal of the land of Yaa: “without limit cattle (*mnmnt*) of every kind.”²⁷ That is to say, the Sinuhe and Deuteronomy passages have in common the listing of the seven agricultural products first, with mention of the herds and flocks as a final addition.²⁸ In Sinuhe this is presented in the single list, whereas in Deuteronomy the domesticated

animals are referred to five verses later (and, of course, in many other places throughout the book).²⁹

We now must ask the question: is there a direct relationship between the Sinuhe text and the Deuteronomy passage? After all, approximately 1,000 years separates the two compositions.³⁰ To be honest, I am of two minds on this question. On the one hand, as we saw above, the tale of Sinuhe was the literary classic of ancient Egypt, and the text was still being copied and read during the Ramesside period, the period when Israel was emerging in the historical record.³¹ In short, there is the possibility of direct relationship between the Sinuhe and Deuteronomy passages, especially if we consider that the Israelites retained knowledge of the former for some centuries.³² On the other hand, the time span between the two compositions is simply too long and the steps in the scenario just outlined are simply too tenuous to contemplate a direct linkage between Sinuhe and Deuteronomy. We should, therefore, think of a general awareness of the land of Canaan, which was possessed both by visitors to the region (such as Sinuhe in the early second millennium BCE) and by local denizens (such as the author of Deuteronomy sometime in the first half of the first millennium BCE).

We now turn to another citation from the tale of Sinuhe. As our hero traversed the Sinai desert, in his trek from Egypt to Canaan (the land of Yaa), Sinuhe—and no doubt many others who attempted this journey—experienced the parched desert and his parched throat firsthand: “An attack of thirst overtook me; I was scorched, my throat parched; I said, ‘This is the taste of death.’”³³ Naturally, the same motif is incorporated into the wandering narrative in the books of Exodus and Numbers, as time and again the Israelites experienced the same thirst.³⁴ Here, of course, one cannot consider a direct linkage between Sinuhe and the Torah narratives, since now we are dealing with a generic theme, one encountered in world literature whenever a desert crossing is envisioned. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that the two texts both evoke the same imagery.³⁵

It is only within the context of either Sinuhe’s journey or that of the Israelites 600 years later that one can fully comprehend the impact of the verse that precedes the description of the “seven species,” namely, Deuteronomy 8:7:

For YHWH your God is bringing you unto a good land; a land of wadis of water, springs and deeps, coming-forth in the valley and in the mountain.

Here one gains the experience of a group of people coming out of the desert or coming off the desert fringe, where water is scarce, entering into a land filled with “wadis of water, springs and deeps,” both in the valleys and in the mountainous terrain. All is relative, though. Sinuhe, with the perspective of someone with a home on the banks of the Nile, was more impressed with the greater amount of wine than water in the land of Yaa, whereas the Israelites, with their desert origins, found Canaan to contain plentiful water.

For one final reference to Sinuhe, we note that the expression *'erec tôva^b* is the equivalent of the Egyptian expression *t3 pw nfr* [it is a good land], by which Sinuhe begins to describe the land of Yaa.³⁶ The Hebrew expression appears more frequently with the double definite article—that is, as *ha'arec hattôva^b*, for which see Deuteronomy 1:35, 3:25, 4:21, 4:22, 9:6, as well as in Joshua 23:16 and 1 Chronicles 28:8. While the lush valleys of the great riverine civilizations (Nile, Indus, Tigris-Euphrates, etc.) may be considered—by any objective measurement—“better” lands from the standpoint of agricultural production, for one who has crossed the desert the verdant nature of the land of Canaan is almost indescribable. The words *ha'arec hattôva^b* [the good land] are indeed most apt.

This observation leads us to the next text that I wish to consider, namely, the extended passage in Deuteronomy 11:10-12:

¹⁰ For the land into which you are coming to inherit it, it is not like the land of Egypt from which you came forth; where you must sow your seed and water with your foot like a vegetable garden.

¹¹ And the land that you are entering to inherit it, it is a land of mountains and valleys; from the rain of heaven you shall drink water.

¹² A land that YHWH your God cares for; always the eyes of YHWH are on it, from the beginning of the year until the end of the year.

As indicated above, the land of Egypt was a model land for food production. It is no surprise that when famine struck the land of Canaan (or at least its southern periphery) in antiquity, groups such as the Edomites and Israelites /traversed the Sinai to settle in Egypt.³⁷ Egypt was the breadbasket of the ancient world, with approximately 100 words for bread, baked goods, and the like.³⁸ The Nile is the longest river in the world, providing a steady and regular supply of water (albeit with ebbs and flows, bound to the annual

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inundation of the Nile). Needless to say, the ancient Egyptians took full advantage of the Nile from the earliest recorded time (c. 3000 BCE). Most significantly, they developed a system of irrigation channels that allowed them to divert the water to fields on either side of the Nile. The main crops, of course, were grains. In the words of Pierre Montet, "The fields of wheat and barley stretched unbroken from the marshes of the Delta to the [first] cataract."³⁹ One need only read Montet's elegant description of the ploughing, sowing, and harvest cycles in the ancient Egyptian countryside to gain a sense of how these cereal crops dominated the economy and everyday life.⁴⁰

To repeat the observation above, from any objective criterion, the Nile Valley provides the optimal environment for the growing of crops (grains and others), while the land of Canaan presents more challenging conditions. In the words of one commentator, "Only a fool would try to convince someone that the intermittent Palestinian rainfall was a superior water supply to the irrigation of the Nile valley."⁴¹ And yet, this is exactly what the author of Deuteronomy does at this point, by turning the obvious on its head and claiming just the opposite. Unlike Egypt, where one must engage in physical labor to divert the waters of the Nile to the fields—such appears to be the force of the idiom *wehišqîta veragleka* [and you (must) water with your foot]⁴²—in the land of Canaan no physical exertion is required. Instead, one simply watches as the rains of heaven, sent by God, descend upon the sown fields.⁴³ If ever there was signal evidence for Israel's awareness of its natural environment, especially as compared to that of its neighbors, Deuteronomy 11:10-12 is the paradigm passage.⁴⁴

The discussion until now implies that the historical Israelites actually experienced the sojourn in Egypt and the wandering through the Sinai Desert. Anyone familiar with the current state of biblical studies will know that this issue is hotly debated. The minimalist position opines that the large narrative that embraces Exodus through Joshua (and much else in the Bible as well) is the fictional creation of later Jewish scribes. One version of this view holds that the Israelites have no connection to the desert whatsoever but rather that they originate as disenfranchised Canaanites, who fled their urban centers (along the coast mainly) to head for the central hill country.⁴⁵ In point of fact, however, there is much historical information that confirms the basic outline of the biblical narrative. Not that I would hold that the Exodus account is to be taken at face value, but for certain the core group of people who emerged as the historical

Israelites in the central hill country in the Early Iron Age clearly had desert (or, perhaps better, desert-fringe) origins.⁴⁶ And while I would not utilize the evidence garnered herein as proof thereof, the picture presented in the current essay is absolutely consistent with this historical reconstruction. Time and again, from reading the Bible, one gains a sense of the Israelites as a desert(-fringe) people encountering the land of Canaan.⁴⁷

In addition to the passages cited above, which provide descriptions of Canaan from the standpoint of one approaching the land from the outside, as further support of the view just expressed, we note that there is a wide array of Hebrew words for “desert,” “steppe,” “wilderness,” and related terrains—twelve according to the count of E. Y. Kutscher (with the most common being *midbar*, obviously).⁴⁸ It is difficult to envision a group of urbanites (or even villagers) having such a rich vocabulary for the vast steppe, wilderness, and desert regions that stretch from Sinai in the southwest across modern-day southern Israel to the south and into southern Transjordan to the southeast and east. These areas, which envelop the sown regions of Canaan (mostly in Cisjordan, with some in Transjordan), represent the original environs of the core Israelites.⁴⁹

Once in the land of Canaan, the Israelites came to appreciate all that their new land offered—including, as Deuteronomy 11:11 indicates, the rain that falls upon the land: *limtar haššamayim tište' mayim* [from the rain of heaven you shall drink water]. This passage, with its eyes to the sky and its attention to rain, serves to explain why ancient Hebrew possesses so many words for “rain”—ten according to Kutscher (with *gešem* and *matar* as the most common). Which is to say, the adage about numerous Eskimo words for “snow” and numerous Arabic words for “camel” (among other examples) does not necessarily hold.⁵⁰ A people with relatively little rainfall (529mm average annual rainfall in Jerusalem, for example) may nonetheless have a broad vocabulary for “rain,” especially if this “relatively little rainfall” stands in contrast to the very negligible amount that falls in the wilderness. While space does not allow for a treatment of all these terms, Psalm 72:6 may be used as a sample verse, especially since it contains three of the words within this semantic field, including the only attestation of the word *zarzîf*:

May he be like rain (*matar*) falling on the mown-field, Like the droplets (*revîvîm*), (as) a downpour (*zarzîf*) on the earth.

But this is not a couplet about rain per se. Rather, the setting for this

passage is the description of the ideal king (the contents of all of Psalm 72), with references ranging from protection of the lowly and care of the needy to a long and successful reign marked by the constant flow of tribute from surrounding nations. In verse 6, however, the poet interrupts the litany of royal phraseology and instead turns to the natural world, with the imagery of falling rain representing the quintessence of the king's success and the realm's prosperity. As we shall see, this verse represents but one of many instances where the ancient Hebrew literati evoke such images to enhance their messages.

In similar fashion, ancient Hebrew has an extensive vocabulary in the semantic field of "cloud," with eight terms listed by Kutscher (the most common is *'anan*). Once more I illustrate these lexemes (along with several more "rain" items) with a single passage, Zechariah 10:1:

Ask YHWH for rain (*matar*) at the time of the latter-rain (*malqôš*), (it is) YHWH who makes the rainclouds (*xazîzîm*); and rain (*matar*) (upon) rain (*gešem*) he will give to them, to everyone vegetation in the field.⁵¹

In truth, scholars are unsure about the meaning of the noun *xazîz* (attested not only here but also in Job 28:26, 38:25). Some argue that it refers to other meteorological phenomena, such as "thunder(clap)" or "lightning," as opposed to "raincloud."⁵² Regardless, this verse once again demonstrates the rich lexis that the Hebrew poets could access in evoking the imagery of rain, clouds, and agricultural fecundity—all of which, we note once more, stems from God in their understanding of the natural world.⁵³

In light of the focus on rain and clouds in ancient Israel,⁵⁴ one is not surprised to find six different words in biblical Hebrew for cisterns, collection pools, and the like, with *bôr* as the most common. As I have done above, once more I illustrate the usage of one of these words through a sample passage, Jeremiah 14:3, and once more one notes that the water imagery is used to paint a larger picture:

And their nobles send their youths to the water; they come to the cisterns (*gevîm*), they do not find water, they return, their vessels empty, they are ashamed and embarrassed, they cover their heads.

Jeremiah 14 is a lament over Judah and Jerusalem, which suffers from a major drought. As expected, the prophet uses this occasion for more than a lesson about the environment. Lack of rain is tied to the people's sins, as seen most

clearly in verse 7: *awônênû 'anû vanû* [our iniquities testify against us].

The Israelites appreciated not only the water from above but also the water from below (and yes, I consciously allude here to the wording of Genesis 1:7). We thus may explain the emphasis placed on such water sources in Deuteronomy 8:7 (cited above), along with the fact that the Bible attests to fourteen lexemes for springs, rivers, wadis, rivulets, and so forth (with words such as *'ayin* and *naxal* among the most frequently attested). Given the long dry season, stretching from April to October, every water source was highly valued; thus, the Hebrew language developed a relatively large lexicon to distinguish the various kinds of springs and streams, large or small, constant or seasonal.⁵⁵

One could point to dozens of biblical passages in which individual words from this semantic field are used. To illustrate, I cite one of the most famous, Psalm 126:4:

Restore our fortunes, O YHWH,
Like watercourses (*'afqîm*) in the Negev.

Psalm 126 is a poem written during the Babylonian exile (586-538 BCE), during which time the people of Judah yearned for their return to the homeland. The exilic poet had a ready image: just as the wadis in the Negev dry up each summer but then return to flowing water courses each winter, so may God restore the fortunes of Israel, by allowing the exiles to return to Judah.

The word lists presented in this article offer the reader—even if only in outline form—a window into ancient Israel's understanding of its environment. The sample passages presented allow one further insight into how these terms were used in the (mainly) poetic passages in order to enhance the messages conveyed. I now turn my attention to a prose text that speaks directly to ancient Israel's awareness of its surroundings and of nature's cycle. I refer to Deuteronomy 11:14-15:

¹⁴ And I will give the rain (*matar*) (to) your land in its season, former-rain (*yôre^b*) and latter-rain (*malqôš*); and you shall collect your grain, and your new-wine, and your fine-oil.

¹⁵ And I will give you grass in your field for your cattle; and you shall eat and you shall be-satiated.

Above I discussed the "seven species" listed in Deuteronomy 8:8. Here I note (in verse 14 in particular) the reduction of that list to its three most important components: grain, wine, and oil.⁵⁶ Strikingly, these staples

comprise what scholars (both those who research the history of food and those who advocate healthful eating) now call "the Mediterranean triad."⁵⁷ Clearly, what is known best from the Greco-Roman world (and until today in locales such as Crete) is also true of ancient Israel. Two comments are noteworthy here: (a) the phrase is another favorite of the author of Deuteronomy, occurring six times in the book;⁵⁸ and (b) the expression has a poetic ring to it, as is evident from the lexical choices, with the rarer poetic words *dagan*, *tîrôš*, and *yichar*, instead of the more common and more prosaic terms *lexem*, *yayin*, and *šemen*, respectively.

My main focus here, however, is on the wording of verse 15. While verse 14 presents an immediate connection between the seasonal rains in Canaan and the agricultural products forthcoming as a result thereof, verse 15 suggests something else altogether. Here the author of the text implies an intermediate step between the rain and human eating. That is to say, the rains of verse 14 will also stimulate the grass in the field, which serves as fodder for the livestock—and only then will you (humans) eat and be sated. This verse demonstrates a profound understanding of the workings of the agricultural cycle relevant to two other staples of the Israelite diet: meat and milk. Though not as self-evident as in the case of agrarian foodstuffs, the supply of these two items, which comprise a large share of the diet of pastoral nomads, is equally dependent on rainfall.⁵⁹ For the rains allow the grasses to grow, which in turn provide for healthy herds and flocks, which in turn provide humans with a steady supply of milk and (in a one-time shot, obviously) meat when necessary.

Most striking in this regard is the parallel between the biblical passage and the opinion expressed by contemporary farmer Joel Salatin, brought to public attention by Michael Pollan in his best-selling tour de force *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. Pollan writes:

But if you ask Joel Salatin what he does for a living (Is he foremost a cattle rancher? A chicken farmer?) he'll tell you in no uncertain terms, "I'm a grass farmer." The first time I heard this designation I didn't get it at all—hay seemed the least (and least edible) of his many crops, and brought none of it to market. But undergirding the "farm of many faces," as he calls it, is a single plant—or rather the whole community of plants for which the word "grass" is shorthand.

"Grass" so understood, is the foundation of the intricate food chain Salatin has assembled at Polyface, where a half dozen different animal species are raised together in an intensive rotational dance on

the theme of symbiosis. Salatin is the choreographer and the grasses are his verdurous stage; the dance has made Polyface one of the most productive and influential alternative farms in America.⁶⁰

If I may be permitted a personal observation here: how many times have I recited Deuteronomy 11 (since it comprises the middle paragraph of the extended *Shema* prayer in Judaism) without firmly grasping the true message of verse 15? Only upon reading this passage from Pollan's book did I realize what the biblical verse was asserting. To those of us (which is most of us) who no longer live on the land (and off the land), the words of Deuteronomy 11:15 pass without full appreciation. And yet, one assumes that the meaning of this verse was obvious to anyone in ancient Israel who engaged in animal husbandry. In sum, verse 14 speaks to that segment of ancient Israelite society that grew crops, while verse 15 speaks to that segment of the society that tended flocks and herds. For the former, the connection between rain and food was immediate. For the latter, the connection between rain and food required the additional middle step. Grass was (and remains) the key: "And I will give you grass in your field for your cattle; and you shall eat and you shall be satiated."

I have spent a good portion of this essay focusing on rain, so it is only appropriate at this point to contemplate the lack thereof. Clearly, the ancient Israelites realized all too well what befell their land when rain did not descend from above. While I could point to obvious verses such as Leviticus 26:19-20 and Deuteronomy 28:23-24, both of which refer to the lack of rain within the context of the curses that will ensue if Israel abrogates the covenant, I elect instead to present Hosea 2:4-5:

⁴Take-legal-action, against your mother, take-legal-action,
For she is not my wife, and I am not her husband;
And may she remove her whoredom from her face,
And her adultery from between her breasts.
⁵Lest I strip her naked,
and place her as on the day of her birth;
And put her as the wilderness,
And set her as the desert land,
And slay her with thirst.

In this well-known passage, the prophet demands legal action against wayward Israel, who is compared to an adulterous wife. Just as a woman should have only one husband, Israel should worship only one God.⁶¹ When

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Israel strays and worships other deities, she is likened by Hosea to a woman who strays and has intercourse with other men. As we know from ancient Nuzi, one of the punishments for adultery in the ancient world was to strip the guilty woman naked (a far more serious display of public humiliation, we might add, than the use of the scarlet letter A, as attested in Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1850 novel *The Scarlet Letter*).⁶² In building his message on two levels—adulterous female and idolatrous Israel—the prophet plays upon this construct by translating this nakedness into a land devoid of vegetation.

The next verse (v. 6) reads as follows:

And her sons, I will not have compassion / cause-rain,
for they are the sons of whoredom.

In a classic display of literary virtuosity, the author employs the double meaning of the root *reš-xet-mem* here, with both “pity, have compassion” (the common meaning) and “rain” (the rarer connotation) intended.⁶³ The two levels of reading continue: God will not have compassion on the children of the family, and neither will he produce rain for the land of Israel. The sense (or better, both senses) is continued in the next passage (v. 7):

For their mother has whored,
Their female-parent has dried up.

The vast majority of scholars and translators are apparently oblivious to the parsing of the verb *hovišā'ā*. They routinely translate the word as if it derives from the root *bet-waw-šin* [be ashamed], almost always without comment.⁶⁴ The grammar, however, demonstrates that the root of this verb is *yod-bet-šin* [be dry] (the specific form is a Hiph'il third-person feminine singular suffix-conjugation). While it is true that the reader will sense the meaning “be ashamed” (especially in the written form of the text during the biblical period, with the consonantal skeleton only), as befits an accused adulteress, the Masorah has correctly transmitted the requisite meaning with the proper vocalization producing a meaning “she has caused (it) to be dry,” with the land of Israel no doubt the intended object here, as adumbrated in verse 5.

After a long intervening passage, which includes both a detailing of Israel's sin (pursuit after Baal, etc.) and God's desire to regain Israel as his true partner, Hosea returns to the rain imagery at the end of the chapter. Betrothal is presented in Hosea 2:21-22:

²¹ And I will betrothe you to me forever,
 And I will betrothe you to me in righteousness
 and in justice,
 And in fealty and in compassion.

²² And I will betrothe you to me in faithfulness;
 And you shall know YHWH.

The attentive reader will also recognize once more the use of the root *reš-xet-mem* in the word *rahamîm* [compassion] at the end of verse 21, and may wonder whether "rain" is intended here again. Such an expectation by the reader is revealed in the next pair of verses (vv. 23-24) to be an accurate analysis of the prophet's language:

²³ And it will be, on that day, I shall respond, states YHWH,
 I shall respond to the heavens;
 And they shall respond to the earth.

²⁴ And the earth shall respond with the grain, and the new-wine
 and the fine-oil;
 And they shall respond to Yizre'el.

The prophet returns to the imagery of nature, with rain from heaven impregnating the earth and with the earth in turn yielding its produce once more. Here we note how the Israelites (and other ancients too) understood heaven and earth in sexual terms. Just like human males impregnate their female partners with liquid semen, causing the females to reproduce, so does the (masculine) sky impregnate the (feminine) earth with liquid rain, causing the earth to bear fruit.

A few linguistic notes are pertinent here: (a) in most languages that bear grammatical gender, "sky, heaven" is masculine (cf. *šamayim*, *le ciel*, *der Himmel*, etc.), while "earth" is feminine (cf. *'erec*, *la terre*, *die Erde*, etc.);⁶⁵ (b) the Hebrew verb *'ayin-nun-he* [respond] can carry sexual meaning, not only in this passage, but elsewhere too;⁶⁶ and (c) the toponym "Jezreel" (the name of the most fertile valley in the country) means "God sows," thereby continuing the imagery. In addition, we note the aforementioned Mediterranean triad in this passage, as the epitome of the earth's fertility.

All of this, to return to the preceding couplet, demonstrates that *rahamîm* at the end of verse 21 indeed bears not only its common meaning "compassion" but also "rain," in anticipation of verse 23. Moreover, once the sexual partnering of heaven and earth is realized in verse 23, the reader (if he or she has not done so already) also gains an appreciation of the

final stich of verse 22. Within the context of betrothal and marriage in verses 21-22, the verb *yod-dalet-ayin* [know] gains the connotation of sexual intercourse.⁶⁷ In sum, the entirety of Hosea 2 invokes multiple planes: the marriage of a man and a woman, the covenant between God and Israel, and the natural world's pairing of heaven and earth, with rain as the centerpiece.

Of the dozens, if not hundreds, of passages that one could use to further exemplify the presence of rain imagery in biblical poetry, I elect to end this article with one that portrays the eschaton. As is well known, when the prophets of ancient Israel imagined the end of days, they frequently described the world as a topsy-turvy place. A stellar example occurs in Isaiah 35:5-7:

⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be revealed,
and the ears of the deaf shall be opened.

⁶ Then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the dumb shall shout;
for waters shall burst-forth in the wilderness,
and wadis in the barren-land.

⁷ And torrid-earth shall become a pond,
and parched land, fountains of water;
the ground of jackals, a pasture,
(and) grassland, reeds and rushes.

Not only will the blind see, not only will the deaf hear, not only will the lame run, and not only will the dumb speak—but the entire wilderness and even the deserts beyond will flow with water, so that the realm of the jackals will become a lush and verdant environment. Israel's awareness of its land, from the desert to the sown, informs line after line of its classical literature incorporated into the books that became the Hebrew Bible.

NOTES

¹ This article is based on my presentation at the Twentieth Annual Klutznick-Harris Symposium titled "The Mountains Shall Drip Wine': Jews and the Environment," held at Creighton University (Omaha, Nebraska), October 28-29, 2007. Given the vast number of biblical verses that speak to the subject at hand, by necessity this essay will be rather subjective and anecdotal in its selection of primary sources and other evidence. My talk was illustrated with approximately fifty photographs, though unfortunately I am unable to include

them here in the published version. I ask that the reader—as he or she proceeds through this essay—envision pharaohs, papyri, grains, dates, figs, olives, grapes, pomegranates, hills, valleys, trees, lizards, ibex, onagers, cisterns, wadis, the Nile, the desert, and bicycles. To aid the reader, I have posted a PDF version of the images used in Omaha at my Web site: jewishstudies.rutgers.edu (Faculty > Rendsburg > Complete List of Publications). Note that I have used a simplified transliteration system in rendering Hebrew, Coptic, and Egyptian (including, for example, /x/ for *het* and /c/ for *tsade*, and with /t/ for both *tet* and *taw*). The following abbreviations are used below:

ANET = James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern*

Texts Relating to the Old Testament (Princeton:

Princeton University Press, 1969)

COS = William W. Hallo, ed., *The Context of Scripture*,

(3 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1997-2002)

Erman and Grapow, *Wörterbuch* = Adolf Erman and Hermann

Grapow, *Wörterbuch der Aegyptischen Sprache* (7

vols.; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1926-61;

rpt., 1982).

For assistance on some of the Egyptological sources cited below, I am indebted to Troy L. Sagrillo (Swansea University), Wolfhart Westendorf (Universität Göttingen), and Renate Gerner (Universität Hamburg), via e-mail exchanges, March 2009. Finally, I thank my wife Beth Kraemer for her careful reading of an earlier version of this article, which caused me to rethink and reformulate several key points.

² In fact, Senwesret I had served as co-regent with his father for about ten years.

³ *Sinuhe*, MS B, lines 81-85. Standard editions of *Sinuhe* are A. M. Blackman, *Middle-Egyptian Stories* (Bibliotheca aegyptiaca 2; Brussels: Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1972), 1-41; and Roland Koch, *Die Erzählung des Sinuhe* (Bibliotheca aegyptiaca 17; Brussels: Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1990). Standard translations may be found in *ANET*, 18-22 (by John Wilson); and *COS* 1.77-82 (by Miriam Lichtheim). See also Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (3 vols.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973-1980), 1.222-35; R. B. Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems 1940-1640 BC* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 21-53; and Stephen Quirke, *Egyptian Literature 1800 BC: Questions and Readings* (London: Golden House Publications, 2004), 58-69. A hieroglyphic transcription, produced by J. J. Hirst, may be found online at <http://jennycarrington.tripod>.

com/JJSinuhe/transcription-3.html.

⁴ The main manuscript is MS B (= Berlin 3022), consisting of 311 lines, which includes the bulk of the text. But since the beginning of this manuscript is not extant (except for a few fragments housed elsewhere), scholars rely on MS R (= Berlin 10499), consisting of 203 lines, for the first part of the story. In addition, there is considerable overlap between the two manuscripts, including the passage here cited.

Three additional papyrus fragments are in Moscow, London, and Buenos Aires, while twenty-six ostraca (housed in Oxford, London, Berlin, Cairo, etc.) preserve portions. For details, see conveniently the lists prepared by Quirke, *Egyptian Literature 1800 BC*, 70; and Hirst, <http://jennycarrington.tripod.com/JJSinuhe/DuplicateTexts2.html>.

⁵ For what follows, see also Gary A. Rendsburg, "The Genesis of the Bible," in *The Blanche and Irving Laurie Chair in Jewish History* (Separatum published by the Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2005), 11-30, esp. 27-28. Available online at http://jewishstudies.rutgers.edu/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=117&Itemid=158.

⁶ MS B, ll. 47-73.

⁷ For Shipwrecked Sailor, the standard edition remains Blackman, *Middle-Egyptian Stories*, 41-47. For standard translations, see *COS* 1.83-84 (by Lichtheim); Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 1.211-15; Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe*, 89-101; and Quirke, *Egyptian Literature 1800 BC*, 71-76. For a literary study, see Gary A. Rendsburg, "Literary Devices in the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120 (2000): 13-23. The standard edition of Wenamon is Alan H. Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Stories* (Anastatique de l'Édition 1932; Brussels: Édition de la Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1973), 61-75. Standard translations may be found in *ANET*, 25-29 (by Wilson); and *COS* 1.89-93 (by Lichtheim). See also Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 2.224-30. For detailed commentaries, see Hans Goedicke, *The Report of Wenamun* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975); and Bernd Ulrich Schipper, *Die Erzählung des Wenamun: Ein Literaturwerk im Spannungsfeld von Politik, Geschichte und Religion* (OBO 209; Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2005).

⁸ For a fine study of these three tales, along with the tale of The Doomed Prince, see José M. Galán, *Four Journeys in Ancient Egyptian Literature* (Lingua Aegyptia, Studia monographica 5; Göttingen: Frank Kammerzell and Gerald Moers,

2005). For annotated translations of three of the tales, see Loren Fisher, *Three Egyptian Stories: Sinuhe, The Enchanted Prince, and Wen-Amon* (Willits: Fisher Publications, 2006).

⁹ For details, see Cyrus H. Gordon, *The Common Background of Greek and Hebrew Civilizations* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1965), 102, 111, 125, 233; and Cyrus H. Gordon, *Homer and Bible* (Ventnor: Ventnor Publishers, 1967), 22-23, 36-37.

¹⁰ For an additional *nostos* account in the book of Genesis—namely, Jacob's return to Canaan after his twenty-year sojourn in Aram—see Gary A. Rendsburg, "Notes on Genesis XXXV," *Vetus Testamentum* 34 (1984): 361-65.

¹¹ For general background, see A. F. Rainey, "The World of Sinuhe," *IOS* 2 (1972): 369-08. On page 376, n. 38, Rainey refers to Benjamin Mazar's "very plausible identification" of the land of Yaa (Egyptian *i33*) with ^{uru}"A-ra-ru attested in EA 256:25.

¹² Pierre Montet, *Everyday Life in Egypt in the Days of Rameses the Great* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 105-08. In addition, there appears to have been a great expansion of viticulture during the Ramesside period (presumably due to the dual causes of expansion of Egyptian rule in Canaan and influx of Semites into the Delta), so that in Sinuhe's day grapevines would have been rarer still.

¹³ Renate Germer, "Fruits," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* (ed. D. B. Redford; 3 vols.; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1.564.

¹⁴ See Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11* (Anchor Bible 5; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 391. Weinfeld also drew attention to the Letter of Aristeas, section 112, with a similar description of the land of Canaan. For an English translation of the text, see R. J. H. Shutt, "Letter of Aristeas," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth; 2 vols.; Anchor Bible Reference Library; New York: Doubleday, 1985), 2.20. The order of items in this text is olive trees, grains, pulses, vines, honey, fruit trees, date palms, flocks and herds.

¹⁵ Not surprisingly, this verse is referred to repeatedly in such works as Michael Zohary, *Plants of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), though no index of references is included in this volume; Oded Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel* (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2002), 3, 88, 91, 101, 103, 114, 116, 123; and Lytton John Musselman, *Figs, Dates, Laurel, and Myrrh: Plants of the Bible and the Quran* (Portland: Timber Press, 2007), 54, 129, 210, 231, 288.

¹⁶ The oldest strata of ancient Egyptian (i.e., Old Egyptian and Middle

Egyptian) did not possess a word for "olive," and thus *b3q* was used for both "plant oil" of various types and "olive oil" specifically. Only during the Late Egyptian stage of the language was Semitic **zayt* (> Hebrew *zayit*) borrowed as *dt*. For *b3q*, see Erman and Grapow, *Wörterbuch*, 1.423-24. For *dt*, see Erman and Grapow, *Wörterbuch*, 5.618; and James E. Hoch, *Semitic Words in Egyptian Texts of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 395.

¹⁷ For Coptic *EBIW* meaning both "bee honey" and "date honey," see the following standard reference works: W. E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), 40b, 52b, 242b; Wolfhart Westendorf, *Koptisches Handwörterbuch* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, [1965] 1977), 25, 32; and Werner Vycichl, *Dictionnaire Étymologique de la Langue Copte* (Leuven: Peeters, 1983), 38. The last work includes the following glosses in separate entries: "miel" and "désigne également le suc ou la confiture de fruits," with "miel de sycomore," "miel de dates," and "miel de figues" as examples of the latter, with the appropriate descriptives added. More specialized studies are Walter C. Till, *Die Arzneikunde der Kopten* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1951), 60, 66 (*non vide*); and Hildegard von Deines and Hermann Grapow, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Drogennamen* (Grundriss der Medizin der alten Ägypter 6; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1959), 166 (*non vide*).

¹⁸ Unfortunately, Erman and Grapow, *Wörterbuch*, 1.434, is not as forthcoming in this regard as one might hope, though note the gloss "Süsstoff" alongside "Honig." Beyond this comment, however, I have not been able to determine more specifically whether or not Egyptian *bit* was used for "date honey" and the like. Given the Coptic usage, though, one may assume such, at least in the later periods (though naturally *Sinuhe* is much earlier). On honey in ancient Egypt, see Troy Leiland Sagrillo, "Bees and Honey," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* (ed. D. B. Redford; 3 vols.; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1.172-74.

¹⁹ The citation reads, "There are in it [sc. Jericho] many sorts of palm trees that are watered by it, different from each other in taste and name; the better sort of them, when they are pressed, yield an excellent kind of honey, not much inferior in sweetness to other honey," at which point the passage continues, "This country withal produces honey from bees." I cite, conveniently, from the translation by William Whiston.

²⁰ This is suggested by Borowski, *Agriculture in Iron Age Israel*, 127, though only in passing.

²¹ See conveniently the map showing the worldwide distribution of the common

honey bee, *apis mellifera*, available online at <http://www.discoverlife.org/20/m?kind=Apis>, using data supplied mostly by the American Museum of Natural History.

²² See Zeev Safrai, *The Economy of Roman Palestine* (London: Routledge, 1994), 103.

²³ While the references are to specific areas in Judea, one notes that Pliny the Elder (23-79 CE), *Natural History*, 5.15, refers to palm trees in his description of Jericho, the Essene settlement near the Dead Sea, and Ein-Gedi. Perhaps more significantly, the IVDAEA CAPTA coins minted by Vespasian to celebrate the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE utilize a palm tree to symbolize the land.

²⁴ For more on this species, including exquisite photographs, see Zohary, *Plants of the Bible*, 60-61; and Musselman, *Figs, Dates, Laurel, and Myrrh*, 114-19.

²⁵ Note that Oded Borowski, *Every Living Thing: Daily Use of Animals in Ancient Israel* (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1998), includes twice as many pages on "small cattle" (i.e., sheep and goats), 51-71, than he does on "large cattle," 71-81.

²⁶ The phrase appears six times: Deuteronomy 6:3, 11:9, 26:9, 26:15, 27:3, 31:20. Note, further, that the last reference, Deuteronomy 31:20, provides a different wording: "when I bring him [sc. collective Israel] into the land that I swore to his fathers, flowing with milk and honey," with 'adama^h used for "land" and with an intervening phrase interrupting the usual flow of the passage. I suspect that the change in wording here represents another example of the literary device, in which the last usage of a repeated passage or refrain is changed in some fashion to mark closure; see further Aharon Mirsky, "Stylistic Device for Conclusion in Hebrew," *Semitics* 5 (1977): 9-23.

²⁷ Typically, Egyptian *mmnt* refers to herds of cattle, as opposed to flocks of sheep and goats. If Sinuhe remained more in the lowlands of Canaan, he was more likely to encounter the former than the latter. On the other hand, the use of the adjective *nbt* [any, every, all] (and in this case, "all kinds") suggests an array of species, including both bovines and caprids. See Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1976), 129.

²⁸ For the sake of bibliographic completeness, I here cite the work of Miroslav Bárta, *Sinuhe, the Bible, and the Patriarchs* (Prague: Set Out, 2003). There is much of interest in this book, but the author does not mention the Deuteronomy passage(s) in connection with Sinuhe.

²⁹ Quite remarkably, the Letter of Aristeas, section 112 (see note 14 above), lists "many flocks and herds of various kinds" immediately after the list of agricultural products. Is it a coincidence that this text, from Ptolemaic Alexandria, follows

the pattern established by Sinuhe, the literary classic of pharaonic Egypt?

³⁰ I estimate the date of Sinuhe to be 1900 BCE, though perhaps the text was written slightly later during the Twelfth Dynasty, let us say, 1850 BCE. The date of Deuteronomy, of course, is greatly debated, with dates ranging from the late tenth century BCE to the late seventh century BCE. The seventh century date is standard in biblical scholarship; see, for example, M. Weinfeld and S. D. Sperling, "Deuteronomy," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (2nd ed.; New York: Macmillan, 2007), 5.614-15. For earlier dates, see Chaim Rabin, "Discourse Analysis and the Dating of Deuteronomy," in *Interpreting the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honour of E. I. J. Rosenthal* (ed. J. A. Emerton and S. C. Reif; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 171-77; and Cyrus H. Gordon and Gary A. Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 162, n. 11.

³¹ Again, for details, see the lists compiled by Quirke and Hirst (see note 5 above).

³² I do not mean to imply that the Israelites committed the Egyptian text to memory or that they possessed copies of the text, but merely that the sense and general content of Sinuhe was known to them. One also can imagine that an Egyptian tale such as Sinuhe (as well as Wenamon) would have particular appeal to people in the land of Canaan.

³³ Sinuhe MS B, lines 22-24.

³⁴ See especially Exodus 15:22-27; Exodus 17:1-7; Numbers 20:2-13.

³⁵ One gains an excellent sense of the wandering in the desert from reading the appealing narrative by Bruce Feiler, *Walking the Bible: A Journey by Land through the Five Books of Moses* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), which also served as the basis for a Public Broadcasting Service special (aired January 2006): <http://www.pbs.org/walkingthebible/>. For those who prefer a more firsthand experience than either reading or viewing, I can recommend the annual Hazon Arava Institute Israel Ride, a five-day bicycle trip from Jerusalem to Eilat. While the itinerary does not take one deep into the Sinai, one nevertheless encounters a very similar landscape, especially as the route proceeds southward from Sede Boqer, with its great vistas of the Nahal Zin (cf. Num 13:21, 20:1, etc., for references to the Wilderness of Zin), toward Mizpe Ramon, with the extraordinary Makhtesh Ramon, and then further south toward Eilat. For a sense of the experience, including great desert vistas, go to (among other pages at the Hazon Web site) the photo gallery at <http://hazon.org/photos/2007IL>.

³⁶ See also Exodus 3:8.

³⁷ See Papyrus Anastasi VI and Genesis 46:31-47:6. Papyrus Anastasi VI (see

ANET, 259) is the dispatch of a frontier official, dated to the reign of Merneptah (1224-1214 BCE). Among other news items, the official reported to his superior as follows: "We have finished admitting the Shasu tribes of Edom at the fortress of Merneptah Hotephirmaat, life, prosperity, health, which is in Tjeku, to the pools of Per-Atum of Merneptah Hotephirmaat, which are in Tjeku, to keep them alive and to keep their flocks alive." Regarding Genesis 46:31-47:6, I do not mean to imply that I accept the biblical text at face value, as if it reflects a real historical event—for outside of the Bible we cannot demonstrate the point. But in light of the information conveyed in Papyrus Anastasi VI, we learn that the settling of Semites from southern Canaan, along with their flocks, in the eastern Delta was a known phenomenon.

³⁸ See Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken, 1970), 218: "No less than fifty-seven varieties of bread and thirty-eight different types of cake are attested in the texts." While Sarna did not provide a reference for these data, they clearly derive from the "Deutsch-Aegyptisches Wörterverzeichnis" included as "6. Band" of Erman and Grapow, *Wörterbuch*, 6.31 (s.v. *Brot*), 6.59 (s.v. *Gebäck*), and 6.93 (s.v. *Kuchen*).

³⁹ Montet, *Everyday Life in Egypt*, 108.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 108-20.

⁴¹ Lyle Eslinger, "Watering Egypt (Deuteronomy XI 10-11)," *Vetus Testamentum* 37 (1987): 87.

⁴² Though see the entirety of Eslinger's "Watering Egypt" (*ibid.*, 85-90) for the argument that a sarcastic tone underlies this phrase, with reference to urination.

⁴³ For more on this passage, see Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 27.

⁴⁴ Moreover, this is not the only place in the Bible where Israel subverts Egyptian culture, for such is also to be found most prominently in Exodus 1-15. See further Gary A. Rendsburg, "Moses as Equal to Pharaoh," in *Text, Artifact, and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion* (ed. G. M. Beckman and T. J. Lewis; Brown Judaic Studies 346; Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2006), 201-19, with special attention to the manner in which Moses becomes Horus and the Pharaoh becomes Seth.

⁴⁵ This is not the place for an extended discussion of this issue. For one survey, see Gary A. Rendsburg, "Down with History, Up with Reading: The Current State of Biblical Studies," McGill University Jewish Studies 30th Anniversary Conference (1999), available online at: http://www.arts.mcgill.ca/programs/jewish/30yrs/rendersburg/index.html#_ednref22.

⁴⁶ Once more, I cannot enter into this discussion in detail. See further Gary A. Rendsburg, "The Early History of Israel," in *Crossing Boundaries and Linking Horizons: Studies in Honor of Michael C. Astour on His 80th Birthday* (ed. G. D. Young, et al.; Bethesda: CDL Press, 1997), 433-53.

⁴⁷ The same approach underlies Daniel Hillel, *The Natural History of the Bible: An Environmental Exploration of the Hebrew Scriptures* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). I cite this work only this one time, though I encourage the reader to peruse its pages for more detailed insights and further development of the points made in this essay.

⁴⁸ For this list and for the other semantic fields to be discussed below, along with general discussion, see E. Y. Kutscher, *A History of the Hebrew Language* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982), 55-56.

⁴⁹ This is not to deny that some Israelites had different origins, for which see Rendsburg, "The Early History of Israel," 447-50.

⁵⁰ Indeed the entire concept can be called into question. For interesting reading on the subject, see Alastair Pennycook, *English and the Discourses of Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998), 147-51.

⁵¹ For more information than I can offer here, see the lengthy treatment of this verse by Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Zechariah 9-14* (AB 25C; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 179-84.

As my English rendering demonstrates, the supply of English words for "rain" is quickly exhausted.

⁵² *BDB*, 304: "thunder-bolt, lightning-flash"; *KB*, 286: "Gewitterwolke, storm-cloud"; *HALOT*, 302: "blast, squall and thunderbolt"; *DCH*, 3.184: "thunderstorm . . . 'perh. specif. thunderbolt, lightning, thundercloud.'" The traditional Jewish understanding has been 'clouds' (cf. B. Ta'anit 9b), on which see N. H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job* (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1957), 408; and Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978), 310.

⁵³ This is perhaps the appropriate time to note that ancient Hebrew did not possess a word for "nature." The root *tet-bet-'ayin* means "sink" in biblical Hebrew, and only in the medieval period was the noun *teva'* [nature] coined, as a calque on Arabic *tabi'at*, driven by the demands of Hebrew scientific literatures. See briefly Ernest Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 240.

⁵⁴ For the obvious connection between these two features incorporated into a well-known biblical story, see 1 Kings 18:42-45.

⁵⁵ At least one of these items may be a regional dialectal feature. Kutscher,

History of the Hebrew Language, 55-56, noted that the word *môca*' is restricted to the territory of Benjamin. See now Gary A. Rendsburg and William M. Schniedewind, "The Siloam Tunnel Inscription: Historical and Linguistic Perspectives," *Israel Exploration Journal* (forthcoming).

⁵⁶ Nathan MacDonald, *What Did the Ancient Israelites Eat?: Diet in Biblical Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 19-24.

⁵⁷ For the ramifications of the Mediterranean triad in Jewish foodways during the rabbinic period, see David Kraemer, *Jewish Eating and Identity Through the Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 52, 67-68, 73, 78.

⁵⁸ The phrase appears in Deuteronomy 7:3, 11:14, 12:17, 14:23, 18:4, 28:51. It appears numerous times elsewhere as well, including Numbers, Jeremiah, Hosea, Joel, Haggai, Chronicles, and Nehemiah (sometimes with variation in the actual wording). The reader may consult the concordances for specific references.

⁵⁹ For a survey of ancient sources that connect the consumption of meat and milk products to pastoral nomads, see Kraemer, *Jewish Eating and Identity Through the Ages*, 52.

⁶⁰ Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 125-26.

⁶¹ Polygamy in ancient Israel was unidirectional only. Polygyny was permitted, while polyandry was prohibited.

⁶² For discussion of the Nuzi evidence, see Cyrus H. Gordon, "Hosea 2:4-5 in the Light of New Semitic Inscriptions," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 13 (1936): 277-80; and Gordon and Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 252.

⁶³ For the latter, based on the cognate in the modern South Arabian languages, see Gary A. Rendsburg, "Hebrew *R/M* = 'Rain,'" *Vetus Testamentum* 33 (1983): 357-62

⁶⁴ This exegetical tradition begins with the Septuagint rendering.

⁶⁵ One major exception, which proves the rule, is Egyptian, with the divine pair Geb, the earth-god, and Nut, the sky-goddess. Since it hardly ever rains in Egypt and since the earth itself provides the liquid (sc., the Nile), Egyptian mythology developed this pair of deities with genders reversed from the norm.

⁶⁶ Gary A. Rendsburg, "Hebrew Philological Notes (II)," *Hebrew Studies* 42 (2001): 191-92.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Genesis 4:1.

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Leonard J. Greenspoon

The Klutznick Chair in Jewish Civilization-
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