

¹ J.A. Emerton, "Two issues in the interpretation of the Tel Dan Inscription," *VT* 50 (2000), pp. 27-37. The following studies are also mentioned: J.A. Emerton, "Further comments on the use of tenses in the Aramaic inscription from Tel Dan," *VT* 47 (1997), pp. 429-40; T. Muraoka, "Linguistic notes on the Aramaic inscription from Tel Dan," *IEJ* 45 (1995), pp. 19-21; idem, "Again on the Tel Dan inscription and Northwest Semitic verb tenses," *ZAH* 11 (1998), pp. 74-81.

² S.R. Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew and some other Syntactical Questions* (Oxford, ³1892), pp. 195-211.

³ For new perspectives from the vantage point of discourse analysis, see F.I. Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew* (The Hague/Paris, 1974), pp. 77-91.

⁴ Taken out of context, the translation can be ambiguous as indicated by the use of a participle in "We left Euston at 9.30 in the morning, *arriving* at Manchester Piccadilly at 12.10."

⁵ E. Lipiński, *Studies in Aramaic Inscription and Onomastics II* (Leuven, 1994), p. 91.

⁶ On asyndesis in Aramaic, see T. Muraoka and B. Porten, *A Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic* (Leiden, 1998), § 73, pp. 255-60, esp. 257-59.

⁷ See P. Joüon – T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Rome, 1991, 1993), § 113*h* with my (TM) addition towards the end of the paragraph.

AN ADDITIONAL NOTE TO TWO RECENT ARTICLES ON THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN THE EXODUS FROM EGYPT AND THE LARGE NUMBERS IN NUMBERS I AND XXVI

The related issues of the number of people in the Exodus from Egypt—600,000 adult males according to Exod. xii 37—and the large numbers included in the two censuses of Numbers i and Numbers xxvi—tens of thousands of adult males per tribe—have received considerable attention in the pages of this journal in recent years.

First, E. W. Davies wrote a lengthy article entitled "A mathematical conundrum: the problem of the large numbers in numbers i and xxvi" (*VT* 45 [1995], pp. 449-69). Davies provided a valuable service in including a thorough review of the history of interpretation of this issue, after which he presented his own suggestion. He summarized his findings as follows: "It [is] suggested, in conclusion, that attempts to find a historical basis for the census lists must be abandoned, for the Priestly writer, in recording such high numbers, was merely observing a literary convention widely attested both in the O.T. and in the literature of the ancient Near East" (p. 469).

Although the title of his article focuses on the two censuses recorded in the book of Numbers, in truth his conclusion is more befitting the issue surrounding the statement in Exod. xii 37. The 600,000 figure is exactly the kind of number that accords with the literary conven-

tion observed by Davies. But one should not turn to the cognate data put forward by Davies—the grossly exaggerated reigns of the kings in the Sumerian kinglist and the numbers recorded in the Assyrian annals reporting the number of captive and deported Hittites, Judahites, etc.—in order to justify this point. The former have their parallel, as is well known in biblical scholarship, in the years of the antediluvian and postdiluvian heroes of Genesis v and xi. The latter come from the realm of royal annals, and while the numbers may be inflated, one must recall that the genres of the Assyrian royal annals and the narratives in the Torah are quite different. The biblical stories are of an epic nature, and it is advisable to seek parallels in epic literature from neighboring countries.

Fortunately, a close parallel is readily forthcoming. I refer to the statement in the Kret epic from Ugarit that the legendary king Kret mustered an army of *ṯlt mat rbt* “three hundred myriads” (*KTU/CAT* 1.14 II 36, IV 16 [= *UT Krt* 89, 179]), that is, 3,000,000 men. In fact, the connections between the Kret story and the biblical account, recognizing the epic quality of both, are manifold.¹ Note that Kret performs a ritual sacrifice, bakes bread as provisions for his troops, embarks with his three million soldiers on a military expedition, marches for three days, stops at a sacred locale, then marches for three more days to reach his destination, remains silent for six additional days, and then on the seventh day the action commences with the successful completion of the mission. All of these features are present in the overarching story line that encompasses Exodus through Joshua. Of particular importance are the lexical items in the Exodus story which indicate that the Israelites are a military force, thus, *raglî hagg̃bārîm* “infantry men” (Exod. xii 37), *kol šib’ôt YHWH* “all the armies of YHWH” (Exod. xii 41), *‘al šib’ôtām* “by their armies” (Exod. xii 51), and *ḥāmûšîm* “armed” (Exod. xiii 18).² In short, epic tradition called for the army to be described in exaggerated numbers, whether it be the 600,000 of Israel or the 3,000,000 of Ugarit.³

The second article is by C. J. Humphreys, “The number of people in the exodus from Egypt: decoding mathematically the very large numbers in Numbers i and xxvi” (*VT* 48 [1998], pp. 196-213).⁴ Humphreys returns to the theory of Flinders Petrie that the Hebrew word ³*elep* in the census lists originally meant “family, group, troop”, but that a later copyist/author/editor misunderstood the word as “thousand”.⁵ In the original text, the totals were 598 groups comprising 5,500 individuals for the first census in Numbers i, and 596 groups

comprising 5,730 individuals for the second census in Numbers xxvi. (A relatively minor difference between Petrie and Humphreys is that the former considered each *'elep* to be a “family”, whereas the latter understands the word as “troop”. I have used the neutral term “group”, though I tend to side with Humphreys on this matter, since again we are dealing with a military context.)

The mathematics presented by Humphreys is most convincing,⁶ and I believe that his position should be accepted. I write to offer one additional support for this theory. I do not believe that anyone until now has noticed that the number of men in each group, according to the Petrie-Humphreys approach, falls between 200 and 730. We have 24 separate numbers in these two censuses, and nowhere do we have a number of so many *'elep*'s and 100, 800, or 900, or simply a round number of so many *'elep*'s. Moreover, the 24 individual numbers are distributed as follows, with the figures from the first census before the slash mark and the figures from the second census after the slash mark:

200's: 200/200
 300's: 300/300
 400's: 400, 400, 400, 400/400, 400, 400
 500's: 500, 500, 500/500, 500, 500, 500
 600's: 650, 600/600
 700's: 700/730, 700

Note that there are only two 200's, two 700's, and one unusual 730, serving as outliers. By contrast, there is a clustering in the middle, with seven 400's, and seven 500's. This pattern suggests a historical veracity of the type that Humphreys has maintained. It would appear that no tribe could have as few as 100 fighting men (or no fighting men, of course), and that no tribe could be so large to have as many as 800 or 900 fighting men. In addition, it appears that there was a relatively standard size of any given tribe's fighting force, consisting of about 400 or 500 soldiers.

The main point is: if these numbers were created more or less at random—which is, in effect, what Davies's approach and various other approaches suggest—then we would expect to find a random distribution of the hundreds place in these numbers. The presence of a discernible pattern suggests that Humphreys, building on the proposal first put forward by Petrie, is correct.

I also would like to point out, quite ironically, given what I stated above concerning the title of Davies's article, that Humphreys's title

is also a bit misdirected. The issue that he tackles is not, as the first part of the title reads, “the number of people in the exodus from Egypt”, but rather, in line with the subheading, “the very large numbers in Numbers i and xxvi”. That is to say, the two issues of Exod. xii 37 and the census figures should be kept separate.

Nevertheless, we may approach the Torah diachronically for the moment and propose a reason why the Numbers material may have been reinterpreted by a later copyist/author/editor. I would suggest that said individual deliberately reinterpreted the census figures to bring them in line, approximately at least, with the 600,000 figure that appears in Exod. xii 37. By creating the text that he/she produced, said copyist/author/editor arrived at a figure of 603,550 adult males for the first census and 601,730 adult males for the second census, close enough to the epic figure of 600,000 for comfort.⁷

In short, I am happy to accept Davies’s opinion, though I would limit this approach to Exod. xii 37 only; and I am happy to accept Humphreys’s work on Numbers i and xxvi, especially in view of the additional support that I have tendered. The two may be correlated with one another, if the somewhat speculative suggestion presented in the preceding paragraph is countenanced.⁸

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¹ For what follows, see C. H. Gordon, “Notes on the Legend of Keret”, *JNES* 11 (1952), pp. 212-13; G. del Olmo Lete, “La conquista de Jericó y la leyenda ugarítica de KRT”, *Sefarad* 25 (1965), pp. 1-15; and C. H. Gordon and G. A. Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (New York, 1997), p. 147.

² I recognize that there is a debate surrounding the term *hāmūšm*, and that not all agree that it means “armed”, but clearly the word bears a military connotation, as may be determined, for example, from Judg. vii 11.

³ It is possible that these specific numbers hark back to the sexagesimal system of ancient Mesopotamia, even though the evidence at our disposal comes from the West Semitic world.

⁴ This article has elicited two other responses: J. Milgrom, “On decoding very large numbers”, *VT* 49 (1999), pp. 131-32; and M. McEntire, “A response to Colin J. Humphreys’s ‘The number of people in the exodus from Egypt: decoding mathematically the very large numbers in Numbers i and xxvi’”, *VT* 49 (1999), pp. 262-64.

⁵ F. Petrie, *Researches in Sinai* (London, 1906), pp. 207ff.; idem., *Egypt and Israel* (revised ed.; London, 1923), pp. 40ff.

⁶ Notwithstanding some of the minor criticisms raised by the articles cited in n. 4 above.

⁷ The reader familiar with my published work and teaching will know that I reject the standard JEDP source division of the Torah. So I do not wish to imply that I accept the notion that Exod. xii 37b stems from so-called “JE” (most likely so-called

“E”) (thus, e.g., S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* [12th ed.; New York, 1906], p. 28) and that Numbers i and xxvi derives from a priestly tradition. Instead, I prefer to speak in more general terms about separate sources, or at least in this particular case, for by and large I favor a literary approach which views large blocks of narrative in a unified fashion.

⁸ In the period between the acceptance of my article and its appearance in this issue of *VT*, there appeared a follow-up article by C.J. Humphreys, “The numbers in the exodus from Egypt: a further appraisal”, *VT* 50 (2000), pp. 323-28. Therein the author makes the same point that I have made above concerning the hundreds figures: “No tribe is as small as 0 or 100 men, or as large as 800 or 900 men” (p. 327). Obviously, I reached the same conclusion before reading Humphreys’ additional note—indeed I have been teaching this point for many years now—and I am happy to see that another scholar has applied the same line of reasoning independently.

Abstract

This short note deduces evidence in support of both E. W. Davies (with qualification) and C. J. Humphreys in their differing approaches to the problem of the large number of Israelites during the exodus and wandering.

A NOTE ON EZEKIEL VIII 6

The text of Ezek. viii-xi contains different themes including the cultic abominations (Ezek. viii), the command to kill (Ezek. ix), the scattering of burning coals over the city (Ezek. x), and the departure of Yahweh’s glory from the city (Ezek. ix-xi). Because of the multiplicity of themes, Ezek. viii-xi defies exegetes of a satisfactory interpretation which can accommodate all these motifs. A common interpretation is to view Ezek. ix and Ezek. x as the two acts of punishment of God on the people for their idolatrous abominations mentioned in Ezek. viii. Take Ewald as an example. After discussing the four abominations in Ezek. viii, he states that the threat in Ezek. viii 18 is executed in a twofold manner, i.e., the slaughter mentioned in Ezek. ix and the burning of the city in Ezek. x 1-8, holding that the latter is already described in Ezek. iv-v.¹ Moreover, Ewald takes the departure of Yahweh’s glory in Ezek. xi 22-23 as the fulfilment of Ezek. viii 6, and claims that Yahweh turns away “from a place that so offends his holy eye”.² Similarly, commenting on Ezek. viii 6, Davidson says explicitly that “[t]hese abominations defiled Jehovah’s sanctuary, the place of his abode, causing him to abandon it”.³ In this understanding, Yahweh is being forced to leave the temple by the abominations committed in the temple. It is the purpose of this short note to examine this under-