Blogger™

GET YOUR OWN BLOG NEXT BLOG»

BlogThis!

PaleoJudaica.com

A weblog on ancient Judaism and its context

E-mail: blogger-at-paleojudaica.com ("-at-" = "@")

Monday, June 20, 2005

UPDATE ON LATEST *GOSPEL OF JUDAS* ENTRY: The photo was of a codex of the Four Gospels, not the *Gospel of Judas*.

posted by Jim Davila | 1:49 PM

SOMETHING MISSING HERE?

Egypt's other pasts

By Sylvia Smith for CNN
Sunday, June 19, 2005 Posted: 1550 GMT (2350 HKT)

CAIRO, Egypt (CNN) -- Although Egypt stands at the crossroads of continents and civilizations, images of pyramids, The Sphinx and mummies dominate, eclipsing its other historic cultural and religious strands.

Now attempts are being made to redress the balance and to put the Pharaonic period in context through an ambitious renovation project in Cairo and a series of cultural events in the United States.

Tourism has flourished under the watchful eyes of the Pharaohs with the majority of foreign visitors being

POWERED BY BLOGGER

archives

03/01/2003 - 03/31/2003
04/01/2003 - 04/30/2003
05/01/2003 - 05/31/2003
06/01/2003 - 06/30/2003
07/01/2003 - 07/31/2003
08/01/2003 - 08/31/2003
09/01/2003 - 09/30/2003
10/01/2003 - 10/31/2003
11/01/2003 - 11/30/2003
12/01/2003 - 12/31/2003
01/01/2004 - 01/31/2004
02/01/2004 - 02/29/2004
03/01/2004 - 03/31/2004
04/01/2004 - 04/30/2004
05/01/2004 - 05/31/2004
06/01/2004 - 06/30/2004
07/01/2004 - 07/31/2004
08/01/2004 - 08/31/2004
09/01/2004 - 09/30/2004
10/01/2004 - 10/31/2004
11/01/2004 - 11/30/2004
12/01/2004 - 12/31/2004
01/01/2005 - 01/31/2005
02/01/2005 - 02/28/2005
03/01/2005 - 03/31/2005

> attracted by the prospect of viewing ancient tombs and temples.
>
> But this rather blinkered view of Egypt's past has been criticized because it overlooks the county's debt to the heritage of the Greeks, Romans, Copts and Islam.
>
> [...]

True, and worth belaboring. But what about the Jews? For example, the Septuagint as the earliest translation of the Bible, Philo of Alexandria as an important Middle Platonist, the vibrant Jewish community in ancient Alexandria in general, etc. There's no mention of any of these in the article. I hope the project itself is more balanced. Does anyone know more?

posted by Jim Davila | 9:40 AM

PROFESSOR MORDECHAI COGAN of the Hebrew University debates scriptural precedents with the anti-disengagement people.

King Solomon gave land away (*Ha'aretz*)

By Mordechai Cogan

> In discussing the legality of the disengagement from the Gaza Strip and northern West Bank, opponents of the move are enlisting verses from the Tanach - according to which God promised the Land of Canaan to the Israelites - and pointing to the fact that those same areas that are about to be evacuated are included in this promise. In addition, the rabbis of Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip warn that din torah (a rabbinical legal decision) prohibits the handing over of parts of Eretz Israel to non-Jews.
>
> [...]
>
> King Solomon transferred "20 cities in the land of the Galilee" to Hiram King of Tyre (1 Kings 9:11-13),

04/01/2005 - 04/30/2005
05/01/2005 - 05/31/2005
06/01/2005 - 06/30/2005

links

HOME

ABOUT PALEOJUDAICA.COM

MEMORABLE PALEOJUDAICA POSTS

ANCIENT TEXTS ONLINE

BOOKS AND THESES/ DISSERTATIONS ONLINE

COURSE SYLLABI (ALPHABETICAL BY LAST NAME OF INSTRUCTOR)

COURSES ONLINE (ALPHABETICAL BY LAST NAME OF INSTRUCTOR - SOME FOR CREDIT, SOME NOT)

IRAQI ANTIQUITES INFORMATION

JOURNALS ONLINE

LANGUAGE RESOURCES

MUSEUM EXHIBITS

SCHOLARLY ORGANIZATIONS AND SOCIETIES

PERSONAL WEBSITES

apparently in order to erase the debt he owed Hiram for his assistance in building the Temple. These were 20 cities with their land and their inhabitants - the entire Acre Valley up to Rosh Hanikra, which became the property of the Phoenicians. This was recorded in the Tanach without any criticism on the part of the writer of the chronicles of Solomon, and the explanation for that is clear: There is no prohibition whatsoever in the Torah against handing over territories to someone who is not a member of the Israelite nation. The ownership of territories in Eretz Israel by the Jewish nation has always reflected the political and military circumstances of the period.

And if we are discussing the boundaries of the Promised Land, we should take note of the southern boundary of that same detailed map in the Book of Numbers. The line stretches from "the outmost coast of the Dead Sea eastward. And your border shall turn from the Negev to Ma'aleh Aqrabbim and pass on to Zin, and its limits shall be from the south to Kadesh Barnea, and shall go on to Hazar-Addar, and pass on to Azmon. And the border shall turn about from Azmon to the wadi of Egypt, and its limits shall be at the sea." That means that most of the Negev south of Be'er Sheva is not included in the estate of our forefathers. Moses explained that this piece of land, which is called the Land of Edom, belongs to the children of Esau, and by God's order, "meddle not with them, for I will not give you of their land, no, not so much as a foot's breadth; because I have given Mount Se'ir to Esau for a possession" (Deuteronomy 2:5).

[...]

It's interesting to note that the story in 1 Kings of Solomon's transfer of the cities to Tyre didn't go down well later on. The Chronicler changed it to "Huram" (Hiram) giving cities to Solomon (2 Chron 8:2: "Solomon rebuilt the cities which Huram had given to him, and settled the people of Israel in them").

From a historian's perspective, it's not at all clear how early any of the passages cited by Professor Cogan are. Nevertheless, if some want to argue against disengagement on the basis of the Bible, it's fair game for him to show that the biblical picture is more complicated.

VARIOUS RESOURCE PAGES OF PALEOJUDAIC INTEREST

WEBLOGS AND REGULARLY UPDATED NEWS SITES

ARTICLES, CONFERENCE PAPERS, AND BOOK REVIEWS BY JAMES R. DAVILA ONLINE

Site Feed

My Ecosystem Details

141291
free counter by bravenet

posted by Jim Davila | 9:26 AM

Sunday, June 19, 2005

SOME DEAD SEA SCROLLS are coming to Singapore:

> **Treasures from Vatican Museum on show in Singapore**
> By Joanne Leow, Channel NewsAsia
>
> SINGAPORE : The Asian Civilisations Museum is bringing in the largest ever Asian exhibition of art and artifacts from the Vatican.
>
> This will be the most expensive project the local museum has ever mounted, with insurance costing a six figure sum.
>
> From paintings by masters like Raphael and rare relics from the beginnings of Christianity, 140 objects from the Vatican and local churches will be on show at the one-off, specially curated for Singapore exhibition.
>
> [...]
>
> One of the extraordinary highlights of this exhibition is two fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls.
>
> They are over 2,000 years old, right from the origins of Christianity.
>
> [...]

I didn't know that the Vatican owned any Dead Sea Scrolls. The article doesn't say which ones they are, and the link given for the exhibition website leads to an incomplete page. The exhibition runs from Saturday to October.

UPDATE (20 June): Stephen Goranson e-mails:

According to a reference by Stephen Pfann in the DSS microfiche book to DSS: A Personal Account 1977 p.47 (by Trever, not Allegro as given there?--my copy is at home), the Vatican paid for some fragments in October 1951. Perhaps these are the same, now delivered? (Or perhaps the Vatican borrowed fragments from the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum?) I don't yet know which fragments.

posted by Jim Davila | 8:42 AM

CHALDO-ASSYRIAN WATCH:

Assyrian Coalition Sends Letter to Assyrian Patriarchs

Posted 06-18-2005 15:24:02 GMT 6-18-2005 20:24:2)

(AINA) -- A coalition of Assyrian (also known as Chaldean and Syriac) political and cultural organizations has sent a letter to two Assyrian Patriarchs, urging them to continue and expand the dialog between their churches. The Patriarch of the Chaldean Church of Babylon (a Roman Catholic uniate), Mar Emanuel III Dally and the Patriarch of the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East, Mar Dinkha IV, are both in the United States visiting their communities.

The letter urges the Patriarchs to continue the dialog begun in 1997 between Mar Dinkha IV and the former Chaldean Patriarch, Mar Bedawid, stressing the critical situation of the Assyrian community in Iraq, and the forthcoming Iraqi constitutional convention. The letter asks the Patriarch to work to ensure that Assyrians will be fundamentally recognized in Iraq's new constitution.

[...]

The full text of the letter is included in the article. You will recall that both Churches use a dialect of Aramaic as their liturgical language.

posted by Jim Davila | 8:21 AM

THE CODEX SINAITICUS CONSERVATION PROJECT is covered in a long Reuters India article. The discussion of Sinaiticus looks pretty accurate, although it's debatable whether it was one of Constantine's fifty manuscripts.

> **FEATURE - Monks use hi-tech camera to read ancient manuscripts**
> Sun Jun 19, 2005 12:54 AM ET
>
> By Tom Perry
>
> MOUNT SINAI, Egypt (Reuters) - The world's oldest monastery plans to use hi-tech cameras to shed new light on ancient Christian texts preserved for centuries within its fortress walls in the Sinai Desert.
>
> Saint Catherine's Monastery hopes the technology will allow a fuller understanding of some of the world's earliest Christian texts, including pages from the Codex Sinaiticus -- the oldest surviving bible in the world.
>
> The technique, known as hyperspectral imaging, will use a camera to photograph the parchments at different wavelengths of light, highlighting faded texts obscured by time and later overwritings.
>
> [...]

Here are some other interesting details about the use of the same technology on other manuscripts at St. Catherine's:

> Hyperspectral imaging will be used to read another of the monastery's most significant manuscripts -- the Codex Syriacus.

> The technology should allow scholars to read the faint remnants of a washed-out 5th-century text which lie underneath visible 8th-century writing. The underlying text in Syriac is a copy of a 2nd-century translation of the New Testament gospels.

The technical name for a manuscript with two layers of writing on it is"palimpsest."

> In the late 19th century, scholars applied chemicals to the manuscript which briefly made the underlying text visible but made the parchment more brittle. "It's almost certain that the whole text has not been extracted yet," Pickwoad said.
>
> Photographing the rippled parchment may involve using up to "four cameras taking images from different angles and then knitting the image together, electronically pulling it flat because we may not be able to pull it flat physically," he said.
>
> The technology could also be applied to read the faint traces of a script in a language only ever seen before carved in a few stone inscriptions. It lies in the pages of a Georgian manuscript dating to the 8th or 9th century.
>
> [...]
>
> The monastery aims to have 100 manuscripts photographed and accessible through a Web site by mid-2006. "Even though it's only 100 out of 3,000, it will be an important scholarly resource," he [monastery librarian Father Justin] said.
>
> Book historians are currently cataloguing the condition of the manuscripts and the physical features of their bindings, 50 percent of which are original.
>
> "The evidence of where a manuscript has been and where it has come from to get here is often in the binding," [book historian Nicholas] Pickwoad said.

> Conservators are even keeping the dust they brush from the manuscripts for traces of pollen or seeds which may yield evidence on how texts in languages including Persian, Amharic and Hebrew made it to the middle of the Sinai Desert.

I wasn't aware that the project involved so many manuscripts.

posted by Jim Davila | 8:10 AM

Saturday, June 18, 2005

STEVEN FINE'S NEW BOOK, *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World*, is noted by Rebecca Lesses over at Mystical Politics. She also tells us a little about her current research on the Aramaic incantation bowls.

posted by Jim Davila | 8:29 AM

ALEXANDER THE GREAT AND THE CANAANITES: In Rogue Classicism, David Meadows notes an *Arutz Sheva* article about this story in the Babylonian Talmud.

posted by Jim Davila | 8:25 AM

GIANTS, ALIENS, AND JOSEPHUS: A press release announces a new novel about the Nephilim and UFOs, published by Zondervan.

> **Zondervan Releases 'The Revealing,' the Final Book in the "Nephilim Trilogy" by Christian UFO Cult Expert Dr. L.A. Marzulli**
>
> *Zondervan has released 'The Revealing,' the stirring*

> *conclusion to the science fiction series of books entitled "Nephilim Trilogy" by Dr. L.A. Marzulli, a Christian UFO cult expert. Although the books are fiction, they include history, biblical prophecy, and the author's own shocking research on Nephilim, giant biblical creatures that are the offspring of fallen angels and human women. Dr. Marzulli's personal theory is at the trilogy's core—that fallen angels are reemerging on the world scene disguised as aliens, are abducting human women for a sinister breeding program, and initiating a great demonic deception that will culminate with the Antichrist and the Apocalypse.*

Here's the Josephus part:

> Opening with the chilling discovery of a giant skeleton under the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, Marzulli's trilogy is based on the premise that ancient giant beings called "Nephilim," who are the unholy offspring sired by fallen angels and born of abducted human women, are reemerging to unleash terror into the modern world scene. The historic origins of this giant hybrid race of Nephilim can be traced to Chapter 6 in Genesis in the Bible before the Flood, and to the 'Book of Enoch,' a book discovered with the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Jewish historian Josephus confirms the existence of the creatures, and that the bones of a Nephilim were on display in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus.

The Nephilim (plural; the singular, if it were attested, would be something like "Naphal"), which the Greek Septuagint takes to be "giants," are found in Genesis 6:1-4. The story is told at much greater length (probably, in my opinion, telling a version of the full story that Genesis grudgingly summarizes) in *1 Enoch*, particularly the Book of the Watchers. There was also a Book of Giants in antiquity which is partially preserved in Aramaic at Qumran and in later Manichean versions.

As for Josephus, here's what he says about the giants in *Antiquities* 5.125 (5.2.3)

> For which reason they removed their camp to Hebron; and when they had taken it, they slew all the inhabitants. There were till then left the race of giants, who had bodies so large, and countenances so entirely different from other men, that they were surprising to the sight, and terrible to the hearing. The bones of these men are still shown to this very day, unlike to any credible relations of other men.

I can't find any mention of the bones being on "display in Jerusalem." And let's face it, Josephus' comment doesn't prove very much. Maybe people just pointed out big funny rocks or dinosaur fossils or some such in his time and said they were giants' bones.

But the premise of the story doesn't sound too bad. I love ancient legends, I'm a voracious reader of science fiction, and I like some epic fantasy. I can handle Nephilim and UFOs in a novel, if the concept is done well. (Whether it's done well here is a very open question, but I haven't read it.)

But this is another matter:

> Marzulli is an evangelical Christian who has done in-depth research on UFO cults and the giant Nephilim. In writing the Nephilim Trilogy, he drew heavily on his own research as well as his past personal involvement in the occult and New Age. Although the trilogy is a work of fiction, Marzulli’s research has convinced him that his books’ basic premise about the identity of aliens and their purpose on earth is true.
>
> “I believe serious spiritual deception is going on,” says Marzulli. “I wrote the Nephilim Trilogy to help people understand the spiritual dimensions of the whole alien and UFO phenomenon, which I believe are part of the prophesies about the end of the world in the Book of Daniel, the Book of Revelation, and elsewhere in the Bible.

He is mixing giants mythology with alien abductions and trying to tell us that it's all real. (His website has more silliness along these lines.) Here we enter into Dan Brown territory and indeed, go well beyond it into Erich von Daniken territory and maybe even beyond that. Why is it that

otherwise competent fiction writers do a little "research" on the Bible and then conclude that all of us who spend our lives working on such things got it all wrong and, luckily, they have found the truth and are now putting it their novel? But give Brown credit; at least he doesn't drag in UFOs. And even von Daniken doesn't drag in the "spiritual dimensions" on top of the UFOs.

Sigh.

posted by Jim Davila | 7:49 AM

Friday, June 17, 2005

MYSTERIOUS RUSSIAN ARTIFACTS:

> **Jewellery find puzzles Russians** (BBC)
>
> Archaeologists in the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad have uncovered 16th century jewellery which they say is unlike any found in the area before.
>
> They were found in a 10cm round box during an excavation at the site of a medieval castle in the city.
>
> It contained 11 items made of gold, silver, tin and hematite, covered with hieroglyphs and inscriptions in Hebrew, ancient Greek and Latin.
>
> [...]
>
> Archaeologists think the rings and amulets might have belonged to a counsellor of Albrecht, Duke of Prussia, who had an interest both in astrology and black magic.
>
> [...]

I know the artifacts aren't ancient, but they were excavated and are inscribed with Hebrew, ancient Greek, and Latin esoterica; so, close enough. The article has a picture of one of the rings, but the face is angled away from the camera so that any inscription on it is unreadable.

UPDATE: Wieland Willker e-mails a link to an article in *Spiegel* which has photos of two of the artifacts. They can be enlarged by clicking on them. The second has the Latin word *Deus* and the angelic name "Rabiel" on it, along with other words in Roman letters and a lot of alchemical-looking symbols that I can't identify.

UPDATE: Joe Cathey e-mails:

> While reading this post I couldn't but help notice that the rings might be possibly left over from the Third Age. It could be a vicious trick by none other then Melkor himself to trick us into falling for his trap. We are not told actually how the nine ringwraiths fell from their perches of power. As you can tell I just again finished "Fellowship of the Ring + Hobbit + Similarion."

Hmmm ... better not try any of those rings on.

posted by Jim Davila | 10:08 AM

ARAMAIC TANGO?

> **The Passion, to a Latin beat**
> Friday, June 17, 2005
> DAVID STABLER (The *Oregonian*)
>
> "Revolutionary." "A breakthrough work." "A work of genius."
>
> When "La Pasion Segun San Marcos" ("The Passion According to St. Mark") exploded onto the stage five years ago with its exuberant mix of tango, drumming, dance, orchestral and choral music in Latin, Spanish and Aramaic, audiences and critics raved.
>
> [...]

posted by Jim Davila | 9:31 AM

Thursday, June 16, 2005

LET ME ADD MY CONGRATULATIONS to Catherine Smith, Mark Goodacre's doctoral student, who has just passed her viva.

So Catherine, what's happening with the Open Text Project? The link is dead.

UPDATE (17 June): Catherine Smith e-mails:

> OpenText.org is alive and doing really well.The site is back up now - it had experienced a bit of a server problem before. Work has been progressing really well. The basic clause level annotation was recently completed for the whole of the New Testament. There are some examples up on the site and we are currently working on getting all of the texts available for viewing and basic searches which will hopefully be available very soon.

Good news. Thanks Cat.

posted by Jim Davila | 10:21 AM

ALAN SEGAL'S BOOK, *Life After Death : A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion* is reviewed by Scot McKnight in *Christianity Today*.

posted by Jim Davila | 9:39 AM

Wednesday, June 15, 2005

THE ROMAN SIEGE OF JERUSALEM during the first Jewish revolt against Rome (66-70 CE) is the subject of an article by J.E. Lendon reprinted on the

HistoryNet website:

> **Roman Siege of Jerusalem**
> The prosecution of one of the greatest sieges in ancient history offers a chance to assess the nature of Rome's military discipline and its importance to the success of the imperial army.

I don't have time to read it all, but it looks interesting. Here's more on the piece and the author:

> This article was written by J.E. Lendon and originally published in the Summer 2005 edition of *MHQ* [i.e., *MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History* -- JRD]. J.E. Lendon is an associate professor of history at the University of Virginia. This article is excerpted from his book *Soldiers and Ghosts: A History of Battle in Classical Antiquity*, to be published in May 2005 by Yale University Press. Copyright ©2005 by Yale University. Reprinted by permission.

(Via Bible and Interpretation.)

posted by Jim Davila | 2:06 PM

THE *JOURNAL OF NORTHWEST SEMITIC LANGUAGES* has published tables of contents for two volumes since I last checked. Here are the articles listed therein:

Issue 29.1 (2003)

> John van Seters, The Redactor in Biblical Studies: a Nineteenth Century Anachronism
> 1-19
>
> Jim Pohlig, Cognition and Biblical Documents: Towards

Overcoming Theoretical and Methodological Obstacles to Recovering Cultural Worldviews
21-35

Francisco Javier del Barco del Barco, Syntactic Structures of Parallelism: a Case Study in Biblical Prophecy
37-53

Michal Ephratt, Hebrew Morphology by Itself 55-65

Hans Rechenmacher, al and /ya in Nominal Clauses 67-85

Reinoud Oosting, Appearing in Zion: the Role of Zion in Psalm 84: From a Linguistic Point of View
87-106

Jan H Kroeze, The Semantic Functions of Embedded Constructions in Biblical Hebrew
107-120

Vincent DeCaen, Moveable Nun and Intrusive Nun: The Nature and Distribution of Verbal Nunation in Joel and Job
121-132

Issue 29.2 (2003)

Articles
Claudia V Camp, Over Her Dead Body: The Estranged Woman and the Price of the Promised Land
1-13

Jacobus A Naudé, The Consonantal Root in Semitic Languages
15-32

Dominic Rudman, A Note on Zechariah 1:5 33-39

Yehoshua Gitay, Rhetoric and Its Limitiations: Job the Dissident X
41-63

Nachman Levine, Vertical Poetics: Interlinear Phonological Parallelism in Psalms
65-82

Steve A Wiggins, Pidray, Tallay and Arsay in the Baal Cycle 83-101

Hermann-Josef Stipp, Bemerkungen zum griechischen Michabuch aus Anlass des deutschen LXXÜbersetzungsprojekts
103-132

Paul A Kruger, Ahab's "Slowly" Walking About: Another Look at 1 Kings 21:27Bb
133-142

Issue 30.1 (2004)

Homage to Siegfried Mittmann i

Selected Academic Publications of Siegfried Mittmann iii

Articles
Johann Cook, Exegesis in the Septuagint 1-19

Sakkie Cornelius, A Preliminary Typology for the Female Plaque Figurines and Their Value for the Religion of Ancient Palestine and Jordan
21-39

Dirk J Human, Yahweh, the Israelite High God, Bends Down to Uplift the Downtrodden: Perspectives on the Incomparability of Yahweh in Psalm 113
41-64

Louis C Jonker, Another Look at the Psalm Headings: Observations on the Musical Terminology
65-85

Jacobus A Naudé, A Perspective on the Chronological Framework of Biblical Hebrew
87-102

Philip J Nel, Psalm 19: the Unbearable Lightness of Perfection
103-117

Christo H J van der Merwe, Towards a Principled Working Model for Biblical Hebrew Lexicology
119-137

Harry F van Rooy, A New Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible
139-150

Daan N Pienaar, Some Observations on Conquest Reports in the Book of Joshua
151-164

Issue 30.2 (2004)

Articles
John van Seters, The Formula leshakken shemo sham and the Centralisation of Worship in Deuteronomy and DH
1-18

Florentino García Martínez, Sammael in Pseudo-Jonathan and the Origin of Evil
19-41

Hans Rechenmacher, Kognitive Linguistik und althebräische Lexikographie
43-59

Jessie Rogers, Wisdom in Sirach 61-79

Lénart J de Regt, Signs of Redactional Development in Some Old Testament Texts and the Translator
81-97

Jan H Kroeze, Towards a Multidimensional Linguistic Database of Biblical Hebrew
99-120

posted by Jim Davila | 1:13 PM

JEWISH-TEMPLE DENIAL appears to be featured in a new association of

Jordanian Islamic scholars. Monsters and Critics reports the following (my emphasis):

> At the conclusion of the symposium on championing the Holy Koran and defending Al-Aqsa, Dr Ibrahim Zayd al-Kilani announced the formation of an association for Muslim scholars in Jordan. The establishment of this association came in response to the demands by numerous religious scholars. They proposed the establishment of such an association to unite religious scholars in Jordan, to confront the Western onslaught targeting the morals and values of the Jordanian people, and to raise the awareness of the Jordanian people and safeguard their religious values.
>
> The symposium championing the Holy Koran and defending Al-Aqsa was held last Saturday at the headquarters of the Islamic Action Front [IAF] party in Tila al-Ali. It was attended by a large number of religious scholars and lasted for about five hours during which the participants debated two working papers. The first working paper was on championing the Holy Koran and **the second was entitled "The Falsehood of the Temple [Mount], one of the most serious perils threatening Al-Aqsa".**

Clearly "scholar" here means "cleric" rather than "historian."

posted by Jim Davila | 9:28 AM

Tuesday, June 14, 2005

BOOK NOTE: I recently read Richard A. Freund, *Secrets of the Cave of Letters: Rediscovering a Dead Sea Mystery* (Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books, 2004). This is an exciting book that describes the recent re-excavation of the so-called Cave of the Letters in the Nahal Hever. Freund's archaeological team used some new technologies to locate and get at material that was unreachable when Aharoni and Yadin excavated the cave in the

1950s and 1960s, respectively. Some of the newly located artifacts remain inaccessible until still-better technologies allow us to recover them. The book also makes the case that the cave was used not just by refugees during the Bar Kokhba Revolt in the early 130s CE, but also by others after the first Jewish Revolt in 66-70 CE. Most controversial of all, Freund argues that the Cave of the Letters is mentioned in treasure #25 of the Copper Scroll, that that treasure was unknowingly excavated by Yadin, and that it included implements that came from the Jerusalem Temple.

The main weakness of the book is its very popular style, which does not allow it to make a detailed case for any of the above which would be satisfying to an archaeologist or textual scholar. For that we must wait for forthcoming scholarly volumes. On the basis of the Nova program last year, Ed Cook raised some doubts about the proposed identification of the Cave of the Letters with the Cave of the Column in Copper Scroll treasure #25. One of his objections, that the weight of the Copper Scroll treasure is too great, is debatable. The scroll refers to 42 *kk* (??). This has widely been taken as an abbreviation for *kkr* (???), "talent" (about 75 pounds) which would indeed be far too much. But if Judah K. Lefkovits is right in taking *kk* as standing for *keseph karsh*/*karshin* (??? ???/?????), "silver karsh" (a Persian measurement equaling 10 shekels or about 71 grams), the amount listed is at least within the same order of magnitude as the weight of the bronze implements in the Cave of the Letters. (See Lefkovits, *The Copper Scroll: 3Q15: A Reevaluation* [STDJ 25 Leiden: Brill, 2000], 481-82 and Freund, 175-77.) I don't know whether this new interpretation of ?? will stand up, but it certainly makes the hitherto implausibly enormous amounts of precious metal in the Copper Scroll sound more believable.

Ed's second objection was to the identifying of the small limestone vessel found in the Cave of the Letters with the *qalal* (???)-vessel mentioned in the Copper Scroll. In the book Freund states confidently that this vessel "is usually a ritual limestone vessel well known in Jerusalem during the time of the Temple, but apparently in use by pious Jews elsewhere as well" (p. 171). I can find no evidence for it ever being a limestone vessel. I've checked most of his rabbinic references and this is not stated in any of the ones I checked. Rashi, who is very late, says there was such a copper vessel (see Lefkovits, p.

207), but I wonder if this isn't just a guess based on its graphic similarity to the Hebrew word that means "burnished" (also ???). Otherwise, there is no indication that we are dealing with anything but a ceramic vessel. Indeed, the Mishnah, our earliest evidence apart from the Copper Scroll, makes it clear that it was not a stone vessel. Ed mentions *Parah* 3.3, but *Parah* 10.3-4 and *Eduyyot* 7.5, the only other Mishnaic passages that mention the vessel, are quite important as well. These passages discuss the circumstances under which a *qalal*-vessel can become ritually impure. Stone vessels are not susceptible to ritual impurity, so the *qalal*-vessels of the Mishnah must have been ceramic. True, the word *could* have referred to a limestone vessel in the first century -- we just don't know -- but I can't find any positive evidence for such a meaning ever at any period, and if it's there, it should be front and center in Freund's presentation, popular though it may be.

In short, as I said, the book is exciting. But where I can test its claims, they are overstated. I remain to be convinced and will be watching with interest for publication of the scholarly defenses of Freund's theories.

UPDATE: Obviously, I still don't get this Unicode font thing. Sorry for all the question marks above. The Hebrew worked fine when I was typing up the post, but it's been lost in the posting for reasons unknown to me.

UPDATE (15 June): Ed Cook e-mails to ask if *karsh* is attested after the Persian period. The answer is possibly, but possibly not. It's used in the fifth-century BCE Aramaic Elephantine papyri. A Phoenician inscription from Lapethos, Cyprus uses the abbreviation *kr* for a measure of weight. This may well be for *karsh*. And Murabba'at document 9:3 (early second century CE?) uses the abbreviation *k*, which could be for *keseph* ("silver") or *karsh*. (Lefkovits, pp. 479-80.)

posted by Jim Davila | 4:40 PM