JEWISH WARS, JEWISH WARRIORS: A PRIMER OF ANCIENT JEWISH MILITARY HISTORY

Benjamin Rigberg (1912-2007) Professor Emeritus, Monmouth University With Stephanie Reich



JOSHUA COMMANDS THE SUN AND MOON TO STAND STILL.

About the author

Benjamin Rigberg was born in 1912 in the Jewish agricultural colony of Woodbine, New Jersey. His family moved to Philadelphia when young Benjamin was five, and he grew up and attended school there. He received his BS degree from Temple University, his MA from the University of Illinois at Urbana, and his Ph.D. in History from the University of Pennsylvania in 1946. Rigberg taught in the Philadelphia public school system for a number of years and, following World War II, when the barriers against Jews entering the history profession began to fall, he taught at Monmouth College (now Monmouth University) from 1958 to 1977. He travelled extensively in Eastern Europe and carried on research on the Czarist period in the libraries of the Soviet Union.

Rigberg's studies in Jewish History and the Hebrew language included a year and a half at Gratz Hebrew College (now Gratz University) from 1929 to 1931, and a year and a half at the Jewish Theological Seminary from 1983 to 1985. He discontinued his studies at the Seminary because of his advancing blindness.

Rigberg's publications include articles on Russian history in the *Jabrbücher Für Geschichte Osteuropas;* on American History in *Theory and Research in Social Education;* and on contemporary Jewish affairs in *Mid-Stream* as well as the book *Judaism in a Rural Setting: Congregation Beth Israel of Walla Walla* published by Western States Jewish History.

Professor Rigberg died on January 24, 2007, five days short of his 95th birthday. He left this uncompleted manuscript on which he was working with the help of Stephanie Reich. The manuscript benefitted from the editing skills of Karen Casten, archeological advice from Sandra Scham, and from the devoted help of his volunteer readers, Don Rothberg, Jeanne Walsh, Sid Booth, Harold Sharlin, Michael Leibman, Tom Blackburn, Katherine Hoyt and others. It is to all these helpers that he would surely want to dedicate this work.

Reference to Eras

Early Bronze Age	3500 – 2200 B.C.E.
Intermediate Bronze Age	2200 – 2000 B.C.E.
Middle Bronze Age	2000 – 1550 B.C.E
Late Bronze Age	1550 – 1150 B.C.E.
Iron Age	900 B.C.E. –

B.C.E., or Before the Common Era, replaces B.C. C.E., or Common Era, replaces A.D.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface		4
Introduction		8
Chapter 1.	From Abraham to Joshua (c. 18th Century B.C.E – 13th Century B.C.E.)	19
Chapter 2.	 Joshua and Judges (c. 13th Century B.C.E. – 11th Century B.C.E.) 1. The Book of Joshua 2. The Book of Judges 	31
Chapter 3.	The United Monarchy (1030 or 1025 B.C.E931 B.C.E.)	45
Chapter 4.	The Divided Monarchy: Israel (931 B.C.E. –722 B.C.E.)	66
Chapter 5.	The Divided Monarchy: Judah (931 B.C.E. – 586 B.C.E.)	84
Chapter 6.	Jewish History Underground: (586 B.C.E. – 198 B.C.E.)	110
	 The Babylonian Exile (586 B.C.E. – 540 B.C.E.) The Military Colony at Elephantine (6th Century B.C.E. (?) – 4th Fourth Century B.C.E.(?)) The Persian Era (540 B.C.E. – 332 B.C.E.) Messianism, Eschatology and other Doctrinal Developments Hellenistic Civilization (4th Century B.C.E. – 4th Century C.E., approx.) 	
Conclusions		134

Bibliography

139

Preface

This study is a primer of ancient Jewish military history for the lay reader and consolidates much of the scholarly work done on the subject to date. My particular focus is on the Biblical accounts of the ancient Jewish rulers and their military exploits, in order to assess where these accounts can be verified by the actual historical record, and where, controversially, they cannot be verified. In chapters 4 and 5, I present new scholarship of interest also to experts in the field on the subject of Israel and Judah, the two Hebrew states whose identity has been confirmed outside the Bible.

My original plan was to investigate fully the three great Jewish rebellions against the Roman Empire, two of them in Judea and one in a large portion of the Diaspora, almost two thousand years ago. I wanted to solve the riddle of how the people of one small nation found the audacity to take on such a great military power not once, but three times in a period of sixty-six years. Currently accepted explanations did not satisfy me, and I have emphasized certain non-rational elements in order deepen our understanding of the Jewish wars. In the course of my research, however, I found that I needed to understand the heritage of Jewish warfare extending back to the beginnings of discernible Jewish existence. In studying ancient military sources, I found that the Jews were great fighters, and that this was known to other nations of their time. As David Biale puts it, "The Jews were a remarkably contentious people in antiquity, and developed a well-deserved reputation for military prowess."¹ Warfare was a constant feature of all the peoples in the ancient Middle East, and this included the Hebrews.

The Hebrews, unlike the Greeks (who also play a pivotal role in this narrative), did not glamorize warfare or promote the strenuous personal qualities which enabled the individual to excel in combat. Homer, as Thomas Cahill points out, delights in depicting the savagery of combat. The *Iliad* contains hundreds of graphic descriptions of the horrors of the battlefield. In one of them, "The body of a man is

¹ David Biale, *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), p. 15.

Jewish Wars, Jewish Warriors by Benjamin Rigberg

split open, his entrails spilling out as he goes down clawing the dust as death comes in black waves of pain."² In another, an invader brings down a Trojan:

[He] hurled and Athena drove the shaft and split the archer's nose between the eyes – it cracked his glistening teeth, the tough bronze cut off his tongue at the roots, smashed his jaw and the point came ripping out beneath his chin.³

Although the Hebrews did not often glorify warfare, there are a few great moments of military jubilation in ancient Jewish tradition. Two of them are in the *Tanakh* and the third is based upon the Books of Maccabees I and II in the *Apocrypha*.⁴ The first of these occurred after Moses had led the Israelites out of Egypt and across the water that parted for them and engulfed the Egyptians. Moses and the Israelites chanted the exultant song that begins with the words: "I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously; Horse and driver He has hurled into the sea" (Exodus 15:1-18). At a much later time, when the Passover Haggadah had been developed, the Lord admonished the Hebrews not to rejoice when their opponents were drowning,⁵ but this strain of compassion does not appear in the original chant.

The second victory song was sung several centuries later by the Judges Deborah and Barak in celebration of the victory of a small Israelite force over a much larger Canaanite army:

Hear, O kings! Give ear, O potentates! I will sing, will sing to the Lord.... ...Then was the remnant made victor over the mighty, The Lord's people won my victory over the warriors....(Judges 5:1-13).

The third example is described in the first two Books of Maccabees in the *Apocrypha*. There the Jews celebrated their military victory over the Syrian Seleucids which led to the re-establishment of religious freedom for themselves, an event memorialized in the annual festival of Chanukkah. Commemoration of the Maccabeean victory can be found in the multitude of songs and games that have come down to us in the Chanukkah festivities.

Jewish Wars, Jewish Warriors by Benjamin Rigberg

² Thomas Cahill, *Sailing the Wine-Dark Sea: Why the Greeks Matter*, (New York: Anchor books, 2003), p. 33. ³ Ibid.

⁴ The *Apocrypha*, or "Hidden Books," refer to fourteen Books excluded by the rabbis from the Hebrew Canon. They were preserved by the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Churches.

⁵ This is found in the *Talmud* (Sanhedrin, 3b) and also in the *Haggadah*, the guide to the Passover ritual.

Individual acts of heroism, such as those depicted in Samson's victories over the Philistines and David's victory over Goliath, are celebrated in the Hebrew Bible as a means by which the Israelites acquired and held the Land of Canaan and not as ends in themselves. Yet, although the ancient Hebrews did not glorify war as such, they engaged in almost continuous warfare, according to both Biblical and extra-Biblical sources. Their reasons for such actions were the same as those of other peoples of the region, namely, the acquisition and defense of territory and trade routes, and the quest for additional resources.

In recent years three books have appeared on the subject of Jewish warfare. The first two are traditional accounts, which do not fully consider the anthropological and archaeological work that has been done in the field in the past one hundred years or so. They accept verbatim what is in the Scriptures. The first, *Battles of the Bible*, by two distinguished Israeli soldiers, Haim Herzog and Mordechai Gichon, published in 2002 as a reworked and updated version of a book which first appeared in 1978, aims to "apply to the Biblical narrative modern military thinking and understanding."⁶ Their premise is that the battles described in the Bible can best be understood in terms of contemporary military principles. This is an excellent book, but it has one major drawback which limits its use, at least for me. The authors proclaim that the Bible is "a factual, unbiased source."⁷ Other scholars, including myself, question the historical accuracy of many of the Biblical accounts of events.

The second recent book, *Wars of the Jews* (1990), by Monroe Rosenthal and Isaac Mozeson, covers far too much ground and is too sketchy to be of real use. That is, it seeks to describe Jewish wars from the time of Abraham up to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. It ranges through all the continents of the Eastern Hemisphere where Jews have lived and enumerates a number of the messiahs who have appeared from time to time. But the authors do show how the geography of the land of Canaan shaped the Israelites' mode of warfare.

⁶ Chaim Herzog and Mordechai Gichon, *Battles of the Bible*, (London: Greenhill Books, 2002), p. 21. Although the title of the book is *Battles of the Bible*, the final section, on the Maccabeean Revolt, is based upon sources entirely <u>outside</u> the Bible.

⁷ Ibid., p. 300.

By contrast, Eric H. Cline's *Jerusalem Besieged* (2004) is a delightful work of the highest scholarship. The author's aim is to examine the many conquests and attempted conquests of the city of Jerusalem from the time of King David to our own day. Skillfully interweaving archaeology and history, he provides a fascinating tale of one aspect of the three-thousand year saga of this immortal city. Cline's bibliography is enormous. This book should be on the shelf of every library that boasts a Judaica and Middle East Studies collection.

Battles of the Bible, despite its shortcomings, and *Jerusalem Besieged* were particularly valuable to me as I developed my own arguments in the study that follows.

A final note: A number of books on Jewish military history omit the period from 586 B.C.E. to the 160s B.C.E., when the Maccabees emerged, because no Jewish state with a military arm existed during that time. I have chosen, rather, to devote a chapter to the many important developments in Jewish life which took place in that long era, because they are fundamental to the understanding of the rebellions that followed. [Prof. Rigberg was unable to complete that chapter before his death.]

Introduction

How reliable is the *Tanakh⁸* as historical record? What developments in historical research and other fields have taken place in recent centuries to help us answer this question, at least in part? Two perspectives have emerged regarding this question. The proponents of the first presume that the *Tanakh* is, in fact, a historical document, and use it to guide their archaeological and historical research. Adam Zertal, an Israeli archaeologist, exemplifies those who adhere to this argument. He based his work on the text which states that Moses commanded the people of Israel, once they had crossed the Jordan and entered the Promised Land, to:

...set up these stones about which I charge you this day on Mount Ebal, and coat them with plaster. There, too, you shall build an altar to the Lord your God, an altar of stones. Do not wield an iron tool over them (Deuteronomy 27: 5-6).

Zertal is certain that he has found this altar, which the *Tanakh* states Joshua built upon entering the Promised Land. Zertal came upon this structure in 1980, and for the following nine years he excavated it. The place consists of "a rectangular structure, about 30 feet by 23 feet, with thick walls and a ramp leading up to a platform ten feet high."⁹ In conducting his archaeological work, Zertal has made use of the *Tanakh* as a guide to show that the altar that some regarded as a legend was historically authentic.

The second perspective is exemplified by Norman Canter. He noted in his excellent book, *Antiquity: The Civilization of the Ancient World*,¹⁰ that after a century of archaeological digging, no traces of the Biblical Exodus from Egypt could be found. From this he reached the conclusion that the Exodus had never occurred, and that the *Tanakh* should not be taken as historical truth.¹¹

Let us go back in time to the emergence of this freedom to question the veracity of religious sources. The text of the Creation story raises questions virtually as old as the written *Tanakh* itself. In the seventeenth century, as the power of the Catholic and Protestant churches waned, critical evaluation

⁸ *Tanakh* is an acronym for the three divisions of the Hebrew Bible: 1) Torah (meaning teaching; also referred to as the five Books of Moses or the Pentatuch); 2) Navi'im (prophets); and 3) Kituvim (the writings).

⁹ Jennifer Wallace, "Shifting Ground in the Holy Land: Archaeology is casting new light on the Old Testament." *Smithsonian*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (May, 2006): 59.

¹⁰ Norman Cantor, *Antiquity: The Civilization of the Ancient World* (New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 2003) p.8. ¹¹ Ibid.

of both the Hebrew and Christian canons developed. Even the opening sentences of *B'reshit* (Genesis) lend themselves to questioning. The Almighty commences His work with the creation of the heavens and the earth. This is summarized in the Bible's inimitable prose: "And the evening and the morning were the first day."¹² There follow other great acts of creation, which are summarized: "And the evening and the morning were the second day;.... and the evening and the morning were the third day." It was only on the fourth day that the Lord created the sun, the moon and the stars. Questions: What set day and night apart before the creation of the sun, the moon, and the stars? Without the sun, how could one demarcate night from day, and one day from another?

As an eight-year-old, I addressed these questions long ago to my Orthodox Jewish mother, and the answer was a slap in the face. But many years later, when I was involved in the study of Jewish history, I found that the rabbis had pondered these perplexing questions almost two thousand years ago and had provided an equally unsatisfying answer: The Lord had created a special light with which to distinguish day from night prior to the fourth day of Creation.

"Scientific" criticism of the Bible began, in European thought, in the seventeenth century with two great intellectual movements: the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment. It was a century of giant intellects, like Galileo, Newton and Spinoza. (Newton, though born in 1642 and dying in 1727, did his greatest work at the age of twenty-one, that is, in the seventeenth century.) It was the century of Grotius, Descartes, Leibniz, Boyle, Hobbes, and Locke. Ironically, in that same "enlightened" seventeenth century, Galileo was sentenced by the Church to permanent house arrest for teaching that the earth revolved around the sun, and Baruch de Spinoza (1632-1677) was excommunicated by the good Jewish citizens of Amsterdam in 1656 for doubting aloud that Moses was the author of the first Five Books of the Bible.¹³ A generation before Spinoza, Uriel da Costa was twice expelled from the Jewish

¹² Some ancient peoples, like the Hebrews, followed a lunar calendar, according to which the day began at sundown. Contemporary Jews continue the practice.

¹³ Although the Jews of the Netherlands enjoyed a measure of freedom, almost unrivaled in the Europe of that day, the Jewish community still contained its own internal tyrannies.

community of Amsterdam for stating that all religions were man-made. However, the strictures of the religious establishment failed to stifle the growing spirit of free inquiry.

Baruch de Spinoza is known as the founder of modern Biblical criticism, and a devotee of natural law, a concept that illumined his age. Natural law for him was identical to divine law.¹⁴

Nothing, then, comes to pass in nature in contravention to her universal laws....Nature, therefore, always observes laws and rules which involve eternal necessity and truth, although they may not be known to us.¹⁵

He held to a deterministic worldview which emphasized that the Almighty did not intervene in history to alter human affairs, and that prayer did not influence Him.

And so what is embodied in the precepts does not depend on man's will, nor will any good or evil befall men as they neglect or heed them, any more than God's will can be influenced by prayer or his eternal or absolute decrees be mutable.¹⁶

It was the specific question of the authorship of the Pentateuch that led to his excommunication.

Spinoza derived some of his arguments regarding this subject from the writings, some of them cryptic, of Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089 – 1163), a 12th century peripatetic Biblical commentator. Ibn Ezra had cited three main reasons why Moses could not have been the author: First, Moses could not have written Deuteronomy because he had not participated in the crossing of the Jordan. Secondly, the rabbis had contended that the Book of Moses itself could have been written on twelve stones. This, of course, would have been impossible in the case of the entire Pentateuch. Thirdly, Ibn Ezra cited a number of contradictions in the Pentateuch, among them that in Genesis 22:14. In this passage, Mt. Moriah was named the Mountain of God, but it had not actually acquired this name until the building of the First Temple, after the Lord had stated that He would choose the site for the Temple. Spinoza's own, and conclusive, citation arguing against the contention that Moses was the Pentateuch's author was Deuteronomy 34:10: "Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses – whom the Lord had

¹⁴ Baruch de Spinoza, *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Selected from his Chief Works*, (New York: The Modern Library (Random House), 1927) pp. 56-57; and 106-107.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 106.

¹⁶ Baruch de Spinoza, "Letter 42: To the learned and accomplished Jacob Ostens, from Lambert de Veltuysen," in Michael L. Morgan (ed.), *Spinoza: Complete works*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2002), p. 870.

singled out, face to face..." The wording of this passage indicated that it must have been written long after Moses had died.¹⁷ Spinoza further noted that Genesis 36:31 stated that "These are the kings who ruled in Edom before any king reigned over the Israelites." From this statement, Spinoza concluded that the author of the passage must have lived after the Hebrews had chosen to live under a monarchy.¹⁸

Other aspects of Spinoza's approach to Biblical criticism included his belief that some teachings in the Bible applied to a particular time only. This meant that that Jeremiah's advice to the Hebrew exiles in Babylonia to accept and pray for the welfare of their conqueror and Jesus' admonition to turn the other cheek were advice to a conquered people and not teachings for all time. Spinoza also established criteria for evaluating a given Book of the Bible, asserting that one had to know who had written it, for whom it had been written, in what epoch it was written, and into whose hands it fell. These were the criteria which were to be used in analyzing the contents of the Books of the Bible.¹⁹Spinoza's familiarity with the *Tanakh* was derived from his thorough knowledge of Hebrew. He wrote a Hebrew grammar which was left incomplete at his death, and not published until later.

Spinoza rejected the idea that the Jews were a chosen people, believing instead that God would bestow His blessings on <u>all</u> peoples.²⁰ Spinoza also insisted that the rituals prescribed in the *Tanakh* applied to the Hebrews only, and could not be applied universally.

Melvin Konner expresses surprise that Spinoza, after his excommunication from the Jewish community of Amsterdam never joined a Christian denomination.²¹ But Spinoza had directed his skepticism toward the Christian as well as Jewish Bible, and therefore there would be no reason why he would become a Christian.

 ¹⁷Spinoza, "The Theological-Political Tractate Containing Various Disquisitions," in Morgan, pp. 472-474.
 ¹⁸ Ibid., p. 474

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 18.

²⁰ a

²⁰ Spinoza did, nonetheless, contend that Israel's ability to "achieve supremacy," retain it, overcome perils, and "achieve [..] security for themselves" was the result of the "Lord's external help." Spinoza, "The Theological-Political Tractate," in Morgan, *Spinoza: Complete Works*, p. 418.

²¹ Melvin Konner, *Unsettled: An Anthropology of the Jews* (New York: Penguin Group, 2003), Penguin Books, 2004 edition, p. 190.

The secularization of learning which had begun in the Renaissance continued full throttle. The scientific revolution and the Enlightenment saw the flowering of the seeds which Spinoza had planted. There developed a full criticism of the Bible, also known as the "Higher Criticism," which has called into question the historical validity of many events described in the Bible.²² Against the background of these changes and doubts, there emerged the discipline of archaeology, along with the related fields of anthropology, epigraphy, linguistics, and numismatics. The study and writing of history became "scientific." Historians supposedly freed themselves from preconceptions and ideologies, seeking to reach conclusions based exclusively on supportable evidence. This method was given expression in the dictum of the famous nineteenth century German historian Leopold von Ranke that history must be written "…wie es eigentlich gewesen war [as it actually happened]." These new areas of learning have buttressed our knowledge of civilizations and cultures contemporaneous with the earliest parts of the Hebrew canon, shedding light on some Biblical events, while placing others in doubt. Modern excavations in the Middle East have uncovered societies and entire eras either unknown hitherto or thought to have been mythical. These findings shed much additional light on societies contemporary with the ancient Hebrews as well as on the ancient Hebrews themselves.

The ability of science to measure historical time -- indeed, all time -- accurately has raised further doubts regarding many Biblical episodes previously accepted on faith. Two examples of the questioning brought about by the new sciences may be offered. The first deals with Abraham. The story in *B'reshit* (Genesis) opens by placing him and his family in Chaldea (today, southern Iraq). Abraham has been placed chronologically by some scholars somewhere in the first half of the second millennium B.C.E., as noted above. However, the facts available outside the Bible reveal that the Chaldeans entered Mesopotamia in <u>c. 1000 B.C.E.</u>, and established a political entity there no earlier than the seventh century B.C.E. What historical credence, then, should we place on the Abraham story in Genesis?

²² Horace D. Hummel's article in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, entitled "Bible Research and Criticism," *Encyclopedia Judaica*. (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972) provides an excellent account of this development up to the last half-century. The gap to the present day is filled by Finkelstein and Silberman. Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's new vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of the Sacred Texts*, (New York: The Free Press, 2001).

The second example deals with Joseph, the firstborn of Jacob's beloved Rachel. Joseph was sold by his jealous brothers to a camel caravan of traders on its way to Egypt. Unfortunately, while Joseph could not have lived later than the seventeenth century B.C.E., the camel was not domesticated as a herd animal until the latter part of the second millennium B.C.E, circa 1100 – hundreds of years later. Does this mean we must abandon the beautiful Joseph story?

When does authenticated Hebrew history begin? Scattered references to the Hebrews dating to the thirteenth century B.C.E may be noted briefly. The first is found on a stele of the reign of the Pharaoh Merneptah (ruled 1224-1214 B.C.E.) uncovered in 1896 and dated to 1207 B.C.E. This stele records the Pharaoh's victories over African and Asian tribes, including Israel. One of the lines on the stele reads,"...Israel – few of his people [remain], and his seed is no more." This absurd assessment is the oldest known reference to Israel outside the Bible.²³ While this inscription does not refer to Jacob's having wrestled with an angel all night, thereby obtaining the name of "Israel," it does prove that there existed an entity called "Israel" in the western Fertile Crescent as early as the thirteenth century B.C.E., if not earlier. Another reference is the tenth century B.C.E. silver scroll, which contains the Hebrew priestly blessing, "The Lord bless thee and keep thee," etc. Although many gaps remain, one may say that beginning as early as the tenth century B.C.E., some extra-Biblical validation of the Biblical record exists.

This raises further questions: Did the Patriarchs and Matriarchs actually live? Is the story about Moses and the water-crossing described in Exodus a "pious myth," as Sigmund Freud and Norman Cantor have maintained? What verification of the early portions of the Bible have the modern sciences provided?

If the tools of historical validation were to be applied rigorously to the Biblical narrative, as indeed they have been, then many important events put into writing almost a thousand years after they allegedly

²³ Simon Dubnov, <u>History of the Jews</u>, (South Brunswick: A.S. Barnes and Co, 1967), Vol. 1, *From the Beginning to the Early Christian Era*, p. 79. See also Ronald S. Hendal, "Israel Among the Nations: Biblical Culture in the Ancient Near East," in David Biale (ed.), *Cultures of the Jews: A New History* (New York: Shocken Books, 2002), p. 46. Hendal gives the date of the stele as 1207 B.C.E., whereas Merneptah reigned from 1224-1214 B.C.E. Another stele exists describing the campaigns of Amen Hotep III (1447-1421 B.C.E.) in Asia. Among the prisoners he took were the "Apiru." This word touches a raw nerve in Canaanite, Biblical and Mesopotamian scholarship. Scholars are sharply divided over the question of whether or not the "Apiru" or "Habiru" were the Hebrews.

occurred could not stand up – that is, there is no reference <u>outside</u> the Bible to the Patriarchs and Matriarchs; the story of Joseph; the water-crossing described in Exodus; the trio of Moses, Miriam, and Aaron; Joshua; the Judges; and the United Monarchy of Saul, David and Solomon. In the pages that follow, I shall indicate when Biblical accounts are supported by historical and archaeological evidence, and when they are not.

The last word, however, may be not with the historians, archaeologists or anthropologists but with the geneticists. Genetics has come to the aid of mythology. One recent genetic study of the Y chromosomes of Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jewish males who claim descent from the Biblical *Cohanim* (priests) has revealed that forty-five per cent of the Ashkenazim, and seventy per cent of the Sephardim, carried a set of genetic variations known as the Cohen Modal Haplotype. The presence of this set of genetic variations implies that the carriers had a common ancestry. Further work, led by Professor David Goldstein of University College London, assessed that this common ancestry went back for 106 generations, or approximately 3,180 years.

The Goldstein team estimates that 106 generations must have occurred to account for the observed amount of variation that has built up on the cohen modal haplotype. Assuming 30 years per generation, this means the ancestor of the cohanim lived some 3,180 years ago (or 2,650 years ago, if a generation time of 25 years is preferred). A general date of about 3,000 years ago is of particular interest since it would place the first cohen at the beginning of First Temple Period of Jewish history.²⁴

This does not, of course, establish the authenticity of Aaron, the older brother of Moses, as the first High Priest. (He would have lived approximately 3,250 or 3,300 years ago.) But it does point to the existence of a hereditary priesthood going back three millennia. Additional indirect evidence must be considered before we assume that the absence of a historically valid record means that certain events did not occur.

For example, the writer's wife, Katherine C. Hoyt, Ph. D, is preparing an anthology of political

thought in Latin America, and she writes in the introduction to her first selection that:

Foundation narratives tell the stories passed from generation to generation in oral or written form about how a particular political entity

Jewish Wars, Jewish Warriors by Benjamin Rigberg

²⁴ Nicholas Wade, *Before the Dawn: Recovering the Lost History of our Ancestors* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), p. 249.

began, what the inhabitants brought with them from the place from which they had migrated, and what distinguishes their polity from other nations or cities, often their particular form of government. Because these tales have usually included unlikely events (the most famous being the nursing by a she-wolf of the twins Romulus and Remus, who later founded Rome), miracles, and intervention by sundry oracles, gods or goddesses, they have until recently been assumed to be entirely fictitious...²⁵

She goes on to say that the particular foundation narrative she is examining, "The Annals of the Cakchiquel Maya," dismissed as myth in the nineteenth century, has been verified by more recent archaeological discoveries.

The question of the exact veracity of the accounts in the *Tanakh* notwithstanding, the Bible remains a powerful source, both because of its universal teachings and also because its writings constitute the foundation narratives of the Jewish people. Removing the story of the Hebrew experience of four hundred years residency in Egypt, for example, would leave a gaping hole in Jewish history. Though many of the events depicted in the *Tanakh* may be considered mythological in the broader sense, others very likely will be verified by archaeology and other sciences in the future. I have found the Bible particularly useful, and have taken quotations generously from it. This approach is appropriate because the present study concentrates on ancient Hebrew military history, and the Bible is chock-full of descriptions of battles and warfare in ancient times.

While the period of the historical validation of the *Tanakh* for the most part begins with the era of the Divided Monarchy, from 931 B.C.E. onward, there remain tantalizing gaps in historical validation on both sides of the historical boundary between the Divided Monarchy and earlier eras. Although there are both brief and lengthy segments of Jewish history after 931 B.C.E. which have not yet been verified historically, archaeologists have discovered artifacts which document events prior to 931 B.C.E. The historian seeks facts, the archaeologist, artifacts. I make use of both history <u>and</u> archaeology for the study of ancient Hebrew military events.

²⁵ Unpublished manuscript by Katherine Hoyt.

Jewish Wars, Jewish Warriors by Benjamin Rigberg

It should also be noted that in recent decades, the archaeology of Palestine has undergone a broad transformation. Its main purpose earlier was to confirm or refute specific Biblical episodes. The emphasis has now shifted completely to the use of the Bible as one of many sources, along with independently gleaned data, to piece together the manner in which the peoples of Syro-Palestine/Transjordan, including the ancient Hebrews, lived. For example, archaeology investigating early Israel formerly tended to emphasize larger sites associated with Biblical tradition. The newer archaeology, by contrast, has been studying smaller sites, and has concluded that most of the people of Palestine lived in rural areas.²⁶ In other words, it has focused on peoples' day-to-day lives.

Historical and archaeological knowledge of the ancient Middle East as a whole was enhanced immeasurably by two events. The first was the accidental discovery of the Rosetta Stone by one of Napoleon's soldiers stationed in the Nile Delta in 1798. This event became the key for unlocking the secret of Egyptian hieroglyphics. The Stone contained an inscription in hieroglyphics and translations into Greek. This enabled the scholar, Champollion, after thirty years of effort, to decipher the hieroglyphics. The second event occurred shortly afterward, in the 1840s. This was the decipherment of Sumerian cuneiform by Sir Henry C. Rawlinson and others, and it opened up the secrets of Mesopotamia to modern historians. "Places like Nineveh and Babylon, previously known primarily from the Bible, were now seen to be the capitals of powerful and aggressive empires, whose artists and scribes thoroughly documented the military campaigns and political events of their time."²⁷

Archaeology and the other sciences mentioned above have, through their discoveries and interpretations, verified important segments of the Biblical past. There will doubtless be further verification as the twenty-first century progresses. The most recent discovery, made in the twenty-first century, gives validity to a Flood story like the one appearing in the Bible and in Sumerian mythology. Archaeologists and oceanographers have found an older coastline, submerged several hundred feet below the present coastline of the Black Sea. This is a clear indication that a flood occurred some thousands of

²⁶ William P. Brown, "Appendix: An Update in Search of Israel's History," in John Bright, *A History of Israel*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), Fourth Edition, p. 466.

²⁷ Finkelstein and Silberman, p. 18.

years ago. Although this discovery lends support to the veracity of the Biblical Flood story, it simultaneously challenges the popular theory that Mount Ararat, hundreds of miles from the Black Sea in modern-day Armenia, was the final resting place of Noah's Ark. In considering the Flood story, one must keep in mind that when our remote ancestors referred to the "world," they meant a circumscribed area of the Eastern Mediterranean and a few thousand square miles of surrounding land, and not the entire globe which we know today. From that point of view, Mount Ararat and modern-day Armenia were in the same geographical "world."

Scientific advances will also play their part in deepening our understanding of the past. One such advance mentioned in *The Washington Post* of May 30, 2005, refers to imaging technology for reading portions of thousands of papyrus manuscripts discovered in Egypt, dating from the second century B.C.E. to the eighth century C.E.²⁸ With techniques such as this, scholars will be able to read documents which had deteriorated to the point of total illegibility.

The most important archaeological discovery that advanced knowledge of the Jewish past was that of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran in 1947 and years following. The Dead Sea Scrolls contain much material about a desert community believed by some scholars to have been the Essenes, a sect featuring rigid discipline which repudiated Temple worship and strove after purity in its own way. Some members of the sect were celibate, and all accepted the doctrine of predestination. The caves of Qumran contain many fragments of the books predating the Common Era which later found their way into the Hebrew canon and a veritable library of ancient Judaica. The material is diverse. It touches almost every aspect of Judaism, including the Day of Judgement. The manuscript covering this subject is entitled "War of the Sons of Light with the Sons of Darkness," according to which, at the end of days, the wicked, including the Jerusalem Temple and its priesthood, will be destroyed, and the righteous, meaning the members of

²⁸ Guy Gugliotta, "Imaging Technology Makes Ancient Text Readable," *The Washington Post*, May 30, 2005, p. A8.

the Essene sect, will reign supreme.²⁹ The Qumran community was destroyed by the Romans in 68 C.E., during the great rebellion against Rome.

This study of ancient Jewish military history interweaves three major strands. The first is historical. It takes the story from the Age of the Patriarchs (roughly 1750 B.C.E.) all the way to the end of the Bible, in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah. It then continues beyond the Bible based on secular sources only, from the end of the Persian era, through the Seleucid, Hasmonean and finally Roman periods, ending in 135 C.E.

The second strand is archaeological. I will lay this out in tandem with the historical, amplifying, modifying and sometimes even overturning a particular story or anecdote in the Biblical account. In the third strand, from 931 B.C.E. forward, I discuss those Jewish rulers whose existence has been verified independently of the Bible. This subject is covered in Chapters 4 and 5.

²⁹ See Shaye J.D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), pp. 150-154.

Jewish Wars, Jewish Warriors by Benjamin Rigberg