

Evidences for The Historicity of the Bible

Faith does not mean believing what
you know is not true!

Yet many scholars doubt that the early heroes of the Bible, such as Abraham or Moses, ever existed.

December 18, 1995

TIME

**IS THE
BIBLE
FACT or
FICTION?**



The following is a comprehensive list of every archaeological discovery that conclusively disproves the accuracy of the Bible:



1)

That's right! There have been **NO** such archaeological discoveries!

This is not to suggest that every factual detail of the Bible has now been confirmed. An enormous number of such details, however, have had archaeological confirmation.

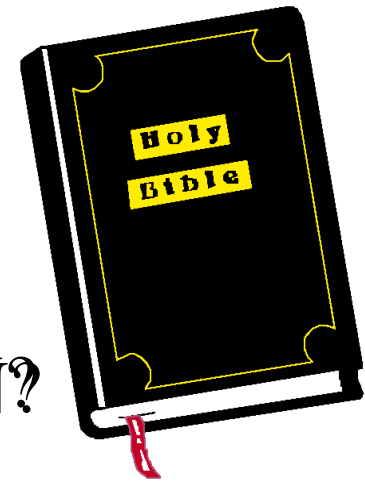


Some scholars
complain that no
inscription has ever
been found that
mentions Abraham.

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TIME

**IS THE
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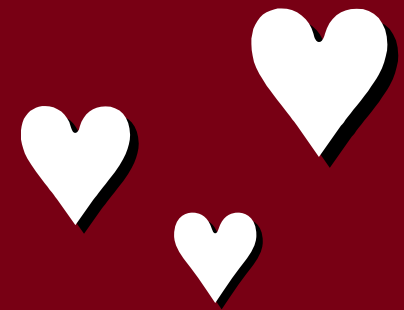
Should archaeologists
expect to find something
like the following
inscription



Dear Sarah:

I think you're gorgeous,
even though you're 90!
Happy birthday.

Hugs and kisses,
Abraham



In fact, there have been many archaeological discoveries that support the historicity of the Bible's account of Abraham and the other patriarchs.



According to the Bible Abraham came from Haran about 2000 BC. But some critical scholars assume that the story of Abraham was invented about 1000 BC. Is this likely?



What a “coincidence”!
Archaeologists have confirmed that Haran was a major commercial center at the time of Abraham (2000 BC), but it was unoccupied from 1800 BC to 700 BC!

Haran



What's in a name?

- How many folks do you know by the name of Asa, Capability, Hephzibah, Ichabod, or Patience (popular English names in the 18th and 19th centuries AD)?
- Just as in the modern world, in the ancient world proper names went in and out of fashion.

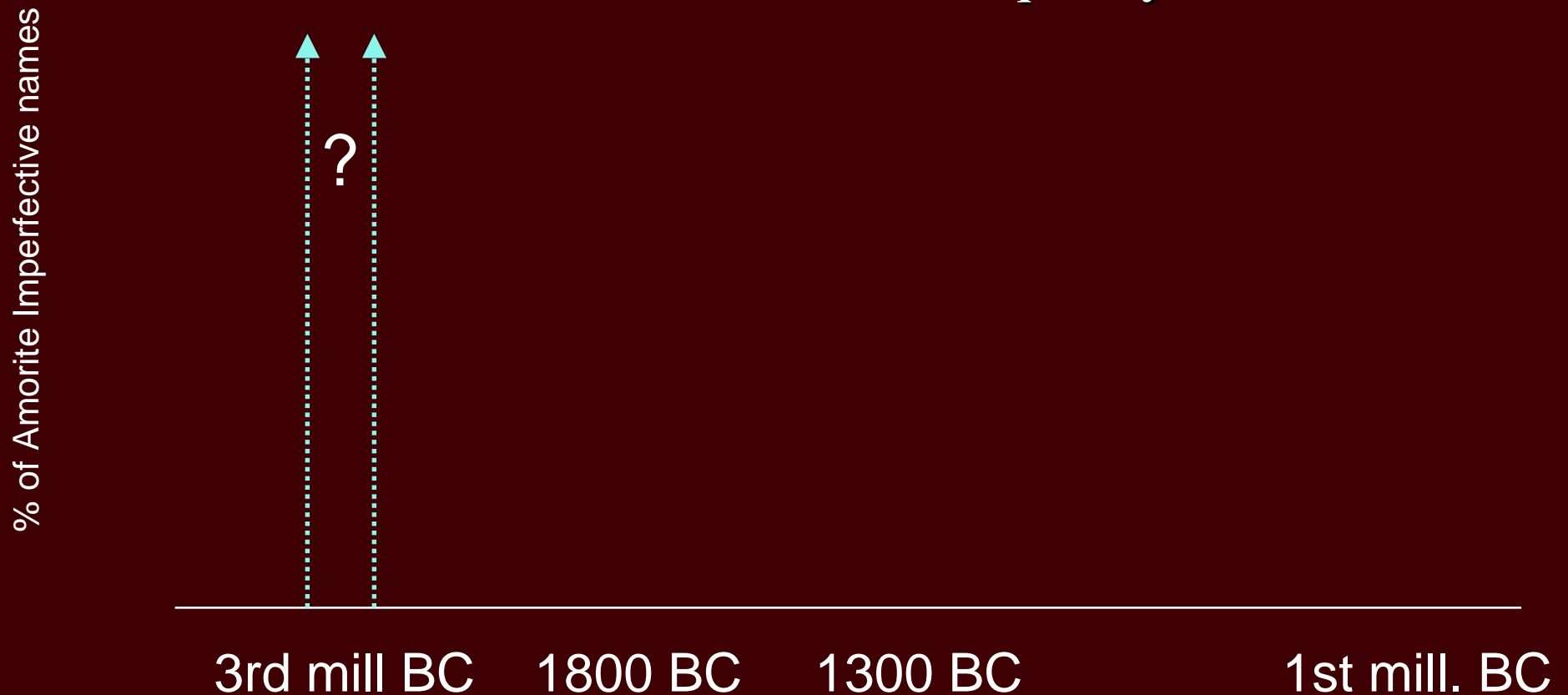
Abraham's name

- Although no one has found an inscription signed by Abraham himself, archaeologists now know (based on 19th-18th century BC examples) that the name “Abraham” existed in the general period when the Bible says that Abraham lived.

Other names in Genesis

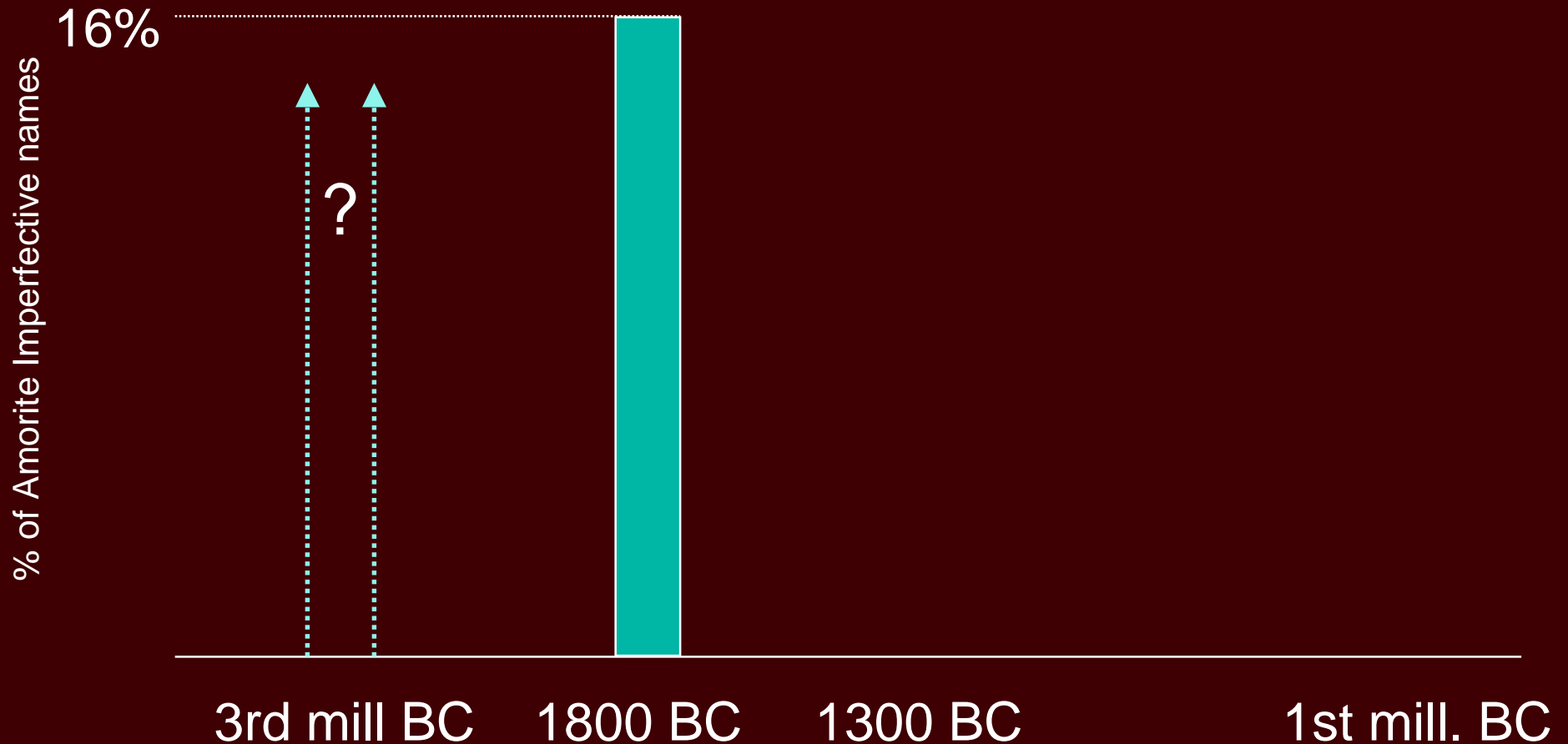
- Old Testament names that begin in English with a “j” or an “i” often represent what scholars call “Amorite Imperfective” names (in Hebrew these begin with “y”). Examples include Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.
- Names of this type outside the Bible are well-attested only in the early 2nd millennium BC and before — exactly when the Bible reports that these patriarchs lived!

■ Amorite imperfective names are well attested in the 3rd millennium BC at Ebla, but no study has yet been done to establish their relative frequency.



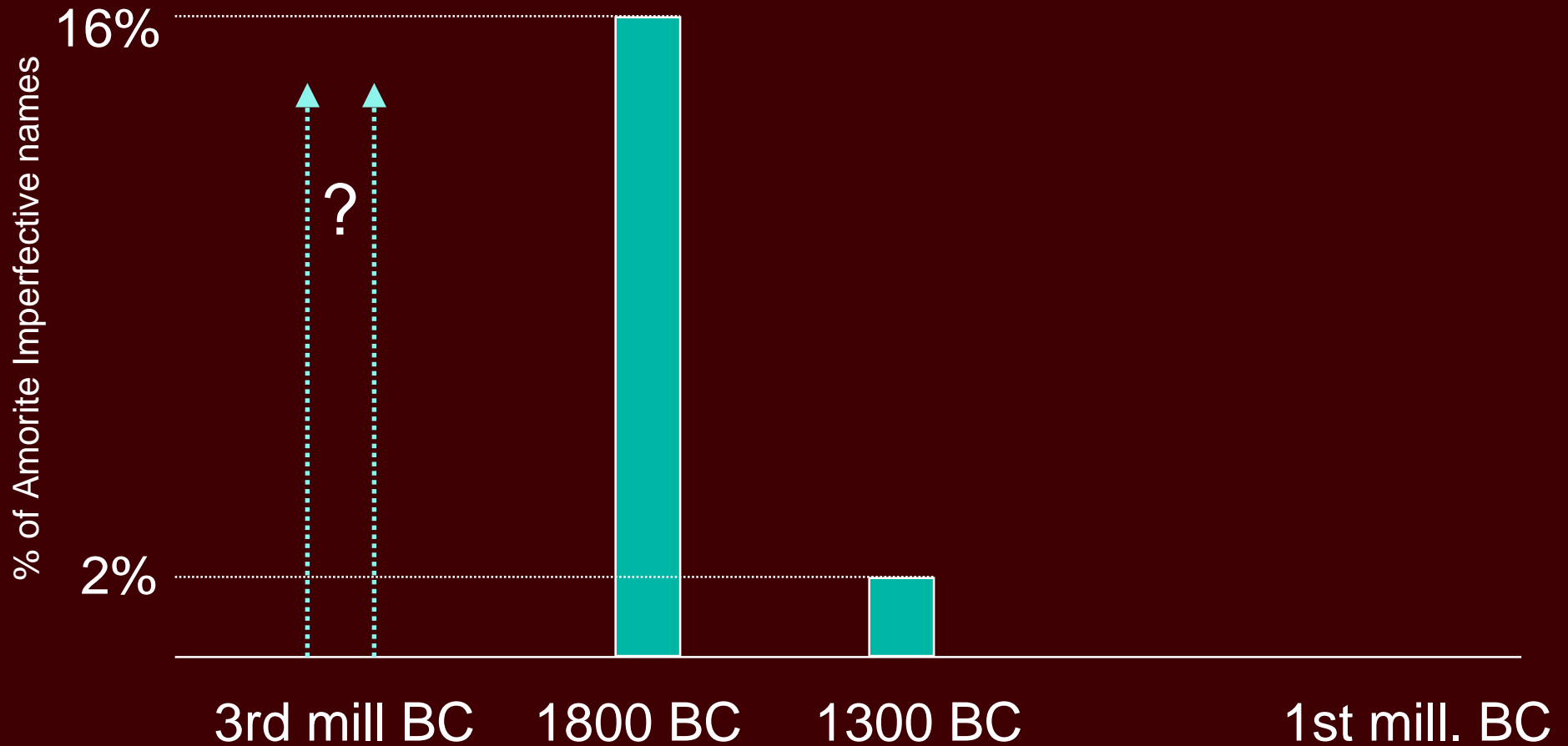
K.A. Kitchen, review of H. Shanks (ed.), *Ancient Israel: A Short History from Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, in *Themelios* 15:1 (October 1989) 25-28.

■ Based on a study of over 6,000 names from about 1800 BC, 16% are Amorite imperfectives (55% of all names beginning with i/y).



K.A. Kitchen, review of H. Shanks (ed.), *Ancient Israel: A Short History from Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, in *Themelios* 15:1 (October 1989) 25-28.

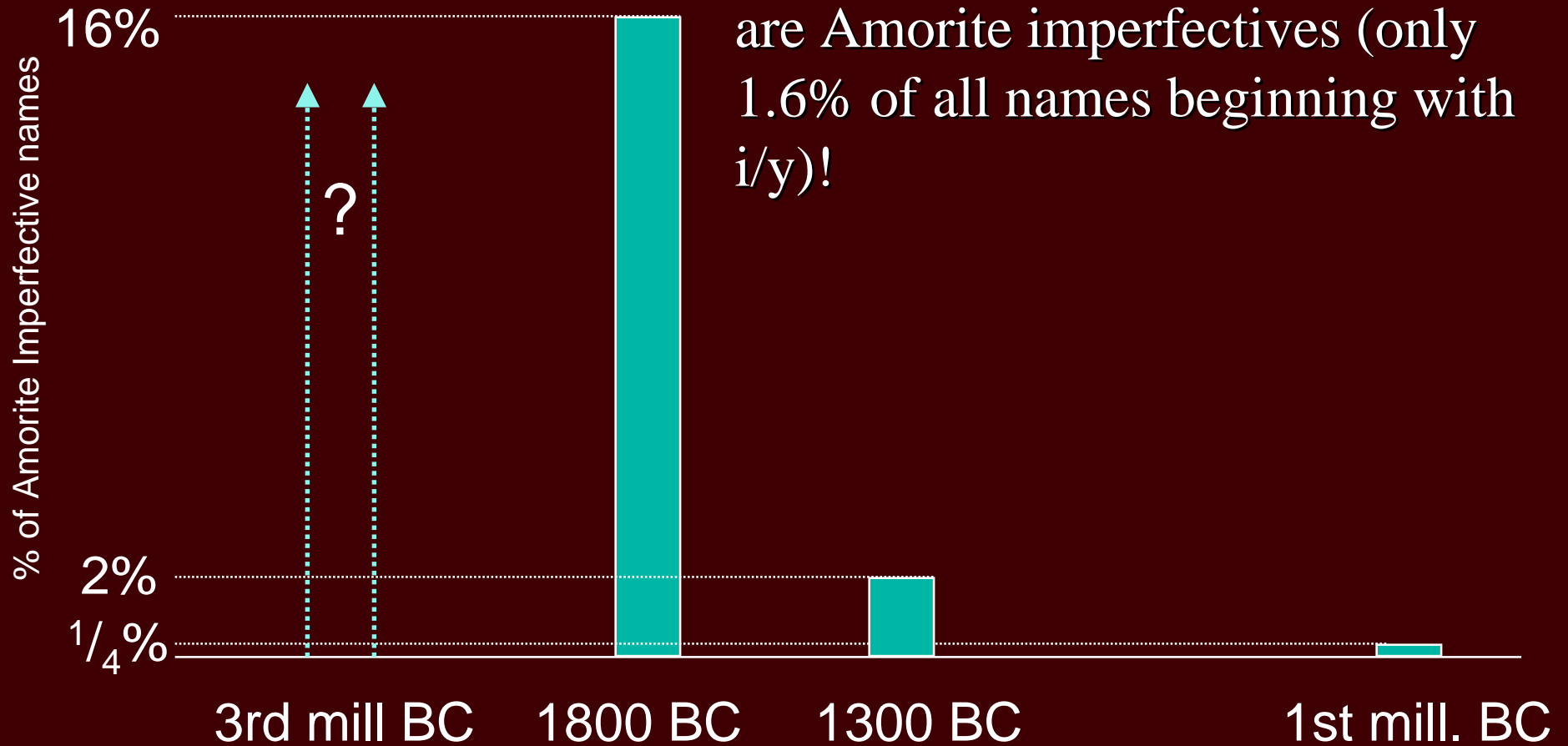
■ Based on a study of 4,050 names from about 1300 BC, only 2% are Amorite imperfectives (30% of all names beginning with i/y).



K.A. Kitchen, review of H. Shanks (ed.), *Ancient Israel: A Short History from Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, in *Themelios* 15:1 (October 1989) 25-28.

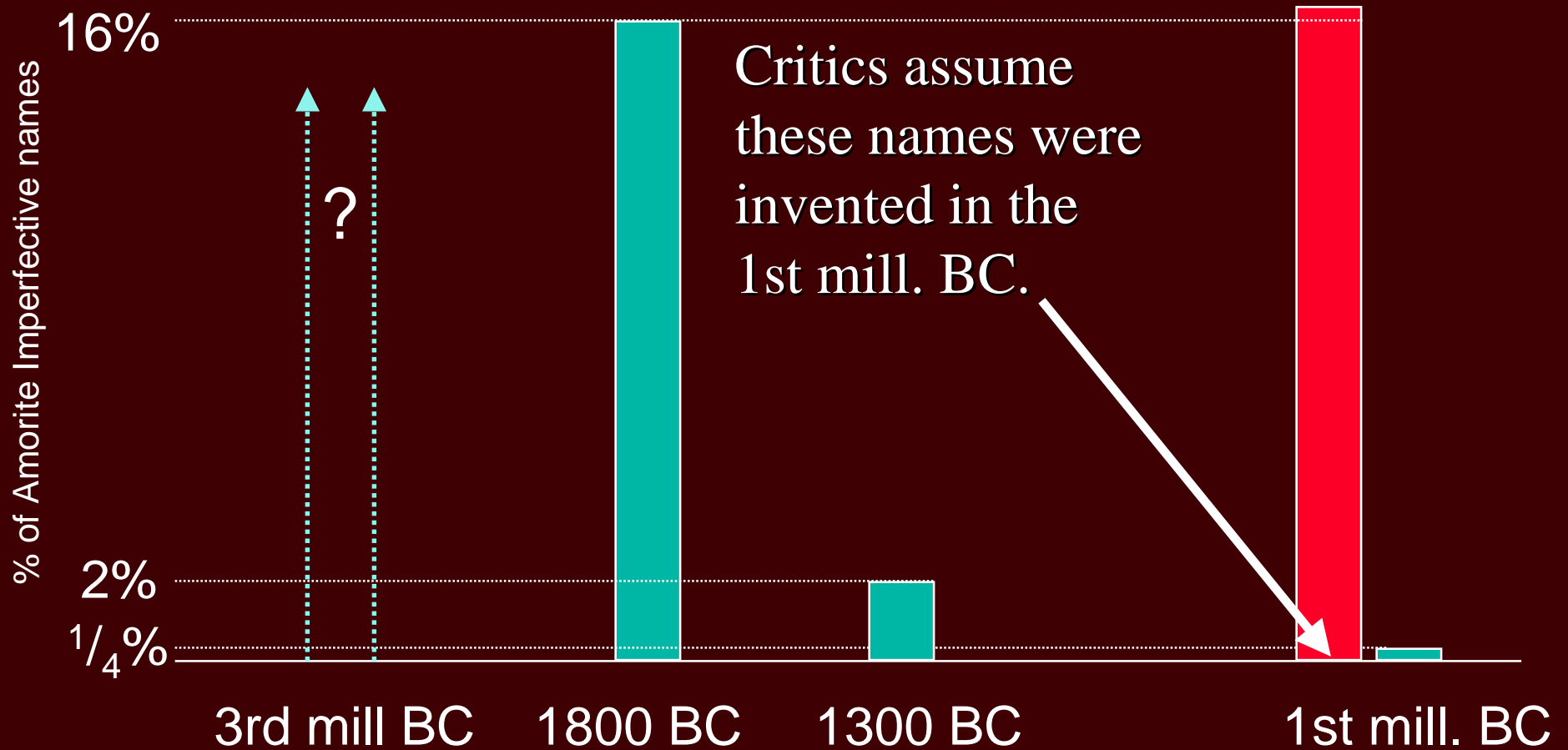
■ Based on a study of 5,000 names from the 1st millennium BC, the period when many scholars assume the patriarchal stories were invented, fewer than $\frac{1}{4}\%$

are Amorite imperfectives (only 1.6% of all names beginning with i/y)!



K.A. Kitchen, review of H. Shanks (ed.), *Ancient Israel: A Short History from Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, in *Themelios* 15:1 (October 1989) 25-28.

- There are 24 major descendants of Abraham in Genesis 16-50. 4 of these have names that are Amorite imperfectives: Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.



K.A. Kitchen, review of H. Shanks (ed.), *Ancient Israel: A Short History from Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, in *Themelios* 15:1 (October 1989) 25-28.

■ What a “coincidence”! The proportion of Amorite imperfect names is exactly what one would expect for the period of the patriarchs!



K.A. Kitchen, review of H. Shanks (ed.), *Ancient Israel: A Short History from Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, in *Themelios* 15:1 (October 1989) 25-28.

Camels?

- Many scholars have claimed that the mention of domesticated camels at the time of Abraham (2000 BC) in Genesis 12:16 and elsewhere in the Pentateuch is impossible. Supposedly camels were not domesticated until about 1100 BC.



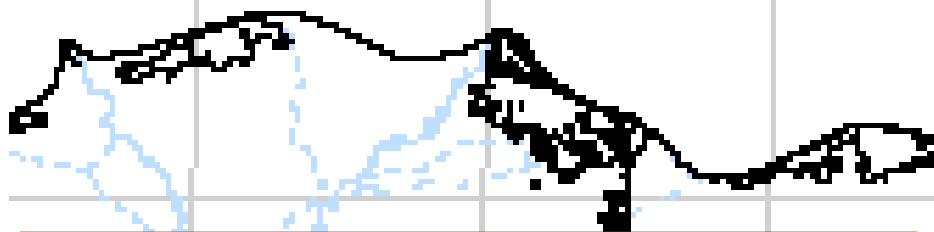
Camels?

- What a “coincidence”!
We now have evidence of the early domestication of camels in a text from Alalakh (18th cent. BC), in Old Babylonian lexical lists from the same period, and in a Sumerian text from Nippur, which mentions the use of camel’s milk!



Picture Credit: Copyright (c) Grolier Interactive Inc.

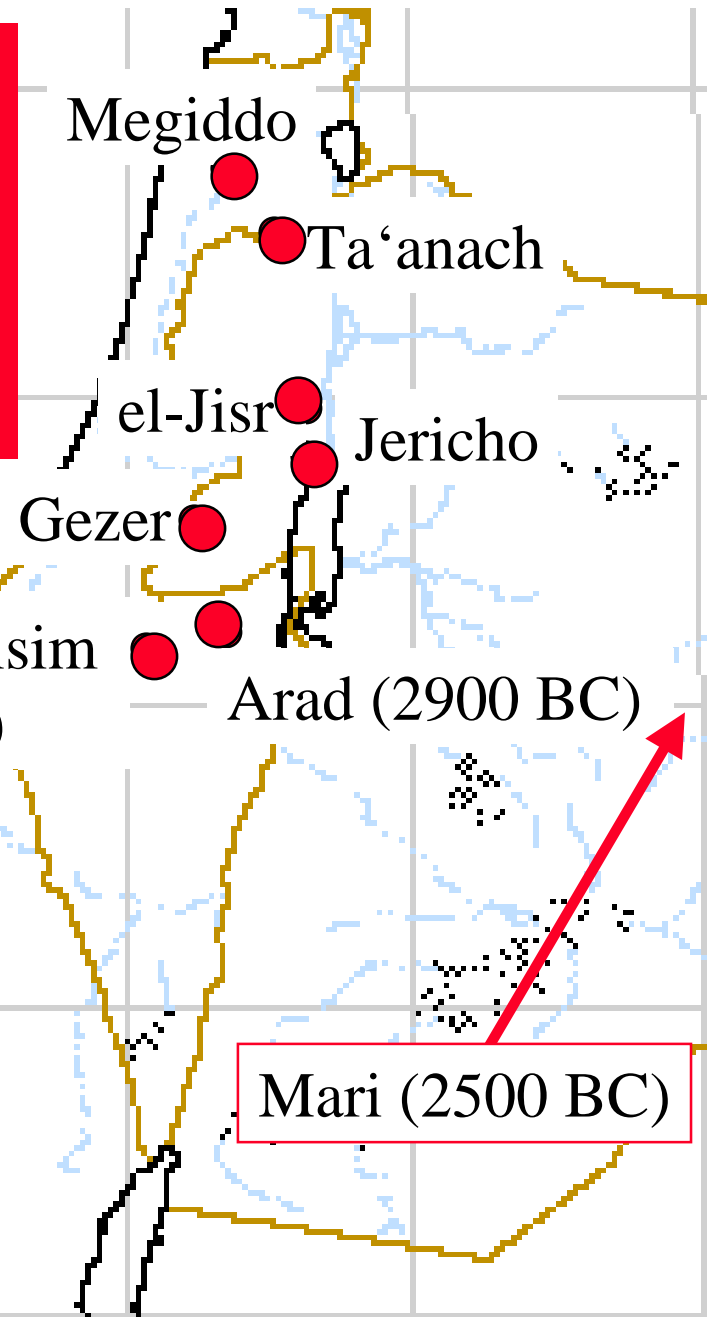
As if this were not enough, camel bones have been found in contexts that are plausibly domestic at each of the following sites (those without dates are approx. 1800 BC):



Various sites in Egypt (2900 BC)



Be'er Resisim (1900 BC)



Mari (2500 BC)

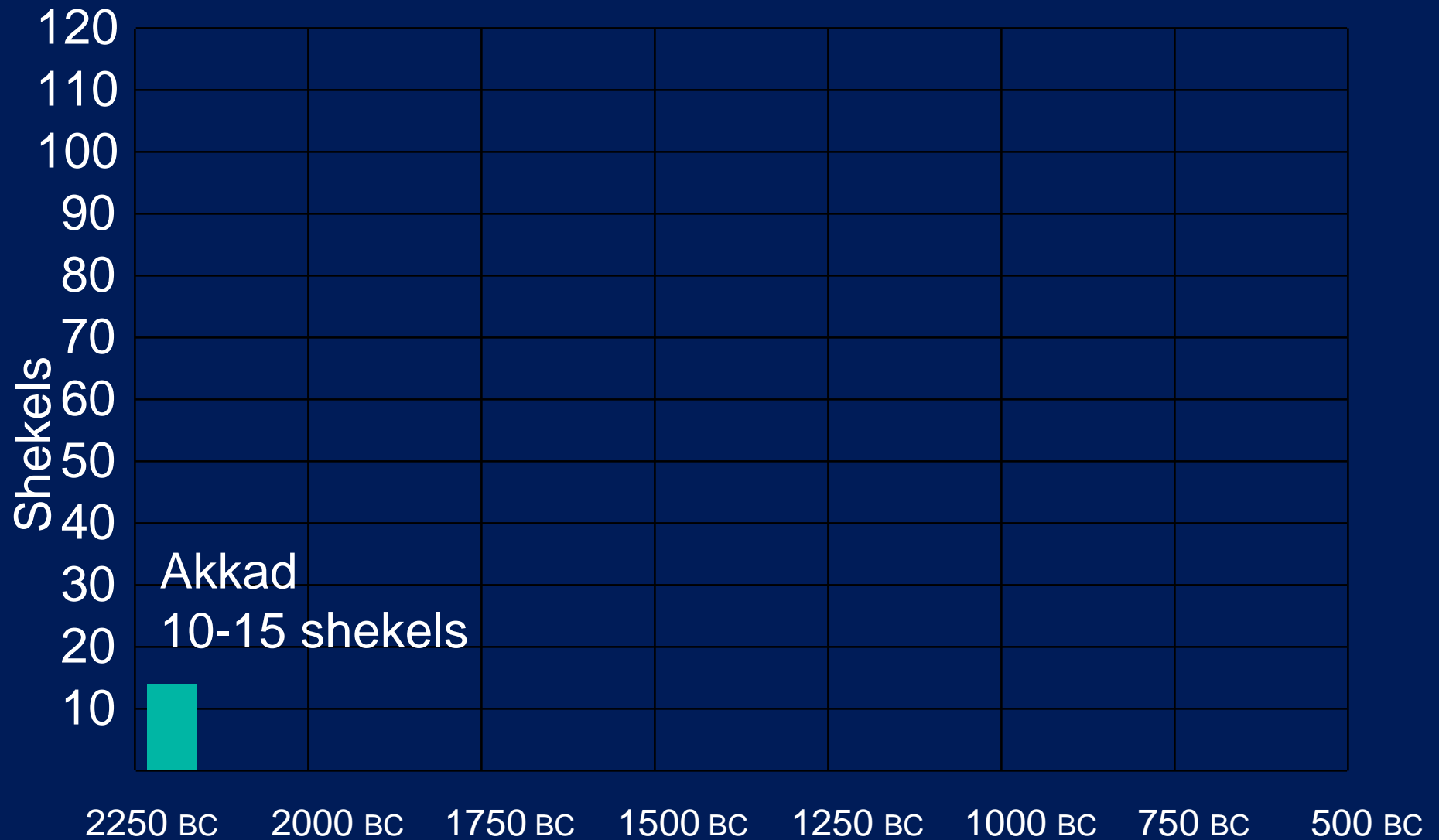
Cf. P. Wapnish, "Camel," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*; "Camel," *Encyclopedia Judaica*; J. Zarins, "Camel," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*; K.A. Kitchen, *Israel and the Ancient Orient*; and N. Sarna, *Genesis*.

Inflation

- Saving for retirement? Inflation is not just an invention of the 21st century. It's been around for millennia!

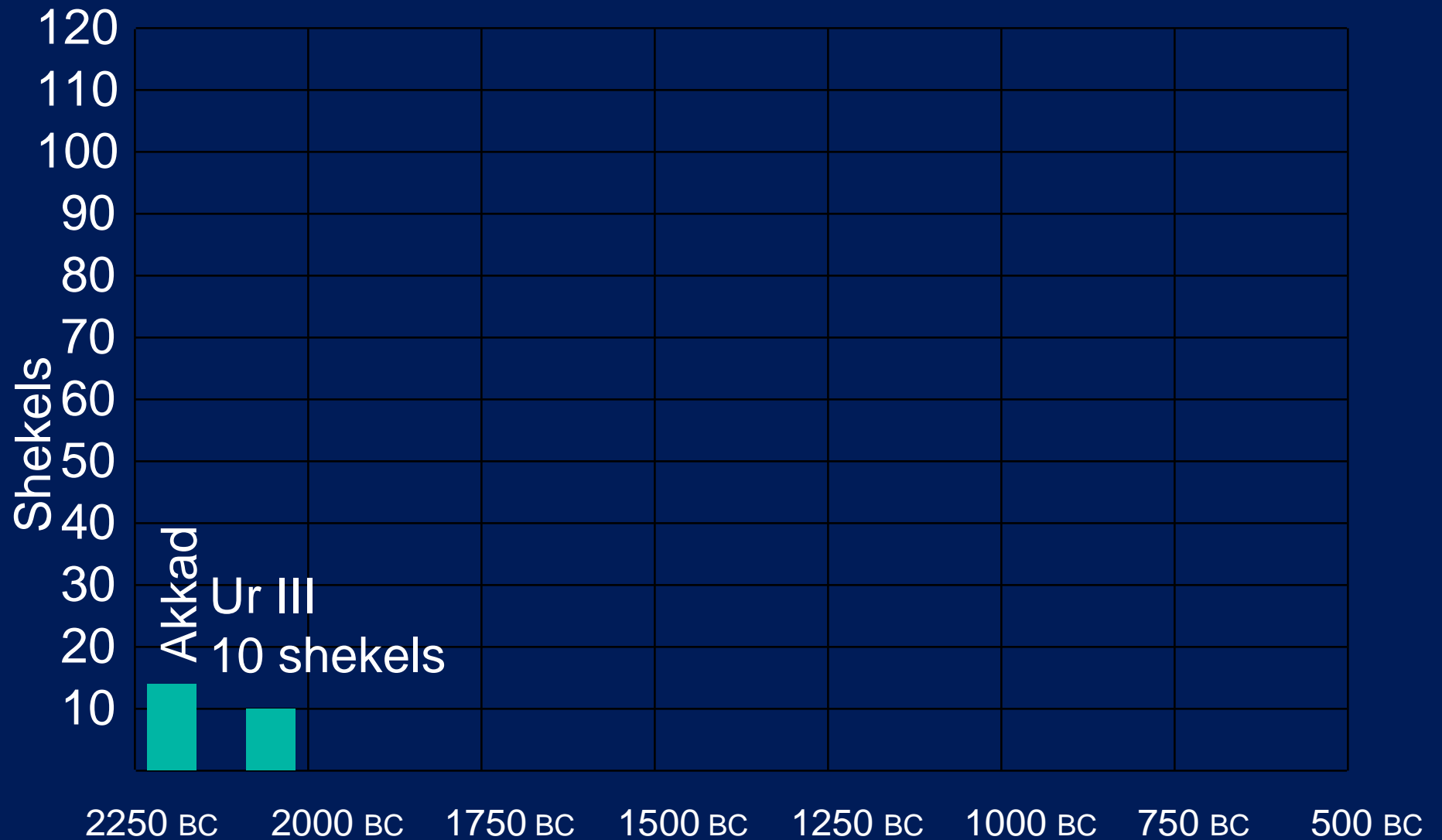


The Price of Slaves



K.A. Kitchen, "Genesis 12-50 in the Near Eastern World," in *He Swore an Oath*, R.S. Hess, et al. eds. (Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1993) 67-92, at 79-80.

The Price of Slaves



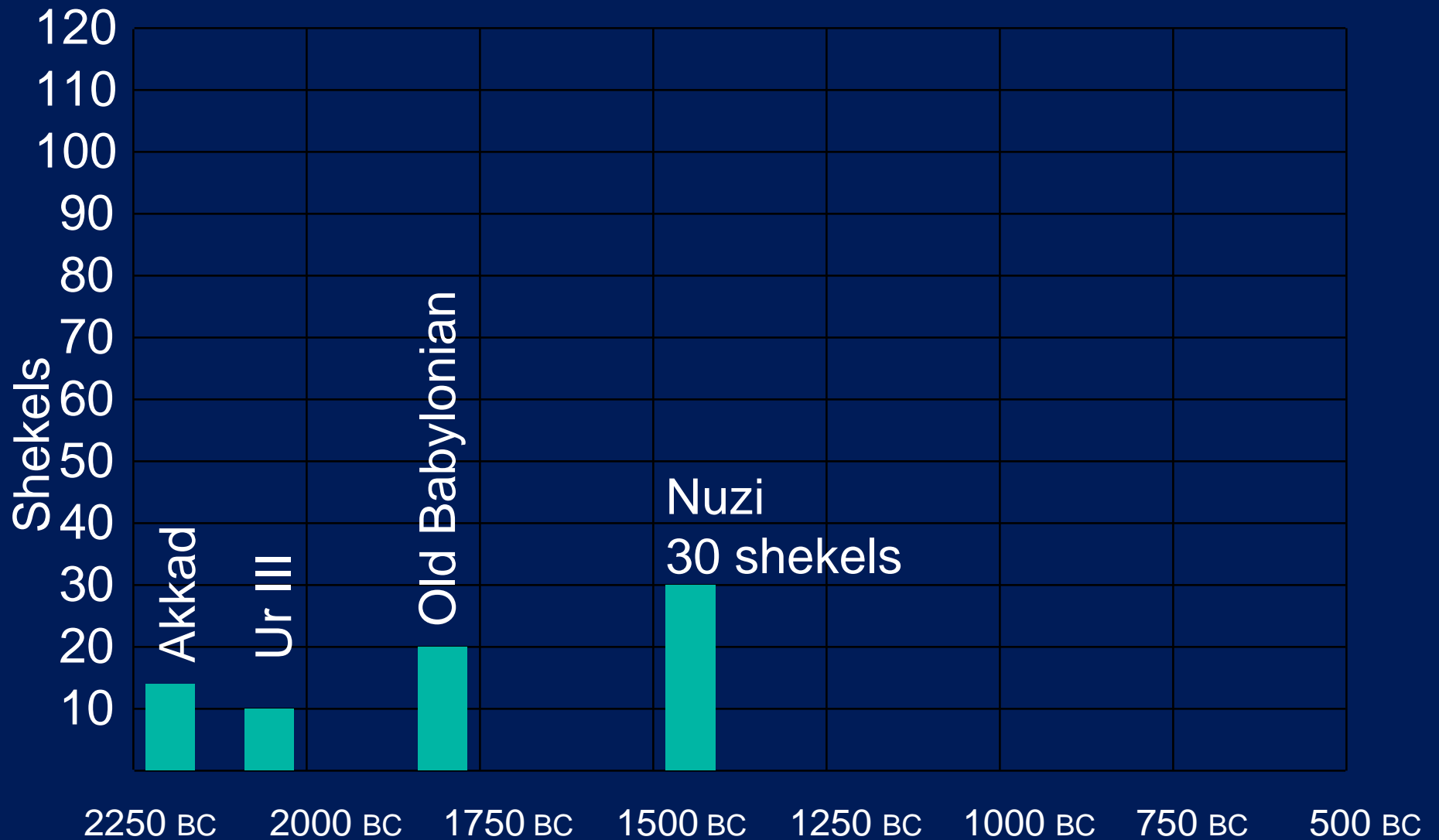
based on K.A. Kitchen

The Price of Slaves



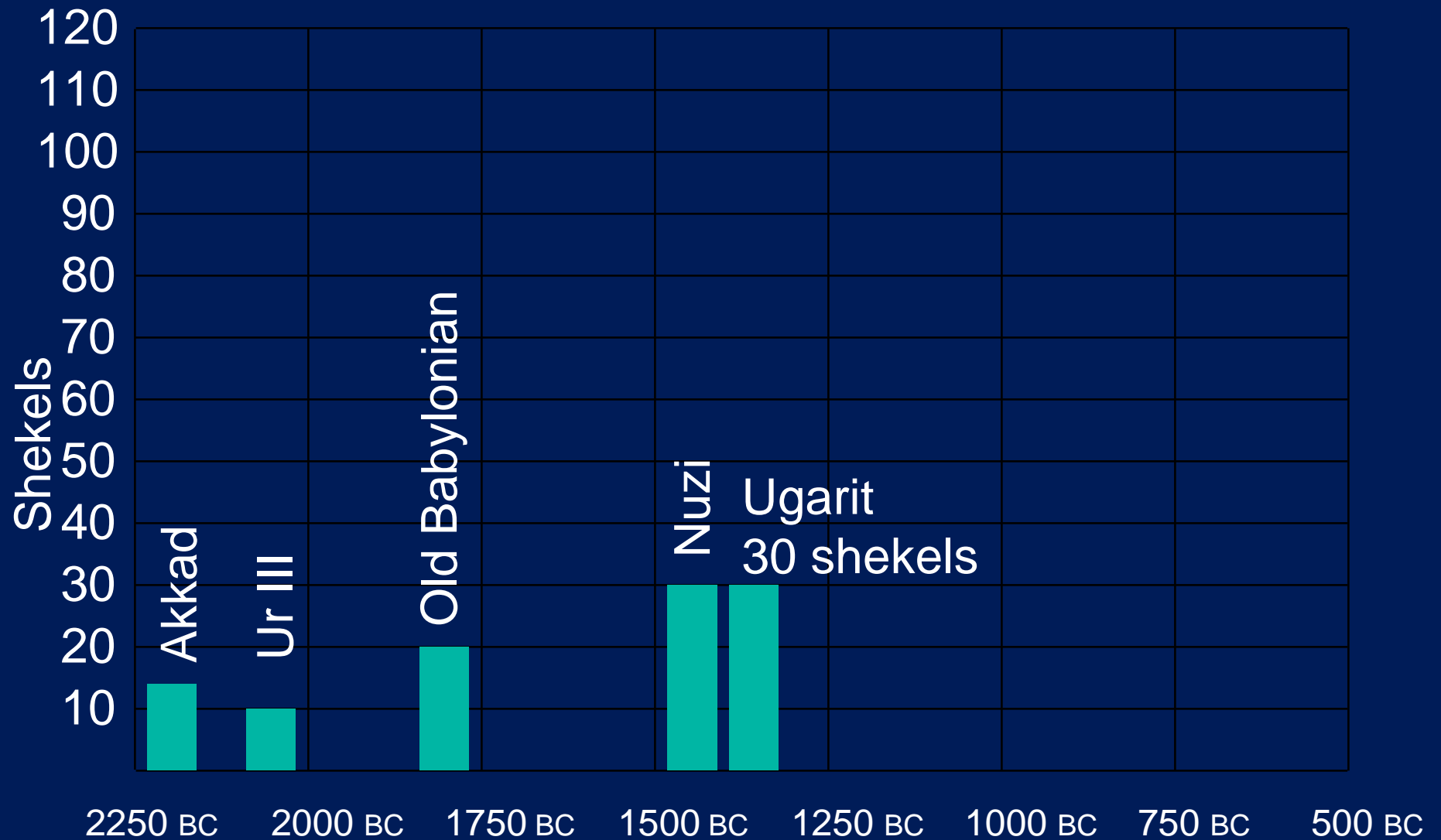
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The Price of Slaves



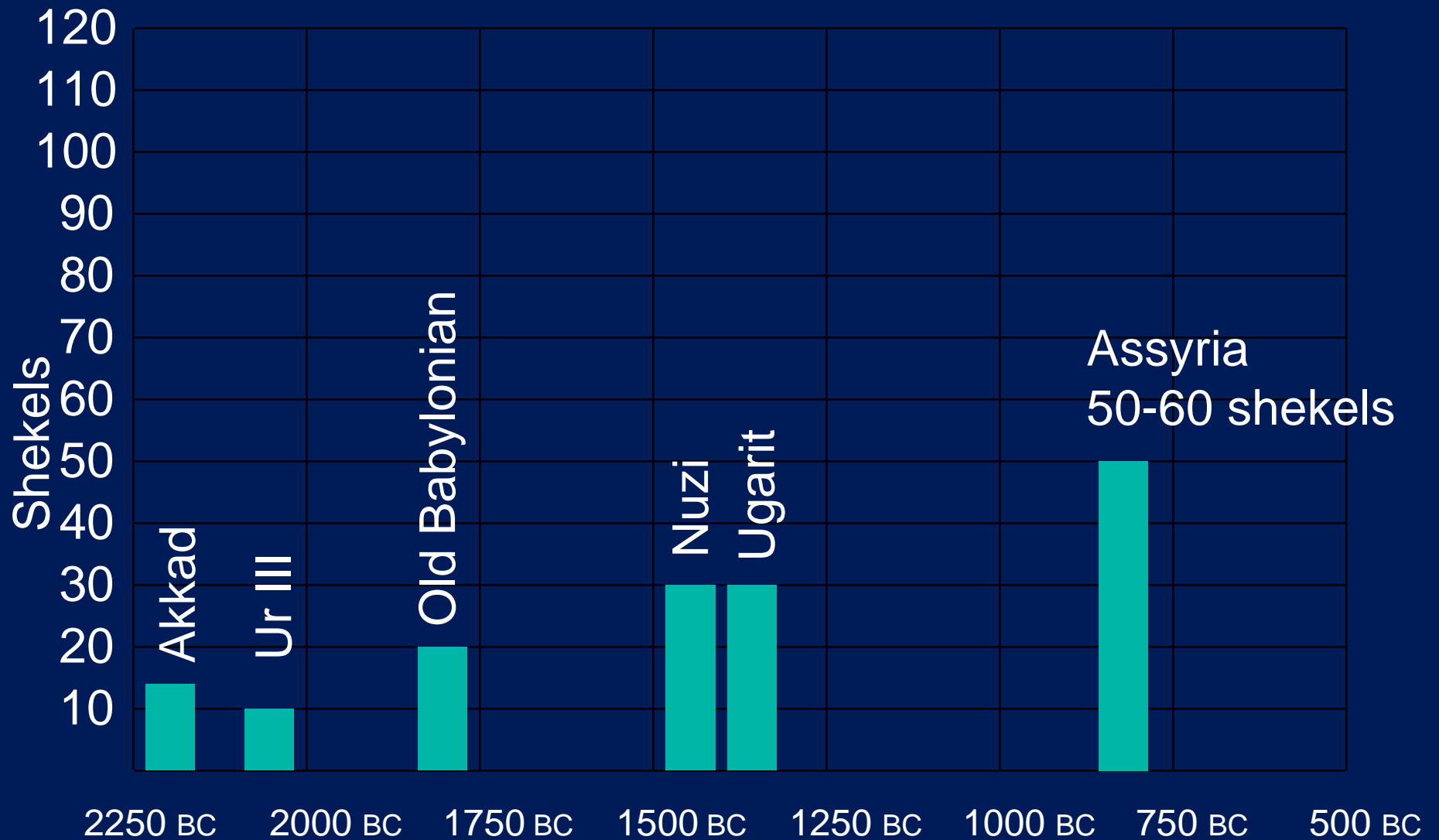
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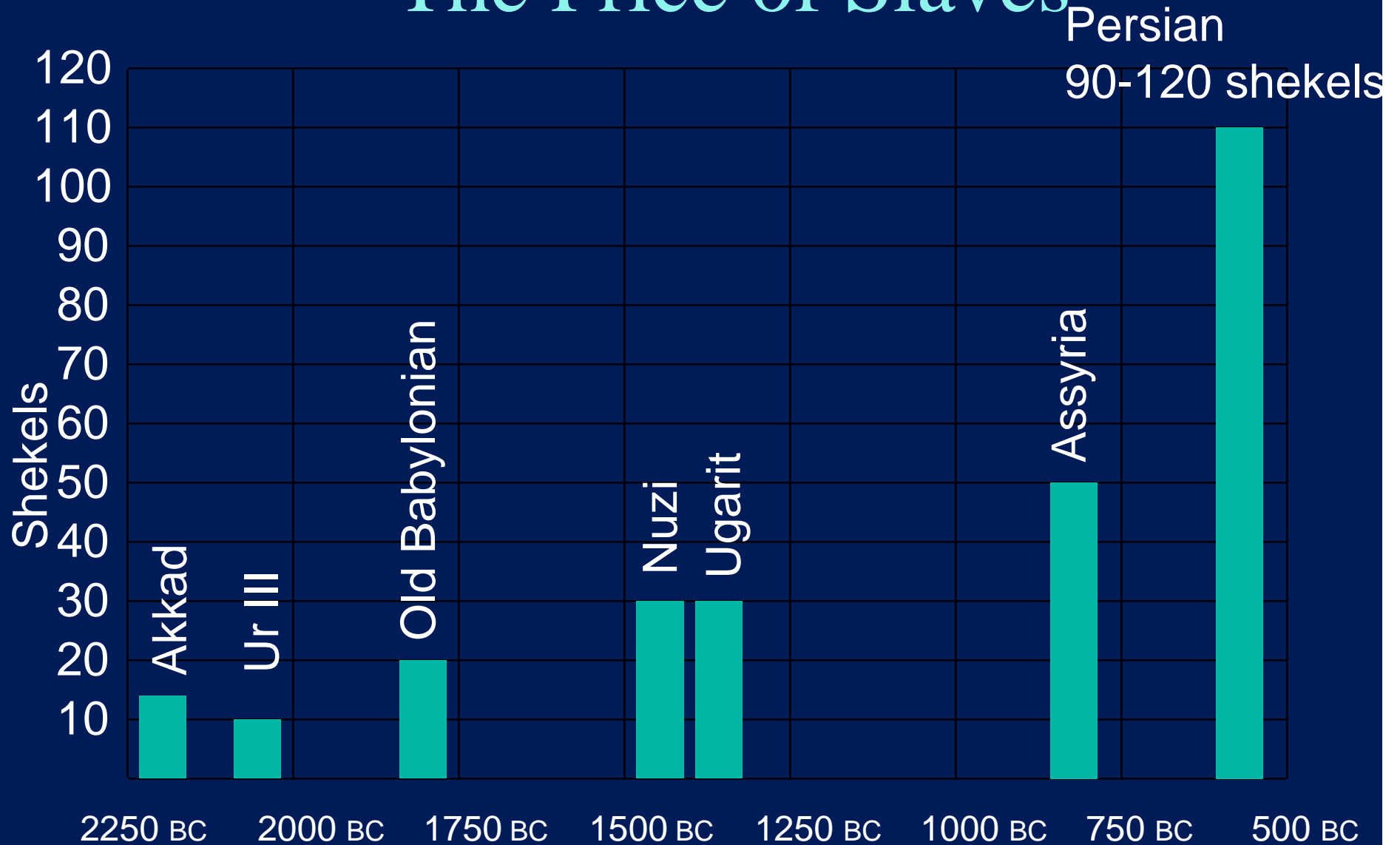
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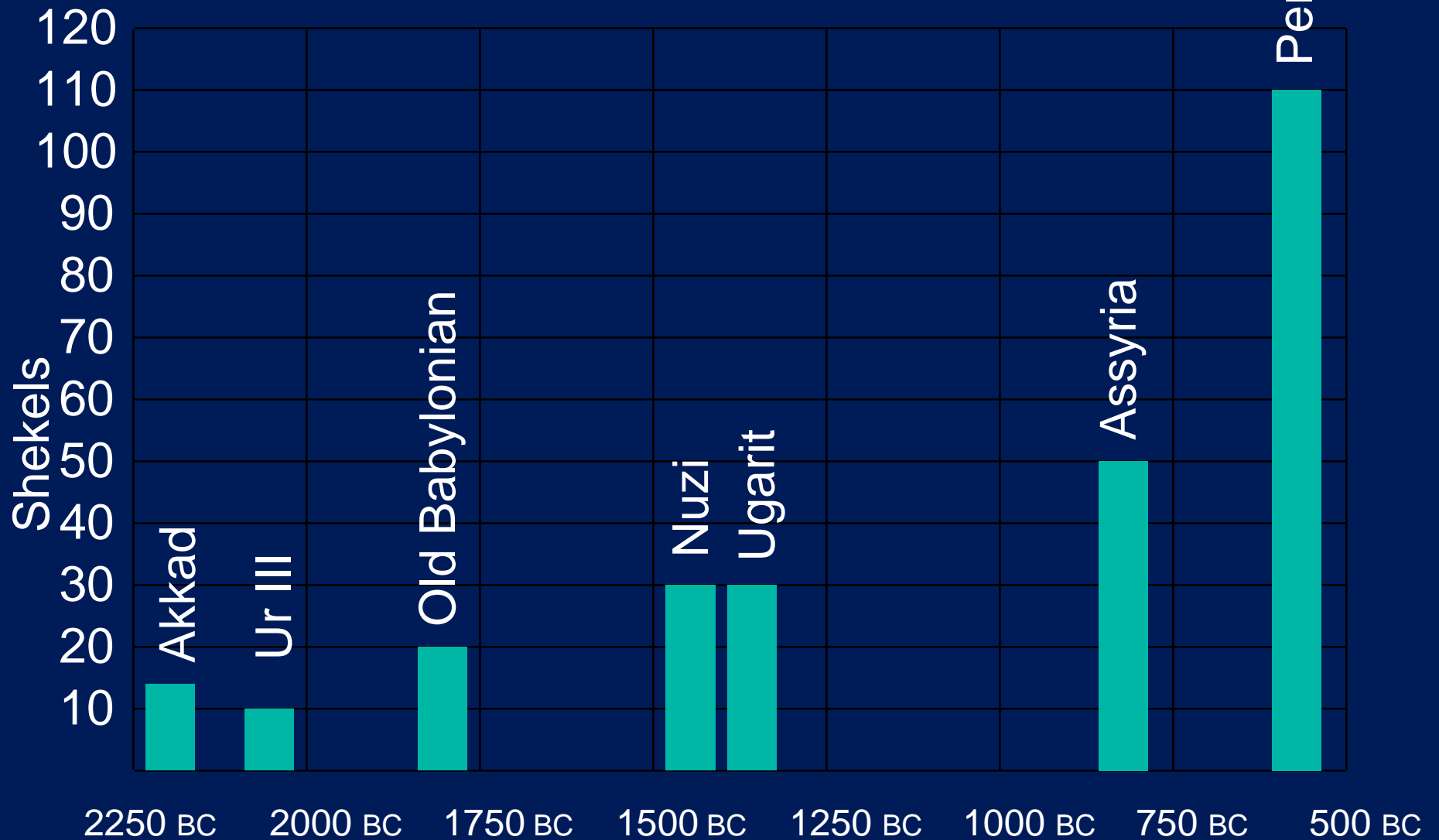
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The Price of Slaves



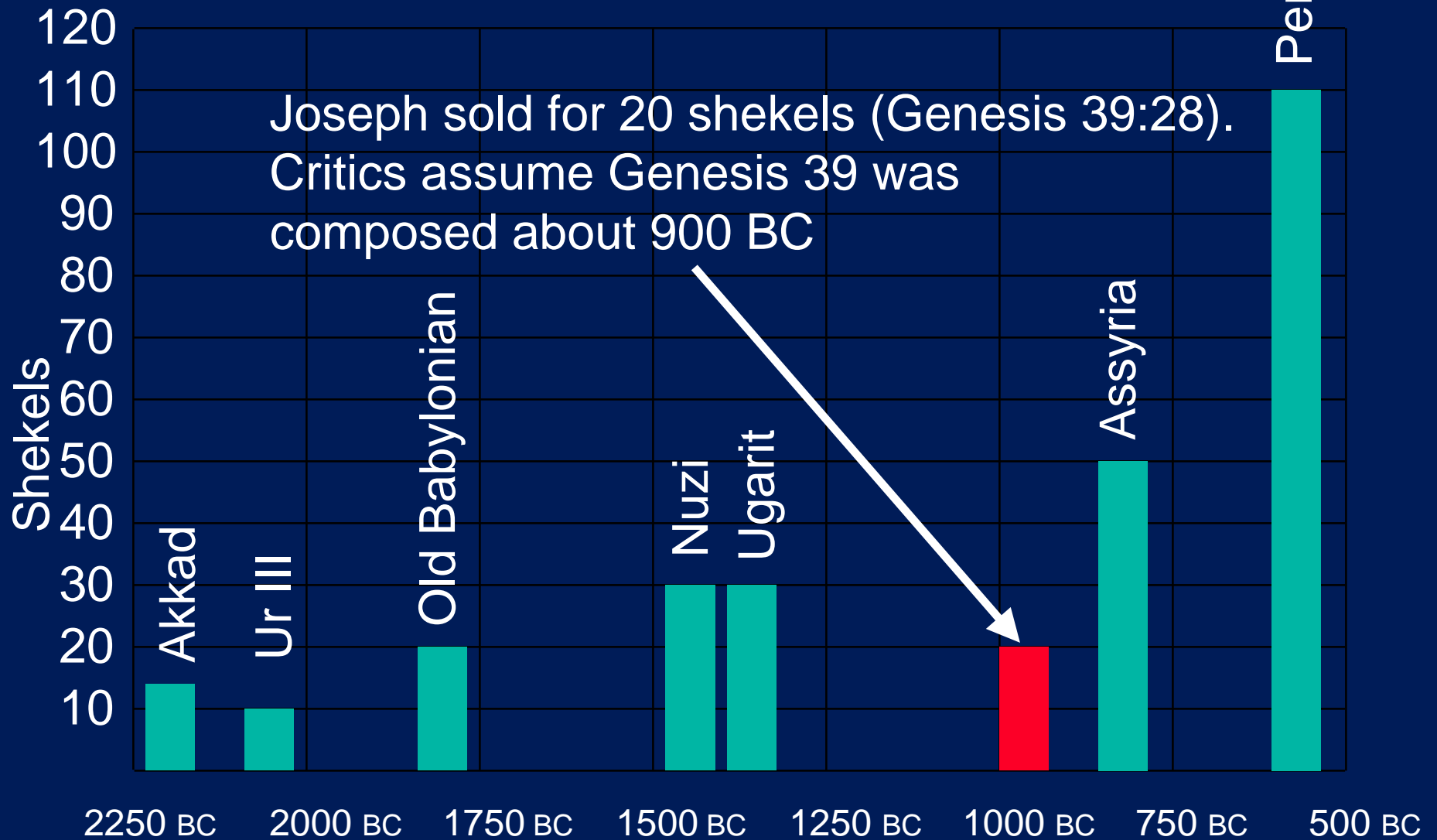
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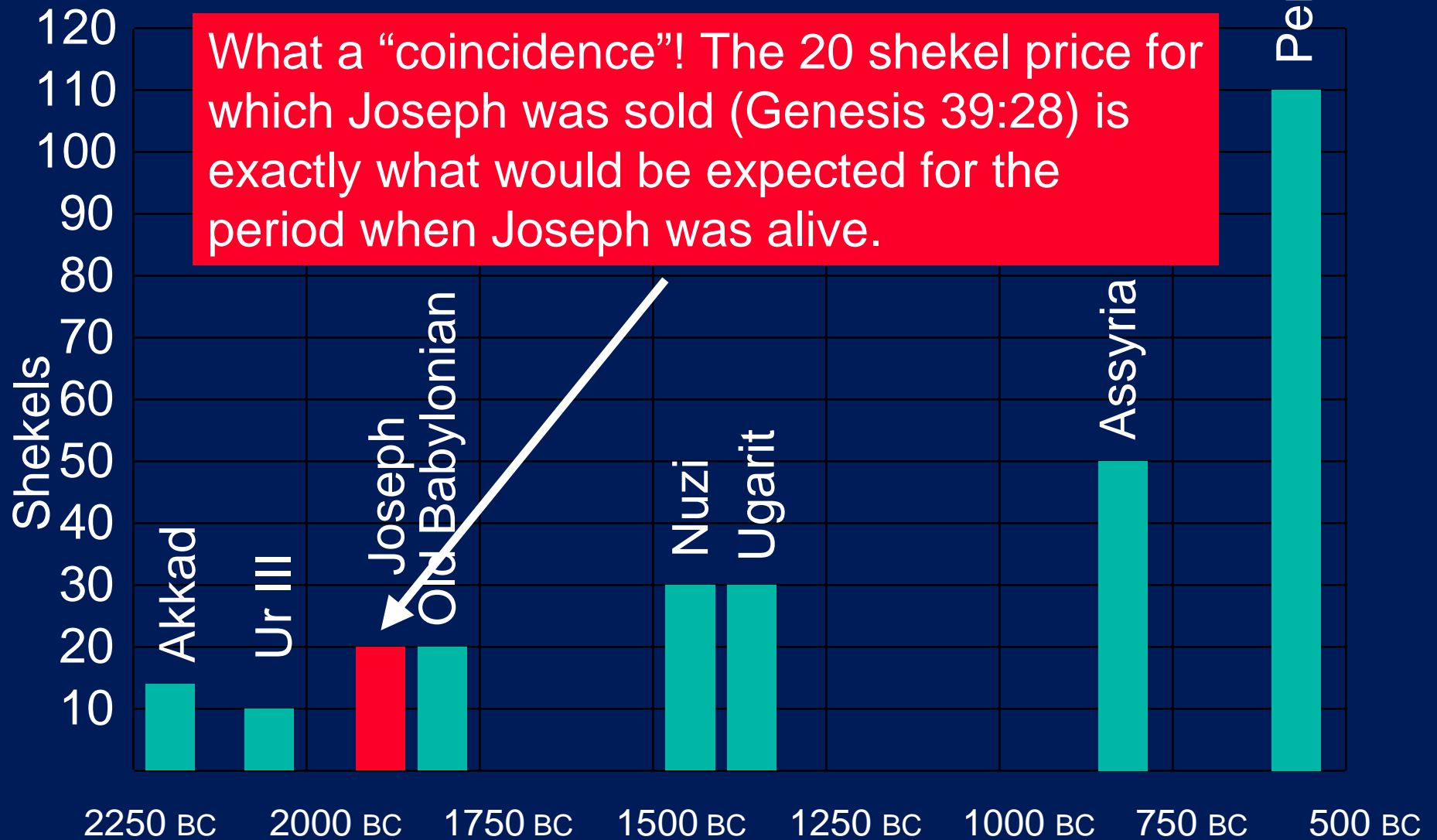


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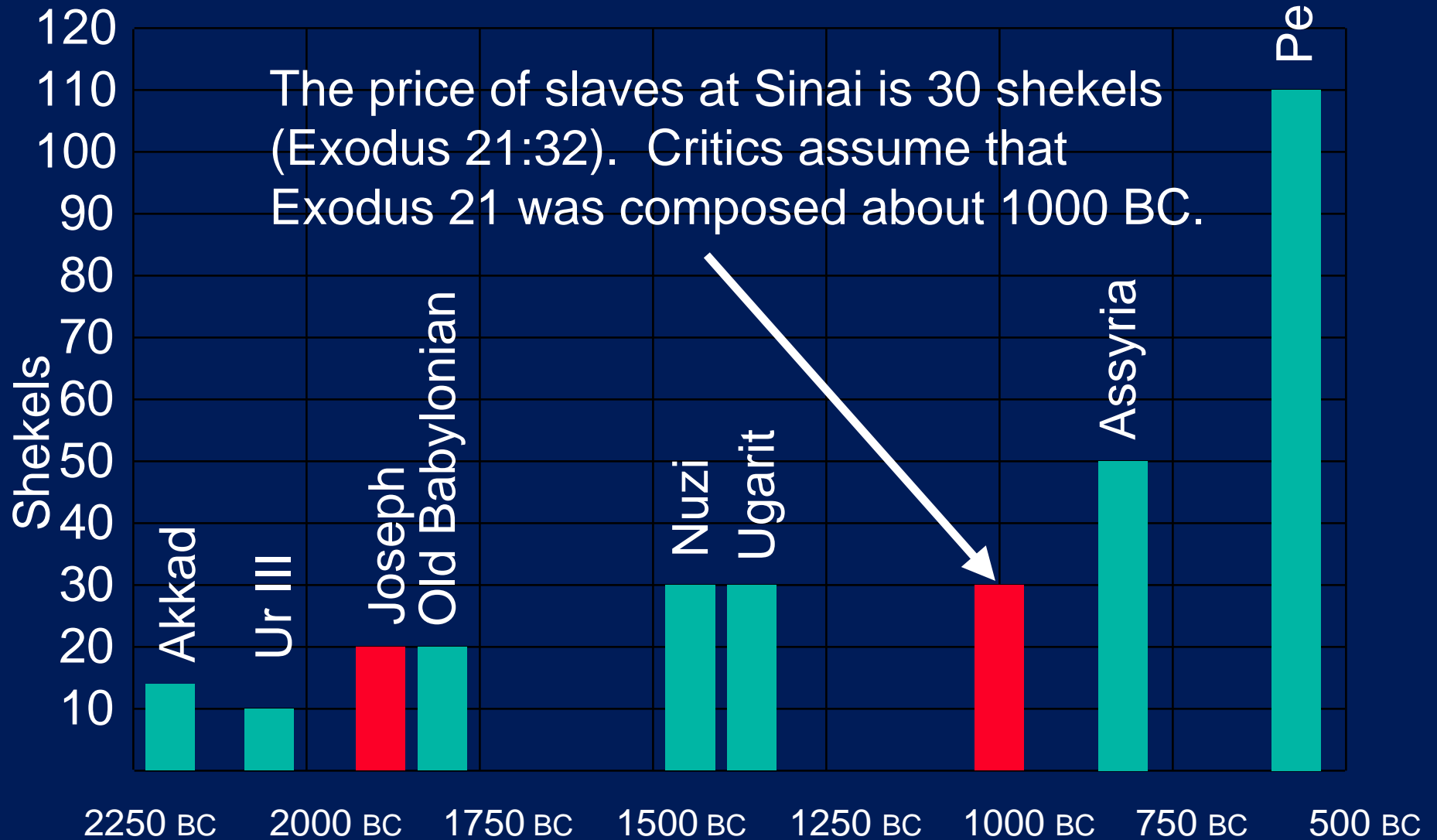


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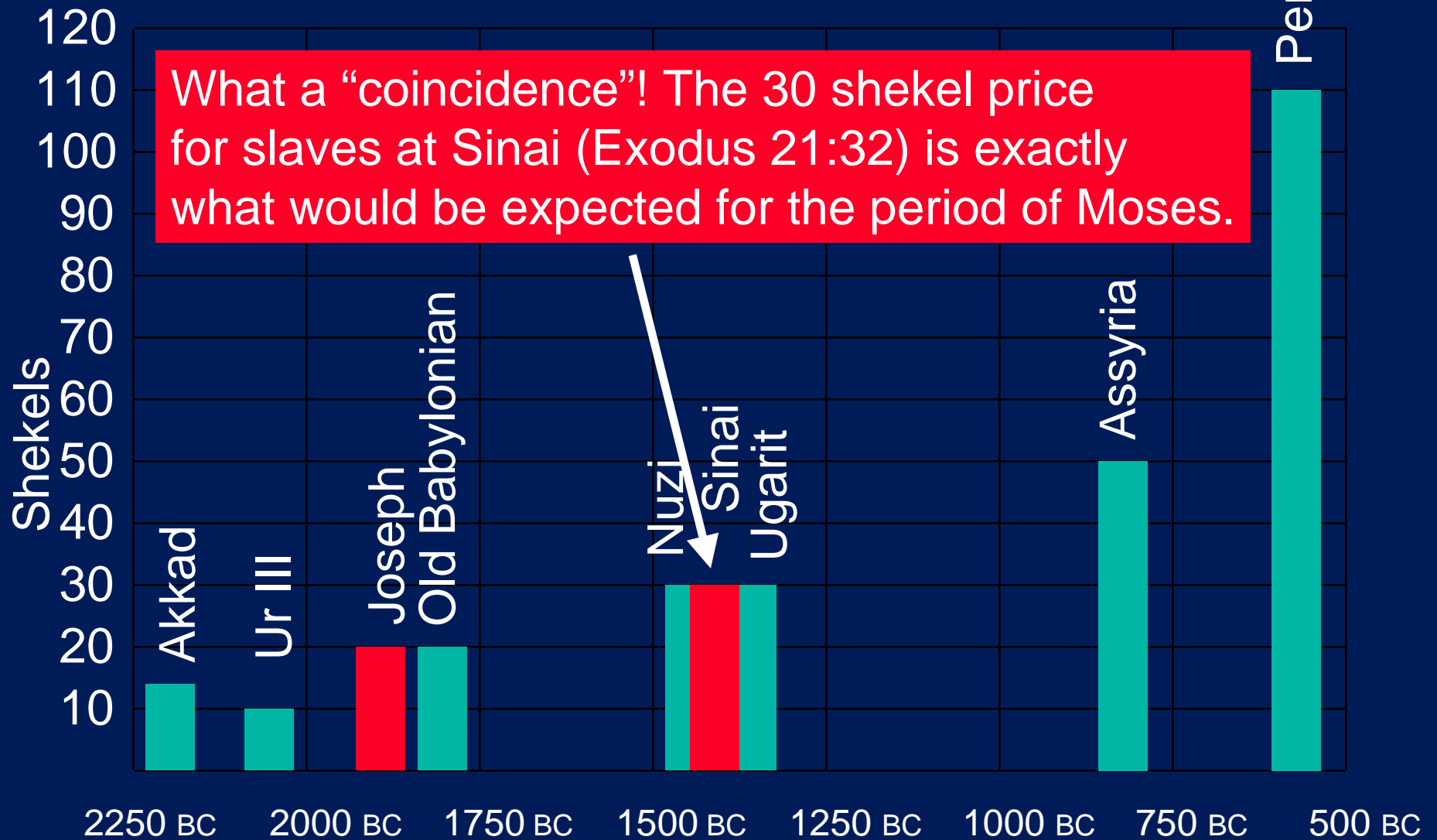


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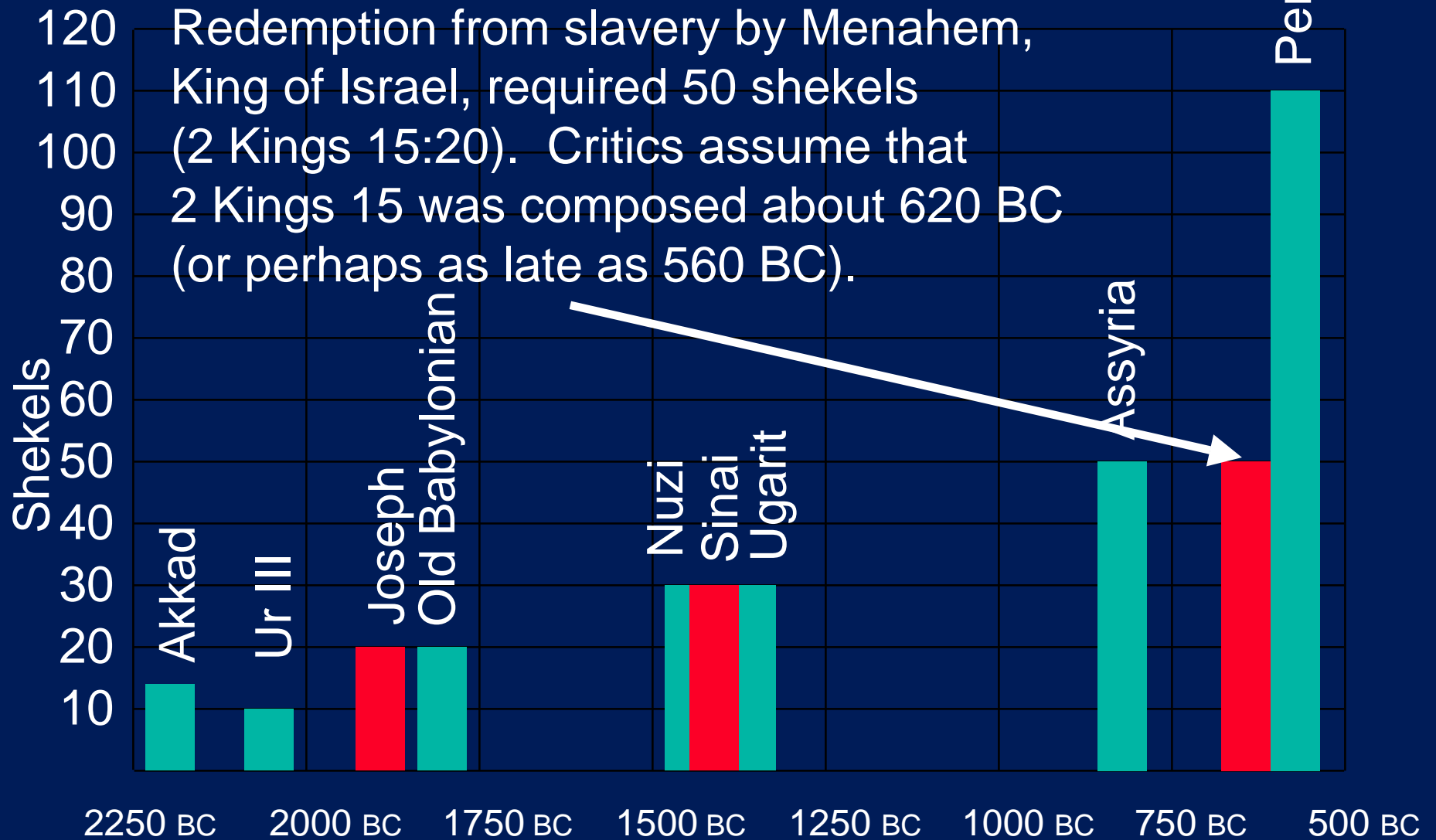
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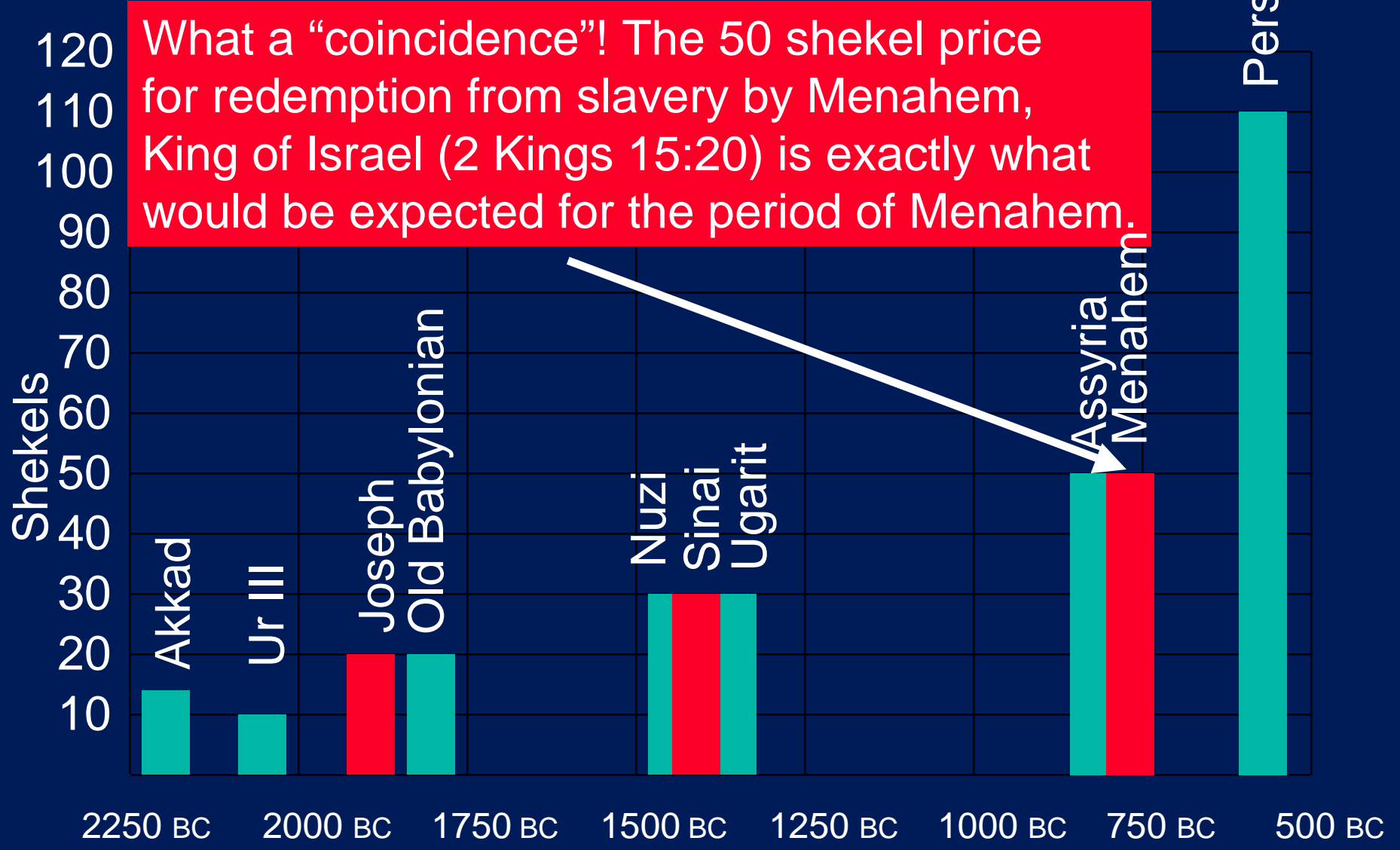
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The Price of Slaves



The Price of Slaves



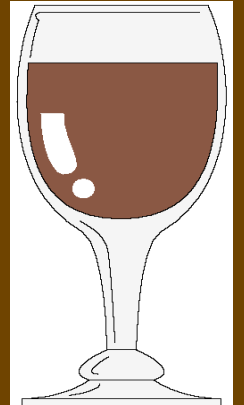
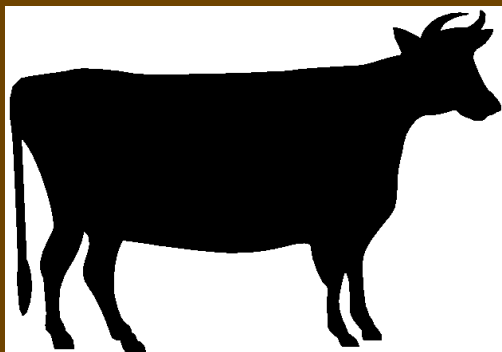
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Details of Israel's Worship

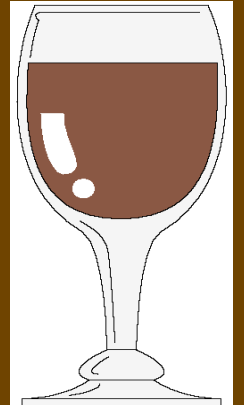
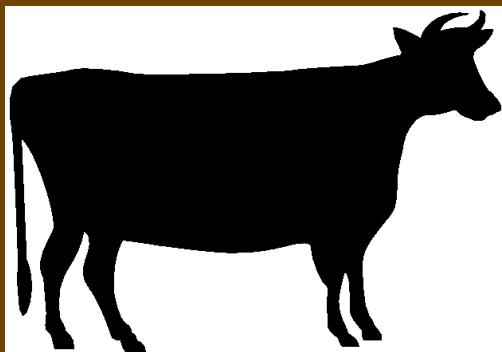
- Critical scholars assume that the cultic details of Israel's worship did not come from the time of Moses (about 1400 BC), but were invented much later (perhaps as late as 600 BC).

Feast of Trumpets

- So, for example, many scholars suppose that the required offerings at the Feast of Trumpets in Numbers 29:2f. came from about 600 BC, rather than from the time of Moses (1400 BC): “one bull... seven lambs... one goat... a meal offering and wine libation”



- But what a “coincidence”! A Hittite text from the mid-2nd millennium BC (the time of Moses) has been discovered that specifies the exact same sequence of offerings as in Numbers 29:2f.: one bull... seven lambs... one goat... a meal offering and wine libation.



The Ark of the Covenant

Was the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25) invented by some later tradition, or does it come from the time of Moses (1400 BC)?



- What a “coincidence”! This portable wooden ark was found in the tomb of Pharaoh Tutankhamun (1350 BC). It is the only such object to survive from antiquity.



Image from *Treasures of Tutankhamun* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1976) plate 7

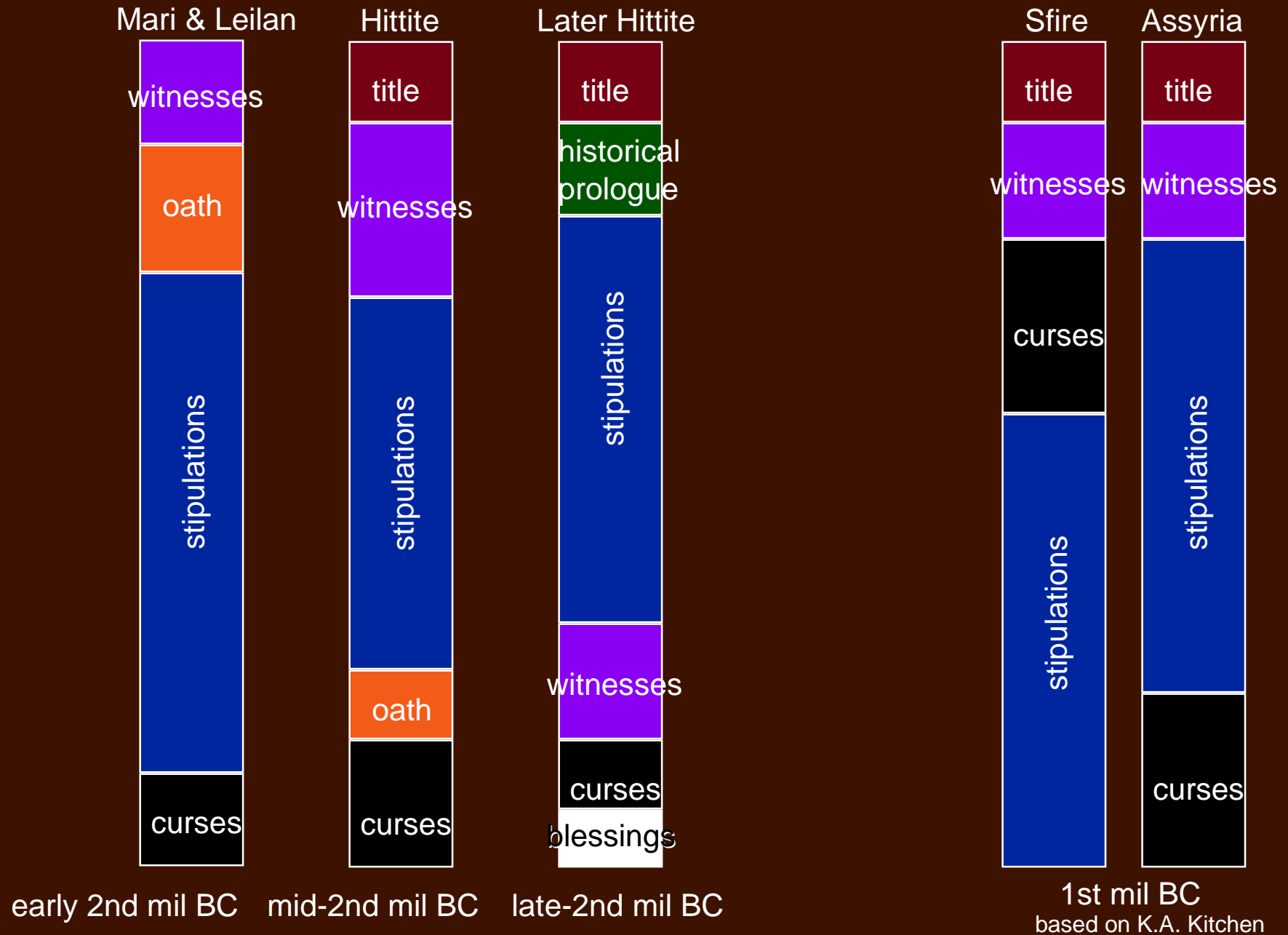


This small gilded shrine and pedestal is similar to the Holy of Holies, was also found in the tomb of Pharaoh Tutankhamun (1350 BC). Interestingly, the pedestal has clearly marked footprints, as if an invisible image were standing on it.

Covenant Forms

- Since the discovery and first publication of a few Hittite treaties, or covenant documents, in the 1920's, some 57 treaties from the ancient Near East have now been discovered and published (about a dozen of which are fragmentary).

Covenant Forms

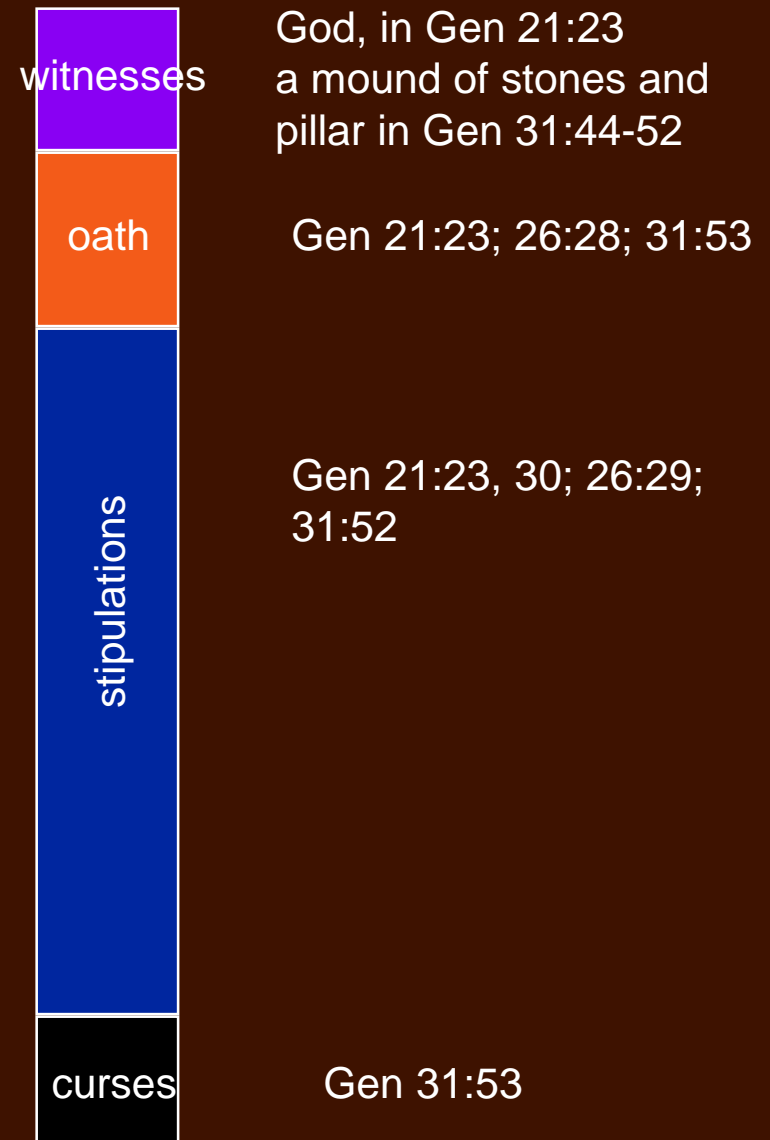


Covenant Forms

- The Bible gives a fairly complete record of three covenants involving the patriarchs:
- Abraham and Abimelech of Gerar in Genesis 21
- Isaac and Abimelech of Gerar in Genesis 26
- Jacob and Laban in Genesis 31
- Where in the progression of covenant forms do these covenants belong?

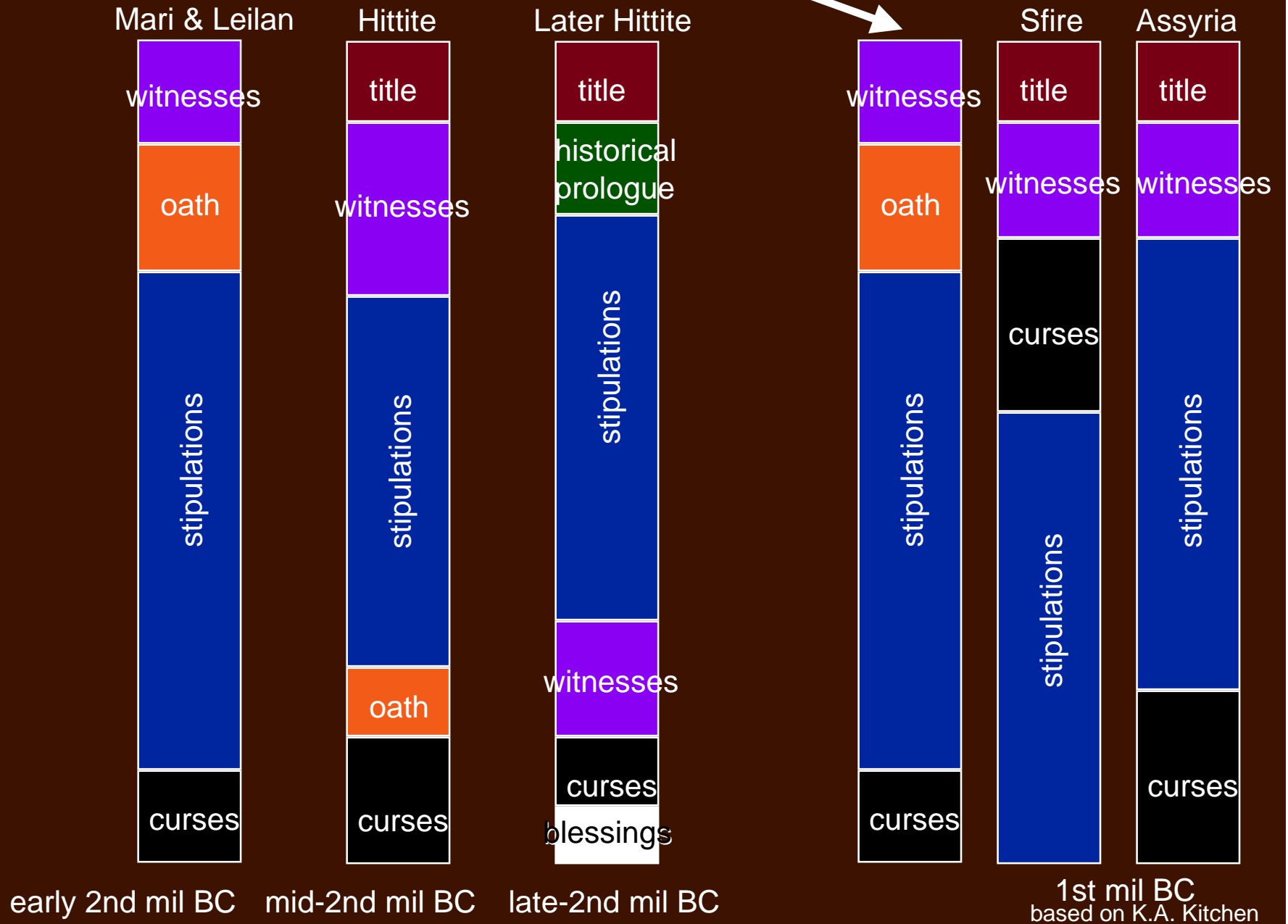
Covenant Forms

- The following elements, with minor variations in order, seem to characterize the patriarchal covenants

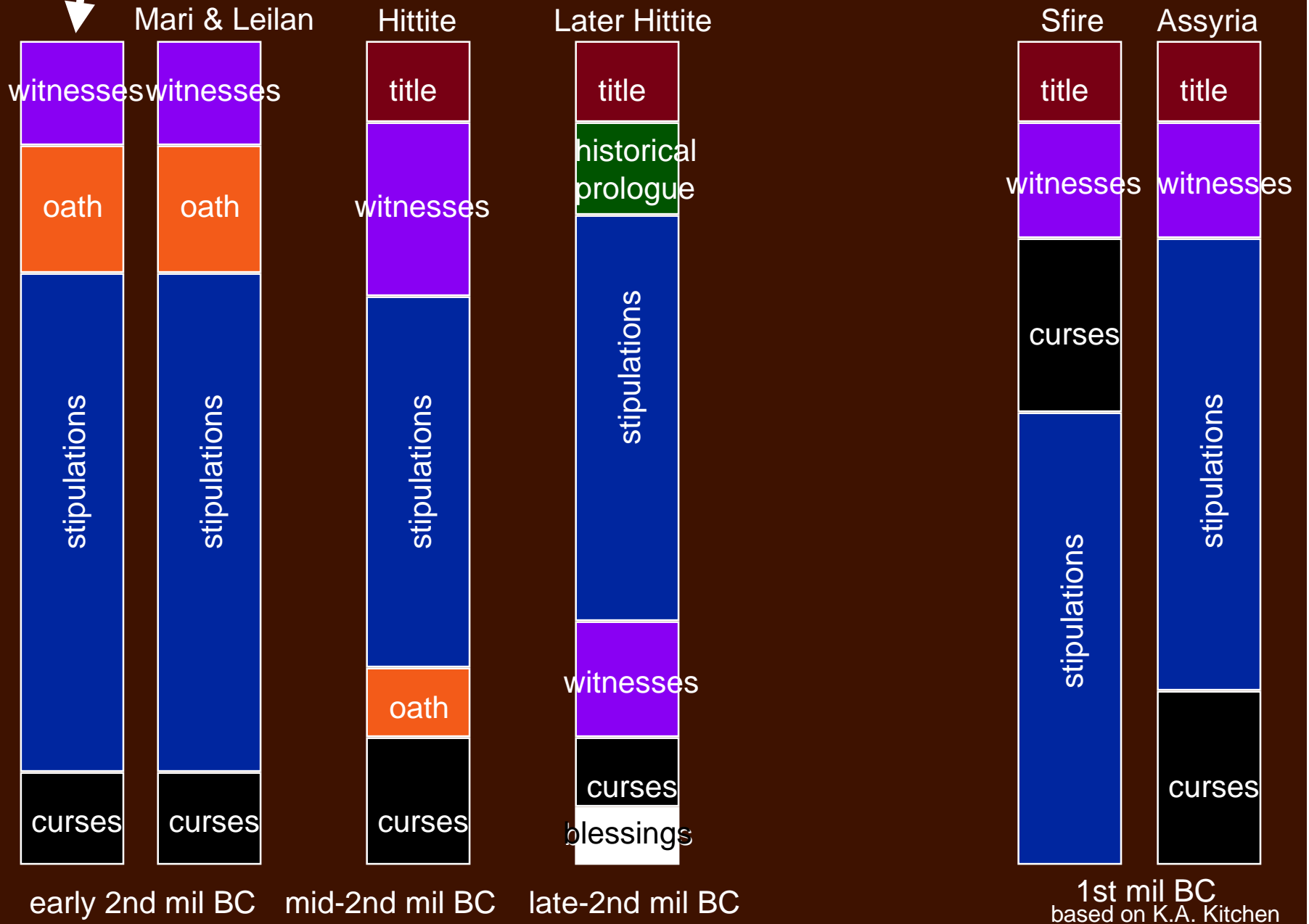


K.A. Kitchen, "Genesis 12-50 in the Near Eastern World," in *He Swore an Oath*, R.S. Hess, et al. eds. (Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1993) 67-92, at 74-77.

Critics assume that the patriarchal covenants were composed in the 1st mil. BC



What a "coincidence"! The patriarchal covenants most resemble what is known of early 2nd mil. BC covenants.

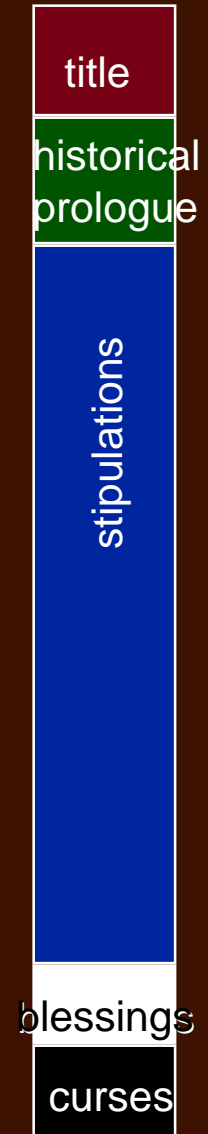


Covenant Forms

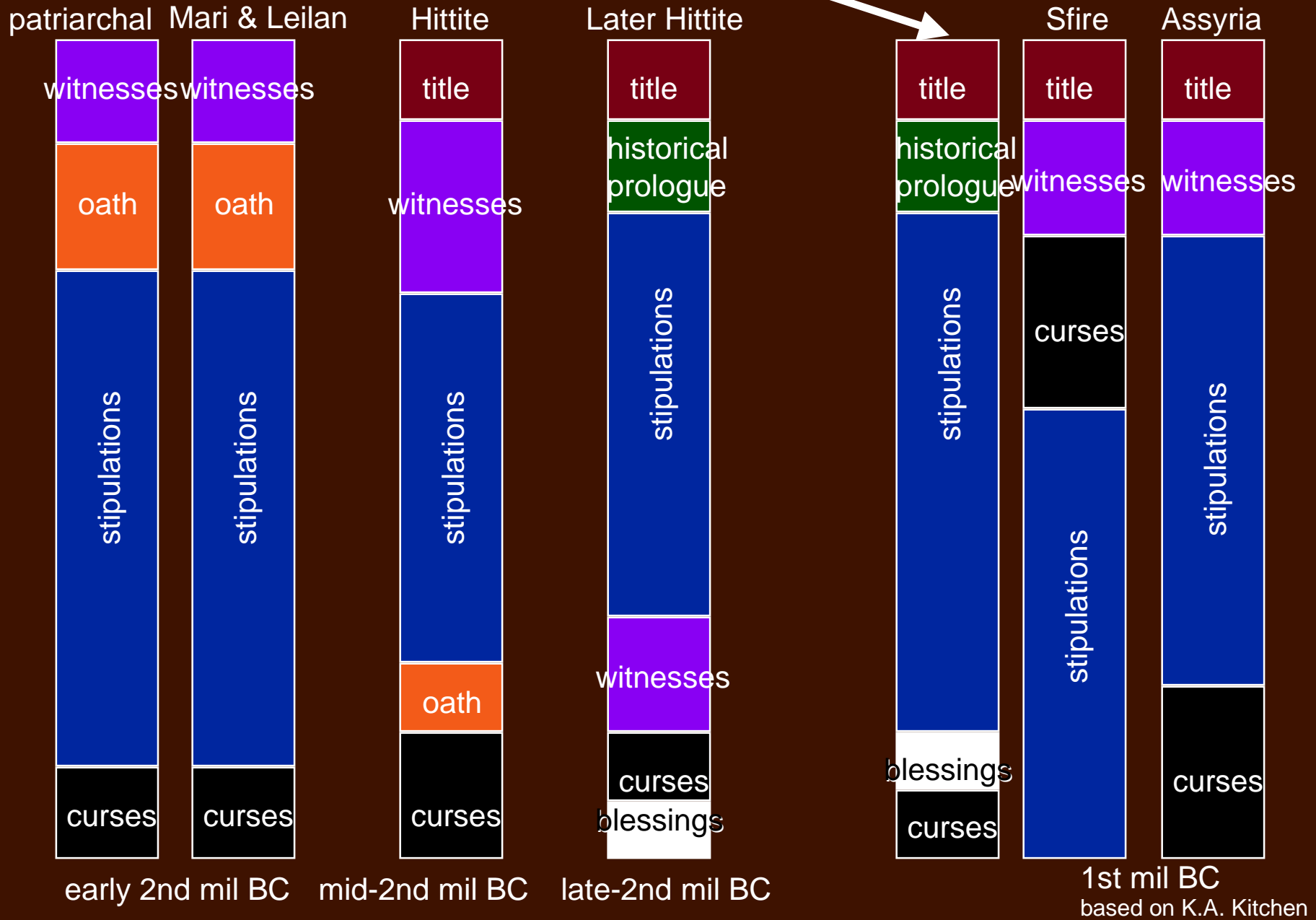
- The Bible gives a very full account of two covenants from the time of Moses:
- the covenant at Sinai (the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20)
- the covenant renewal in the plains of Moab (Deuteronomy)

Covenant Forms

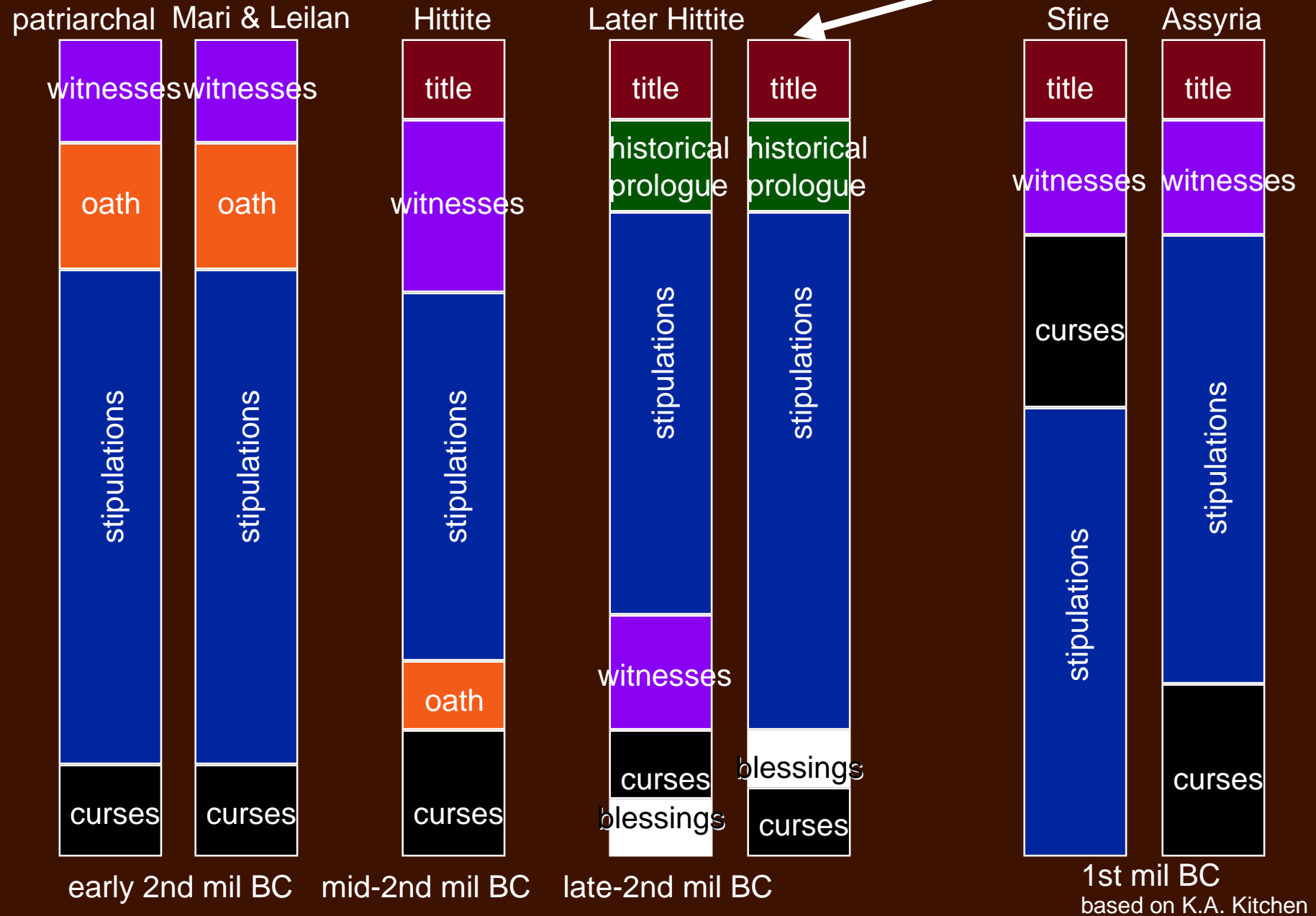
- 1) Title: Exod. 20:1; Deut. 1:1-5
- 2) Historical Prologue (past relations reviewed):
Exod. 20:2; Deut. 1:6-4:49
- 3) Stipulations
 General: Exod. 20:3-11 (or 20:3-17); Deut.
 5:1-11:32
 Specific: Exod. 20:12-17 (or 20:21-26 and
 21:1-23:33); Deut. 12:1-26:19
- 4) Sanctions
 Blessings: Exod. 20:6, 12; Deut. 28:1-14
 Curses: Exod. 20:5; Deut. 28:15-68



Critics assume that the Mosaic covenants were composed in the 1st mill. BC

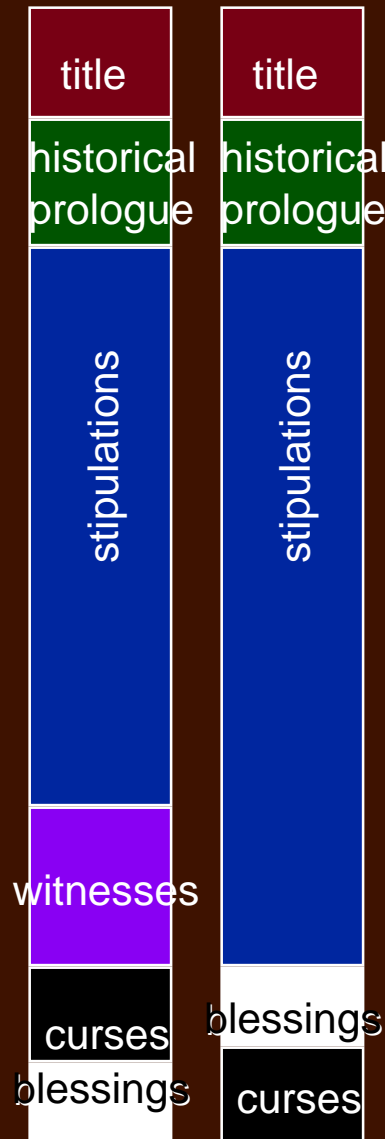


What a “coincidence”! The Mosaic covenant forms in Exod. 20 and Deut. match almost exactly the standard covenant form of the late-2nd mill. BC, when Moses lived!



The omission of the normal section of “witnesses” in the Mosaic covenants is only to be expected. This is so because this section listed the names of various pagan gods who were supposed to be witnesses to the terms of the covenant.

Later Hittite Mosaic

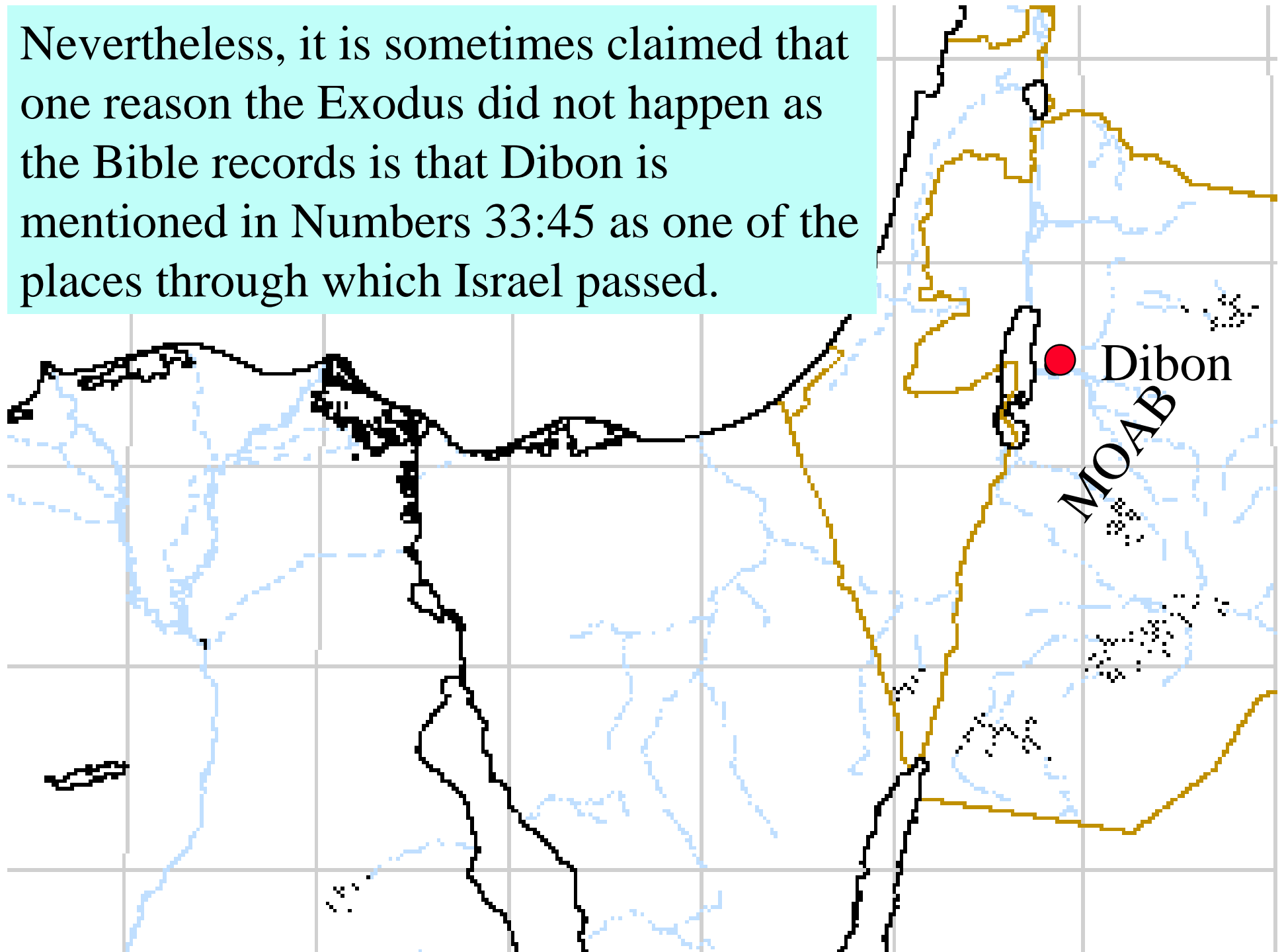


late-2nd mil BC

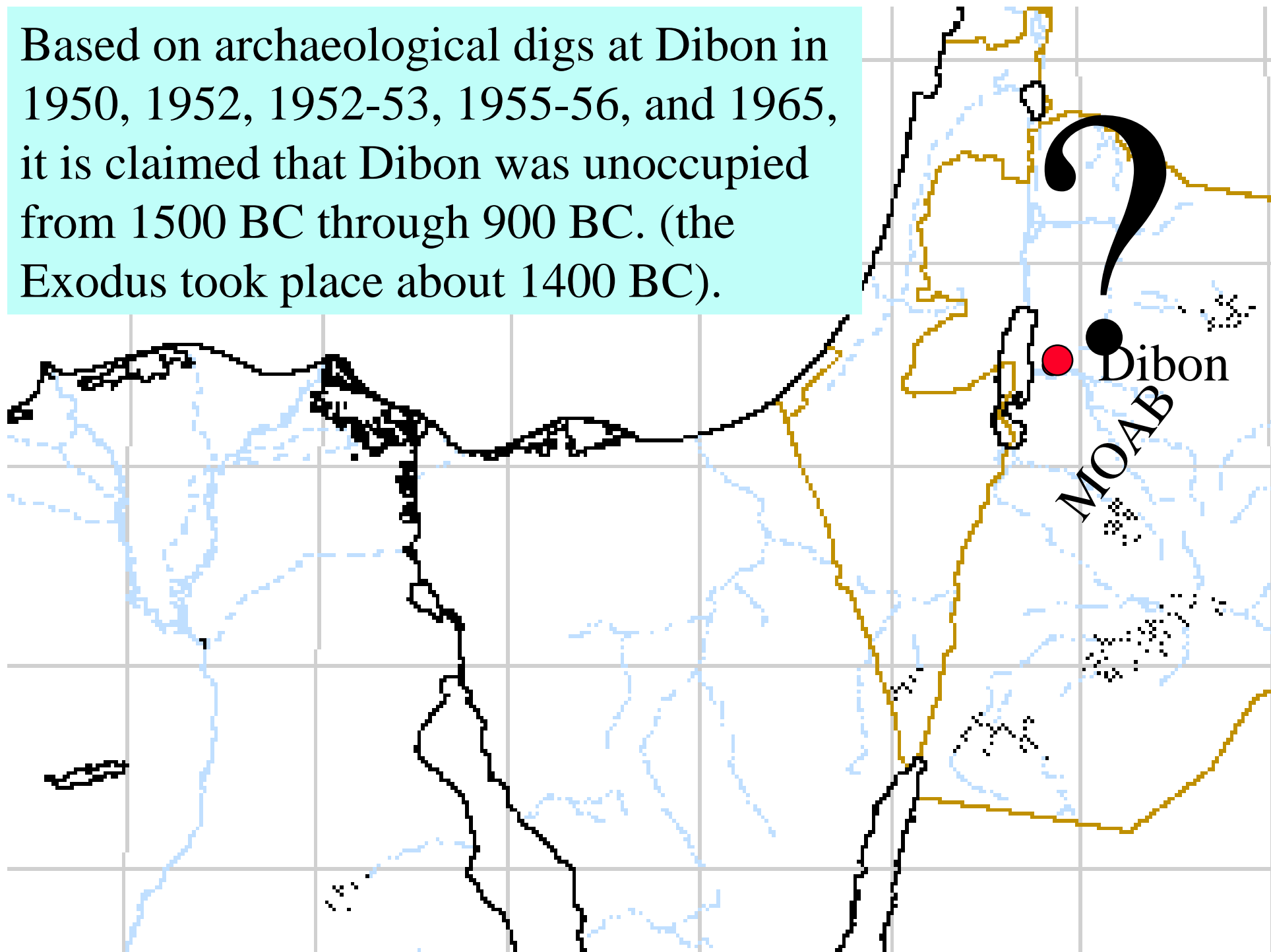
Regarding the Exodus....

Since ancient Egyptians never recorded their defeats (they left no record of the 200 year period of Hyksos supremacy from 1786-1550 BC) and invariably exaggerated their victories, it should not be expected to find Egyptian records of the Exodus confirming their humiliating defeat before runaway slaves.

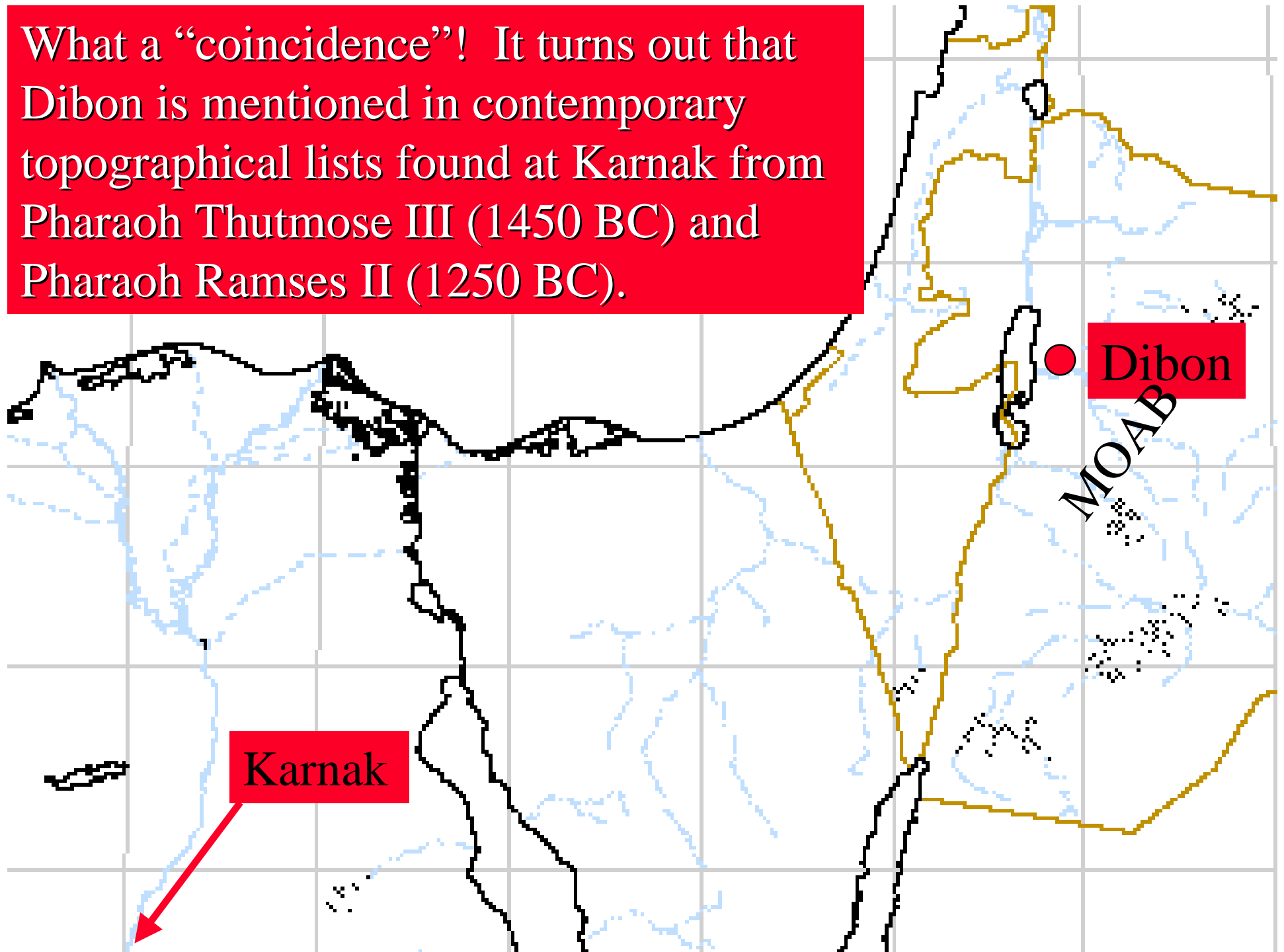
Nevertheless, it is sometimes claimed that one reason the Exodus did not happen as the Bible records is that Dibon is mentioned in Numbers 33:45 as one of the places through which Israel passed.



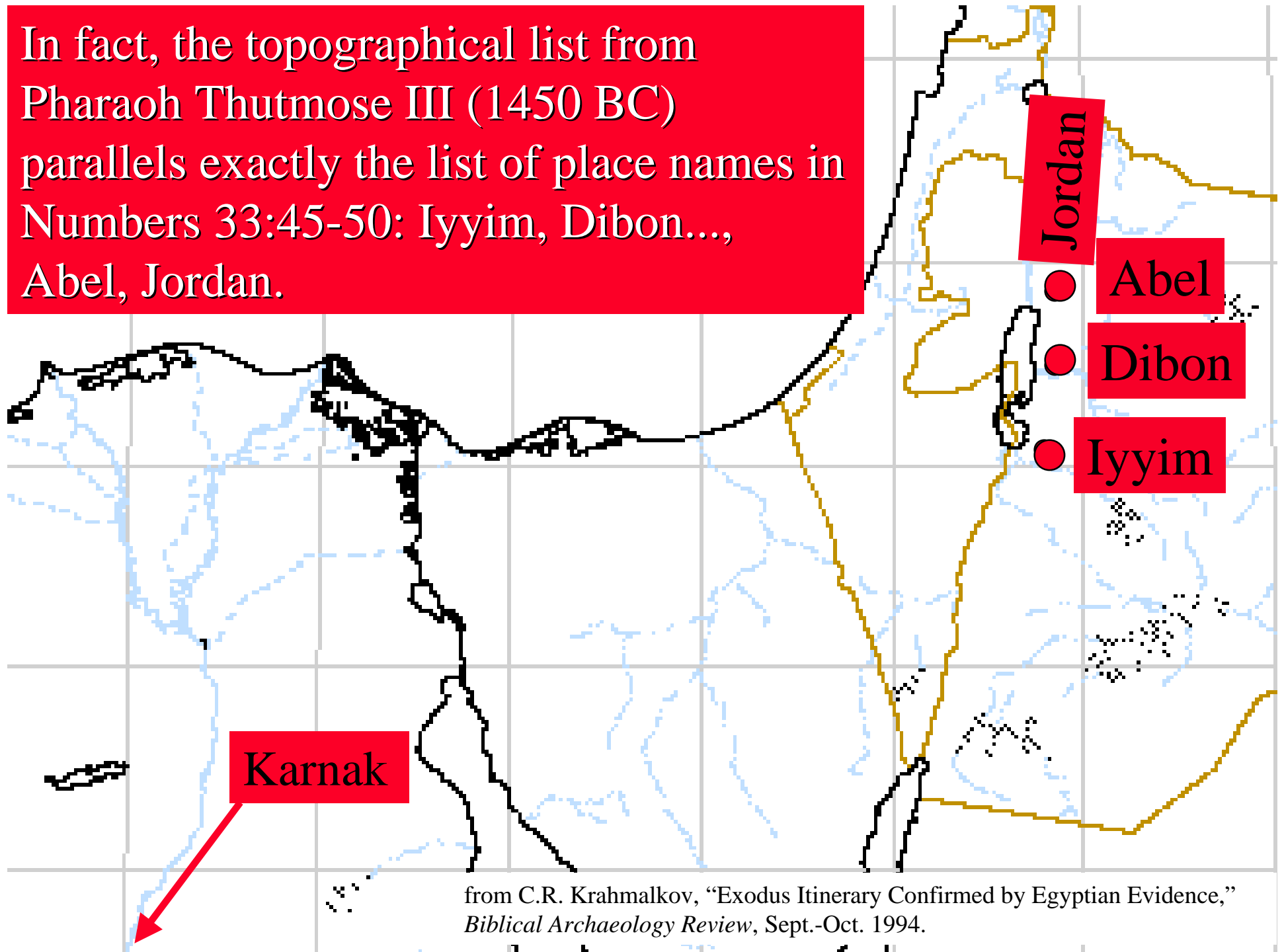
Based on archaeological digs at Dibon in 1950, 1952, 1952-53, 1955-56, and 1965, it is claimed that Dibon was unoccupied from 1500 BC through 900 BC. (the Exodus took place about 1400 BC).



What a “coincidence”! It turns out that Dibon is mentioned in contemporary topographical lists found at Karnak from Pharaoh Thutmose III (1450 BC) and Pharaoh Ramses II (1250 BC).



In fact, the topographical list from Pharaoh Thutmose III (1450 BC) parallels exactly the list of place names in Numbers 33:45-50: Iyyim, Dibon..., Abel, Jordan.



from C.R. Krahmalkov, "Exodus Itinerary Confirmed by Egyptian Evidence,"
Biblical Archaeology Review, Sept.-Oct. 1994.

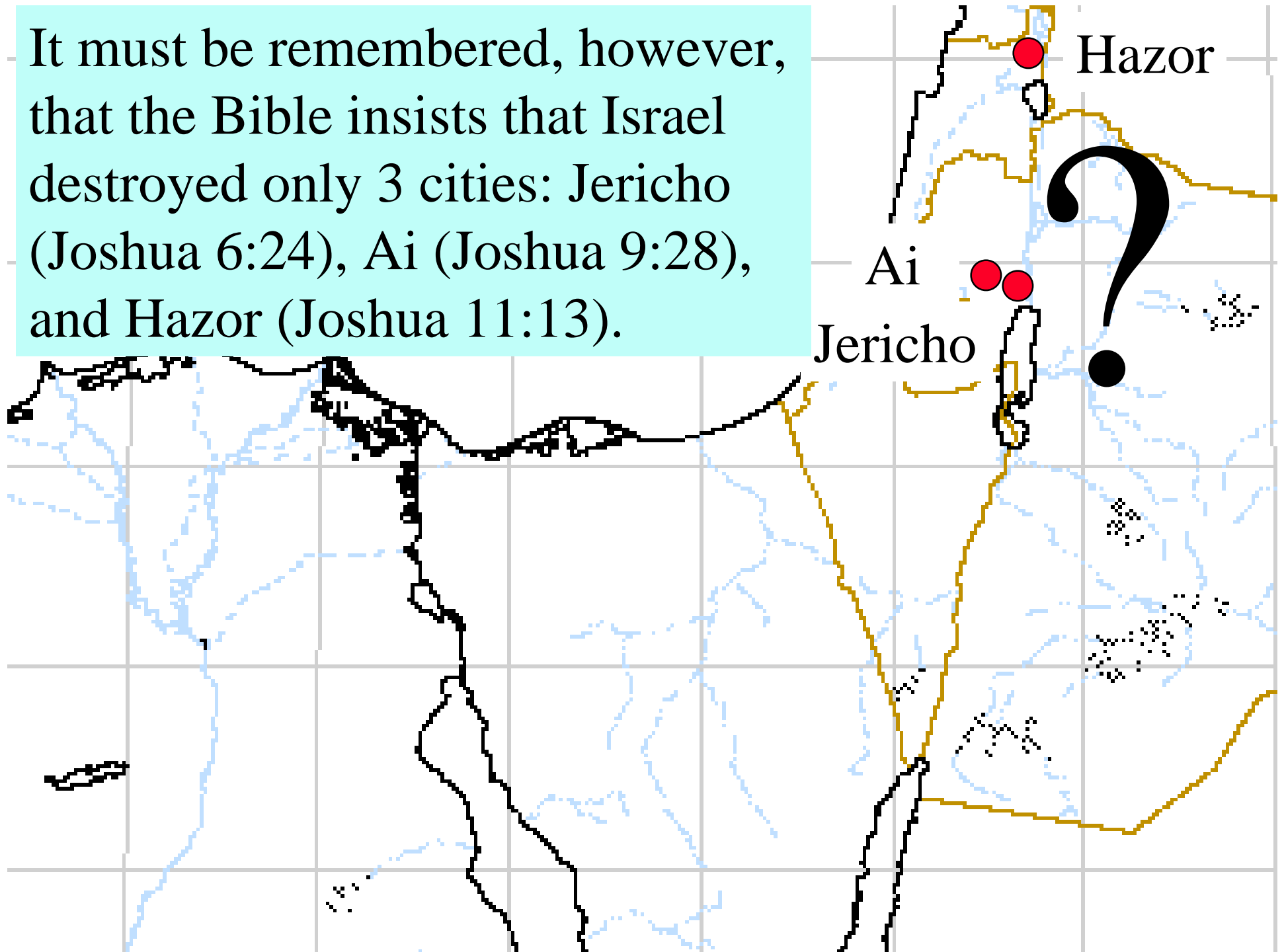
This incontrovertible evidence serves to demonstrate an important archaeological principle:

“the absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence.”

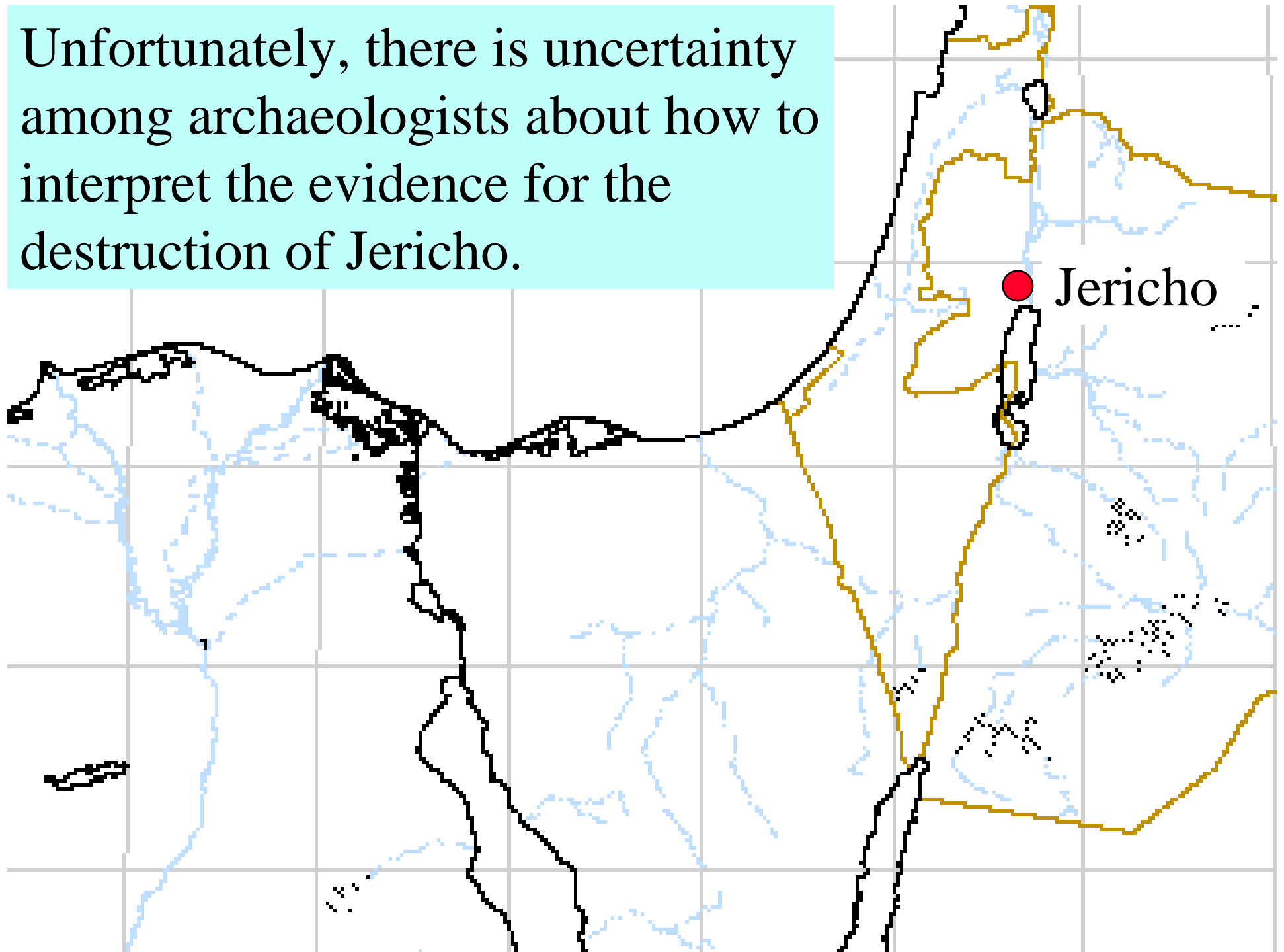
The Conquest of Canaan

- It would ideal to be able to confirm the conquest of Canaan at the time of Joshua.
- One way to do this would be to look for destruction levels at each of the cities that Israel took from the Canaanites.

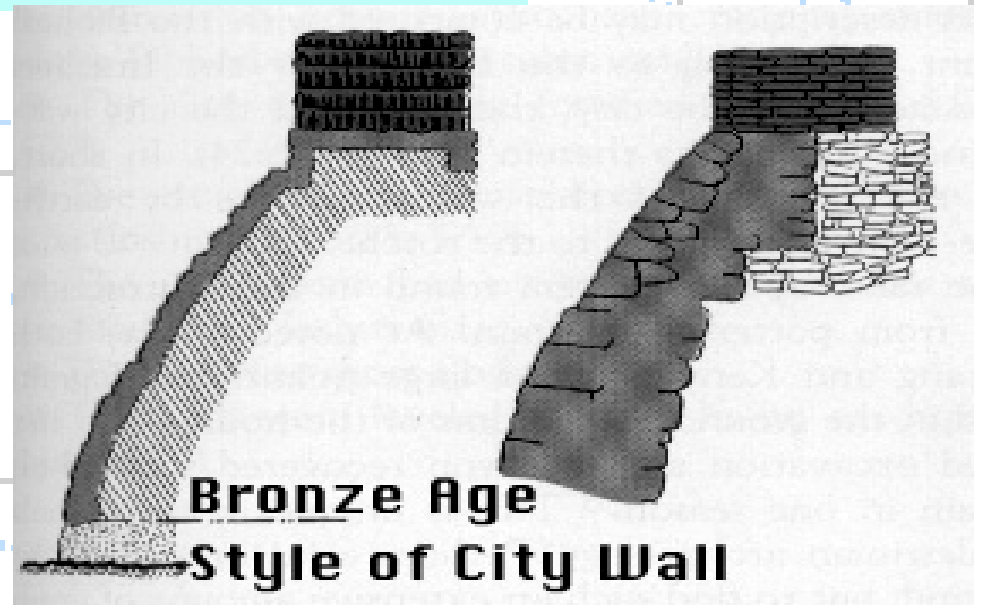
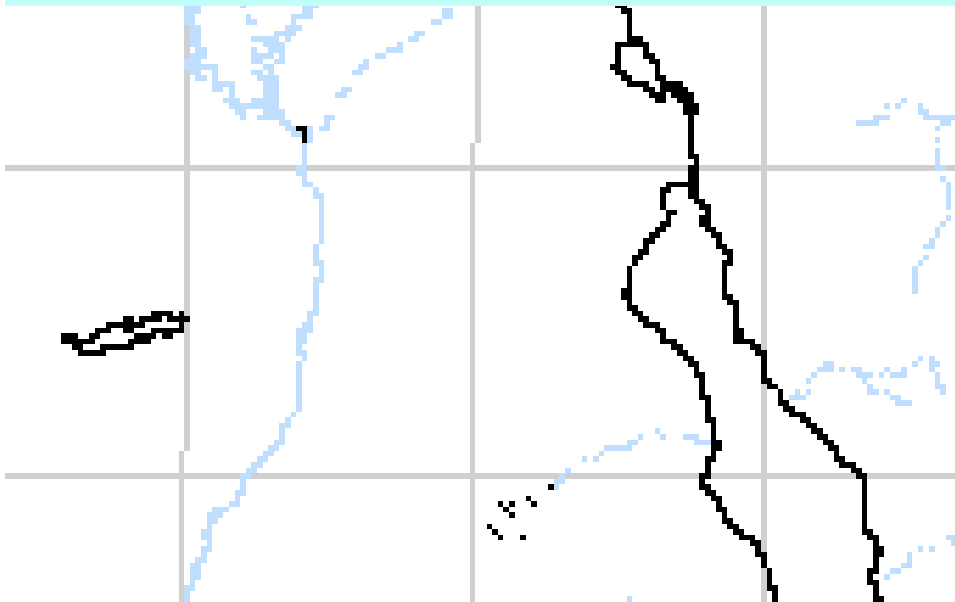
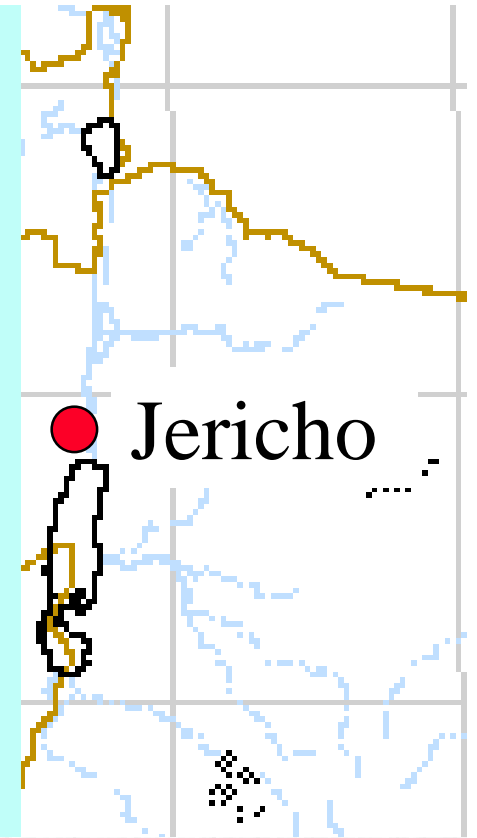
It must be remembered, however, that the Bible insists that Israel destroyed only 3 cities: Jericho (Joshua 6:24), Ai (Joshua 9:28), and Hazor (Joshua 11:13).



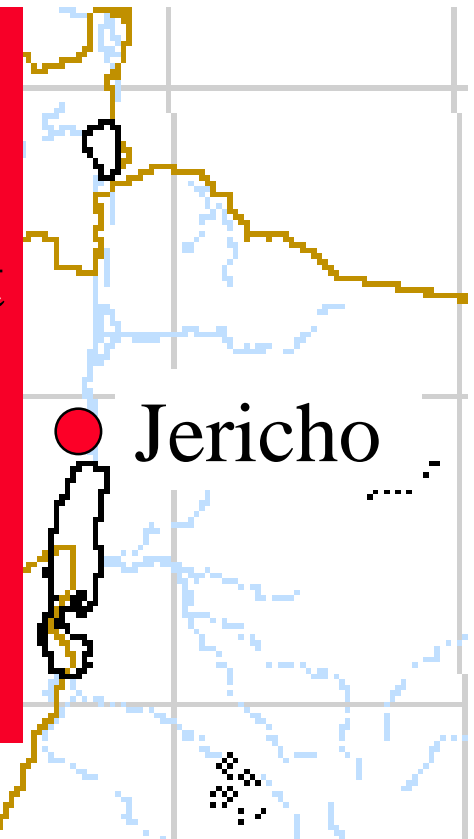
Unfortunately, there is uncertainty among archaeologists about how to interpret the evidence for the destruction of Jericho.



For example, City IV of Jericho was surrounded by a 15 foot high stone revetment wall topped by an 8 foot high mud brick wall. Kathleen Kenyon, who excavated Jericho in the 1950's, argued that these walls and the city were destroyed by an earthquake and fire, but that this took place about 1550 BC.

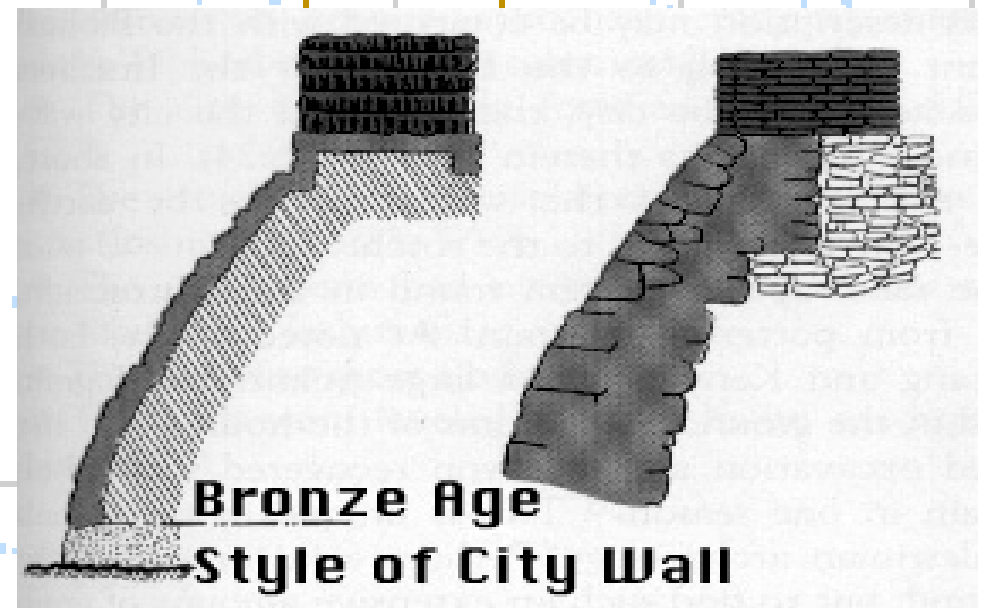


What a coincidence! More recent evidence, however, as analyzed by archaeologist Bryant Wood, indicates that the walls of City IV of Jericho were destroyed about 1400 BC. In other words, the earthquake and fire took place exactly at the time of Joshua!

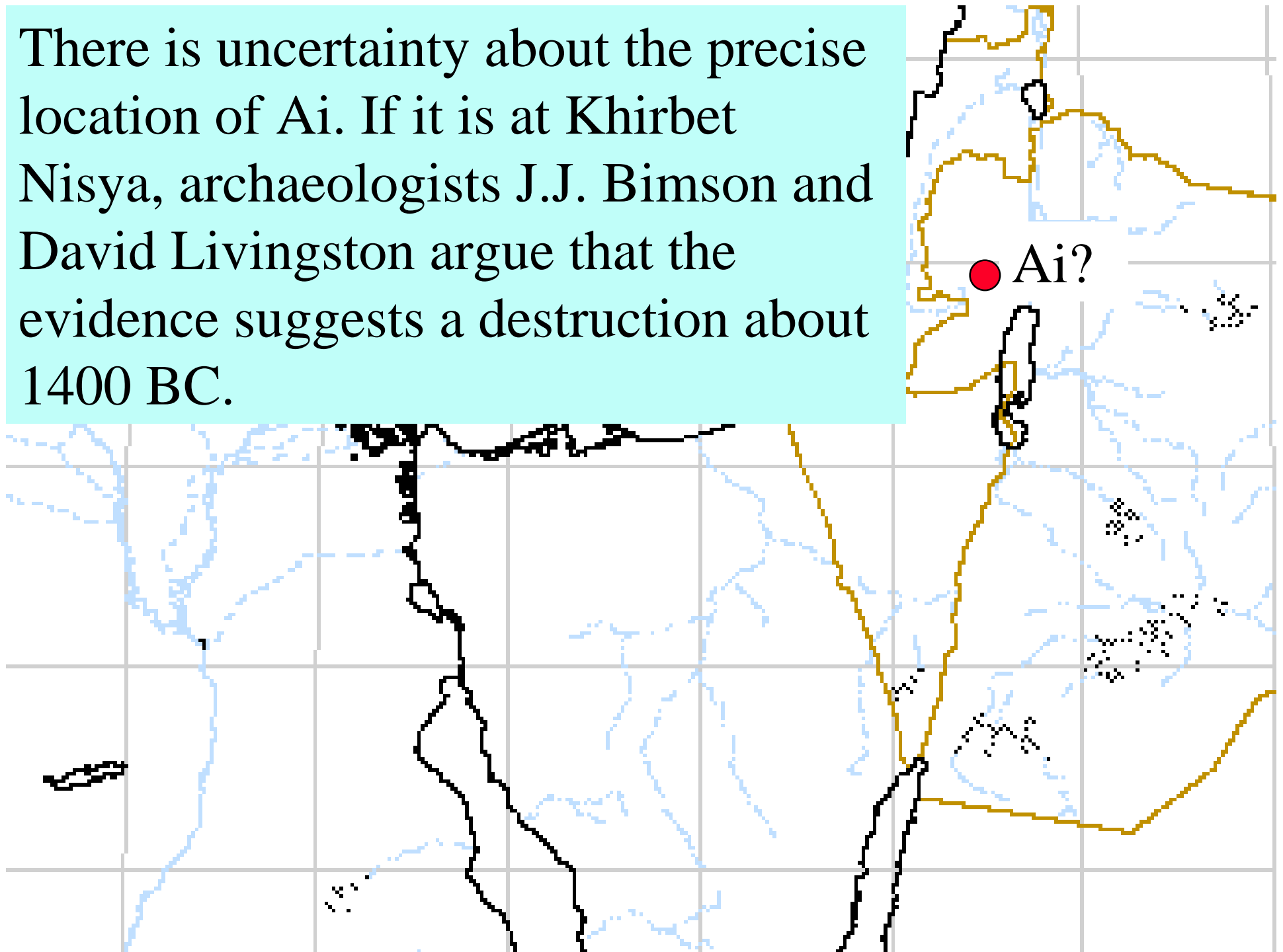


Bryant G. Wood, "Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho?" and "Dating Jericho's Destruction," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 16:2 (1990).

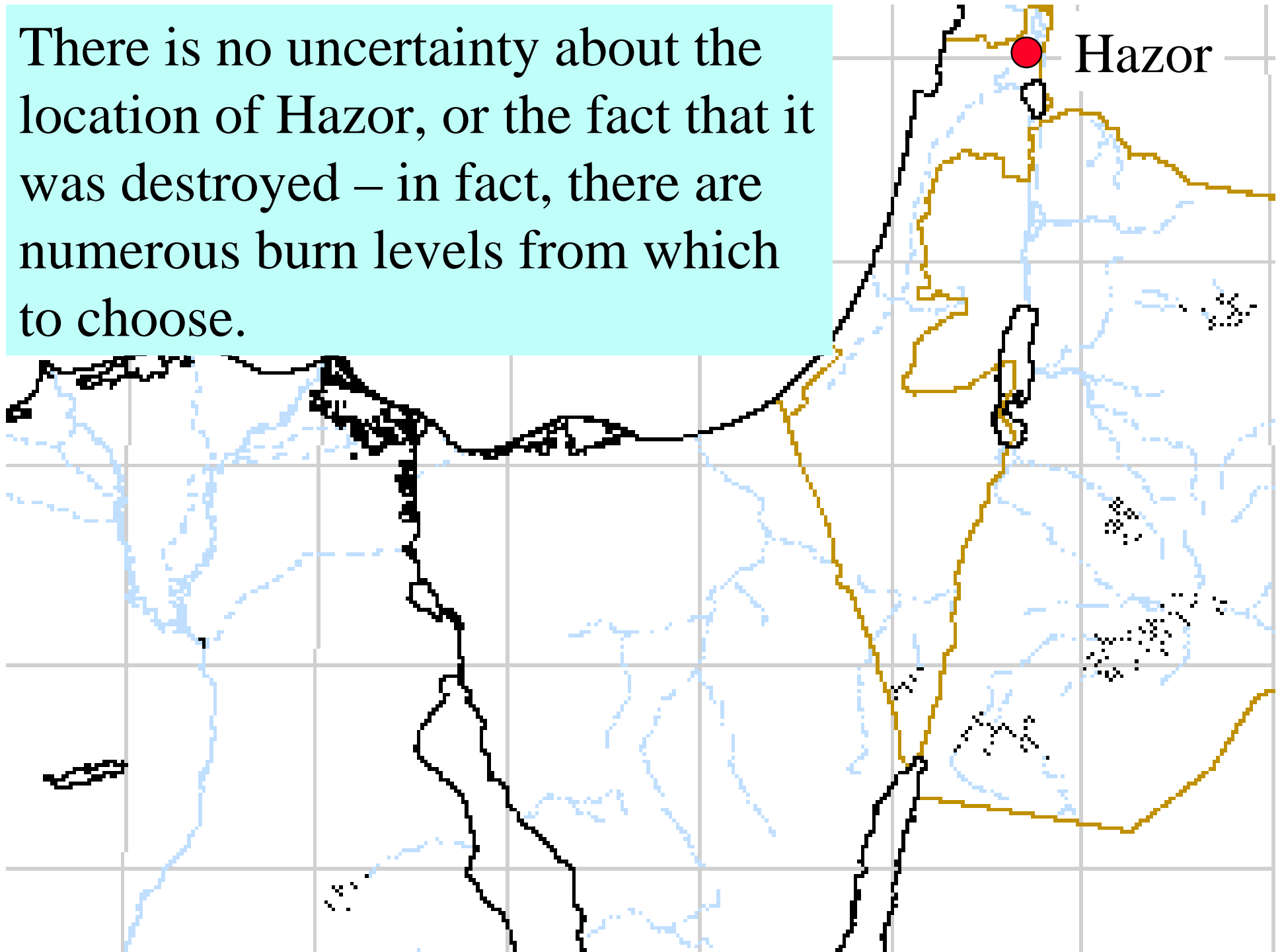
Bryant G. Wood, "New Evidence from the Italian-Palestinian Excavation at Jericho for the Date of the Destruction of the Bronze Age City," a paper read November 15, 2001 at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Colorado Springs, Colorado.



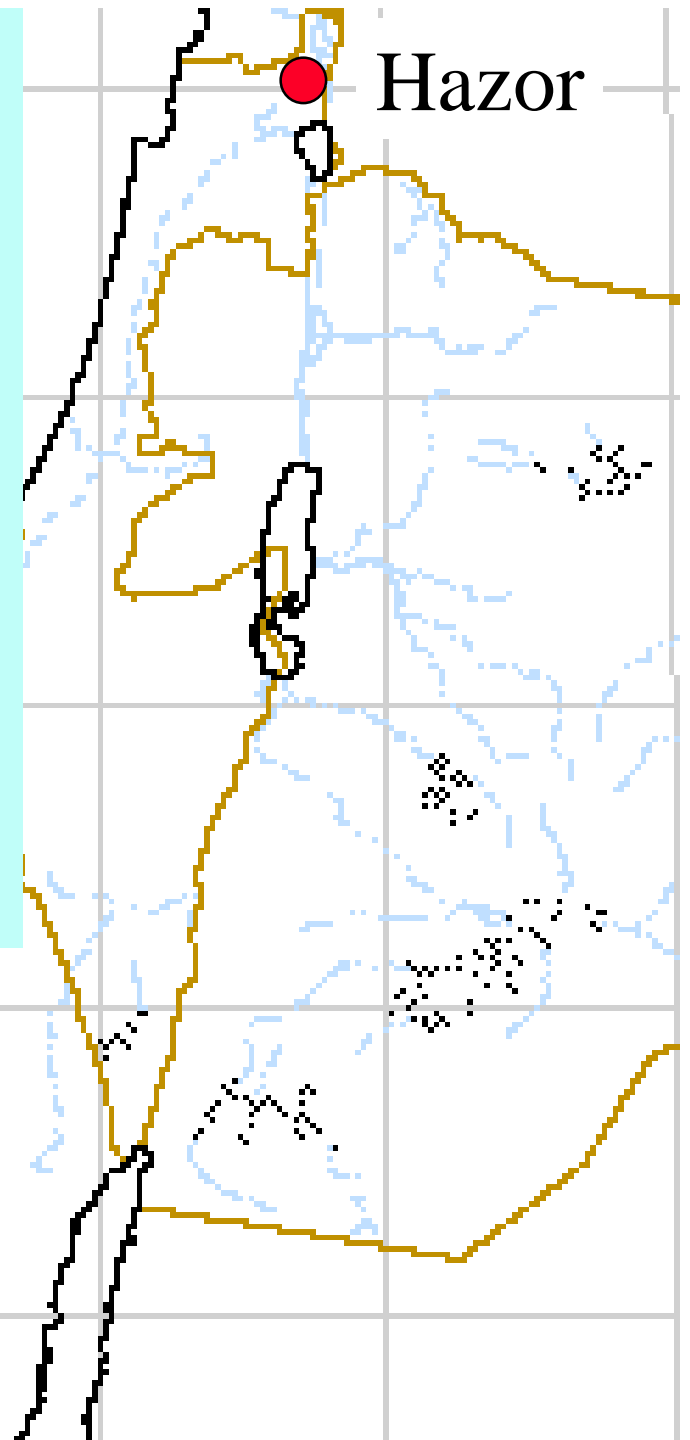
There is uncertainty about the precise location of Ai. If it is at Khirbet Nisya, archaeologists J.J. Bimson and David Livingstone argue that the evidence suggests a destruction about 1400 BC.



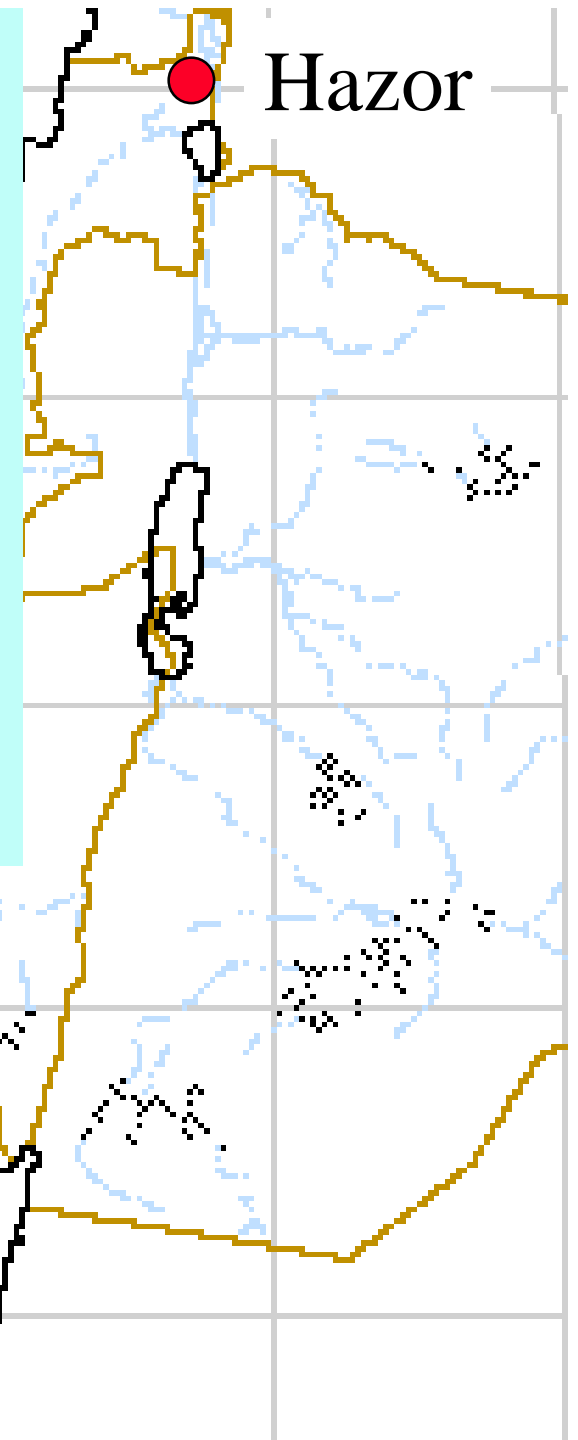
There is no uncertainty about the location of Hazor, or the fact that it was destroyed – in fact, there are numerous burn levels from which to choose.



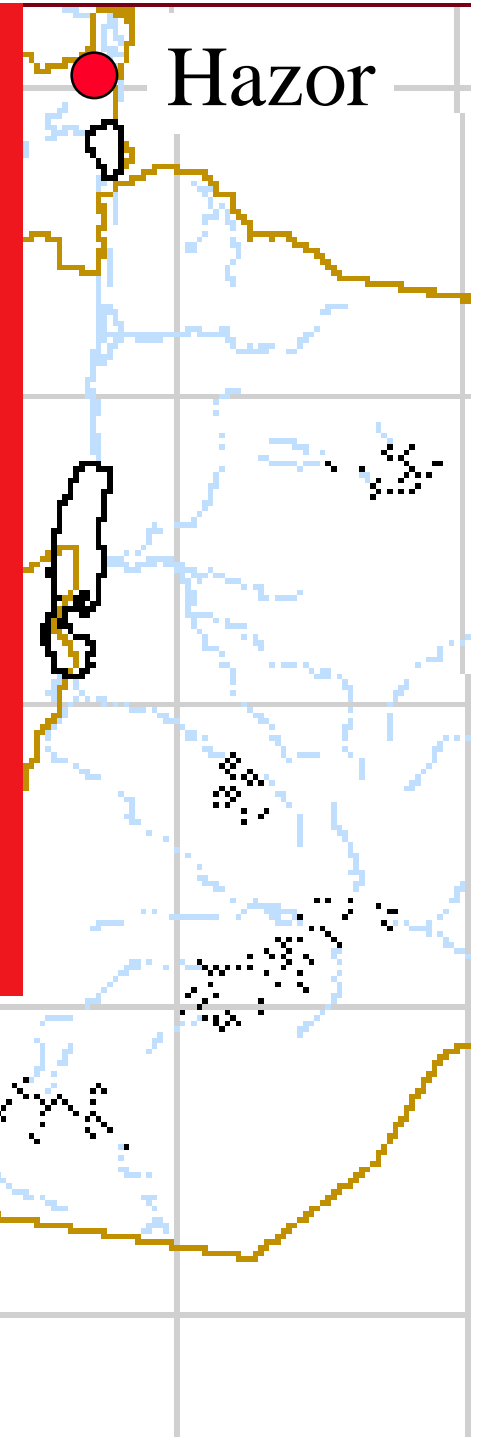
The first burn level (Stratum XV of Upper City and Stratum 2 of Lower City) can be dated about 1400 BC. For example, Area H of the city, which includes a temple, is buried under 2 meters of destroyed brick. This could easily be the work of Joshua and his army.



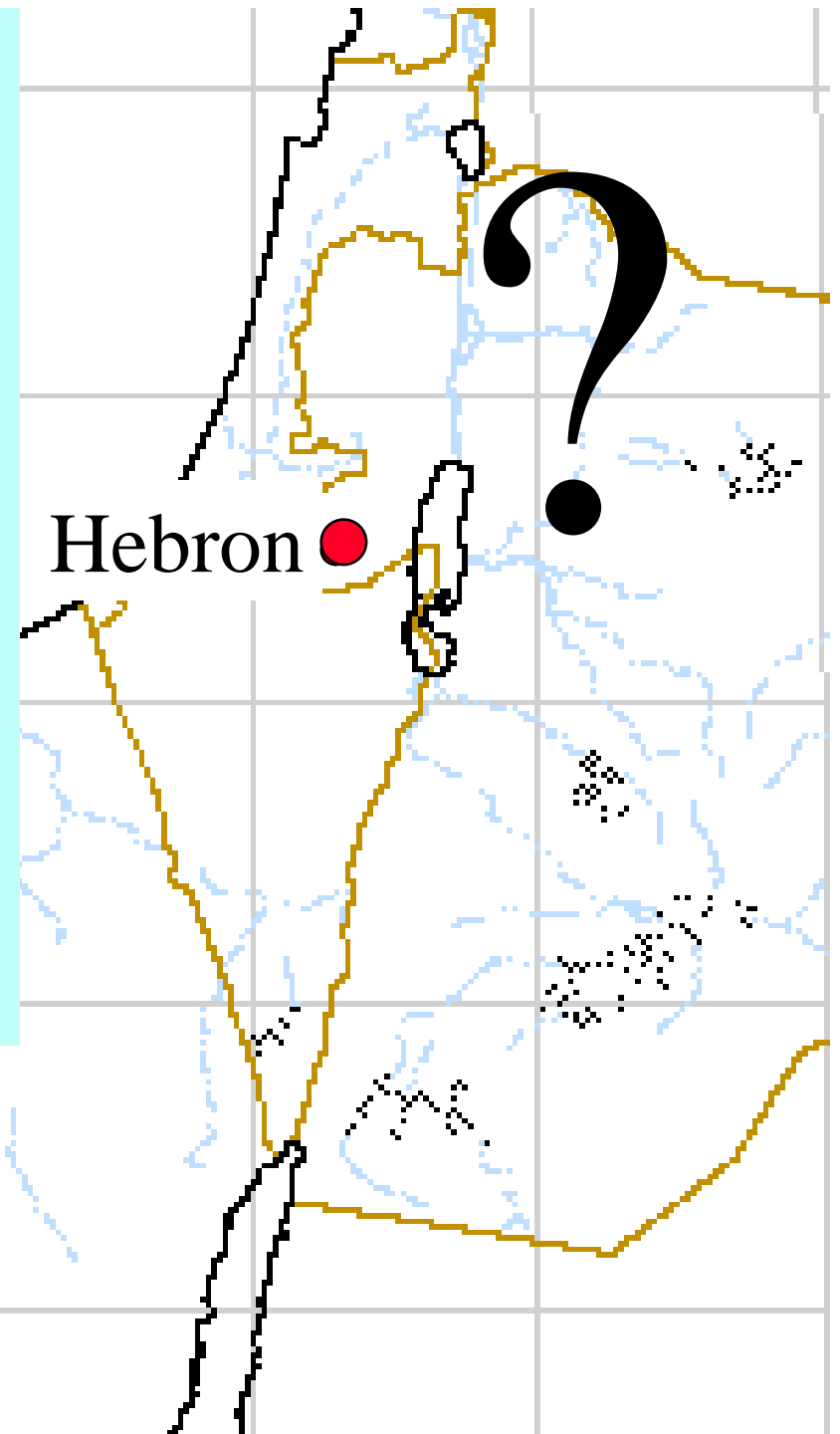
The second burn level (Stratum 1B in Lower City), about 1300 BC, is generally attributed to Pharaoh Seti I. The third burn level (Stratum XIII of Upper City and 1A of Lower City) can be dated about 1220 BC. This could be the result of Deborah's victory over Jabin, King of Hazor (Judges 4 and 5).



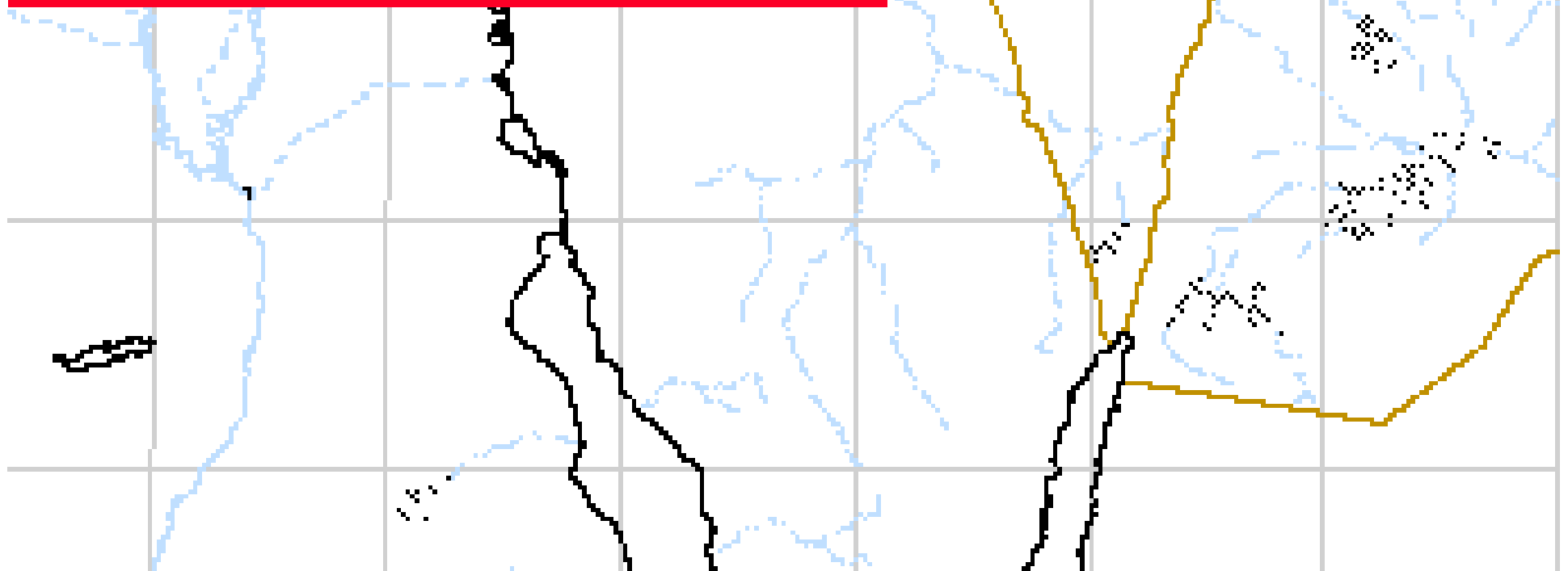
What a “coincidence”! The new population who resettled the city of Hazor after the third burn level (1220 BC) showed no interest in the old religion - exactly as would be expected of Israelites! Previous temples to Canaanite gods were not rebuilt, and the numerous clay and pottery idols characteristic of earlier periods soon disappear.



Finally, Joshua 10:36f. reports that Israel attacked Hebron early in the conquest of Canaan. The archaeological evidence, however, suggests that the city was unoccupied from 1550 BC - 1200 BC, which would mean that the city did not exist at the time of the conquest!



What a “coincidence”! It turns out that Hebron is mentioned in contemporary topographical lists from Pharaoh Ramses II (1250 BC) and from Pharaoh Ramses III (1175 BC).



Once again the Bible wins! because
when it comes to archaeology

“the absence of evidence is
not the evidence of absence.”

The earliest mention of Israel outside the Bible

In 1896 Flinders Petrie discovered a stela in Pharaoh Merneptah's mortuary temple in Thebes (1220 BC). The stela celebrates various victories of the Pharaoh in the region of Palestine.



One line mentions Israel:
“Israel is laid waste, its seed
is not.” This boast, with its
exaggeration that is typical of
ancient pharaohs, is the
earliest mention of Israel
outside the Bible. It provides
incontrovertible evidence of
Israel’s presence in the
Promised Land at the time.



And one could go on....

Other ancient inscriptions confirm the existence of

- David (Tel Dan stela 9th BC; Moabite Stone 9th BC)
- Omri (Moabite Stone 9th BC)
- Ahab (Kurkh Monolith of Shalmaneser III 9th BC)
- Jehoram (Tel Dan stela 9th BC)
- Ahaziah (Tel Dan stela 9th BC)
- Jehu (Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III 9th BC)
- Joash (Tell Al-Rimah stela of Adad-Nirari III 9th BC)
- Uzziah (Annals of Tiglath-Pileser III 8th BC)
- Menahem (Annals of Tiglath-Pileser III 8th BC)
- Pekah (Annals of Tiglath-Pileser III 8th BC)
- Ahaz (Annals of Tiglath-Pileser III 8th BC)
- Hoshea (Annals of Tiglath-Pileser III 8th BC)
- Hezekiah (Annals of Tiglath-Pileser III 8th BC)
- Manasseh (Prism B of Esarhaddon; Rassam Cylinder of Ashurbanipal 7th BC)
- Jehoiachin (ration documents of Nebuchadnezzar 6th BC)

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? The history of Biblical Criticism is a history of how yesterday's confident claims made about "errors" in the Bible are destroyed by today's unexpected archaeological discoveries.

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Hittites?



In the 19th century many scholars claimed that the Hittites did not exist, though they are mentioned at many points in the Bible.



Hittites ☺

What a coincidence! In 1906 Hugo Winckler deciphered the Hittite language. Scholars soon realized that their libraries were filled with over 10,000 inscriptions from Hittites who supposedly didn't exist!

In the 19th century some scholars claimed that Tiglath-pileser III did not exist, although he is mentioned in 2 Kings 15 and 16.





Then archaeologists began digging at the site of Nineveh, the capital of the neo-Assyrian Empire. In the that excavation, they unearthed thousands of bricks, each one bearing the stamp:

**“Tiglath Pileser, king of
the west lands, king of
the earth....”**



More evidence of the historical trustworthiness of the Old Testament will be found in the following works:

J.D. Douglas, et al., eds., *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 3 vols. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1998)

Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *A History of Israel From the Bronze Age Through the Jewish Wars* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998)

Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Old Testament Documents: Are They Reliable and Relevant?* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2001)

Kenneth A. Kitchen, *The Bible in Its World. The Bible and Archaeology Today* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press; and Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1977)

Alan R. Millard, *Treasures from Bible Times* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1985)

Jumping ahead to the New Testament

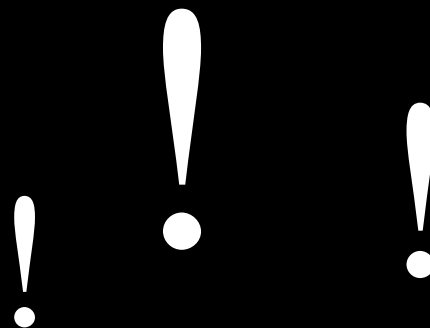
Some people imagine that the Gospel accounts about Jesus were written long after the events they report or that the copies we have of the original books of the New Testament are late and unreliable. If so, the record of Jesus' claim to be the Son of God or His miracles could be the result of much later pious exaggeration or legend.



What a coincidence! Scholars are now convinced that the entire New Testament was written within the lifetime of those who personally knew Jesus.

[This is why, for example, the New Testament nowhere reports the martyrdoms of James (62 AD), Paul (64 AD), or Peter (65 AD), or the burning of Rome (64 AD) or the destruction of Jerusalem (70 AD), in spite of the importance of these events.]

Furthermore, the copies that we now have of each of the books of the New Testament could hardly be more numerous or more reliable.



Scholars assume that we have accurate copies of each of the following ancient books, even though this is based on a few very late surviving manuscripts. This situation is typical for ancient books other than the Bible.

Author and work	Span	Earliest copy	# of copies
Herodotus (480-425 BC) History	← 1300 years →	900 AD	8
Aristotle (384-322 BC) Metaphysics	← 1400 years →	1100 AD	5
Caesar (100-44 BC) Gallic Wars	← 1000 years →	900 AD	10
Tacitus (56-120 AD) Greek History	← 1000 years →	1100 AD	20
Suetonius (70-140 AD) Roman History	← 800 years →	950 AD	8

In the case of the New Testament, we have more than 5300 manuscripts. 30 of these are from the 2nd or 3rd century AD. This is a photograph of the John Rylands Papyrus, which preserves a portion of John 18 and is dated about 125 AD.



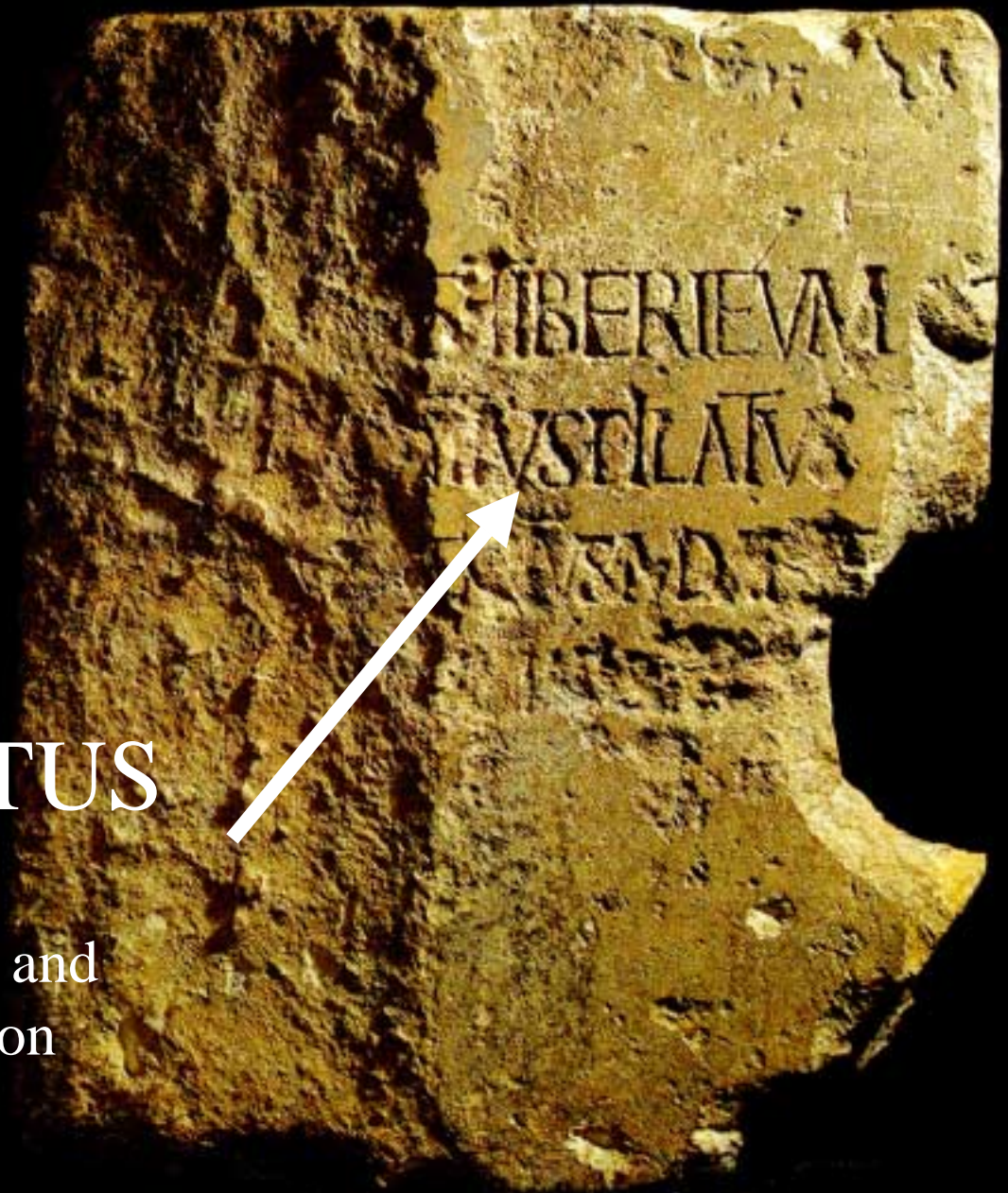
Image taken from Alan Millard, *Discoveries from the Time of Jesus* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1990) 165. See also Gordon D. Fee, "The Textual Criticism of the New Testament," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, F.E. Gaebelin, ed., Volume 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979).

The Pilate Inscription from Caesarea

PONTIUS PILATUS

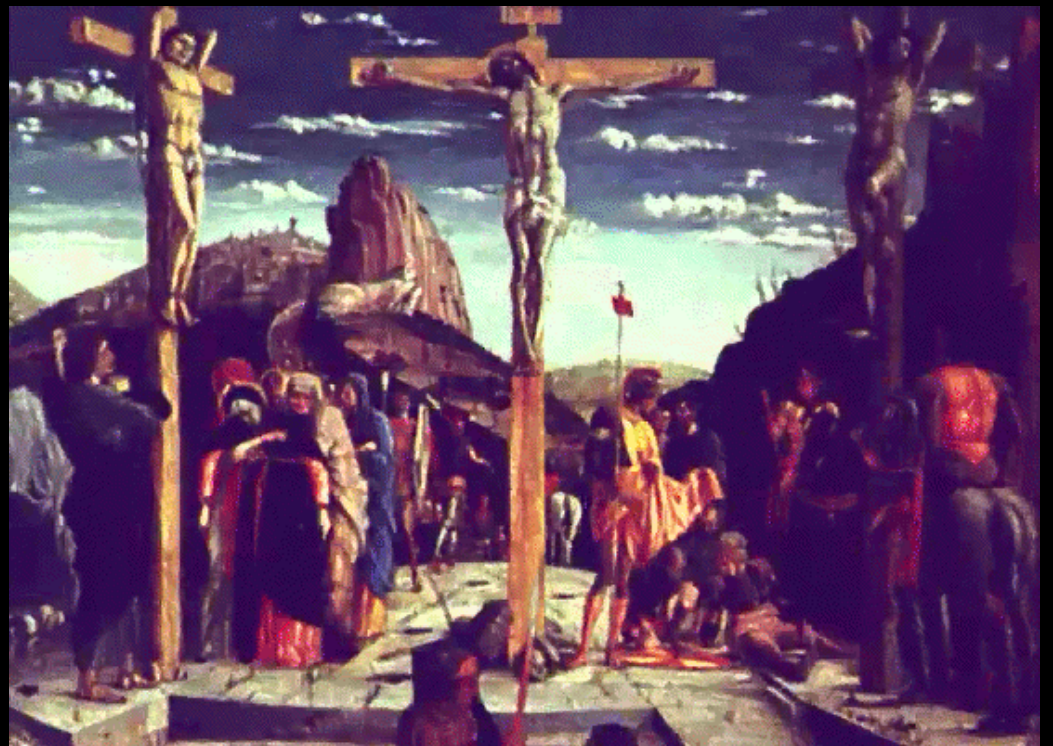
Found in 1961, this the first and
only contemporary inscription
which mentions Pilate.

Image taken from Alan Millard, *Discoveries from the Time of
Jesus* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1990) 67

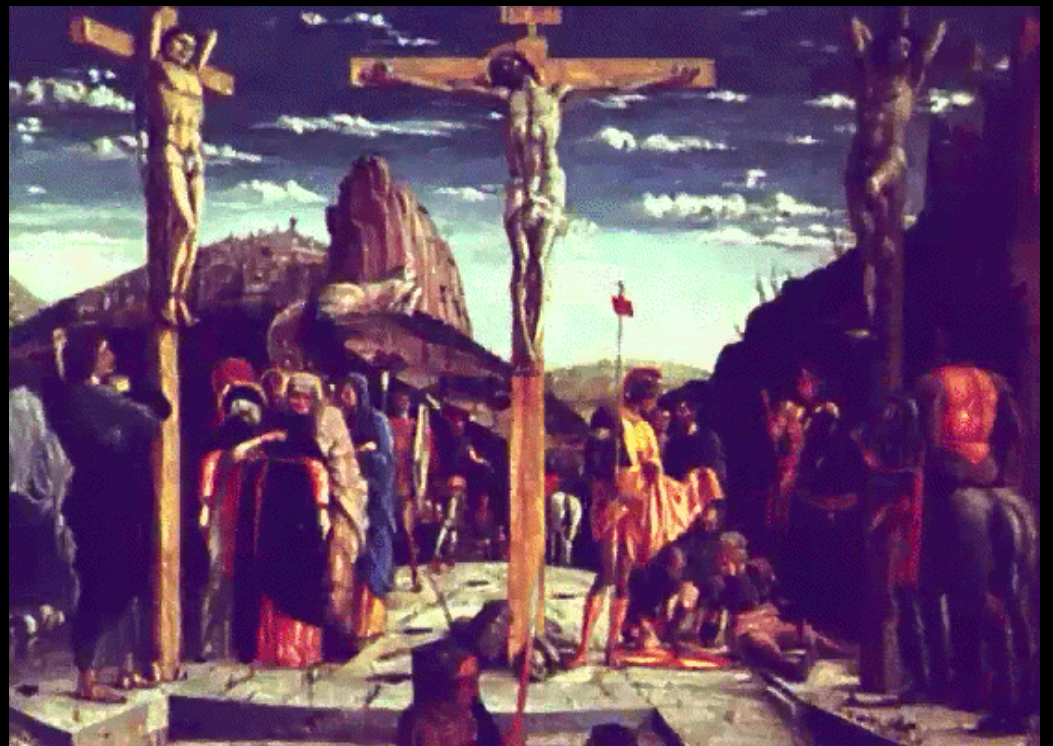
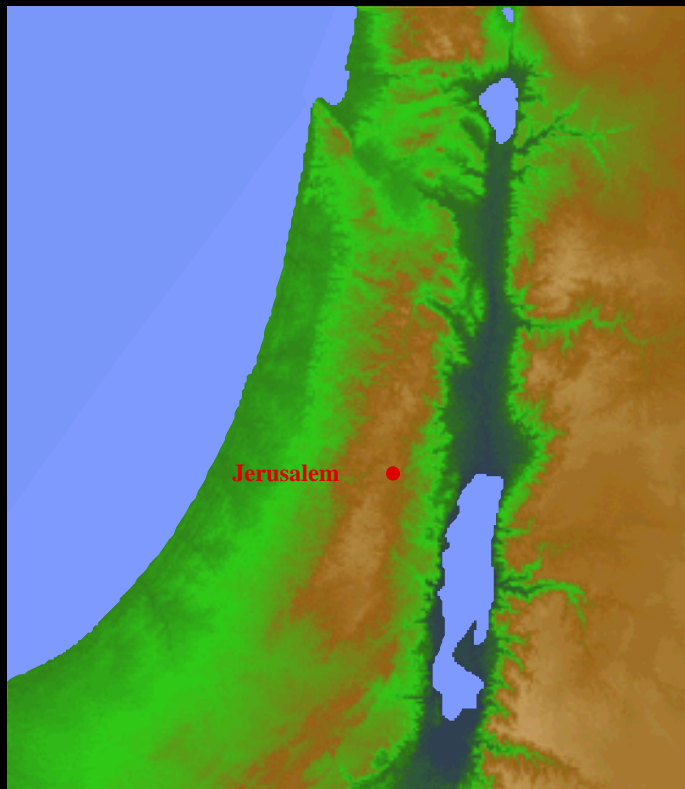


The Crucifixion

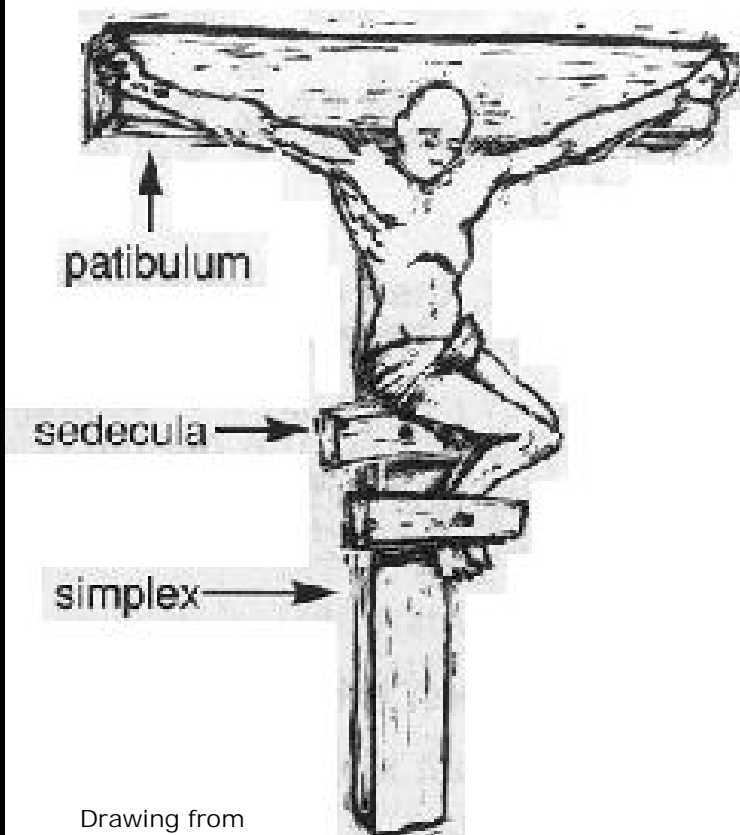
Critical scholars have disputed the likelihood that Jesus was nailed to the cross based on the assumption that Roman practice was to tie victims to a cross, not nail them.



Until 1968, when on Ammunition Hill outside Jerusalem the first and only skeletal remains of a crucified individual were found.



What a “coincidence”! This 5’6” man, whose name was John, was crucified sometime before 70 AD. Still embedded in his decomposing ankle bone was a 7” iron nail. The right radius also has a scratch where another nail was used.



Drawing from
<http://www.wcg.org/lit/booklets/risen/risen3.htm>

The Nazareth Decree

1st century AD

“Caesar’s order... It is my will that graves and tombs lie undisturbed for ever.... If anyone [disturbs one] I require that he be executed for tomb-robbery”

This decree, which is unprecedented for its death penalty, is thought by many to reflect a misguided overreaction by Caesar to news of the empty tomb of Jesus Christ.

Image taken from Alan Millard, *Discoveries from the Time of Jesus* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1990) 134

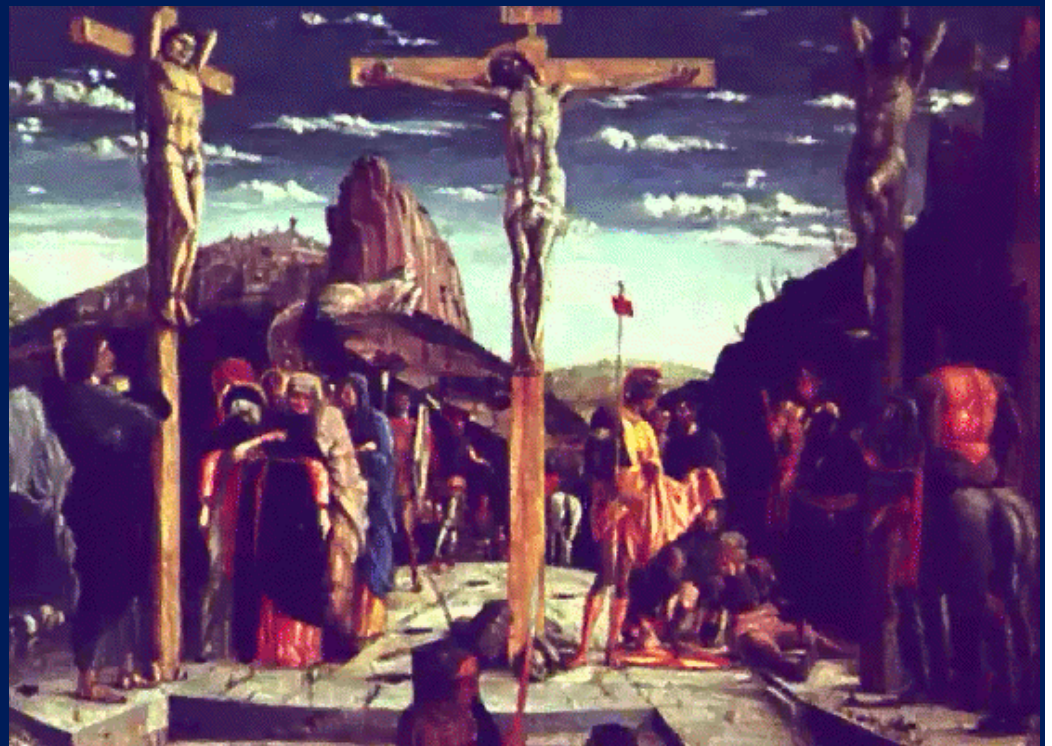


We have every reason to have confidence in the Bible. But such confidence by itself is not enough. Jesus once said to the Bible scholars experts of his day:



“You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.”
(John 5:39-40).

May it not be so for us!



More evidence for the historical trustworthiness of the New Testament will be found in the following works:

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(Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1987)

J.D. Douglas, et al., eds., *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 3 vols.
(Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1998)

Alan Millard, *Discoveries from the Time of Jesus* (Oxford:
Lion Publishing, 1990)

Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI:
Zondervan, 1998)

Edwin Yamauchi, "Archaeology and the New Testament," in
The Expositor's Bible Commentary, F.E. Gaebelin,
ed., Volume 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979)