Egyptian Loanwords as Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus and Wilderness Traditions

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Introduction

Over 80 years ago, R. D. Wilson published an article arguing that foreign loanwords in the Old Testament—in other words, lexical items that have been borrowed into Biblical Hebrew and Biblical Aramaic from nonSemitic languages—provide evidence for the authenticity of biblical texts. [1] He contended that said terminology appeared "at the time when we would have expected them to come, provided that the original historical documents of the Old Testament from Abraham to Ezra were contemporaneous with the events recorded." [2]

In his study, Wilson argued that the number of Egyptian loanwords in the exodus and wilderness traditions supports their authenticity. [3] Since Wilson's time, however, our understanding of Biblical Hebrew and Egyptian has vastly improved, and several works have been published on Egyptian loanwords in the Hebrew Bible. [4] Reanalysis of this topic is therefore overdue. In this essay,

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[1] . Robert Dick Wilson, "Foreign Words in the Old Testament as an Evidence of Historicity," *PTR* 26 (1928): 177–247.

[2] 2. Ibid., 244–45.

[3] 3. Ibid., 218–23.

[4] . E.g., Thomas O. Lambdin, "Egyptian Loan Words in the Old Testament," *JAOS* 73 (1953): 145–55; Yoshiyuki Muchiki, *Egyptian Proper Names and Loanwords in North-West Semitic* (SBLDS 173; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999); cf. Aaron D. Rubin, "Egyptian Loanwords," in *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics* (ed. Geoffrey Khan; 4 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 1.793–94.

I will reexamine the Egyptian loanwords that appear in the exodus and wilderness narratives vis-à-vis the question of these narratives' authenticity.

Terminology and the Significance of Loanwords

Before proceeding further, let us define some important terms and explore some key concepts. A *loanword* may be defined as a word that has been borrowed from another language. Thus, a loanword is a lexical item that has been adopted from one language (the *donor language*) and made part of the vocabulary of another language (the *recipient language*). Words can be borrowed for a number of reasons, most often due to necessity (i.e., lack of a native term for a particular item) or prestige (i.e., because the foreign term is highly esteemed for some reason). [5]

What value is there in identifying loanwords in a given language? Linguists find value in loanwords because they shed light on phonological correspondences between the donor and recipient languages, illuminating understanding of both languages' phonological systems. More importantly for our purposes, by definition loanwords provide evidence of contact between people groups. Loanwords can therefore reveal a great deal about past historical, cultural, and social relationships as well as the kinds of contacts that have taken place among different people. [6]

At this point, it may be helpful to consider a concrete example. Between ca. AD 1050 and 1400 and peaking in relative terms during the 13th century, thousands of French loanwords entered the English language. [7] Clearly, something must have happened during this time period for English speakers to

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[5] . Martin Haspelmath, "Lexical Borrowing: Concepts and Issues," in *Loanwords in the World's Languages: A Comparative Handbook* (ed. Martin Haspelmath and Uri Tadmor; Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2009), 36–37; Hans Henrich Hock and Brian D. Joseph, *Language History, Language Change, and Language Relationship: An Introduction to Historical and Comparative Linguistics* (2nd ed.; Trends in Linguistics: Studies and Monographs 218; Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2009), 241; Lyle Campbell, *Historical Linguistics: An Introduction* (3rd ed.; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 56–57.

[6] . Ibid., 432–33.

[7] . Julie Coleman, "The Chronology of French and Latin Loan Words in English," *Transactions of the Philological Society* 93 (1995): 95–124.

have adopted such a large quantity of French vocabulary. Based on this evidence alone, we could conclude that significant contact took place between English speakers and French speakers. In this particular case, it is known from history that something did indeed happen, something that well explains the significant increase of French loanwords: Duke William II of Normandy conquered England in 1066. [8] A peak in French linguistic influence during the 13th century AD, moreover, fits precisely with the historical circumstances of the Norman Conquest and its aftermath. When the Normans first conquered England, they consciously avoided French in

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[8] . Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable, *A History of the English Language* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2002), 108–26, 167–78; Dieter Kastovsky, "Vocabulary," in *A History of the English Language* (ed. Richard M. Hogg and David Denison; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 249–50.

order to maintain an air of legitimacy, and French was not formally taught or used. It was not until two centuries later, which corresponds precisely to the highest relative rate of French borrowings into English, that French was declared the official language of the government, and law and instruction in French began. [9]

The significance of loanwords for the exodus and wilderness traditions' authenticity thus becomes clear. If the ancient Israelites really did spend time in Egypt akin to the events described in the exodus and wilderness traditions, one might expect the Egyptian language to have had an impact on the text of these narratives. In particular, we should find significant proportions of Egyptian loanwords in the exodus and wilderness narratives. These proportions should be significantly higher than elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible and elsewhere in Northwest Semitic, unless of course we have similar situations of intense Egyptian contact reflected in these other texts. Furthermore, if the exodus and wilderness traditions represent authentic history, there may be some indications that the Egyptian loanwords in these traditions were borrowed during the Late Bronze Age because this is when the events of these traditions purportedly took place.

After establishing what the Egyptian loanwords in the exodus and wilderness narratives are, I turn to examination of the above-mentioned issues. First, are the proportions of Egyptian loanwords in the exodus and wilderness traditions greater than those of the remainder of the Hebrew Bible? Second, are the proportions of Egyptian loanwords in the exodus and wilderness traditions greater than those of Northwest Semitic texts in general? Third, is there any evidence that the Egyptian loanwords in the exodus and wilderness narratives were borrowed during the Late Bronze Age?

Egyptian Loanwords in the Exodus and Wilderness Narratives

The exodus and wilderness narratives (i.e., Exodus–Numbers) contain 27 different Egyptian loanwords, primarily comprising terminology for realia and material culture (see table 1). [10] Altogether there are 381 total

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[9] . Douglas A. Kibbee, *For to Speke Frenche Trewely: The French Language in England, 1000–1600: Its Status, Description, and Instruction* (Amsterdam Studies in the Theory and History of Linguistic Science, Series 3: Studies in the History of the Language Sciences 60; Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1991), 186–88.

[10] . For these identifications, see my *Foreign Words in the Hebrew Bible: Linguistic Evidence for Foreign Contact in Ancient Israel* (LSAWS; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, forthcoming); cf. James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 138–40; idem, *Ancient Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 209–20. Unfortunately, space does not permit the justification of each and every loanword in this list or the refutation of other terms alleged to be Egyptian that are not in fact Egyptian. Although some may disagree with these identifications, minor

**Table 1. Egyptian Loanwords in the
Exodus and Wilderness Narratives**

Loanword	*Egyptian Donor Term*	*Occurrences*
אַבְנֵט sash, wrap	*bndw*	8×
אֶמְהָאָחֶל red jasper	*ḥnm.t*	2×
אֵיפָה *ephah* -measure	*ip.t*	6×
בַּד pole	*bdȝ*	32×
בַּד linen	*bdȝ*	10×
גָּבִיעַ cup, candleholder	*qbḥw*	8×
גֹּמֶא reed plant	*qmȝ* (cf. *gmy*)	1×
הִין *hin*-measure	*hnw*	17×
זֶפֶת pitch	*sft* (cf. *sft̰*)	1×
זֶרֶת hand-span	*d̰r.t*	4×
חַרְטֹם magician	*ḥr-tp* (cf. *ḥry-tp*)	7×
חוֹתָם seal, signet ring	*ḫtm*	6×
טַבַּעַת seal, ring	*d̰bʿ.t*	42×
יְאֹר Nile river, river	*irw* (cf. *itrw*)	25×
לֶשֶׁם feldspar, amazonite	*nšm.t*	2×
נֹפֶךְ turquoise	*mfk.t* (cf. *mfkȝ .t*, *mfȝ k.t*)	2×
סוּף reed plant	*t̰wf* (cf. *t̰wfy*)	11×
פְּאֵר headwrap	*pyr* (cf. *pry*)	1×
פַּח metal plating	*pḫȝ*	2×
פִּטְדָה peridot	**pȝ -d̰d*	2×
פַּרְעֹה Pharaoh	*pr-ʿȝ*	115×
צִי river-boat	*d̰ȝ y*	1×
שִׁטָּה acacia wood	*šnd.t* (cf. *šnd̰.t*, *šnt.t*)	26×
שֵׁשׁ Egyptian linen	*šs*	33×
תֵּבָה box	*db.t, tb.t* (cf. *d̰bȝ .t, tbi*)	2×
תַּחְרָא leather vest	*dḥr*	2×
תַּחַשׁ Egyptian leather	*tḥs* (cf. *t̰ḥs*)	13×

occurrences of Egyptian loanwords in the exodus and wilderness traditions, making up 1.172% of the distinct lexemes and 0.591% of the total words in this corpus. Significantly, the book of Exodus alone contains 26 Egyptian loanwords that occur a total of 333 times, or 1.864% of the book's distinct lexemes and 1.391% of the book's total word count.

Egyptian Loanwords in the Remainder of the Hebrew Bible

Outside the exodus and wilderness narratives (i.e., outside Exodus–Numbers), the Hebrew Bible contains 51 different Egyptian loanwords (see table 2). [11] Altogether, there are 450 total occurrences of Egyptian loanwords in the Hebrew Bible outside the exodus and wilderness traditions, making up 0.635% of the distinct lexemes and 0.122% of the total words in this corpus. Several of the occurrences of the Egyptian loanwords outside Exodus–Numbers clearly allude to the exodus and wilderness traditions, however. [12] When these occurrences are excluded, there are 51 Egyptian loanwords outside the exodus and wilderness traditions [13] that occur a total of 421 times, or 0.635% of the distinct lexemes and 0.115% of the total words in this corpus.

When one compares the above data, it becomes evident that the exodus and wilderness traditions contain a significantly higher proportion of Egyptian loanwords than the rest of the Hebrew Bible, both in terms of the ratio of Egyptian loanwords to total lexemes (i.e., the relative number of Egyptian loans) and in terms of the ratio of occurrences of Egyptian loanwords to total word counts (i.e., the relative frequency of Egyptian loans). [14] When one compares the Egyptian loanwords in the book of Exodus with

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additions to or minor omissions from the list will not significantly change the statistics presented here.

11. For these identifications, see my *Foreign Words in the Hebrew Bible*; cf. Muchiki, *Egyptian Proper Names and Loanwords*, 236–58; Lambdin, "Egyptian Loan Words in the Old Testament," 145–55. As above, space does not permit the justification of each and every loanword in this list or the refutation of other terms alleged to be Egyptian that are not in fact Egyptian. Although some may disagree with these identifications, minor additions to or minor omissions from the list will not significantly change the statistics presented here.

12. These occurrences are: יְאֹר (Ps 78:44), נֹפֶךְ (Ezek 28:13), סוּף (Deut 1:40; 2:1; 11:4; Josh 2:10; 4:23; 24:6; Judg 11:16; Ps 106:7, 9, 22; 136:13, 15; Neh 9:9), פִּטְדָה (Ezek 28:13), פַּרְעֹה (Deut 6:21–22; 7:8; 11:3; 29:1[2]; 34:11; 1 Sam 2:27; 6:6; 2 Kgs 17:7; Ps 135:9; 136:15; Neh 9:10), and שָׂטֶי (Deut 10:3).

13. Not surprisingly, the Joseph Cycle contains a number of Egyptian loans (אַבְרֵךְ, אָחוּ, גֹּבִיעַ, חֹתָם, חַרְטֹם, טַבַּעַת, יְאֹר, פַּרְעֹה, שֵׁשׁ). Of its 10 loans, only 2 are unique to the Cycle itself (אַבְרֵךְ and חֹרִי).

14. A chi-square test demonstrates that the difference is statistically significant: for the relative number of Egyptian loans, χ^2 (df = 1, n = 78) = 6.990, p < .05; for the relative frequency of Egyptian loans, χ^2 (df = 1, n = 831) = 626.613, p < .05.

**Table 2. Egyptian Loanwords in the
Remainder of the Hebrew Bible**

Loanword		Egyptian Donor Term	Occurrences
אַבְנֵט	sash, wrap	*bndw*	1×
אַבְרֵךְ	pay attention!	*ib-r.k*	1×
◌ְאָח	brazier	*ʿḫ*	3×
◌ָאָחוּ	reed plants	*ȝ ḫw*	3×
אֵטוּן	fine linen	*idmi*	1×
אֵיפָה	*ephah*-measure	*ip.t*	34×
◌ַבַּד	pole	*bdȝ*	7×
◌ַבַּד	linen	*bdȝ*	13×
בַּהַט	Nubian stone	*bht* (cf. *ibhty*)	1×
בַּחַן	tower, watchtower	*bḫn*	2×
בֹּחַ	greywacke	*bḫn*	1×
גְּבִיעַ	cup, candleholder	*qbḥw*	6×
גֶּמֶא	reed plant	*qmȝ* (cf. *gmy*)	3×
◌ְדְּיוֹ	ink	*ry.t*	1×
הָבְנִים	African blackwood	*hbn* (cf. *hbny*)	1×
הִין	*hin*-measure	*hnw*	6×
זֶפֶת	pitch	*sft* (cf. *sft̠*)	2×
זֶרֶת	hand-span	*dr.t*	3×
חַרְטֹם	magician (Hebrew)	*ḥr-tp* (cf. *ḥry-tp*)	4×
חַרְטֹם	magician (Aramaic)	*ḥr-tp* (cf. *ḥry-tp*)	5×
חֲרִי	cake	*ḥr.t*	1×
חוֹתָם	seal, signet ring	*ḫtm*	8×
טַבַּעַת	seal, ring	*ḏbʿ.t*	8×
טֶנֶא	produce basket	*dni.t*	4×
יְאֹר	Nile River, river	*irw* (cf. *itrw*)	39×
כְּלִי	ship[a]	*qr, qwr, kr, kwr* (cf. *krr*)	1×
מֶשִׁי	fine garment	*msy*	2×
נֹחַ	power, strength	*nḫt*	1×

Loanword		Egyptian Donor Term	Occurrences
נֹפֶךְ	turquoise	*mfk.t* (cf. *mfk3 .t, mf3 k.t)*	2×
נֶתֶר	natron	*ntrỉ* (cf. *nṯrỉ)*	2×

Table 2. Egyptian Loanwords in the
Remainder of the Hebrew Bible (*cont.*)

Loanword		Egyptian Donor Term	Occurrences
סוּף	reed plant	*ṯwf* (cf. *ṯwfy)*	17×
עָרָה	reed plant	*ʿr*	1×
פְּאֵר	headwrap	*pry, pyr*	6×
פַּח	trap	*pḫ3*	24×
פִּטְדָה	peridot	**p3 -ḏd*	2×
פַּרְעֹה	Pharaoh	*pr-ʿ3*	159×
צִי	river-boat	*ḏ3 y*	3×
קַב	*qab*-measure	*qb* (cf. *qby)*	1×
קִיקָיוֹן	castor-oil plant	*k3 k3 , kyky*	5×
קַלַּחַת	cooking pot	*qrḥ.t*	2×
קֶסֶת	scribal palette	*gstỉ*	3×
קֹף	African monkey	*gwf, gỉf, gf, g3 f*	2×
שְׂכִית	ship[b]	*skty*	1×
שׁוֹשַׁן	Egyptian lotus	*ššn, sšn* (cf. *sššn)*	17×
שָׁטָּה	acacia wood	*šnd.t* (cf. *šnḏ.t, šnt.t)*	2×
שֶׁנְהַ בִּים	ivory	*3 bw*	2×
שֵׁשׁ	◦Egyptian alabaster	*šs*	4×
שֵׁשׁ	Egyptian linen	*šs*	4×
תֵּבָה	box	*db.t, tb.t* (cf. *ḏb3 .t, tbỉ*)	26×
תַּחַשׁ	Egyptian leather	*tḥs* (cf. *ṯḥs)*	1×
תֻּכִּי	African ape	*t3 -ky.t*	2×

a.　The spelling of the absolute form of כְּלִי , which occurs only in Isa 18:2, is unclear because the Masoretes seem to have incorrectly pointed it as the construct plural of כְּלִי, "vessel."

b.　The spelling of the absolute form of שְׂכִיּוֹת, which occurs only in Isa 2:16, may be שְׂכִית in light of its Egyptian donor term. However, the Masoretes may have pointed שְׂכִיּוֹת incorrectly, so it is impossible to be certain.

those of the rest of the Hebrew Bible (excluding Leviticus–Numbers), the difference in proportions becomes even more significant. [11] From the standpoint of contact linguistics, this observation indicates that the exodus and wilderness narratives—especially the narratives of the book of Exodus— exhibit greater Egyptian influence than the remainder of the Hebrew Bible.

It is instructive to compare the proportions of Egyptian loanwords in the exodus and wilderness narratives with the proportions of Old Iranian loanwords in the Hebrew Bible, particularly the books of Esther and Ezra–Nehemiah, because few would deny that the Old Iranian loanwords in these books reflect Old Iranian influence and the historical circumstances in which these texts were written. These books contain 26 different Old Iranian loanwords, occurring a total of 82 times and making up 1.455% of the distinct lexemes and 0.448% of the total words in this corpus. [12] The relative number of Old Iranian loans in Esther and Ezra–Nehemiah is comparable to the relative number of Egyptian loans in the exodus and wilderness traditions, but the relative frequency of Egyptian loanwords in the exodus and wilderness traditions is significantly higher than the relative frequency of Old Iranian loans in Esther and Ezra– Nehemiah. [13] The same is true when we limit the exodus and wilderness traditions to the book of Exodus. [14] If we acknowledge Old Iranian linguistic influence on the books of Esther and Ezra–Nehemiah and the implications it has for these books' dates of composition, we should similarly acknowledge Egyptian linguistic influence on the exodus and wilderness traditions and the implications it has for their date of composition.

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[11] . A chi-square test demonstrates that the difference is statistically significant: for the relative number of Egyptian loans, χ^2 ($df = 1$, $n = 77$) = 22.246, $p < .05$; for the relative frequency of Egyptian loans, χ^2 ($df = 1$, $n = 783$) = 1,811.697, $p < .05$.

[12] . The Old Iranian loanwords found in Esther are אֲחַשְׁדַּרְפָּן (3×), גֶּנֶז (2×), אֲחַשְׁתָּרָן ((2×), כַּרְמָה (3×), פִּתְשֶׁגֶן (1×), פַּרְתְּם (2×), דָּת♀02 ((1×); the Old Iranian loanwords found in Ezra–Nehemiah are אִדַּרְדָּא (1×), אַפֶּתֹם1, אֲפַרְסַתְכָי (2×), אֲפַרְסְכָי (7×), אָסְפַּרְנָא (1×), אֲחַשְׁדַּרְפָּן (אַדַרְזְדָּא(1×), אֵרִיךְ (1×) אַשַּׁרְנָא (2×) גִּזְבַּר (1×), גְּנַז (3×), דָּת, (1×), Aramaic), תִּרְשָׁתָא (1×), שְׁרֹשׁ♀(4×), פִּתְגָם (3×), פַּרְשֶׁגֶן (1×), פַּרְדֵּס (1×), נִשְׁתְּוָן (1×), זְמָן (1×) ((5×). As is evident from this list, some of the Old Iranian loanwords occur in both Esther and Ezra– Nehemiah, and some occur in both Hebrew and Aramaic. For these identifications, see my *Foreign Words in the Hebrew Bible*; although some may disagree with these identifications, minor additions to or minor omissions from the list will not significantly change the statistics presented here.

[13] . A chi-square test demonstrates that the difference between the relative number of loans is statistically insignificant: χ^2 ($df = 1$, $n = 53$) = 0.620, $p > .05$. The difference between the relative frequency of loans, on the other hand, is statistically significant: χ^2 ($df = 1$, $n = 463$) = 5.207, $p < .05$.

[14] . A chi-square test demonstrates that the difference between the relative number of loans is statistically insignificant: χ^2 ($df = 1$, $n = 52$) = 0.801, $p > .05$. The difference between the relative frequency of loans, on the other hand, is statistically significant: χ^2 ($df = 1$, $n = 415$) = 94.044, $p < .05$.

Summary

The exodus and wilderness narratives contain a significantly higher proportion of Egyptian loanwords than does the rest of the Hebrew Bible. The proportions of Egyptian loanwords in these narratives, moreover, are comparable to the high proportions of Old Iranian loanwords in the books of Esther and Ezra–Nehemiah, thought to exhibit Old Iranian influence. Consistency requires that we acknowledge Egyptian influence on the exodus and wilderness traditions just as we acknowledge Old Iranian influence on the books of Esther and Ezra–Nehemiah.

Egyptian Loanwords Elsewhere in Northwest Semitic

To examine further whether the Egyptian loanwords in the exodus and wilderness traditions represent significant Egyptian influence, we must also investigate the proportions of Egyptian loanwords elsewhere in Northwest Semitic. Northwest Semitic texts should not contain high proportions of Egyptian loanwords like the exodus and wilderness traditions unless they reflect similar situations of intense Egyptian contact. The relevant Northwest Semitic languages of the second and first millennia BC are Ugaritic, Phoenician, Aramaic, Moabite, Ammonite, and Edomite. The Egyptian loans in these languages are as in table 3. The Egyptian loans in Ugaritic are ʾ*irp* (KTU 4.123:20), *hbn* (KTU 4.402:6), *qlḫt* (KTU 5.22:16), and *t̠kt* (KTU 4.81:4–5, 8–9; 4.366:1–14 [15]). [16] Compared with the vast and continually expanding corpus of Ugaritic, these occurrences of Egyptian loanwords are negligible.

The only clear Egyptian loanword in Phoenician is חתם, which appears twice in a 4th- or 3rd-century BC Phoenician papyrus from Egypt (*KAI* 5.9–10) and once in an unprovenanced Phoenician inscription (probably from southern Anatolia). [17] Although the Phoenician corpus is not as vast as that of Ugaritic, these occurrences of Egyptian loanwords are also negligible.

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[15] . The sole appearance of *t̠kt* in the Baʿal Cycle (KTU 1.4 V 7) is an error for *t̠rt* (Mark S. Smith and Wayne T. Pitard, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle*, vol. 2: *Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU/CAT 1.3–1.4* [3 vols.; VTSup 114; Leiden: Brill, 2009], 532, 558–60).

[16] . Cf. Muchiki, *Egyptian Proper Names and Loanwords*, 280–83. An additional possible Egyptian loan is Ugaritic *kw* (KTU 2.47:17; 4.691:6), perhaps from Egyptian *kb*. Muchiki lists several improbable Egyptian loans: Ugaritic ʾ*aḫ* (probably "shore" and not "grass, vegetation"); ʾ*ap*, "chamber, court"; ʾ*ary*, "fellow, kin"; *ḥtp*, "offering, sacrifice"; and *mk* (a deictic particle). Practically none of the alleged Egyptian loans mentioned in Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Lexical Studies in Ugaritic* (Aula orientalis: Supplementa 19; Sabadell: Editorial AUSA, 2007), 135–45 is a genuine loanword. Watson seems to pay little attention to issues of phonology, morphology, and semantics in his identifications.

[17] . Cf. Muchiki, *Egyptian Proper Names and Loanwords*, 45.

Table 3. Egyptian Loanwords Elsewhere in Northwest Semitic

Loanword	Egyptian Donor Term	Occurrences
Ugaritic		
ʾirp wine vessel	i̓rp	1×
hbn African blackwood	hbn (cf. hbny)	1×
qlḫt cooking pot	qrḥ.t	1×
ṯkt ship	skty	18×
Phoenician		
חתם seal, signet ring	ḥtm	3×
Old Aramaic		
אחו reed plants	ꜣ ḫw	2×
חתם seal, signet ring	ḥtm	18×
Imperial Aramaic		
איטשרי agricultural produce	*i̓dr-šri̓	2×
אפסי beam, plank	i̓ps	1×
גמא reed plant	qmꜣ (cf. gmy)	3×
דרי room	ḏry.t	1×
זרת hand-span	ḏr.t	1×
חלʾ ship deck	ḥry.t	4×
חסי pious one	ḥsy	1×
חתם seal, signet ring	ḥtm	24×
חתפי offering table	ḥtp.t	1×
טף part of a ship's mast	dpw	2×
מלות beam, plank	*mrt	5×
מנחה excellent one	mnḫ.t	8×
מסטי a garment	msd.t	1×
סי beam, plank	sꜣ w	5×
סעבל beam, plank	s ꜥꜣ -bl	2×

פחטמוני mooring post	*p3 -ḫt-mnì.t*	1×
פסחמצנותי scribe of the divine book	*p3 -sḫ-mḏ3 .t-nṯr*	1×
פעקס leather belt	*p3 - ˤgs*	1×
פערער prow of a ship	*p3 - ˤrˤr*	1×
פק beam, plank	*pg3*	5×

Table 3. Egyptian Loanwords Elsewhere in
Northwest Semitic (*cont.*)

Loanword	*Egyptian Donor Term*	*Occurrences*
פק, פיק tray	*p3 -wg*	3×
פרעה pharaoh	*pr- ˤ3*	17×
צפעה a bowl	*ḏp- ˤ3*	2×
קב *qab*-measure	*qb* (cf. *qby*)	294×
קלבי Egyptian wine	*qlby*	13×
קלול a vessel for liquids	*krr*	10×
קנחנתי divine shrine	*qnḥ.t-nṯr*	2×
קנרתעא a large ship[a]	**qnd.t- ˤ3*	5×
קנרתשירי a small ship[b]	**qnd.t-šrì*	6×
רסי southern	*rsy, rsw*	1×
שים pole	*šmy.t*	2×
נחות שנבי poor harvest due to negligence	*šw-nby-n- ˤḥw.tì*	1×
שנטא (a garment)	*šnḏw.t, šnḏy.t*	1×
שש Egyptian alabaster	*šs*	3×
תחית courtyard	*t3 -ḫ3 .ty*	6×
תמואנתי way of a god	*t3 -mì.t-nṯr*	1×
תמי, תמא precinct, quarter	*dmì*	2×
תמיס boat paneling	*tms*	2×
תמנח excellent one	*t3 -mnḥ.t*	1×
תסהר a boat	*t3 -shr.t*	1×
תקבה a vessel	*t3 -qb.t*	2×
תקם castor oil	*tgm*	11×

תרי room	*t3̣-riꜣ.t*	8×
תשי customs duty	*t-š3̣ y.t*	19×
Moabite, Ammonite, and Edomite		
N/A	N/A	—
a. Because ד and ר were commonly confused, קנרתעא (*TAD* C3.7 Ev1:2, 16; Ev2:19; Gr1:12; Gr3:16) could instead be read as קנדתעא; if so, the Egyptian donor term would be **qnd.t-ꜥ3̣*.		
b. Because ד and ר were commonly confused, קנרתשירי (*TAD* C3.7 Ev1:14; Ev2:5; Fr1:7; Fr2:4; Gr2:22; Jv2:7) could instead be read as קנדתשירי; if so, the Egyptian donor term would be **qnd.t-šri*.		

The Aramaic language of the first millennium BC can be divided into two periods: Old Aramaic, attested ca. 850–600 BC, and Imperial Aramaic ("Official Aramaic"), attested ca. 600–200 BC. [18] Old Aramaic contains only 2 Egyptian loanwords, namely, אחו (*KAI* 222A:29, 32) and חתם (*AECT* 49.1:1; *AECT*-L.12:1; L.13:1; L.15:1; L.16:1; L.18:1; L.*2:1; Seals 69:1; 74:1; 75:1; 76:1; 80:1; 83:1; 375:1; 425:1; TelSheHa 3:1; 4:1; 5:1), and thus Egyptian influence on Old Aramaic is negligible. Imperial Aramaic texts, on the other hand, exhibit much greater Egyptian influence and contain 44 different Egyptian loanwords. [19]

Altogether there are 483 total occurrences of Egyptian loanwords in Imperial Aramaic, making up 2.230% of the distinct lexemes and 0.203% of the total words in this corpus. [20] Many of Imperial Aramaic's Egyptian loanwords are found in Egyptian Aramaic, the most commonly attested dialect of Imperial Aramaic, which includes the Elephantine Papyri and texts from various other locales in Egypt (e.g., Saqqara, Memphis, and Carpentras). Of

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[18] . Stephen A. Kaufman, "Aramaic," in *The Semitic Languages* (ed. Robert Hetzron; New York: Routledge, 1997), 114–17.

[19] . Cf. Muchiki, *Egyptian Proper Names and Loanwords*, 165–76; Takamitsu Muraoka and Bezalel Porten, *A Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic* (HdO 32; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 373–75. Muchiki as well as Muraoka and Porten list several dubious loans: אר (a type of wood), הן (allegedly a liquid volume measure but probably to be read as ין in *TAD* C3.1:2–5 [contra *RES* 1791:2–5]), היר (of unknown meaning), חותם (allegedly "seal" but probably part of a personal name in *TAD* A5.4:1), נמעתי (allegedly an Egyptian divine epithet but probably an error for נעמית, "pleasant," in *TAD* D20.5:4), פלשני (a proper name rather than a title in NSaqPap 70:3), קף (allegedly "ape" but of uncertain meaning in *TAD* C1.1:165), שושן (allegedly "Egyptian lotus" but probably denoting a functionary or personal name in *TAD* A3.11:3–4; C3.26:15), שף (allegedly "palm" but more likely an abbreviation for שערם פרסם "peras of barley," in *TAD* C3.16:3–5), and שש (allegedly "Egyptian linen" but based on an incorrect reading of *TAD* A3.11:3).

[20] . I am grateful to Professor Stephen Kaufman for providing the Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon's total lexeme and word counts. The total lexeme (1,973) and total word (237,970) counts of the Imperial Aramaic corpus used here do not include the Uruk Incantation, an Aramaic text written in syllabic cuneiform, or the Persepolis Fortification Tablets and the Amherst Papyrus, both of which are not yet adequately published and translated.

Imperial Aramaic's Egyptian loanwords, all 44 are attested at least once in Egyptian Aramaic texts, occurring a total of 186 times. [21] Naturally, the Egyptian loanwords attested in Egyptian Aramaic texts reflect local Egyptian influence because the texts themselves come from Egypt. [22] The remaining 297 occurrences of Egyptian loanwords in Imperial Aramaic are the words חתם (22×), an early loan from Egyptian into West Semitic that

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[21] . Almost half (≈ 40%) of the Egyptian loanwords in Egyptian Aramaic are nautical terms, and a significant number occur in a single text, *TAD* A6.2, which is a letter by Arsames (a late-fifth-century BC satrap of Egypt) ordering the rebuilding of an Egyptian boat (Muraoka and Porten, *Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic*, 379–80).

[22] . Cf. ibid., 378.

occurs in Imperial Aramaic texts from Mesopotamia, the Levant, Iran, and Anatolia in addition to Egypt; and קַב (275×), a volume measure that appears frequently in Second Temple Period ostraca (especially the 4th-century BC Idumean ostraca).

The remaining Northwest Semitic languages of the first millennium BC—Moabite, Ammonite, and Edomite—contain no certain examples of Egyptian loanwords. [23] The extant texts we have for these languages, however, are admittedly limited.

Thus, Egyptian loanwords do not constitute a significant proportion of Northwest Semitic texts with the exception of Imperial Aramaic. However, the Egyptian loanwords in Imperial Aramaic are found almost exclusively in Egyptian Aramaic, a dialect of Imperial Aramaic attested in texts from Egypt. The relatively large number of Egyptian loanwords in texts local to Egypt is not surprising; because Egyptian Aramaic makes up the majority of Imperial Aramaic, it is also not surprising that the ratio of Egyptian loanwords to total lexemes (i.e., the relative number of Egyptian loans) is higher in Imperial Aramaic than it is in the exodus and wilderness traditions. [24] Conversely, however, it is noteworthy that the ratio of occurrences of Egyptian loanwords to total word counts (i.e., the relative frequency of Egyptian loans) is significantly higher in the exodus and wilderness narratives than it is in Imperial Aramaic. [25]

The most significant observation that emerges from this portion of the discussion is that Northwest Semitic texts do not exhibit significant Egyptian lexical influence except in the case of Imperial Aramaic, which is undoubtedly due to the intense local Egyptian influence on this particular dialect of Aramaic. The large proportions of Egyptian loanwords in the exodus and wilderness narratives are atypical of Northwest Semitic, and we should explain them via a situation of intense Egyptian contact, just as we explain the high proportions of Egyptian loanwords in Imperial Aramaic, especially given the observation that the Hebrew Bible nowhere else contains such high proportions of Egyptian loanwords.

Summary

Other Northwest Semitic texts generally lack Egyptian terminology, demonstrating that the high proportions of Egyptian loanwords in the exodus and wilderness narratives are atypical of Northwest Semitic and almost certainly due to a particular historical circumstance that gave rise to the borrowing of so many Egyptian words. The sole exception is Imperial Aramaic, which not surprisingly contains a high proportion of Egyptian loanwords due

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[23] . The term חתם does appear in several Ammonite seals, but these may be forgeries (*CAI* 55.1; 57.1*;* 61.1).

[24] . A chi-square test demonstrates that the difference is statistically significant: χ^2 (*df* = 1, *n* = 71) =7.160, *p* < .05.

[25] . A chi-square test demonstrates that the difference is statistically significant: χ^2 (*df* = 1, *n* = 864) = 266.911, *p* < .05.

to the fact that many of its texts were from Egypt. Consistency requires that we acknowledge Egyptian influence on the exodus and wilderness traditions just as we acknowledge Egyptian influence on Egyptian Aramaic texts.

Date of Borrowing

To support further the authenticity of the exodus and wilderness narratives, we can investigate when their Egyptian loanwords were borrowed by Hebrew speakers. If the exodus and wilderness narratives represent authentic historical traditions, and if the Egyptian loanwords in these narratives were borrowed during the time of the exodus and wilderness wanderings, then these loanwords should have entered Hebrew during the Late Bronze Age.

Many of the Egyptian loanwords in the exodus and wilderness narratives cannot be dated conclusively, but some clues do exist. A good number exhibit phonological and morphological indicators characteristic of Late Egyptian, indicating that they could have been borrowed any time beginning in the New Kingdom. [26] More helpful than a *terminus post quem*, however, are the indicators that establish a *terminus ante quem* for the time of borrowing. At least two indicators establish an earlier rather than later date of borrowing for some words, supporting the authenticity of the exodus and wilderness traditions: representation of the Egyptian feminine ending and reborrowings. [27]

Representation of the Egyptian Feminine Ending

The exodus and wilderness traditions contain several loans from Egyptian feminine nouns, namely: שָׁטָה, נֵפֶךְ, לֶשֶׁם, טֶנֶא, טַבַּעַת, זֶרֶת, אֵיפָה, אַחְלָמָה, and תֵּבָה. Representation of the feminine ending in Egyptian changed over time, and the way that it is represented in Egyptian loanwords can have important implications for determining the time of borrowing. [28]

The loss of Egyptian feminine -*t* begins already during the Old Kingdom, primarily with the adjective *nb* ("all, every") in place of *nb.t* after feminine nouns. This phenomenon had extended to feminine nouns by the end of the

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[26] . The changes include lenition of *i*, *ꜣ* , *w*, and *y* (evident in אַבְנֵט, בַּד "pole," בַּד "metal plating," נֵפֶךְ, סוּף, פַּח, יְאֹר, חַרְטֹם, הִין, גְּבִיעַ, "nenil") and depalatalization of *t* to *t* and *d* to *d* (evident in בַּד "pole," בַּד "linen," זֶפֶת, טַבַּעַת, תֵּבָה, תַּחַשׁ). On these phonological changes in Egyptian, see James P. Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Language: An Historical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 37–43, 48–50; Antonio Loprieno, *Ancient Egyptian: A Linguistic Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 32–35, 38; Friedrich Junge, *Late Egyptian Grammar: An Introduction* (trans. David A. Warburton; 2nd ed.; Oxford: Griffith Institute, 2005), 35–37.

[27] . Unfortunately, other indicators—namely, important developments in Egyptian's vocalic system between the second and first millennia BC—are largely inconclusive for the Egyptian loanwords in the exodus and wilderness traditions. An important exception is חֹתָם, which seems to reflect an earlier rather than later vocalization and is otherwise thought to be an early borrowing, given its widespread attestation in Central Semitic.

[28] . Cf. Muchiki, *Egyptian Proper Names and Loanwords*, 271.

Middle Kingdom, and by Late Egyptian it was dropped altogether. [29] Akkadian texts containing Egyptian words and proper nouns demonstrate this same change. By the Amarna period (ca. 1300 BC), the final *-t* appears as *-a* rather than *-at*, and by ca. 700 BC it appears as *-i* in Neo-Assyrian texts. A final *-i* rather than *-a*, lastly, is also evident in Egyptian loans into Imperial Aramaic, in which final י represents an *i*-vowel. [30] Although not explicitly attested until the Neo-Assyrian Period, it is likely that the shift from final *-a* to *-i* took place by ca. 1200–1000 BC, just like many other important changes in Late Egyptian.

The preservation of the Egyptian feminine *-t* in the words זֶרֶת and טַבַּעַת indicates that they were borrowed relatively early, probably sometime between the Middle Kingdom and the Ramesside Period (ca. 2000–1300 BC). [31] The Hebrew forms that end with final ה (תֵּבָה, אֵיפָה, שָׂטָה, אַחְלָמָה), on the other hand, reflect a form from the later part of the second millennium BC, after the *t* was dropped but before the *-a* shifted to *-i*. The segolate nouns לֶשֶׁם and נֵפֶךְ must have been borrowed sometime after final *-at* was lost, but it is unclear when they entered Hebrew because the vowel that had marked the feminine was lost when anaptyxis later occurred (**lašma/ *lašmi > léšem* and **nufka/*nufki > nṓfek*).

Thus, of the 8 loanwords from Egyptian feminine nouns, at least half were most likely borrowed during the latter part of the second millennium BC. Most notably, *none* of the Egyptian loanwords in the exodus and wilderness narratives clearly preserve the Egyptian feminine ending as *-i* as they should if they had been borrowed during the first millennium BC. This is in contrast to the Egyptian loanwords found in Imperial Aramaic, which preserve the Egyptian feminine ending *-i* as lanif eht yb detacidniי. [32]

Reborrowings

Just as the inhabitants of ancient Canaan borrowed many words from Egypt, so Egypt borrowed a number of Northwest Semitic words, especially during the New Kingdom. [33] Occasionally, Northwest Semitic peoples borrowed a word from Egyptian and then subsequently lent it back into Egyptian in a slightly different form. In cases such as this, one can determine the *terminus ante quem* of a word's entering Northwest Semitic by noting the reborrowed form's earliest attestation in Egyptian.

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[29] . Allen, *Ancient Egyptian Language*, 49, 61; Loprieno, *Ancient Egyptian*, 57, 60–63; Alan H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar, Being an Introduction to the Study of Hieroglyphs* (3rd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), 34; Junge, *Late Egyptian Grammar*, 35. The feminine *-t* was only lost in absolute nouns during the Old and Middle Kingdoms. Nouns with pronominal suffixes, on the other hand, preserved the *-t*, often by means of a second *-t* (or *-ṯ*) added before a suffix pronoun. I am grateful to James P. Allen for his assistance with this topic.

[30] . Muchiki, *Egyptian Proper Names and Loanwords*, 181, 270–71.

[31] . See ibid., 243, 247; Lambdin, "Egyptian Loan Words in the Old Testament," 149–50, 151.

[32] . Muchiki, *Egyptian Proper Names and Loanwords*, 181, 270–71.

[33] . See James E. Hoch, *Semitic Words in Egyptian Texts of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

Unfortunately, of the Egyptian loanwords in the exodus and wilderness traditions, only one Egyptian term fits this category. This word is Hebrew תַּחְרָא, which occurs twice within the description of the high priest's ephod (Exod 28:32; 39:23). In both instances, it appears in the expression כְּפִי תַחְרָא, "like the opening of a תַּחְרָא," which compares the well-stitched opening of the item תַּחְרָא to the head opening for the high priest's garment. Hebrew תַּחְרָא is a loan from Egyptian *dḥr,* "leather, animal hide," but the Egyptians subsequently borrowed this word back as *tḥr*, applying it to the leather panel ing of a carriage. [34] This establishes a *terminus ante quem* of ca. 1200 BC for the borrowing of Egyptian *dḥr* by Biblical Hebrew, since Egyptian *tḥr* first appears in the late Nineteenth-Dynasty Anastasi Papyrus IV (16.9). [35] Of course, this word could have entered Northwest Semitic quite early and not necessarily during the time of the Late Bronze Age, because the original Egyptian form *dḥr* appears as early as the Old Kingdom. However, given the existence of other Egyptian loanwords in the exodus and wilderness narratives that date to the Late Bronze Age as well as the likelihood that most of the other Egyptian loanwords in these narratives were not borrowed prior to the New Kingdom, it is quite likely that Hebrew תַּחְרָא was borrowed during the Late Bronze Age.

Summary

Based on the very limited clues we have, at least some of the Egyptian loanwords in the exodus and wilderness traditions seem to have been borrowed during the Late Bronze Age. [36] This is precisely when the events of these traditions would have occurred if they represent authentic history. This does not prove conclusively that these traditions originated during the Late Bronze Age because Hebrew speakers could have adopted Egyptian terminology during the Late Bronze Age and continued to use it into the Iron Age or even the Persian Period. Nevertheless, the Late Bronze Age origin of these Egyptian loanwords nicely supports a Late Bronze Age origin for the exodus and wilderness traditions. When considered in conjunction with the other Late Bronze Age Egyptian elements in the exodus and wilderness traditions, [37] this greatly enhances the case for the antiquity of these traditions and thereby their authenticity.

Conclusion

Three salient points emerge from the above discussion. First, the exodus and wilderness traditions contain significantly higher proportions of Egyptian

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[34] . *WÄS* 5.328, 481–82; Hoch, *Semitic Words in Egyptian Texts*, 363.

[35] . *LEM* 7.53.

[36] . It may very well be the case that more of the Egyptian loanwords in the exodus and wilderness narratives entered Hebrew during the Late Bronze Age, but unfortunately there are no other clues than the ones discussed above that can help determine when they were borrowed.

[37] . Cf. Hoffmeier's *Israel in Egypt* and *Ancient Israel in Sinai*, as well as the other contributions to this volume.

terminology than the rest of the Hebrew Bible, proportions comparable to the high proportions of Old Iranian terminology of the books of Esther and Ezra–Nehemiah that reflect foreign influence. Second, the exodus and wilderness traditions contain significantly higher proportions of Egyptian terminology than other Northwest Semitic texts, with the exception of Imperial Aramaic texts that exhibit intense Egyptian contact. Third, at least some of the Egyptian loanwords found in the exodus and wilderness narratives were borrowed during the Late Bronze Age, and it is likely that many of the other loanwords also were borrowed then. What are we to make of these observations?

Perhaps the Egyptian loanwords in the exodus and wilderness narratives were borrowed during the Late Bronze Age but were borrowed into Late Bronze Age Canaanite and subsequently passed into Hebrew without any historical contact such as described in the narratives. [38] This is possible, especially for the few Egyptian loans in the exodus and wilderness narratives that are attested in multiple Northwest Semitic languages besides Hebrew. Nevertheless, while this explains the existence of these loanwords in Hebrew, ultimately it does not adequately explain the high concentration of Egyptian terminology in the exodus and wilderness narratives. The writers of the exodus and wilderness traditions must have had a reason to use such a high concentration of Egyptian terminology and would have to know that the transmitted Egyptian loans borrowed via Canaanite were indeed of Egyptian origin. Both prerequisites are unlikely.

Alternatively, one could try to explain the high proportions of Egyptian loans in the exodus and wilderness traditions as a late literary creation. Whoever wrote these texts presumably used Egyptian loanwords to give the narratives an Egyptian coloring, making it look like they came from a particular time period when they really do not. In this view, the exodus and wilderness narratives do not recount part of Israel's early history but instead function etiologically. Perhaps the exodus narrative has been invented to explain the celebration of the Passover and justify the so-called "credo" found in Deuteronomy, "Yahweh brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand" (Deut 26:8; cf. Deut 6:21–23; Josh 24:6–7); [39] perhaps the narratives concerning the tabernacle were invented by a later Priestly writer, because it was unthinkable to an ancient Israelite that no sanctuary existed in Israel's early history. [40]

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[38] . The Amarna correspondence of the 14th century BC contains a number of Egyptian loanwords, attesting to Egyptian influence upon the language of the inhabitants of Canaan (Muchiki, *Egyptian Proper Names and Loanwords*, 298–303). However, many of the Egyptian loanwords in the Amarna correspondence are attested in only two letters, EA 14 and EA 368, both lists of Egyptian items almost certainly written in Egypt. Thus, they provide no evidence for native inhabitants of Canaan having adopted Egyptian vocabulary, especially because the native, Semitic equivalent is provided along with the Egyptian term.

[39] . Cf. Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (trans. Bernhard W. Anderson; Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 47–51, 65–71.

[40] . Cf. Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (trans. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies; Edinburgh: Black, 1885), 36–37.

We must consider whether someone writing after the fact would be capable of inventing such a literary creation. Modern authors, after all, do write historical fiction. As any author who has ever done so knows, however, writing historical fiction takes extensive historical research. One must carefully research the society and culture of the era in which the narrative was set, which takes not only time and effort but access to resources that describe that era. [41] It seems unlikely that the ancient Israelites would have been able to research the level of detail that the exodus and wilderness narratives display, particularly with respect to its loanwords. The vast majority of Egyptian loanwords in the exodus and wilderness narratives relate to particular aspects of material culture, including terms for specific pieces of clothing (אַבְנֵט, פֵּאֵר, שֵׁשׁ, תַּחֲרָא) minerals (אַחְלָמָה, לֶשֶׁם, נֹפֶךְ, פִּטְדָה), and plants (גֹּמֶא, סוּף, שִׁטָּה). Such technical vocabulary presumably would be hard to come by without research, assuming that resources for such research was even available. In any case, why would a late writer go through the effort of researching such mundane details, trying to make his account look authentic, especially when his audience probably would not even know the difference? [42] Such authenticity seems both tangential and unnecessary if the exodus and wilderness traditions were really composed for the alleged reasons mentioned above, especially because historical verisimilitude is not the goal of biblical or other ancient Near Eastern narrative.

There is a simpler, more logical explanation of the data. Just as one concludes that the sudden increase of French loanwords in the English language ca. AD 1050–1400 reflects some particular circumstance in history, so one should conclude that a high concentration of Egyptian loanwords in the exodus and wilderness traditions reflects some particular historical circumstance. Given the observation that at least some of the Egyptian loanwords in the exodus and wilderness narratives were borrowed during the Late Bronze Age, it is likely that the events of these narratives took place during the Late Bronze Age, just as one would expect if they represent authentic history. This is the simple and logical conclusion we should come to, given what we know from contact linguistics. The burden of proof remains on those who would offer any alternate explanation, to demonstrate exactly why their hypothesis is superior to this conclusion.

Since Wilson's study, no one has adequately shown that the Egyptian loanwords in the exodus and wilderness traditions provide evidence for the authenticity of the same. In this essay, I have compared the distribution of Egyptian loanwords in the exodus and wilderness traditions with that of the remainder of the Hebrew Bible and other Northwest Semitic texts, demonstrating that the former's proportions are significantly greater than that of the latter except in cases of intense Egyptian contact. I also have argued that at least some of the Egyptian loanwords in the exodus and wilderness narratives

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[41] . See James Alexander Thom, *The Art and Craft of Writing Historical Fiction* (Cincinnati, OH: Writer's Digest Books, 2010), 53–80.

[42] . Cf. Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai*, 248–49.

entered Hebrew during the Late Bronze Age, precisely when we would expect them to have been borrowed if the events of these narratives really occurred. Consideration of the Egyptian loanwords in the exodus and wilderness traditions greatly supports our understanding of these narratives' authenticity and more broadly demonstrates how loanwords can contribute to our understanding of the biblical text.