

## Interacting with the *Patterns of Evidence: The Moses Controversy* Film

A documentary film called *Patterns of Evidence: The Moses Controversy*, presented by Thinking Man Films and produced by Timothy Mahoney, aired at theaters on March 14 (with 2 subsequent showings: March 16 and 19). This film dives headlong into an extremely controversial topic that has intrigued and engaged scholars and non-specialists for centuries: the historicity of Moses and his ability to compose the first 5 books of the Bible at the time biblical chronology requires that he would have (1446–1406 BC).

Since this topic is tied directly to groundbreaking research I conducted from 2012–2016, and that the results of the research play a prominent role in the film, I realized it could be useful to scholars, professors/teachers, students, and non-specialists alike if I were to interact with some of the statements and ideas presented in the film. Following is a list of 23 responses to statements made or matters discussed in *The Moses Controversy* film that I present as worthy of further consideration, clarification, or disputation.

(1) Professor Douglas A. Knight (Vanderbilt University) suggested that the Hebrew Bible (HB) was composed in the Persian Period (5th–4th century BC). This view is fairly popular among critical scholars today, but it ignores several pieces of vital evidence. First, the priestly prayer from Numbers 6 is contained in the Silver Scroll from Ketef Hinnom, which dates to late in the 7th century BC and predates the Persian Period by about 200 years. The early existence of the Silver Scroll strongly implies that the Pentateuch was composed by this time. Second, there are clear, historiographic differences in the historical books of the HB from the time that Moses wrote (1446–1406 BC) until the latter prophets wrote (down to *ca.* 430 BC). For example, I discussed in my “Amenhotep and the Historicity of the Exodus Pharaoh” article (free from [https://www.academia.edu/1049040/2006\\_Amenhotep\\_II\\_and\\_the\\_Historicity\\_of\\_the\\_Exodus-Pharaoh](https://www.academia.edu/1049040/2006_Amenhotep_II_and_the_Historicity_of_the_Exodus-Pharaoh)) how the early historical books of the Bible do not include names of Egyptian kings, which is a convention that Moses followed from Egyptian scribal practice of the New Kingdom (NK), while later books record them. His precise following of historiographical conventions of times long before the Persian Period cannot be explained satisfactorily by any theory of the composition of the HB in post-exilic times. Third, Hebrew inscriptions from Egypt (Lahun, Wadi el-Hôl) and Sinai (Serâbî el-Khâdim and Wadi Naşb) dating from 1840–1446 BC, which contain references to 3 biblical characters, now render any theory of an extremely late composition of the Bible completely impossible. Otherwise, one would have to suggest that for about 1000 years the names of two obscure biblical figures and one prominent biblical figure were guessed at correctly by these alleged redactors of the HB who supposedly composed it in the Persian Period.

(2) Knight also stated that if a historical Moses did write in the 15th century BC, there was no literacy among the people for whom he wrote. Tim Mahoney correctly replied that in Deut 6:9, Moses instructed all of the Israelites to write on the doorposts of their houses and gates all of the teachings he had given them. In order for the Israelites to pull off this instruction, they had to be completely literate. Additionally, the proto-consonantal Hebrew (PCH) inscriptions of the NK that are translated in my book, *The World’s Oldest Alphabet: Hebrew as the Language of the Proto-Consonantal Script*, attest to their having been written by shepherds, miners, craftspeople, and vintners. These professions speak of common people with blue-collar occupations, not scribes or an aristocratic class that alone possessed the ability to read and write.

(3) David Rohl stated that it would have taken miles of papyrus to write a particular biblical book in Middle Egyptian (ME) hieroglyphics. While Rohl would be correct simply to say that the Hebrews, including Moses, wrote in Hebrew and not in Egyptian, what he said in the film is fundamentally overstated. An example of why Rohl is incorrect, albeit in the form of a short inscription, is found in a bilingual (PCH and ME) sandstone sphinx known as Sinai 345a, which is translated in my book. The inscriptions read the

same in both languages, and while the Hebrew inscription requires 7 consonantal letters, the ME inscription requires only 8 glyphs. As far as raw space goes, they each can be written with almost exactly the same amount of space. Rohl's assertion thus cannot be accepted by anyone who understands ME *and* Hebrew.

(4) Tim Mahoney contended that the complex pictographs of hieroglyphics were replaced by the simplified strokes of letters. While Mahoney certainly meant well, what he said is an oversimplification of the reality. Actually, in the early stages of Hebrew (i.e. the first 400–600 years), the script was highly pictographic. This is inescapable, because PCH's pictographic letters actually are hieroglyphs borrowed from ME. In other words, the Hebrews were writing the very same pictographs that the Egyptians were writing, at least in the case of 22 of the hieroglyphs from the ME sign list. It was not until late in the time of the judges and/or early in the monarchy (*ca.* 1150–900 BC) that the pictographic element mostly had become lost from written Hebrew. This effect of moving from the artistic to the simple and abstract, over a period of centuries, is a natural and expected process, which allowed them to write much more efficiently.

(5) Christopher Rollston wrongly dated the origin of the Hebrew script, as well as the beginning of its evolution in form, to *ca.* 900 BC. The truth is that its origin dates to *ca.* 1859–1842 BC, and its evolution was slow and gradual from that time until *ca.* 900 BC. And just for good measure, it *continued* to evolve until the exilic Hebrews switched-out this script for the Aramaic (block-letter) script that is used until today. As Mahoney correctly asked in the film, if the Hebrew script evolved in the centuries after *ca.* 900 BC, why could it not have evolved in the centuries before *ca.* 900 BC?

(6) Randall Price said that Moses had written sources at his disposal, and that some of the history recorded in the Bible was formed on the basis of the source-material that he received from these Hebrews who came before him. Price is undoubtedly correct, and since my research has proven that the alphabet dates to the lifetime of Joseph (soon after Jacob's death, actually), Price's statement explains why the narrative about Joseph exceeds—in detail and in length—the narrative of Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob. Joseph's two eldest sons, the inventors of the alphabet at the homestead of their Hebrew uncles, would have had first-hand information from their father, meaning that one or both of them could have written a biographical account of their father's life. However, they arrived at biblical Ramesses just before Jacob's death, so they would not have had much chance to hear their grandfather tell his life story. And of course, their great grandfather and great-great grandfather also were deceased by the time the alphabet was formed.

(7) Tim Mahoney asked if there is any evidence outside of the Bible that demonstrates that Moses could have written the Torah (Pentateuch). This question can be answered best by reading *The World's Oldest Alphabet*, but the short answer is, "Yes." Mahoney mentioned later in the film that I have claimed that the name "Moses" is to be read in one of the inscriptions, which is called Sinai 361. The inscription reads, "Our bound servitude had lingered. Moses then provoked astonishment. *It is* a year of astonishment because of the Lady." The meaning and significance of this inscription is presented in the book.

(8) While pointing to the way in which the vertical column and the horizontal line read in Sinai 357, which he calls the making of an "L" shape, David Rohl depicted the horizontal line as reading from left to right, which seems intuitive, especially for anyone familiar with how to write an L-letter. In other words, the single vertical column that is part of the inscription stands to the left of the horizontal row, leading to how a cursory viewing of the horizontal row could lead someone to believe that it should be read from left to right. Certainly horizontal lines of PCH writings *can* read from left to right, but the default direction clearly is right to left, which became the standardized direction of writing by the monarchy. Moreover, a careful study of Sinai 357 demonstrates that it *only* can be read from right to left. Not only was a divider placed between the column and the row, which the anonymous epigrapher on whom Rohl relied for his "reading" of the inscription never detected [Note: As a beloved prof of mine once taught us, the danger of

standing on someone else's shoulders is that you *both* may fall.], but the vertical column veers conspicuously to the left as it nears the horizontal line. This demonstrates that the horizontal line was inscribed first, and thus should be read first. Later in the film, Rohl explained that these are "two separate inscriptions," and that the second one (i.e. the horizontal line of Sinai 357) says, "Please read the first one."

It must be asked as to what Rohl was thinking here. He has no formal training in biblical studies or biblical Hebrew, has no training in epigraphy of Semitic inscriptions, and cannot even correctly render the direction in which a horizontal row reads. So, why does he step out on a limb, as if to speak as one having authority, by stating that the horizontal inscription is begging the reader to read the vertical column? This is not even the kind of statement that ever shows up in ancient Semitic inscriptions, so there is no justification for Rohl's translational guesswork. Moreover, there is a perfectly correct and legitimate way to read the horizontal line here, which naturally and logically leads into the statement made in the vertical line. Consult my book for more on Sinai 357.

(9) Rollston claimed that the inscriptions from Wadi el-Hôl (WeH) and Serâbî el-Khâdim (SeK) are argued to be Middle Kingdom (MK), and he undoubtedly is mimicking the view of proto-consonantal epigraphers here, as this is not his field. He noted that the Wadi el-Hôl inscriptions are dated to the MK partially because they are next to ME inscriptions of the MK, which is correct. He then stated that the inscriptions from SeK also should be dated to the MK because the closest inscriptions to them are MK. However, this statement is extremely misleading, if not patently false. The alphabetic inscriptions at SeK were not located anywhere near the MK inscriptions composed in ME. They were found in random caves that mostly were close to one another in proximity. Moreover, as I detailed in my book, the only pottery found in any of these caves is expressly NK, dating to the reign of Thutmose III or his son, Amenhotep II. Moreover, as I also discuss in detail in the book, the WeH and SeK inscriptions differ from one another dramatically in their residual pictographic value, meaning that the letters in the WeH inscriptions are far more picturesque and artistically drawn, while the letters in the SeK inscriptions have a much lesser degree of artistic element and were inscribed more abstractly. This palaeographic detail suggests a long lapse in time between the writing of the inscriptions at each of these sites, as the Hebrew script devolved into a form that resembled Egyptian hieroglyphs less and less with virtually each passing generation. Rollston's mistake can be understood here, as he does not specialize in or publish on the earliest alphabetic script. Yet since this is true, why does he take a public position on an issue that is outside his area of specialization?

(10) Mahoney stated that the proto-consonantal inscriptions are not Egyptian hieroglyphs, and that this script is something completely different. Mahoney's statement here is meant with good intentions, but it is not precise. In fact, the proto-consonantal alphabet derives completely from 22 hieroglyphs (see Figure 1 in my book), so at least in the beginning, these two scripts were the opposite of something completely different. It was not until the time between the lifetime of Moses (1526–1406 BC) and the Israelite monarchy that the two scripts were something completely different. Of course, to Mahoney's credit, it should be stated that the earliest Hebrew alphabetic letters were "a poor man's rendition" of the exquisite hieroglyphs produced by carefully trained Egyptian scribes of the MK, making the 2 noticeably different *in appearance*.

(11) Rollston claimed that the Phoenicians standardized the early alphabetic writing system. However, there is no conclusive evidence whatsoever to sustain this claim. Inscriptions from Canaan/Israel of the Iron Age I (after 1200 BC) that are Phoenician date to a time no earlier than the Hebrew inscriptions of that era. And as Naveh pointed out, which Mahoney documents in the film, the Hebrew alphabet of that time more closely corresponds to the proto-consonantal alphabet than Phoenician does.

(12) The statement was made in the film that the world's oldest alphabet is the proto-Sinaitic script. As I explained in my book, this designation (i.e. proto-Sinaitic script) is a misnomer. The implication is that the script is native to Sinai, which Goldwasser wrongly believes, when in fact the dated inscriptions from

Lahun and Wadi el-Hôl make it clear that Egypt is the origin of the script, not Sinai, despite the fact that the oldest proto-alphabetic Hebrew inscription is from Wadi Naşb (in Sinai). As I discuss in my book, SeK and Maghara are sites where turquoise mines were exploited in antiquity, but the Egyptians only went there on annual expeditions. No permanently occupied sites existed anywhere in the vicinity, neither at nor close to the turquoise mines, and my book cites the Egyptian scholar who wrote a doctoral dissertation on this topic and confidently stated that there were no permanently-occupied settlements at or near SeK.

(13) While hinting at the thesis of my book, Mahoney said to Orly Goldwasser that some people are suggesting that the oldest alphabetic script is Hebrew. She replied, “This is sad. I mean, it’s not science. This is disseminating fake knowledge and fake science. It’s opportunism.” To this, I simply would say that I have no idea why she calls her scholarship “science” but mine something less than science. Doubting that Goldwasser has logged anywhere close to the time that I have with this subfield of study, I would be ready to debate her on the topic any day, at any location, in any country, and all while paying for all of my own expenses. On a final note, I tried several times during the years of my research to contact Orly Goldwasser in order to discuss all of my findings with her. Never once did she return even one of my requests to discuss them. She had every opportunity to dissuade me from “disseminating false knowledge and fake science.”

(14) Rollston has rejected the proto-consonantal script as Hebrew partially because “the scripts are dramatically different.” Mahoney wisely replied that “scripts can look dramatically different and be part of the same language.” The truth is that Mahoney is correct, not only with English (as he exemplified), but also with Hebrew. Figure 1 in my book takes the reader through a step-by-step journey through time with each and every letter of the earliest forms of the Hebrew alphabet. The evolutionary change of each letter is completely logical and understandable. Rollston is used to looking at a form of the script that dates back no earlier than 1000 BC or so. Since the alphabet originated in *ca.* 1850 BC, this means that the original Hebrew script dates back 850 years before Rollston is used to seeing it. If you, as my reader, were to look at writings in your native tongue that go back to AD 1150, how easily do you think you could read those writings? Now you know the corner into which Rollston has backed himself.

(15) Mahoney’s illustration of Hebrew 1.0, 2.0, and 3.0 is basically correct. However, he would be far more correct chronologically if he were to slide the “Hebrew 2.0” over significantly to the left, to the time of Egypt’s NK. After all, the corpus of inscriptions from SeK dates to the NK, despite how this would devastate Rohl’s chronological-revisionism construct (to which Mahoney is sympathetic), and it represents an almost perfectly middle-form between the Hebrew of the MK and the Hebrew of the Israelite monarchy.

(16) David Rohl, while alluding to an unspecified PCH inscription, proposed that this inscription gives instructions about how to use manna. He went on to say, “Pay attention to the way you use manna. Follow the father and his instructions.” This astonishing assertion is even more cringeworthy than his errant claim that Sinai 357 uses a horizontal line to tell the reader to read the vertical line. First of all, there is no known proto-consonantal inscription that even mentions manna. Second, by anyone’s view, the SeK inscriptions were inscribed pre-exodus. The exodus account begins in Exodus 12, yet manna is not even attested in the Bible until Exodus 16, when the Israelites are starving in the desert, after the event of the exodus. There literally is no occasion for manna to be documented in a pre-exodus text, as the Israelites were not introduced to its existence until afterward. After all, it’s meaning is, “What is it?” Manna had not been invented at the time that the SeK inscriptions were inscribed, not using any historian’s construct.

Why does Rohl venture such blind guesses at translations when he has no training or experience in the following systematic phases of epigraphical work, but rather accepts some unspecified epigrapher’s reading/transliteration, sends it to a modern rabbi (also with no training in ancient Hebrew epigraphy), and awaits a translation? Phase 1: the drawing of each letter on a given inscription. Phase 2: the identification of each of those letters with a known Hebrew letter (assuming one is correct in assigning phonetic

[consonantal] value to each Hebrew letter). Phase 3: the separating of letters into words, which almost never can be performed unless the first word in the inscription is visible and discernible. Phase 4: the determining of whether each word is a noun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, or some other grammatical form. The reason this is so important is that ancient Hebrew's "continuous script" (i.e. no punctuation or separation between words/clauses/sentences) does not always make it clear, and many Hebrew words possess cognate forms that often are indistinguishable (e.g. whether it is a noun, a verb, an infinitive, etc.).

(17) Mahoney mentioned that I have identified 3 biblical characters among the 15 PCH inscriptions translated in my book. These characters are Asenath (the wife of Joseph), Ahisamach (the father of Oholiab, one of two men specifically commissioned to build the tabernacle), and Moses (the man chosen to lead the Israelites out of Egypt). Asenath's name appears in Sinai 376 (*ca.* 1772 BC), Ahisamach's in Sinai 375a (*ca.* 1480 BC), and Moses's in Sinai 361 (*ca.* 1446 BC).

(18) When Mahoney asked Rollston about the 3 biblical names that appear on these early Hebrew inscriptions, the epigrapher replied, "You have to have evidence for these proposals, and it's just not there." However, Rollston's argument is weak and innocuous. All of the necessary evidence is presented in my book. This consists of at least the following: 1. an appendix that carefully argues for the proper phonetic identification of each proto-consonantal letter, 2. a stroke-by-stroke description of each letter in every word of Sinai 376, Sinai 375a, and Sinai 361 (thus justifying the identification of each letter), and 3. a detailed discussion about each of the words in all 3 inscriptions. My reply to Rollston is that the evidence *is* there. Rollston, who denounced the validity of my book's thesis (i.e. Hebrew is the language of the first alphabetic script) before it even was in print, simply has turned a blind eye to the overwhelming evidence available.

(19) Mahoney stated that what complicates the issue of the meaning of the inscriptions is that Rohl's and my approaches in reading the letters have produced different interpretations. Actually, this is not too complicated at all. If one reads my methodology and Rohl's methodology in #16 above, it is clear that one of us is a trained Hebrew epigrapher with peer-reviewed publication, while the other is not; one has been teaching biblical Hebrew for several decades, while the other has yet to study this language formally; one has published a book on the world's oldest alphabetic script, and the other relies on the work of a combination of other people, including those with no training whatsoever in ancient historical/epigraphical studies; and one takes the integrity of biblical history/chronology seriously, while the other is willing to produce translations that directly contradict its statements. What complications remain for discerning the trustworthiness of Rohl's assigning of meaning to various PCH inscriptions versus that of mine?

(20) Goldwasser lamented that no scholars have accepted her theory that the proto-consonantal script was invented by the poor miners of Sinai's turquoise mines. She has suggested that these were just people who were illiterate in any script, which gave them the freedom to invent. While Anson Rainey sufficiently debunked this untenable theory in about 2010, I further demonstrated its impossibility in my book. Whoever invented the proto-consonantal script undeniably must have been not only fluent in ME, but knew exactly how to write it. After all, the inventor(s) hand-picked 22 pictographs from the ME sign list of 800+ hieroglyphs and used them to engineer a completely new system of writing, based only on the principle of acrophonics (i.e. a system whereby the sound of a letter is represented by the initial sound produced in the word that depicts that letter). The inventor was *illiterate*? Utterly impossible.

(21) Rohl proclaimed that a famine lasting 7–10 years struck Egypt during Amenemhat III's reign, and with this he implied that the famine predicted by Joseph in Genesis 41 is this very famine. First of all, and far less relevant, after studying an enormous amount about the reign of Amenemhat III, I never came across any description of a famine lasting that precise length of time. As a result, I challenge David Rohl to produce such conclusive evidence. Second of all, and of great importance, finding random events in ancient

Egyptian history and automatically assigning them to events in biblical history is exceedingly dubious and problematic. Careful chronological work on ancient Israelite chronology (recorded extremely specifically in the Bible) and Egyptian chronology must be performed first, and only then does one have the potential to synchronize the two. If this can be accomplished effectively and conclusively for a given period in time, only then can such connections between events in biblical history and events in Egyptian history be made.

Sure, Rohl has a reasoned-out chronological system, but it is flawed in just about every conceivable way, so much so that I would need another 100 pages or more to document and refute all of it, and many of my colleagues could do the same. In contrast, I *have* done the kind of careful work on Israelite and Egyptian chronology that is required, and I *have* been able to make precise synchronizations, which in turn have produced some amazing connections between the two. With one of these synchronizations, I can state conclusively that the 7-year famine described in Genesis 41 only can be connected to the reign of Sesostri III, the father of Amenemhat III. All of this will be argued in my upcoming book. Moreover, how does Rohl explain that (1) the exploitation of the Fayyum began precisely in the reign of Sesostri II, the father of Sesostri III, which every Egyptologist who studies the MK knows, (2) massive granaries pop up suddenly throughout many of the prominent cities of Egypt, as well as even more massive granaries within the forts that Sesostri III built throughout Nubia, and (3) the complete upheaval in Egyptian society (highlighted by the elimination of the entire institution of the nomarchy, and the wholesale loss of power possessed by the nomarchs) occurred not during the reign of Amenemhat III, but during that of his father, Sesostri III?

(22) Mahoney stated that the reign of Amenemhat III matches the time of Joseph and the patterns he discovered for his first film. The problem with this claim is that for the first film, Mahoney depended fully on Rohl's dubious connections and was not aware of the imprecision in his chronological scheme. Yes, Joseph was alive during the reign of Amenemhat III, and even lived until the year that his successor died, but everything recorded in the Bible regarding the administration of Joseph occurred during the part of Sesostri III's reign that preceded the year in which he put Amenemhat III on the throne as his coregent. This can be proven beyond a shadow of a doubt, and my next book will accomplish this very thing.

(23) Mahoney uttered one of the most profound statements in the film, when he said, "Paradigms blind all of us from the possibility of seeing something new or different. But what if the presuppositions on which these paradigms are based are faulty." This reminds me of the counsel given to me by my first Hebrew professor when I initially told him about the amazing discoveries that fell into my lap, those that went into my first book and the ones going into my second book. He told me to study the life of an innovator, which is exactly what I then did, and to expect that I will face the very same reception of my work that all innovators experience. What came to mean the most to me were the eerily-prophetic words of the German philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer: "All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident." So far, I have experienced only stages 1 and 2. I look forward to seeing if I will live long enough to experience stage 3 for myself.

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