SHEMOT: Argentina World Cup Champions and the Exodus from Egypt

The Bible, Biblical archeology, and ancient Jewish history are taught in the Jewish academic world. But there is a phenomenon that is not much talked about: the "oedipal" relationship between many Jewish scholars and the texts they teach. In this relationship, the Jewish text (representing its Author) is the father that must be removed. The preferred way to eliminate these texts is to render them a myth, which is done by questioning their credibility and historical value. This anti-text attitude, de and I say this with great pain, is characteristic of most Israeli universities and professors, except for Bar Ilan University and some other universities worldwide. In the eyes of these scholars, "the biblical text is false until otherwise proven," something none of them bothers to do. Something similar happens with the "interpretations" given to archaeological discoveries, which always point toward the same direction: denying the historicity of our Tora. The reasons for this pathetic attitude towards Jewish sources do not pertain to history or archeology but to the psychology department. It is part of Jewish self-hatred, a self-destructive attitude that manifests itself in several ways.
Today I want to present—and disprove—a couple of famous examples of this academic rhetoric.

This Shabbat, we will begin reading the book of Shemot, Exodus. And we will get closer to the founding history of the Jewish people: the exit from Egypt. The Oedipal Jews claim that the Exodus from Egypt did not happen. A few years ago, a conservative rabbinical leader, David Wolpe, who heads a large Sephardic community in Los Angeles, California, made a famous statement before his large congregation on the Passover

holiday: “The departure from Egypt is not a historical fact: it is a myth”, he stated (see here).
The implications of this claim are tremendous: if the Jewish founding story is false, the Tora is not a book dictated by God, but a mythological text, without credibility or relevance. If the Bible is not Divine, why should I care what some mythical writers wrote 3,500 years ago?

To deny the Exodus, Wolpe relied on the words of the head of the archeology department at Tel Aviv University, Israel Finkelstein, “the Jews were not in Egypt, the captivity did not exist, the Exodus never happened.” What compelling evidence was used to disprove the Biblical account of the exodus from Egypt? What arguments led Finkelstein and others to such a tremendous and far-reaching assertion? “The absence of archaeological remains,” Finkelstein said. If 2 or 3 million people had wandered through the desert for 40 years, we would have to find, for example, clay pots from that journey. And nothing was found!

Two elements make this argument academically untenable. First, there is a golden rule: “Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence”, “that no material evidence is found about something, is not enough evidence that that event did not exist .”It is like questioning the historicity of the discovery of America because the archaeological remains of the Pinta, the Niña, and the Santa Maria were never found. But there is a second argument to debunk this ridiculous claim that is even more solid and definitive.

“[Wolpe and others] claim that the Sinai desert has been searched and no evidence has been found of the mass of millions of people the Bible says they were there for 40 years. That statement is not true. There have been few major excavations at Sinai, and it certainly could have been traced back more… Uncovering objects buried 3,200 years ago is an impossible task, especially in the Sinai desert. An Israeli colleague told me with a laugh that a vehicle that had been

lost in the Yom Kippur war in 1973 was recently discovered under 16 meters of sand! In 40 years, 16 meters of sand have accumulated! ” [Elliot Friedman]. Think how many kilometers of sand you would have to dig to start looking for something!

And here I ask myself again: is this simple problem not known or considered by Someone like Finkelstein or Wolpe? Or perhaps they know the claim is ridiculous, and they still say it because they assume their audience isn’t knowledgeable in the topography of the Sinai desert? (On other the possible motives of Finkelstein and other Israeli archaeologists to deny Biblical history, see note below *). I hope it is now clearer why I described this anti-text attitude as “Oedipal.”

A second argument, also not very solid, to deny the historicity of the exodus is that the number of Jews who left Egypt, according to the Tora, was 603,550 men over the age of 20 and their respective families. “This number is impossible to accept,” said the nihilists. And why is it impossible to accept?
Let’s listen to the experts: “Someone calculated long ago that if that number of people, [2.5 million] were marching through the desert… Then when the first ones reached Sinai, half the people would still be in Egypt!”
In other words, it is impossible to conceive that a human mass of 2 million people moves and mobilizes in an area extending for 150 or 200 km.

And I must confess that I only realized the lack of merits of this argument when Argentina became the Soccer World Champion! I saw the photos and videos of the human tide in Buenos Aires, between 3 and 5 million people, depending on the newspaper one reads, moving along the 9 de Julio street and the Ricchieri Highway, an area of about 15 or 20 km and relatively narrow. I confess that the first thing that came to my mind when I saw those videos was that—keeping the distance between the two events—I was witnessing the image of a human group whose number was similar to that of the Exodus from Egypt! I

understood what King Balaq said then when he saw the multitudes of Israel from the top of the mountain and declared: *hine khisa et ‘en haarets*, that is, “these people are so numerous that they have covered the surface of the earth”, that is, from the mountain, Balaq could not see even an empty stretch of land. As in the image of the human tide on 9 de julio avenue last Sunday, December 18th. When I saw those photos, I think I visualized for the first time a more realistic image of the exodus from Egypt, which perhaps we tend to think of as a cartoon-like fantasy. These images helped me better understand the epic magnitude of Yetsiat Mitsrayim and our people’s incredible 40-year journey in the desert.

* *Bryant Wood, director of the Associates for Biblical Research in Maryland, argued that the evidence falls into place if the story is dated back to 1450 BC. He said that indications of destruction around that time at Hazor, Jericho, and a site he is excavating that he believes is the biblical city of Ai support accounts of Joshua’s conquests.*
He also cited the documented presence of “Asiatic” slaves in Egypt who could have been Israelites and said they would not have left evidence of their wanderings because they were nomads with no material culture. But Wood said he couldn’t get his research published in serious archeological journals. “There’s a definite anti-Bible bias,” Wood said. The revisionist view, however, is not necessarily publicly popular. Herzog, Finklestein, and others have been attacked for everything from faulty logic to pro-Palestinian political agendas that undermine Israel’s land claims.