

LA STÈLE DE LA TEMPÊTE
RÉVÉLATIONS SUR L'EXODE ET LES PLAIES D'EGYPTE
THE TEMPEST STELA
REVISITING THE ROOTS OF THE EXODUS

Directed by Olivier Vandersleyen

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The Tempest Stela – Revisiting the roots of the Exodus

“An established myth has to be taken as it stands. You can always ask yourself what inspired it, because it is unlikely to have come out of nothing. But to say that science can explain everything, having no regard to myth, is problematic. “

Thomas Römer, 3 July 2017

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SYNOPSIS

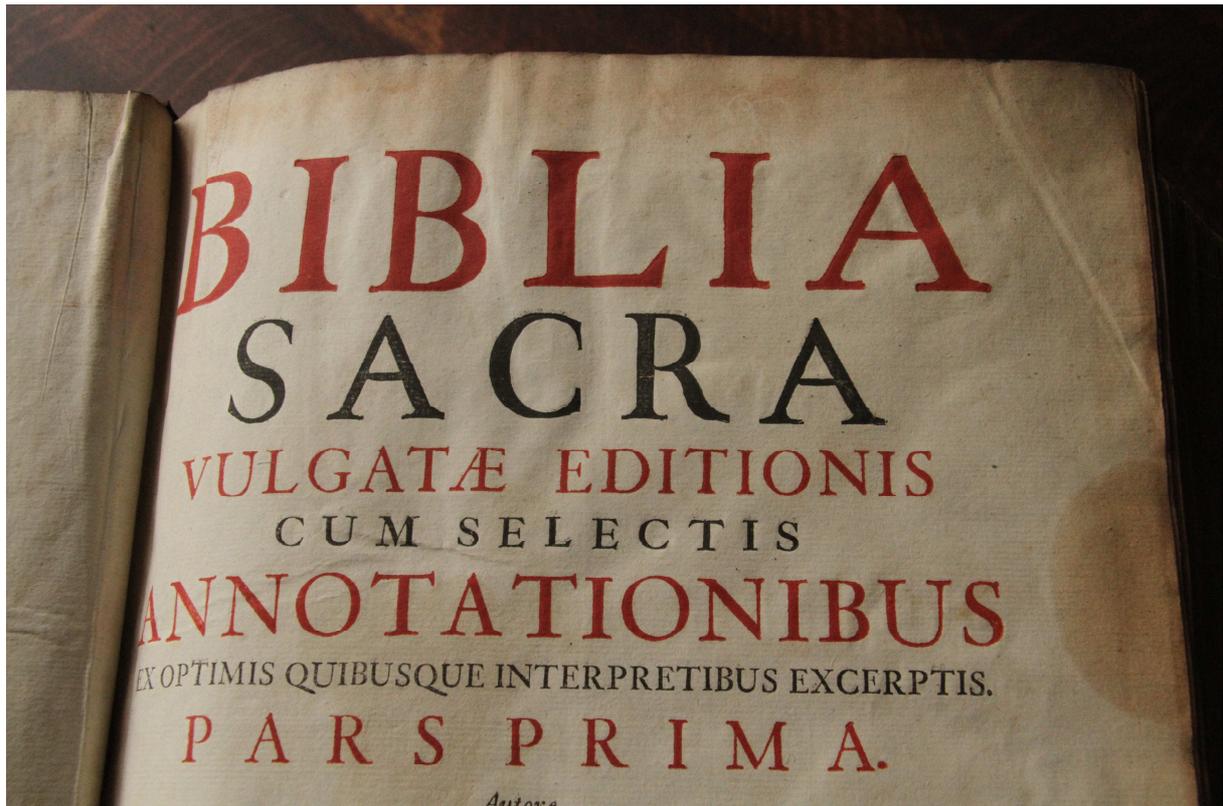
50 years ago, the Belgian Egyptologist Claude Vandersleyen translated a stela found just after the end of World War II at Karnak, near Luxor in Egypt. It had been commissioned by Pharaoh Ahmose, and describes a terrible storm in Egypt which calls clearly to mind the Plagues of Egypt as described in the Book of Exodus.

In 2014, research at the University of Chicago confirmed a link between the Tempest Stela and the catastrophic eruption of Thera, the volcano on Santorini which destroyed half the island 3500 years ago. The eruption caused long-term damage to the climate world-wide, but hit the south eastern Mediterranean most hard.

Did the disaster lead to the mass departure of an entire people? If the eruption could be accurately dated, this might make it possible to pin a date upon Exodus. Some of the most eminent experts in the relevant fields (climatology, geology, vulcanology, dendrochronology, Egyptology, archaeology and theology) are asked to give their views.

As we listen to what they have to say, and learn of recent discoveries and scientific analyses, our perception of one the most dramatic events described in the Bible will evolve.





PROJECT NOTE

Human beings have always aspired to leave behind a trace of their existence. Some create immortal works of art - paintings, music, sculptures, literature - which survive the passage of time and are still able, time and again to stir our emotions. But were their creators, in the heat of their creation, looking to posterity? Surely not: true creation is an untarnished act, it seeks no reward. It just happens. It is sufficient unto itself.

The same is not always true in scientific research, which often resembles a competition. The lures of glory stalk the laboratories: to be the first one, perhaps the only one, isn't that a great idea? Great discoveries have often been a matter of chance, but most scientists work towards a goal. It is to understand, or to discover, by working on what is already known. Either to cite in support, or to argue against.

And just as in competitive sports, some participants are tempted to make compromises. The phenomenon of *buzz* and *fake news* is well known in journalism: everybody says so, so it must be true. As director, my job was rather the opposite. I'm a miner, not a surfer.

The idea of making this film came to me rather by chance. And after three years of painstaking investigation I realise what an enriching experience it has been. I have come to appreciate the extent to which convictions are powerful. In short: those who proclaim the truth will never be believed!

And yet my job as a maker of documentaries is to reveal the truth, despite everything. It is something I had never previously perceived.

It all started with a hieroglyphic account carved upon a stela 3500 years ago, a photograph of which came into my father's hands. Like an immortal work of art the story of what happened so long ago is still reverberating to this day. The stela helps to explain the profound consequences – climatic, economic, demographic, political and historical – which flowed from a massive volcanic eruption 1300 km away from where it was found.

The story of the eruption on Santorini in 1628 BC is not new. Nor is its association with the Ten Plagues of Egypt or with Exodus. But there is a big difference between making vague assumptions, and painting with “a broad brush”, which may suit the purposes of unscrupulous bloggers or the populist media, and on the other hand establishing a scientific truth.

Is the story on the Tempest Stela that of the Santorini eruption? Did the catastrophe cause an entire people to depart? These are the questions which led me to the doors of the scientists who each explained their own analysis in terms of their own discipline. In each case, it is their own voice you hear – no “voice off” to put words in their mouth, as is the case in some documentaries. This is not docufiction which uses fake situations and fake characters to give an account which is pure invention. I have in mind the blockbuster films about Exodus which achieve some major compromises with truth and reality.

I show you what I see : each of the experts is left to give his or her viewpoint, whatever their hypothesis or opinion might be. Indeed, it was precisely my purpose to demonstrate the conflict of opinions, even if at the end I draw a personal conclusion. It is up to those watching to make up their own minds.

The story is founded upon existing archaeological documents. This film merely clarifies some points. It does not concentrate upon what people believe, but upon historical fact. There have been many catastrophes in Egyptian history, like the Plagues of Egypt described in the Bible. But they are scattered throughout Egyptian literature. They have never been confined to the specific context of the story of Moses and his descendants.

Less than 100 years ago the Bible was regarded as The Truth; people believed that the Bible was factual and archaeology was “Biblical” archaeology. My film attempts to set the record straight. I talk to experts, and conduct cross-checks in all the areas to ensure that there can be no doubt : the Bible is not a historical record. A distinction has to be drawn between a historical text based upon records, and founding legends which sometime incorporate things to which history refers but cannot be traced to any specific event. Exodus is unquestionably a founding story, a founding myth such as all peoples have.

So nothing personal. Other than that I find, whatever science may prove, the Human Race will always need to believe in something supernatural, transcendent, something which defies explanation, or which we do not wish to explain.

APPROACH

The starting point of the film is an article written in 2014 by two academics at the University of Chicago whose research led to a new understanding of the Tempest Stela*. They took as their base the translation done 50 years ago by Professor Claude Vandersleyen*. They developed a holistic view of the consequences of the Santorini eruption by linking it to events in Egyptian history.

The film begins by endeavouring to show how much the Stela reflects what it must have been like on the ground, thanks to the expert testimony of the climatologists, geologists, vulcanologists, dendrochronologists, Egyptologists and archaeologists who appear. Most had never met face-to-face, but they knew each other by name. I assembled the pieces of the jigsaw by going to see them one by one.

I have tried to compare and contrast their assertions and their discoveries. There are no fictitious images in this film, apart from archive images of real volcanoes erupting, and of storms. Later in the film I compare what science tells us with the analyses of Egyptologists, archaeologists, historians and theologians. When all is said and done, this was real detective work with clues, witnesses and evidence, but taking place 3500 years after the actual incident.





LOCATIONS

KARNAK (EGYPT)

The Karnak temple complex is an open-air museum covering 2 km² and located north of Luxor. It contains a vast array of structures and buildings which underwent construction, demolition and extension over more than 2000 years at the hands of numerous Pharaohs. It is the biggest surviving ancient religious complex in the world. French archaeologists have been excavating there since the 19th Century. Starting in 1937, the French Archaeological Mission carried out the consolidation of the 3rd pylon of the Temple of Amon-Ra (a pylon is a monument consisting of two rectangular-base towers located either side of a gateway which is crowned with a lintel).

The builders of the pylon, which was commissioned by Pharaoh Amenhotep III (9th Pharaoh of the 13th dynasty) had to get hold of large quantities of stone and rubble to pack the interior. So they “recycled” into rubble the surrounding temples. We know that Ahmose* ordered building work to be done in the temple of Amon (one of the main gods in the Egyptian pantheon, and God of Thebes) at Karnak So it is no accident that the Tempest Stela came to lie among the ruins which were used to fill up the 3rd pylon.

CENTRE GOLENISCHEFF (PARIS)

The Centre Golenischeff is part of the École Pratique des Hautes Etudes (EPHE) in Paris The Egyptology documentation centre was set up in 1946 and named in 1947 in honour of the Russian Egyptologist Vladimir Golenischeff who died that year and left his library to the institution. It was a tribute to his work, and to his collections which gave a real boost to Egyptology research at the EPHE. The centre was housed in an annex to the Guimet Museum, in the 16th arrondissement, until 1990 and was attached to the “Centre documentaire d'histoire des religions”. It moved several times and has now been established since 2010 in the 13th arrondissement. The current Director is Laurent Coulon. The photographs of the Tempest Stela used by Professor Claude Vandersleyen for his translation in 1967 are in the keeping of the Centre.

EL KAB (EGYPT)

The El Kab necropolis is located outside the ancient town of Nekheb, about 600 metres from the walls. It lies on the southern slope of the hill overlooking the town, and this rocky burial ground houses the tombs of the noble families of the town during the Middle Kingdom, at the time of the war against the Hyksos and at the start of the 18th Dynasty (the New Kingdom). One of the best-known is the tomb of Ahmes son of Abana, admiral of Pharaoh Ahmose's * fleet. He was exceptionally successful in battle and on seven occasions was rewarded with gold, the ultimate distinction, by three separate Pharaohs.

His tomb consists of two chambers; in the main one he is depicted as a large figure on the wall, with his grandson Paheri on a smaller scale at his feet. The war chronicles carved as hieroglyphs on the walls have been invaluable to Egyptologists as they are the sole source of information about the expulsion of the Hyksos from the Nile Valley, the reconquest of Lower Egypt and the battles to regain possession of African and Asian territory by the Pharaoh Ahmose*.

ABYDOS (EGYPT)

The Mortuary temple of Seti I at Abydos is located 91 km north of Luxor. It is well-known to tourists, and is the best preserved building from the New Kingdom. It contains a feature which makes it indispensable to Egyptologists: on one of its walls is the "Abydos Table". These lists in cartouche form the 76 kings of Egypt culminating with Seti I (19th dynasty, father of Rameses II).

But there is no mention of Queen Hachepsout (5th sovereign, 18th dynasty) or of Amenhotep VI (10th sovereign, 18th Dynasty) better known as Akenaton the heretic, all trace of whom the successors did their best to expunge from history. There is also no mention of the usurper dynasties (13th), the Hyksos*(14th to 16th) or the two parallel dynasties of Abydos and Thebes (17th) which were a feature of the Second Intermediate Period.

TELL EL-DAB'A (EGYPT)

Once, Tel el-Dab'a was called Avaris and was the Hyksos* capital during the 17th Dynasty. The Lower Egypt city was taken by Ahmose*, who chased the Hyksos as far as Palestine. Thus he reigned over the whole of Egypt and laid the foundations for the New Kingdom, a period during which Ancient Egypt flourished.

CINQUANTENAIRE MUSEUM (BRUSSELS)

The Cinquantenaire Museum is where Professor Claude Vandersleyen* carried out most of his Egyptological research, including his doctoral thesis.

SANTORIN (GRÈCE)

The island of Santorini, 70 km north of Crete, was the scene of the Thera* eruption 3500 years ago, when the volcano destroyed half the island. Today the caldera is visible, a circular lagoon several kilometres wide with cliffs rising to about 100 metres on the island side, which filled the hole created by the collapse of the roof of the magma chamber.

Geologists have analysed the deposits of ash and pumice which are 50 metres deep, and came across a section of an olive tree which made it possible to establish a date for the eruption.

The town of Akrotiri was a flourishing centre of commerce prior to the eruption, and was obliterated. Digs in Akrotiri have made it possible to understand the sequence of events.

ABUL GOUD (EGYPT)

The Abul Goud "Forbidden Museum" in Luxor is a government-owned depository of ancient articles found during the excavations. It took more than one year to secure permission to go and film the Tempest Stela in Abul Goud. It is a closed area. To get permission to film in Egypt you have to apply to the Permanent Committee for Egyptian Antiquities, which is part of the Ministry of Antiquities, but the approval of the Ministry of Information is also needed, and that is directly under the authority of Marshal Abdel Fattah al-Sissi.

The images from Abul Goud contain the first pictures taken of the Tempest Stela* since it was discovered in 1947.

Professor Claude Vandersleyen*, the father of the maker of the film, was seeing the Stela in person for the first time, and gives us a live translation.

DEIR EL BALLAS (EGYPT)

An archaeological site 30 km north of Thebes in Upper Egypt. It was the location of the palace of the 17th Dynasty Pharaohs. It is from there that Ahmose* set off to complete the reconquest of Lower Egypt. It has become a real tip, and filming there requires permits which are difficult to obtain.

MAIN CHARACTERS



THE TEMPEST STELA

The Tempest Stela was commissioned by Pharaoh Ahmose* about 3500 years ago. This flat stone contains the same hieroglyphic text on both sides. The text describes in about 20 lines the consequences of a terrible storm which devastated Egypt, and then the action taken by the King to repair the damage and to make offerings to the gods. It describes how the sky turned black and violent storms caused catastrophic floods, both of which call to mind two of the Plagues of Egypt.*

In the words of Claude Vandersleyen, who was the first person to translate the text in 1967 – at which time he could not have made a connection with the eruption of Thera* the volcano on Santorini – the Stela “reads as soberly as the minutes of a meeting, and only uses imagery to convey how violent the hurricane was; only once does the king’s astonishment show through the dry account, the technical nature of which is far from being its least interesting feature”. He goes on to say “the account of events as they occurred in time and space is remarkably rigorous”. And he stresses its exceptional character : it is “undoubtedly the most detailed account of a weather event in Ancient Egypt, and in this case the rain is described as calamitous”.

The Stela was discovered in 1947 during excavation work in Karnak* by the French archaeological mission. The first two fragments were not even mentioned in the report on the dig, as no-one knew what they were. Three others turned up in 1950, and the upper one showed that it could be attributed to Ahmose.* More pieces were found in 1951 which showed the links between the first five. And in 1958-59 when the foundations of the 3rd pylon had been reached, two more came to light. One had formed part of the headpiece, and brought further information.

The Stela was about 1.10 m wide, by about 1.80 m high, but only 9 cm thick which explains why it became so fragmented. It is kept in a “forbidden museum” at Abul Goud* (Luxor) where it is stored alongside other items discovered during the digs at Karnak*. The shots of the Stela in this film are the first taken since the original photograph.

PHARAOH AHMOSE I was the founder of the 18th Dynasty with whom the New Kingdom began. He was a scion of the royal house of Thebes and acceded to the throne at the age of 10 upon the death of Kamose, the last Pharaoh of the 17th Dynasty. According to Manetho* the Egyptian historian, he reigned for 25 years. He ruled Upper Egypt and completed the reconquest of the Nile Delta by expelling the Hyksos*, a foreign people who had ruled Lower Egypt from their capital Avaris for the previous century. He pursued his victorious path beyond the frontiers, and subjected Nubia and Canaan to his rule. What we know of his reconquest of Lower Egypt comes from the inscriptions on the chamber walls in the tomb of Achmes son of Abana, admiral of the fleet of Ahmose. His tomb lies at El Kab*. Few traces remain of Ahmose: a few stelae (Egyptian Museum, Cairo), a mummy (Luxor), a carving of his head wearing the White Crown of Upper Egypt (Metropolitan Museum), an axe (Egyptian Museum, Cairo), a dagger (Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto) and a bracelet (the Louvre). He also got a pyramid, of which little is left. It lies in Abydos* and is the last pyramid ever built as part of a royal funereal complex in Egypt. After him, the Pharaohs of the New Kingdom were buried in the Valley of the Kings.

The fact that his reign has been more accurately dated because of the accurate dating of the eruption of Thera* is a major step forward in Egyptology, since it has made it possible to align the dates in Babylonian and Egyptian civilisation more accurately. It has also become possible to identify with greater precision the dates of the various Egyptian dynasties (including those of the Hyksos*).

THE HYKSOS ruled Lower Egypt for about 100 years. They were of Asiatic origin and came out of Canaan during the Second Intermediate Period (which preceded the New Kingdom); they drove out the members of the 14th Dynasty (end of the Middle Kingdom) and founded the 15th and 16th Dynasties. It is they who brought the horse and the chariot into Egypt; they were much more advanced than the other peoples in the area in terms of weaponry and military organisation. But we don't know whether they really invaded the Nile Delta or whether they gradually assumed power in an Egyptian society in decline.

The reconquest of Lower Egypt began at the end of the 17th Dynasty and took around 30 years. Pharaoh Ahmose * completed the job when he captured Avaris, the capital, which the Egyptologist Manfred Bietak has identified as present-day Tel el-Dab'a.

PROFESSOR CLAUDE VANDERSLEYEN is the father of the maker of this film. He was born in 1927, and is an Egyptologist who specialised in the 18th Dynasty of the Pharaohs. He was Professor at Louvain University (UCL) where he lectured in Egyptian art, language, art history in general and Greek papyrology. He has published many works on Ancient Egypt. In 1967 when he was a pupil of the eminent French Egyptologist Jean Yoyotte* he translated the Tempest Stela on the basis of a photograph. He saw the Stela in person for the first time in his life at the age of 89, at the Abul Goud* depository, during filming.





THERA Its eruption took place in 1628 BC in the Bronze Age, and is known as the “Minoan eruption”. It was gigantic, reckoned to have been the equivalent of a 45 megaton bomb. Around 150 km³ of rocks and dust were projected to a height of 35 km in a single day. The caldera is still visible today on the island of Santorini*: an immense circular depression filled with seawater which was caused by the collapse of the roof of the magma chamber, and with high cliffs on the island side. The layer of ash and pumice on the island is about 50 metres deep. The town of Akrotiri * was destroyed in the eruption.

The eruption caused a change in the climate of the whole earth. 90% of the ozone layer was destroyed and a cold spell affected the region for the next 7 to 10 years. The eruption generated pyroclastic flows (mixture of scalding gas, steam and lava) and triggered tsunamis which flooded the ports of the South Eastern Mediterranean. This has been proved by the analysis of sediment. The sky was darkened by dust for months after.

The eruption had a heavy impact upon the South Eastern Mediterranean, and may have facilitated Pharaoh Ahmose's reconquest of Lower Egypt and his expulsion of the Hyksos*, whose fleet may have been damaged by the tsunamis caused by the eruption 1300 km away. According to research carried out at the University of Chicago the resulting disruption to trade and to farming may have weakened the Babylonian Empire. This would explain why Babylon was unable to fight off an invasion by Hittites, another ancient culture which flourished in what today is Turkey.

The exact date has been established through a series of findings which are consistent : the dendrochronology of an olive branch found in one piece in the ash on Santorini* by professor Walter L. Friedrich*, the core samples drilled from the Mediterranean sea bed and from the Greenland icecap, Babylonian Tablet No 63 (one of 70 terracotta tablets) saying that Venus could not be properly seen because the sky was darkened, and the Rhind* papyrus which mentions the noise, lightning, and rain after the eruption and gives the date as during the reign of the Hyksos king of the time.

The fact that the eruption can be dated to between November 1628 and May 1627 BC means that a series of other events, and reigns, can also be located in time (including Ahmose's* reign, since he describes the events on the Tempest Stela).

EXPERTS INTERVIEWED



TIM DRUIT is a volcanologist at the Laboratoire Magmas et Volcans of the Observatoire de Physique du Globe in Clermont-Ferrand (France). He specialises in, *inter alia*, pyroclastic flows (mix of gas, steam and rock particles emerging from an active volcano) and the formation of calderas (large circular depression resulting from the collapse of the roof of a magma chamber which is evacuated during an eruption), and in particular in the case of the island of Santorini* (Greece).



MARINA BALDI is a climatologist at the Italian National Research Council's Institute of Biometeorology in Rome. She has investigated the relationship between the climate in the Mediterranean and the eruption of Thera*, the volcano on the island of Santorini*, and examined the disaster described on the Tempest Stela* from a climatological point of view. She has also participated in a climatological study of seven of the ten Plagues of Egypt.



LEFTERIS ZORZOS is an archaeologist and PhD student at University College London. He is a founder member of Aegeus - Society for Aegean Prehistory. In 1999, at the age of 16, he was the youngest archaeologist to take part in the excavations at Akrotiri, the town on the island of Santorini* (Greece) destroyed by the eruption of Thera*.



GILLES LERICOLAIS is the current Director of European Affairs at Ifremer (French research institute for exploitation of the sea). With a doctorate in marine geology, he has spent a considerable amount of time studying the formation of the Black Sea with the Marion Dufresne research vessel. He has extracted core samples from the Mediterranean seabed to reconstruct the history of the eruption of Thera*, the volcano on the island of Santorini*.



ROBERT RITNER is Professor of Egyptology at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (United States). He is the author of over a hundred publications on religion, medicine, magic, language and literature, as well as the political and social history of Ancient Egypt. With Nadine Moeller*, he coauthored an article entitled "The Ahmose 'Tempest Stela', Thera and Comparative Chronology", which links the account of the disasters mentioned on the Tempest Stela* with the eruption of Thera*, the volcano on the island of Santorini* (Greece).



NADINE MOELLER is Associate Professor of Egyptian archaeology at the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago (United States) and holds a PhD in Egyptian archaeology from Cambridge University. Her research focuses on absolute chronology and climate change in antiquity. With Robert K. Ritner*, she co-authored an article entitled "The Ahmose 'Tempest Stela', Thera and Comparative Chronology", which links the account of the disasters mentioned on the Tempest Stela* with the eruption of Thera*, the volcano on the island of Santorini



STURT MANNING is Professor of Classical Archaeology at Cornell University College of Arts and Sciences in Ithaca (United States) and Director of the Cornell Tree-Ring Laboratory. He is an international expert recognised for his numerous works on dendrochronology and carbon dating, which focus on Bronze Age and Early Iron Age civilisations in the Eastern Mediterranean. It is he who gathered and validated all the data relating to the chronology of the olive branch found by Walter L. Friedrich*. His article giving 1628 BC as the absolute date of the eruption of Thera*, the volcano on the island of Santorini* (Greece), was published in July 2016.



ROLAND ENMARCH is Senior Lecturer at the University of Liverpool (United Kingdom) and holds a DPhil in Egyptian literature from Oxford University. He has specialised in the "pessimistic poetry" of the Egyptian Middle Kingdom (period from 1991 to 1640 BC), and the development of the genre of literary laments and its impact on the evolution of Egyptian style in rhetoric and literature. He is one of the few world specialists in the poem "The Dialogue of Ipuwer and the Lord of All" contained in the Ipuwer Papyrus*, held in the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden (Netherlands), which was the basis for the chapter on the Plagues of Egypt in the Book of Exodus*.



MANFRED BIETAK, Professor Emeritus of Egyptology at the University of Vienna (Austria) and Director of the Austrian Archaeological Institute in Cairo (Egypt) until 2009. He has served as Visiting Professor at the Collège de France and Harvard. He directed the excavations at Tell el-Dab'a* (formerly Avaris, capital under the Hyksos*) from 1966 until 2009. He discovered the town of Avaris



FRANÇOISE LABRIQUE is Professor of Egyptology and a religious historian at the University of Cologne (Germany) and the Université Libre de Bruxelles (Belgium), where she studied classical philology. She focuses her research on Egyptian and Greek literature and religion, employing epigraphy and iconographic analysis.



TEIJE DE JONG is Professor Emeritus at the University of Amsterdam Institute for Astronomy (Netherlands). He has taken a special interest in the Babylonian observations of Venus, the brightest star in the sky. He noticed in the writings on the Babylonian tablets that Venus could not be observed for a period of two years as it was obscured by the Earth's atmosphere and that this occurred just after 1628 BC, the recognised date of the eruption of Thera*, the volcano on the island of Santorini* (Greece).



ISRAËL FINKELSTEIN is Director of the Institute of Archaeology at Tel Aviv University (Israel). His archaeological research is aimed at establishing the matches and mismatches between the sacred texts and the archaeological reality on the ground. He is co-author of the controversial bestseller, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision*, which provides a summary of the scientific work carried out between the 1970s and the present day on the archaeology of the Biblical period.



THOMAS RÖMER is a theologian, and an eminent world specialist in and exegete of the Old Testament. He has a doctorate in theology from the University of Geneva and is Professor at the Faculty of Theology and Sciences of Religions at the University of Lausanne (Switzerland) and also Professor at the Collège de France, where he holds the chair in The Hebrew Bible and its Contexts. He is endeavouring, on the basis of the most recent archaeological and epigraphical discoveries, to reveal what lies behind the scriptures making up the Hebrew Bible.

EXPERTS MENTIONED

LABIB HABACHI (1906-1984) was a highly distinguished Egyptian Egyptologist who worked at the Antiquities Department of the Egyptian Government. It is he who first discovered the Hyksos* capital (Avaris) at Tell El-Dab'a*, as confirmed by the work of Egyptologist Manfred Bietak*.

ANGELOS G. GALANOPOULOS (1910- 2001) was a Greek seismologist who worked at the Athens Seismology Institute and lived in Santorini. He was one of the first to link the Tempest Stela* with the eruption of Thera*, the volcano on the island of Santorini*, 3500 years ago. In his view, it was the tsunami triggered by this eruption that destroyed Atlantis and the Minoan civilisation.

JEAN YOYOTTE (1927-2009) was a highly distinguished French Egyptologist who held the chair in Egyptology at the Collège de France from 1992 to 2000. From 1965 to 1985, he directed the excavations at Tanis in the north of Egypt. It is he who entrusted Egyptologist Claude Vandersleyen*, then a research student at the Collège de France, with the task of translating the Tempest Stela* from three photos.

MANETHO, an Egyptian priest living in the 3rd century BC, authored a three-volume History of Egypt (*Ægyptiaca*) in Greek during the reign of Ptolemy II. He is responsible for the - sometimes rather arbitrary - division of the rulers of Egypt into 30 dynasties. This History of Egypt is used as a basis by Egyptologists, although it went unnoticed for three centuries after it was written, which gives rise to doubts as to whether it was really authored in the 3rd century BC.



THE RHIND PAPYRUS

This is in the keeping of the British Museum, and is chiefly known for the fact that it contains remarkable mathematical calculations, copied from a much older text. It is in hieratic script, and consists of 87 examples of how to resolve some problems of arithmetic, algebra, geometry and the calculation of areas. It is 5 metres long and 32 cm wide.

But on the back is some text which was added later. The text speaks of a great noise (the God Seth “has spoken”) and heavy rain (the goddess Isis “has opened the Heavens”). It must have been pretty unusual, even terrifying, to warrant a mention on the back of a mathematical text which the scribe had made a few years before and which he was in the process of consulting.

We can imagine the scribe hurriedly making a note of the date (3rd day of the first month of the rainy season, in the 11th year of the reign of his Hyksos king, probably Khamoudy, the last king of the Hyksos 15th dynasty), and of political and military happenings so as to identify the date more easily : capture of Heliopolis and Tjarou by the “Prince from the South” (Ahmose*). These form part of the sequence of events leading up to the fall of Avaris, the Hyksos* capital in the Nile delta which marked the end of their hundred years occupying Lower Egypt.

This papyrus which is over 3500 years old is testimony of the highest order, and one more indication to confirm that the eruption of Thera*, the Santorini* volcano, was felt in Egypt during the reign of Ahmose*. The Tempest Stela * refers to the same event.



THE IPUWER PAPYRUS

Officially known as the “Papyrus Leiden I 344 *recto* “ (**not** the same as the Leyden papyrus), it contains an Egyptian poem in cursive hieratic script, The Admonitions of Ipuwer, or “The dialogue of Ipuwer and the Lord of All”. It was written at the end of the 13th century BC, discovered at Memphis in Egypt in the 19th Century and translated in 1909 by Sir Alan Henderson Gardiner, a British Egyptologist. It is in the keeping of the National Museum of Antiquities in Leyden (Netherlands).

In his poem, Ipuwer complains that world has gone upside-down : the rich have become poor and the poor rich. He appeals to the “Lord of All ” (the king, or the Sun God) to do his stuff and destroy his enemies. There follows a description of the chaos that has overtaken Egypt. Slaves are abandoning their masters because of violent cataclysms : the Nile has turned to blood, there is famine, drought, the slaves run off with the wealth of the Egyptians, and death stalks the land.

The reference to the “river of blood” was for long taken as evidence of the truth of the Book of Exodus*, although it could perfectly well describe the colour of the river after sediment has been stirred up during flooding, or merely be a metaphor for the chaos reigning in Egypt, as the poem describes. It also speaks of the corn withering, the herds, the darkness, the sufferings of the children, the lamentations on all sides, the sky on fire, boils, many aspects touched upon in the Book of Exodus*.

This literature could easily have inspired the authors of the Bible, but no disrespect to those who rather see it as reliable evidence to corroborate the Ten Plagues of Egypt version.



THE BOOK OF EXODUS

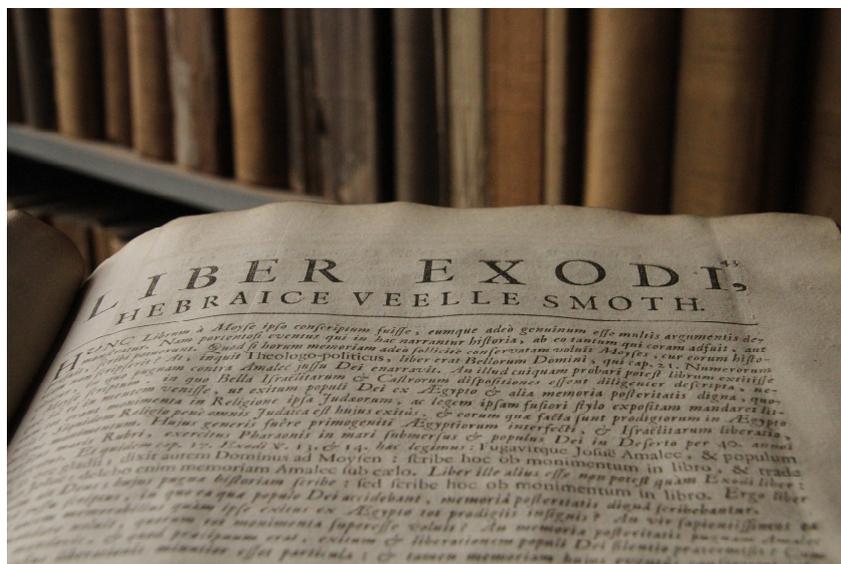
This is the second book of the Old Testament. It sets out the founding myth of Israel : the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt. Kept in slavery by the Egyptians, Yahweh delivers them by striking Egypt with 10 Plagues and forcing Pharaoh to give way; they escape under their leader Moses. Pharaoh's army pursues them, the Red Sea parts to let them through, and then drowns their pursuers. After wandering for 40 years in the Sinai desert, they find the Promised Land of Israel in Canaan.

The Ten Plagues strike because of Pharaoh's refusal to let the Hebrews go. Yahweh shows in this way that he is more powerful than Pharaoh, who in Egypt is also regarded as a god. The Ten Plagues were, in order : The Nile turns to blood, a plague of frogs, then mosquitoes (or lice), then flies (or hornets, or wild beasts), death of livestock, boils, fiery hailstorms, locusts, darkness covers the land, and then death of the firstborn. Scientists have long endeavoured to explain the Plagues, or to substantiate their reality by things which happened, or which might have happened around that era.

But the reality of Exodus has become more and more tenuous as archaeology has progressed : nothing has been found to substantiate it. It is hard to imagine 2 m people (600 000 Israelites plus others in attendance - not to mention livestock) wandering the desert for 40 years and leaving no trace. Besides, the population of Egypt in the 17 Century BC was less than 2 million. And the Hebrews would not appear to have been slaves as such; rather they were exploited for their skills, notably as builders, but paid little. There was much coming and going in the Nile Basin around then, depending on climatic conditions : people went where there was food. Egypt was green, with many immigrants and was a permanent melting-pot of peoples from the Southern Mediterranean and the Levant.

Dating Exodus poses even more problems if Exodus itself as an event cannot be established. The dates according to the Book of Exodus suggest the 13th Century BC, but this is pure theory. Before the recent finds described in this film, Exodus had often been linked to the expulsion of the Hyksos*.

However, the film world never tires of the subject of Exodus and has a cavalier attitude to historical accuracy, for example in the film *Exodus* which dates it to the reign of Rameses II, the most glorious period in the history of Egypt, in terms of aesthetics. The most recent documentary so far, *Patterns of Evidence* (2015), pretends that Exodus happened during the Middle Kingdom but on the basis of evidence which historians and archaeologists regard as highly controversial.





THE DIRECTOR

OLIVIER VANDERSLEYEN has his own production company, Widescreen. He has been teaching at ENSAV (Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Visuels – La Cambre), Brussels, since 1979. He is a member of the Belgian and European Press corps, and as cameraman has covered events like the fall of the Berlin wall, the war in Former Yugoslavia and conflict in Northern Ireland for the major TV broadcasters. He is a graduate of INSAS (Institut National Supérieur des Arts du Spectacle et des techniques de diffusion), Brussels; his first job was with FR3, in France, and has also worked with France Inter, France Culture and Sud Radio. He created a series for radio about the violin, for FR3 Lorraine, with Yehudi Menuhin. Prior to his film-investigation about the Plagues of Egypt and Exodus, he had made three documentaries about the industrial and social history of Belgium,

FILMOGRAPHY

- The Tempest Stela – Revisiting the roots of the Exodus (2017)
- Mad about hats (2013)
- Do a good job, have a good time : The Utopia of Arthur Brancart (2012)
- Greenhouse effects (2010)

FICHE TECHNIQUE

Shooting format DVCpro HD 1080@50i
Screening format ProRes 422 ou Mpeg2HD 1080
Running time 64:50 MINUTES
Original version Multilingual with SSTT FR/EN/NL/DE
Subtitles ANGLAIS / English
Image ratio 1.77 (1920 x 1080) 16/9
Sound Stéréo
Produced by Widescreen (unsubsidised)

Production cost : € 65 000

Duration : 3 years, including 58 days on location and 7 months editing

Production : 1 October 2014 to 20 October 2017

Fiming : 5 January 2015 to 17 August 2017

Locations : Austria, Belgium, Egypt, France, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, UK, USA

Negotiations to obtain permission to film lasted just over 1 year.

Director : Olivier Vandersleyen*

Cameraman Rome : Alessandro Rossini

Cameraman Paris : Eric Jusen

Cameraman Brussels : Philibert Vandersleyen

Original Music : Gaspard Giersé

Mixing : Alexander Davidson

Voice off : Hughes Belin

Additional sounds and mixing : Deborah Dourneau

Translation and subtitles : Andy Unwin (EN) Petra Claes and Martine Laroy (NL), José Maringer (DE),
Sabiha Safi (AR)

Visual design : Pierre Dalla Palma

Cover and Web design : Charlotte Vandersleyen

Very special thanks to Christian Leblanc and François Gourdon, without whose help this film could not have been made

CONTACT

Olivier Vandersleyen: +32 (0) 478 98 32 49
olivier.vandersleyen@widescreen.be