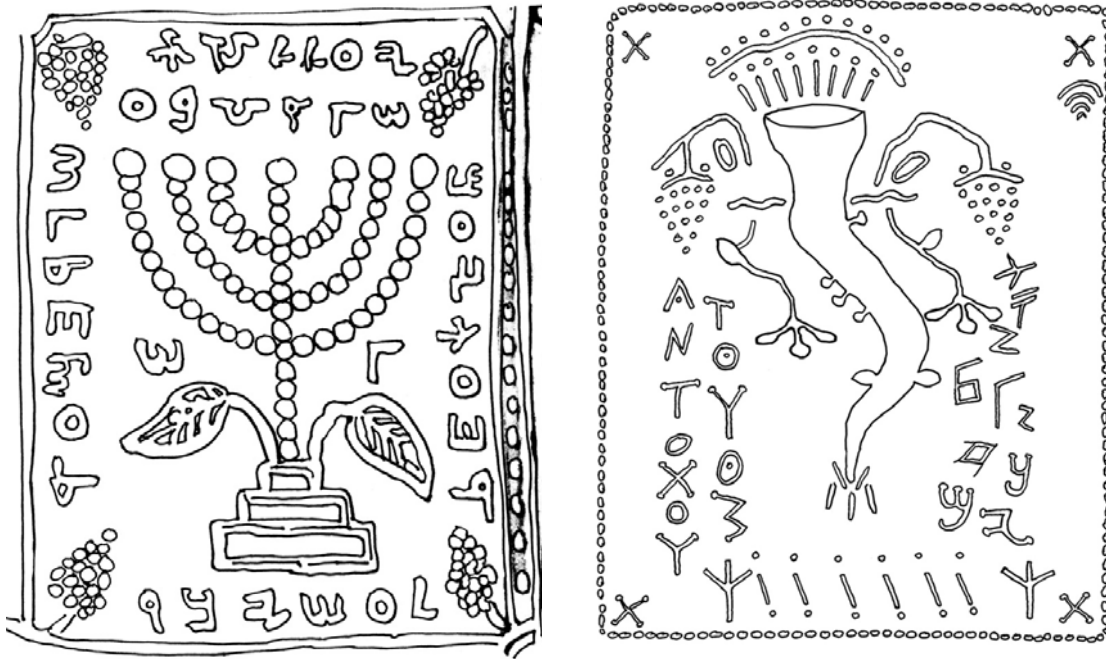


SOME LEAD BOOKS FOUND IN JORDAN.

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Hebrew lead books have been found in the last few years, some in a cave in Jordan and others appearing in various markets or offered on-line for sale. Other items have been found with the books, but tonight I shall concentrate only on the books.

The Department of Antiquities of the Kingdom of Jordan found some of the objects in a cave in a village in NW Jordan. The battle of Yarmouk was fought not far away in 636 CE, when the Muslims defeated the Byzantine army and the gained control of Syria. This is not to suggest that the lead books were hidden in the cave after the battle, since there were some small niches cut into the cave wall that matched the size of some of the books. This suggests they had at one time been placed there.

The books vary in size, but all are small. The largest are the size of a post card, the smallest the size of a bank card. The individual metal pages have been cast so that the letters and patterns stand above the surface. *Many copies of the same page have been found, showing that this was a form of printing.* When writing is incised into the metal, printing like this is not possible.

Forming the original moulds for the pages required the skills of a seal maker, but exactly how the thin metal sheets were cast is not yet known. Most are lead, but some are gold and some copper.

The individual sheets were pierced and bound together into small 'books' using wires or more elaborate closures. Some were bound on all four sides and thus sealed, suggesting that they were to preserve material rather than have it available for regular use. The holes for binding the pages are pierced through the patterns, suggesting that the 'pages' were originally separate tablets that were bound and sealed at a later stage.

Some of the metal tablets have been made recently, but tests show that some are ancient. We do not know if we have any 'originals', since even the ancient tablets could be copies of something even older. Some tests on the lead of the page I shall discuss in detail show that it was not made during the last 200 years. Other tests examining the surface show that it has not been disturbed or reworked for nearly 2 000 years. Reports from these tests can be found on the website of the *Centre for the Study of the Jordanian Lead Books*.

Since the metal tests cannot be decisive, the material cast into the page has to provide its own context.

Now I need to say something about our methods. We were confronted with what looked like a jumble of letters, mostly Hebrew in various forms, but some Greek. Enthusiastic bloggers rushed to post their views on this, asserting that the finds were all fakes because they could not read them. Scholars were more cautious.

Another feature was the mixture of letters and symbols. Such a combination is found on coins, but texts such as the Dead Seas Scrolls are not illustrated. The symbols are all, as far as we can see, linked to the temple. There are seven branched lamps, *etrogim*, bowls of harvest offerings, palm branches and many more. These, together with the script, show that the items have a Hebrew context, but that Hebrew context could include the Hebrew Christians.

Further, the bloggers asserted, the images were simply copied from coins of the period. Some certainly correspond to those on coins, but the motifs chosen for coins are usually well known and recognizable before they appear on a coin. This means that the lead books and the coins could have a common origin. The symbols in the books could have been the reason for the symbols on the coins.

There are some images that not found elsewhere, for example, there is a seven branched lamp stand with a shallow curvature to the branches [which we use as our logo] and another lampstand formed of 70 small circles which I shall show you later. There are also lines of diagonal crosses, known to Ezekiel in 600 BCE as the sign of the name of the LORD, used to mark his faithful servants. They were used to mark a high priest with oil on his forehead, and also in Christian baptism.

Lead books such as we have are otherwise unknown in a Hebrew context. The popular assertion that they were forgeries prompted the question: ‘Forgeries of what?’

Small sealed books are a feature of the Book of Revelation, and so my first thought was that they were linked in some way to the apocalyptic tradition and visions known to the first Christians and almost certainly to Jesus.

Most of the items are damaged, but in some cases we have found several copies of the same design and have been able to reconstruct it by superimposing several examples. By collating 14 damaged examples, it was possible to restore the design we have called ‘the horn of salvation’. The horn is sprouting roots. There are palaeo-Hebrew letters to the right and Greek to the left of it. This is shown at the top of this paper.

My colleague Dr Samuel Zinner was the first to attempt a reconstruction in this way, and he also proposed that this was ‘the horn of salvation’ mentioned in Psalm 132.17:

[In Zion] I will make a horn to sprout for David,
I have prepared a lamp for my servant.

This was our first ‘context’: it was Messianic. The sprout’ or ‘branch’ was a messianic title used by the prophets Jeremiah and Zechariah (Jer.23.5; Zech 3.8, 6.12), and also found in the Dead Sea Scrolls (4Q 174.I).

The horn itself is a complex symbol. A horn of oil was used to anoint the ancient kings: Samuel anointed King David (1 Sam.16.13); Nathan the prophet and Zadok the priest anointed Solomon as king (1 Kgs 1.39). According to later Jewish tradition, the true anointing oil was hidden away just before the first temple was destroyed, and it would be restored when the true temple was rebuilt (B Horayoth 12a; Num. R. XV.10). The horn of oil was a sign of temple restoration and the coming of the Messiah. .

The horn, here called the *shofar*, was sounded on important occasions: when the LORD gave the Law on Mount Sinai (Exod.19.16, 19); when the king was anointed (1 Kings 1.34, 39); to warn of war (Jer.4.5); and to announce the Day of Judgment (Joel 2.1; Zeph.1.16; Rev.1.10; 4.1). The *shofar* also sounded on the great holy days in the temple: at New Year, during Tabernacles, and announcing the Jubilee when the scattered people would to the temple in Jerusalem (Isa.27.13). Here, the horn is announcing the Day of Judgment.

Dr Zinner made the link between this image of a sprouting horn and the ancient Amidah prayer. Prof Yehuda Liebes suggested in 1984 that one section of the Amidah prayer was changed towards the end of the first century CE. ‘Blessed are you O LORD, who makes the horn of David sprout’, became ‘Blessed are you O LORD who makes the horn of salvation sprout’. The change made possible an allusion to Jesus, because the two words ‘salvation’ and ‘Jesus’ are almost identical in Hebrew. Rabbinic tradition said that the change was made by Simeon haPakoli, known to Christian as Simeon son of Clopas, the second bishop in Jerusalem whose mother stood at the foot of Jesus’ cross (John 19.25; Eusebius, *History of the Church* 3. 11).

It is therefore no surprise that the horn of salvation is also found in the New Testament. Zechariah, the father of the John the Baptist, sang to celebrate the naming of his son:

Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people,
And has raised up a horn of salvation for us, in the house of his servant David (Luke 1.68-69).

There can be no doubt that Jews and Christians shared the message of this image. The first Christians and the Jews who fought to liberate their land from the Romans may have known and used it. Even at this early stage in our work, it is clear that some of the lead books reflect the years of war against Rome, and that Christians seem to have been fighting in that war of liberation.

Anna, the old prophetess who saw the infant Jesus when he was brought to the temple by Mary and Joseph, saw that Simeon had recognized him, and went and told everyone who was looking

for 'the redemption of Jerusalem' (Luke 2.38). Those words appear many times in the lead books: 'the redemption of Jerusalem'.

A coin minted during the second war against Rome, 132-135 CE, shows the four pillars of the holy of holies in the temple, with the curtain removed so that the ark is visible. Now the ark had been in the first temple but disappeared and was never in the second temple, built in about 525 BCE. The ark would return to the temple, it was said, in the time of the Messiah, and the coin expressed that hope. The same image of the ark restored to the holy of holies appears elsewhere too. *It is the central vision of the Book of Revelation*, where the holy of holies is opened, the ark is seen, and the Messiah is born. How did St John, who wrote the Book of Revelation, know about the vision that became the motif on the coins of the second war against Rome? Even the latest dates proposed for the Book of Revelation are earlier than the coin.

This is a good example of a coin image known elsewhere in a source that is earlier than the coin itself. This may be true of other symbols in the lead books. We cannot say with confidence that the lead books *copied* the coins.

Several pages seem to reflect the second war against Rome. My colleague Dr Zinner has found many examples of the name Simon, which he thinks refer to Shim'on bar Kokhba, the leader of the second war, who was seen by many as the Messiah. Little is known about him, but the lead books play on his name 'Shim'on' and the first word of the Jewish statement of faith, the Shema': 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is One LORD'.

Wordplay on names is also found in the New Testament. The father of John the Baptist, who sang of the horn of salvation, also wove four names into his song: Zechariah, meaning the 'LORD has remembered', his wife Elizabeth, meaning 'the LORD has sworn an oath', his son John, meaning 'the LORD has been gracious', and Jesus, meaning 'salvation or deliverance'.

[The LORD] has raised up a horn of salvation for us...
That we should be *saved* from our enemies...
To perform *the mercy* promised to our fathers,
And *to remember* his holy covenant,
The *oath* which he swore to our father Abraham... (Luke 1.69-73).

We only have the Greek of Zechariah's song, but translating back into Hebrew reveals this intricate wordplay on the names just like the play on Shim'on and the Shema'. This was the world of the Hebrew Christians. This not to say that the lead books were made by the Christians, only that the lead books represent something that was familiar to the first Christians.

The name 'Jesus' has been found several times, but 'Jesus was a popular name, and so it may not refer to Jesus of Nazareth. So too Shim'on was a popular name, and the instances of Shim'on in the lead books may not refer to Shim'on Bar Kokhba. The redemption of Jerusalem was a

hope of both the Jews and of the first followers of Jesus of Nazareth, It is just not possible to say at this stage where, if at all, the boundaries lie.

The Menorah Page.

I now come to the detailed examination of one page that has occupied me, and fascinated me, for two years or more. One page depicts a central menorah with a symmetrical pattern of letters arranged around it. Several examples of this page have been found, some in lead but one in gold. This latter was seen only on-line when offered for sale, but it showed all the details more clearly than did the lead copies. I have used one lead copy, bought from a registered dealer in Jordan.

The whole menorah is formed of 70 small circles, including the seven lamps which are also depicted as circles. The menorah was often shown as formed from small circles, but I have not yet found one using precisely 70 circles. Josephus described the menorah in Moses' tabernacle as having 70 ornaments: 'globules, lilies, pomegranates and bowls' (*Antiquities* 3.6.7). Maybe the 70 circles were the ornaments, but then there is the question: why 70 ornaments?

The menorah had seven branches, and 70 ornaments suggests 10 per lamp. The obvious link to biblical symbolism is the dragon/snake in the Book of Revelation, who had seven heads with ten horns on each, and whose agent, the beast from the sea, also had seven heads with ten horns on each (Rev.12.3; 13.1-2). The visionary/apocalyptic tradition was constructed around pairs of opposites like this: the harlot in the Book of Revelation and the Qumran texts is the evil opposite of the holy city Jerusalem, Nero is the evil opposite of the Messiah, and so on. As we shall see, a pattern of pairs set as opposites around the menorah is the key to reading this page.

The dragon/snake with seven heads and seventy horns was the evil opposite of the menorah. The snake caused the whole world to go astray, and so the menorah represented whoever kept the whole world on the right path. The visions in Revelation, even though we know them in Greek, were originally written in Hebrew, and the old Hebrew wordplay is clear in many places although lost in the Greek translation. Since 'horn' in Hebrew also means 'beam of light', the dragon/snake and his 70 'horns' was opposed to the seventy lights of the menorah.

The dragon was thrown from heaven, together with his angels who were one third of the stars. They fought against the woman and her children, but Michael and his angels defended her. Presumably they too were stars, like the heavenly host that fought with Deborah (Judg.5.20), and the angel host described in the Qumran War Scroll that was expected to join the sons of light in their battle against the mysterious Kittim. The sons of light described in the War Scroll were exiled in the wilderness.

In the Book of Revelation, the woman clothed with the sun had great wings like an eagle and she also fled to the wilderness, where 'they shall nurse her' for 'time, times and half a time'

(Rev.12.14, translating literally). The nursing image is also found in Isaiah (Isa.60.16; 66.10-11), but there the natural way to read the Hebrew is that the Lady fed her children, rather than the children feeding her. Perhaps this was also in the Hebrew text underlying Revelation 12.14; the woman clothed with the sun continued to feed her children in the wilderness.

The motif of ‘time, two times and half a time’ – three and a half - is another key to reading this menorah page. There are blocks of four letters which have to be read three and a half times - giving 14 letters – which then carry the message. This mysterious length of time is also found in Daniel, where the great angel wearing white linen told him to seal the words and the book for ‘a time, two times and half a time’ (Dan.12.4-7); and in the final prophecy of the book, we read:

Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament;

And those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever (Dan.12.3).

The wise would understand what that meant.

The angel of the LORD spoke of this to the father of John the Baptist when he told him of the birth of his son:

[He] will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children

And the disobedient to the wisdom of the just/righteous ones,

To make ready for the LORD a people prepared (Luke 1.17).

The seventy

The seventy lights of the menorah, the children of the Lady in the wilderness, appear in the story of Jesus sending out 70 to proclaim the kingdom (Luke 10.1, 9). Why 70? They had power over demons, serpents and scorpions, and when they returned to report their success, Jesus said that *he had seen Satan fall from heaven* (Luke 10.17- 19). He linked the number 70 to the fall of Satan recorded in Revelation, and Jesus saw his 70 as warriors against the dragon/snake with his 70 horns. They had power to ‘tread on’ serpents and scorpions and the power of Satan. There may have been others who saw themselves as these warriors, but St Luke shows that the followers of Jesus certainly saw themselves that way. They were the beams of light from the menorah, they were children of the light.

They were the light of the world. Jesus claimed this title for himself (John 8.12), when he was in the temple for the feast of Tabernacles, but he also gave it to all his followers (Matt.5.14). The lights should not to be hidden, he said, but put on *the* lamp stand, *luchnia*. Had these lights been hidden away? And was this a reference to a particular lampstand, since the same Greek word was used for the menorah? Were the sons of light themselves a part of the menorah light? This would explain why the top lamps of our menorah are depicted as circles, in the same way as the 70 smaller circles that form the rest of the lampstand.

A menorah with 70 ornaments was not the form that Josephus knew in the temple. He came from a priestly family, and so could have entered the temple and seen the actual menorah in his time. His brief account implies that he had been into the temple: ‘the level part of the temple received those passing within...’ He said the menorah had seven lamps that represented the planets, but gave no more detail (*War* 5.5.5). Philo also said that they represented the stars (*Questions on Exodus* II.75-76, 104) or that they represented the planets (*Life of Moses* 2.21.1).

The menorah Josephus knew was depicted on the arch of Titus, one of the spoils of war taken to Rome in 70 CE, but that menorah had only 42 ornaments. Nevertheless, Josephus knew that the original menorah had 70 ornaments, although the accounts in Exodus do not give this number. Further, Josephus’s account does not mention the almond motifs on the Exodus menorah (Exod. 25.33-34; 37.20); he describes only globules and bowls, lilies and pomegranates.

‘Seventy’ suggests that the number of ornaments was significant, and if the seven lamps represented seven ‘planets’ [the sun, moon and five planets known at the time], then the 70 ornaments are likely to have been stars. In neighbouring Ugarit, their ancient tales of the gods had long known of the seventy sons of Athirat, their great sun goddess (KTU 1.4.vi.46 ‘He invited the 70 sons of Athirat’), and Hebrew tradition knew of the seventy nations (Gen.10) and of the 70 shepherd angels who ruled the LORD’s people after they had strayed from his ways (1 Enoch 89.59-77; 90.22-27). The Palestinian Targum to Deuteronomy 32.8 also mentions 70 angels, even though the Hebrew text here does not mention the number 70 nor that they were angels or sons of God:

When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance,
When he separated the sons of men,
He fixed the bounds of the peoples,
According to the number of the sons of God (Deut.32.8).

This translation is reconstructed from the Qumran text and the Lxx, where the sons of God are called ‘angels’. The Palestinian Pseudo-Jonathan Targum combines the Masoretic Hebrew, the tradition of the 70 angels known in Enoch, and the 70 nations in Genesis 10:

When the Most High made allotment of the world unto the nations ... He cast the lot among the seventy angels, the princes of the nations with whom is the revelation to oversee the city, even at that time He established the limits of the nations according to the sum of the number of the seventy souls of Israel who went down into Egypt...

Thus, even though there is nothing in the Masoretic Hebrew text to suggest that there were seventy angel-sons of God Most High, the Lxx knew of the angels of the nations, the Qumran text called them sons of God, and the Targumist knew there were 70.

The Mother of the 70 sons

Missing from all three accounts is the Mother of these sons, known in Ugarit as Athirat, the sun goddess who was the heavenly mother of the king. The Book of Revelation shows the same Lady in the first temple in Jerusalem. We know it was the first temple because the ark was there, and the ark was missing from the second temple. She was the woman clothed with sun [Jerusalem's equivalent to the sun goddess], and she gave birth to a son who was taken to the throne of God (Rev.11.19-12.16). Her son escaped from the dragon with seven heads and seventy horns, she fled to the wilderness, and the dragon attacked her other children. The Christians, then, knew and preserved visions set in the first temple. In this case, it was a vision of the heavenly Mother of the Son of God who had other children and was living in the wilderness to escape persecution.

St Paul knew these children of the heavenly Mother. He called them the sons of God, because they had received the Spirit that made them sons. Jesus was the firstborn of her sons who became king, and the Christians were her other children (Rom.8.14-17, 28-29). The one whom St Paul calls the Spirit was their Mother. Where did Paul learn all this? Presumably it was from the people who were preserving the visions that St John interpreted and formed into the Book of Revelation. St Paul had spent some time in 'Arabia' after his conversion (Gal. 1.17), and, although this is not Arabia as we know it today, it was certainly an area east and south of the River Jordan. This could have been 'the wilderness' where the Lady had fled and continued to nurse her children.

The sprouting menorah.

The menorah on our page is sprouting two leaves from its base, and after extensive research, I have not found any other image of a menorah sprouting leaves. Thus two features of our menorah are unique: the seventy small circles and the sprouting leaves.

This is consistent with the tree imagery used in Exodus, which prescribes almonds and almond flowers as decoration for the menorah (Exod.25.33-34; 19-20). The sprouting suggests new growth, such as the shoot from the stump of Jesse and the branch growing from his roots (Isa.11.1), or the seed that remained in the stump of the sacred tree after it had been cut down (Isa.6.13, Hebrew text but not Lxx). It is possible to reconstruct a temple purge when Isaiah was a young man, and so the sprouting menorah would represent new growth in the royal house of David, the Messiah. In an early vision, dated before Hezekiah put the tunnel through into Jerusalem in the time of Isaiah to divert the waters of the Gihon spring, Enoch saw that in the centre of the earth [Jerusalem] new branches were growing from a felled tree (1 Enoch 26.1). This was an ancient hope from the time of Isaiah.

Our sprouting menorah was a symbol of the Lady of the first temple. In Proverbs the tree of life was the symbol of Wisdom (Prov.3.18), another name for the Lady, and she longed to pour out her Spirit on her foolish children (Prov.1.23), who had ignored her teachings and would suffer as

a result. Wisdom's symbol was not one particular type of tree: Ben Sira compared Wisdom's tree to a cedar, a cypress, or a palm, like a rose, an olive and a plane. She spread out her branches like a sacred terebinth, and she blossomed and bore fruit like a vine (Ben Sira 24.13-17). Some 300 years before Ben Sira, the prophet Ezekiel lamented the fate of the Queen Mother in Jerusalem: she had been the great vine whose branches became the sceptres of kings, but she had been uprooted and taken to the wilderness, and there were no more branches to be kings (Ezek.19.10-14).

The tree, which represented the Mother of the anointed kings of Jerusalem, had been uprooted and taken to the wilderness, just as the woman clothed with the sun had fled to the wilderness. In our menorah, two new shoots are growing. To show one royal figure twice was an ancient custom: there were twin figures of the king on either side of the tree of life in the Assyrian sculptures from Nineveh; there were twin boys suckling the sun goddess at Ugarit in the famous ivory panel; and in other lead books there are two stars on either side of a palm tree. In Ugarit the star of the crown prince was Venus in its two aspects as the evening star and the morning star, and so the lead books show the Messiah and his Mother.

'Shoot' was a title for the Messiah. In Zechariah and Jeremiah the word is *šemah* which implies both new growth and new light and the very similar-sounding word *śemah* means rejoicing (Zech.3.8; 6.12; Jer.23.5; 33.15); in Isaiah the word is *nešer* which implies both growing green and guarding or preserving. Using the images of both growth and light, Jesus proclaimed himself as the root and offspring of David, the bright morning star (Rev.22.16).

Another key to reading this menorah page is the many meanings of one Hebrew root, especially the roots formed from three letters. Two techniques are used: first, the three letters are written as a triangle, which can be read in many ways depending on where you start to read, and in which direction you read; and second, seven of the graphemes each represent two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, *The 15 triangles and other shapes are set in exactly matching pairs on either side of the menorah*. In this example of the 'shoot' the three-letter groups *smḥ* and *nšr* are found several times, together with all their variants formed by reading the triangles in different ways.

Although the triangle is the most frequently used shape, other polygons are used, such as quadrilaterals, pentagons, hexagons and even heptagons. Each has an exact mirror image on the other side of the menorah, giving some complex word pairs that all make perfect sense in the context of Isaiah vocabulary, Johannine vocabulary, and the vocabulary of the early Byzantine hymns to Mary, such as the Akathist.

The mathematics of the sprouting menorah.

The menorah is carefully drawn. Not only are there 70 small circles, but between each node of the branches is a sequence of three, then two, then one small circle. This was a diagram for calculations.

Little is known about ancient Hebrew mathematics. Precise measurements were given for the tabernacle and the temple, and for all the items of furnishing except the menorah. No reason was given for these measurements, but they were symbolic of the whole creation as represented by the temple. The Hebrew word for ‘iniquity’, *‘āwōn*, means ‘distortion’, and Ezekiel showed that distortions in the temple measurements indicated a disregard for the law of God that led to human iniquity (Ezek.43.10-11). One Hebrew word for ‘measurement’, *middâ*, also means ‘mystery’; this is how it is used in the mystical texts which are linked to the names of rabbis and high priestly figures from the end of the second temple era. R Akiba, for example, experienced the mystical ascent to stand before the heavenly throne, and was then told to return to the creation and teach about the *middâ*, (Merkavah Rabbah 686). He had to reveal the mysteries he had seen.

Although the tradition in the Merkavah texts claims a late second-temple origin, the belief in mystical ascent to stand before the heavenly throne is attested as early as Isaiah 6. He saw the LORD, and he, or a later disciple, was told that the LORD created all the heavenly host ‘by number’, although this is a different word for number, *mišpār* (Isa.40.26).

Ezekiel, who came from a priestly family, described an angel high priest figure who was created as the ‘seal of the pattern’ (Ezek.28.12b, translating literally), full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. ‘Pattern’, *tabhnîth*, is found on the menorah page as a quadrilateral around the menorah, *tbnyt*, the first and last letter being the same. The mirror image of this quadrilateral is ‘knowledge of the wise counsel’ or ‘knowledge of her tree’, and the two quadrilaterals intersect through the central lamp of the menorah. This cannot be coincidence: the ‘pattern’ was knowledge of wise counsel/the tree of wisdom. .

There are complex astronomy texts in 1 Enoch, revealed to Enoch by the archangel Uriel (1 Enoch 72.1), based on the number 7 and on a year of 52 weeks, giving 364 days. This is the calendar used in the Qumran Temple Scroll, which describes how the temple and its cult should be restored. The measurements are precise, and they show that the temple gates were aligned with the points on the eastern horizon where the sun rose at the solstices and equinoxes. Both the calendar and the plan of the temple were sun-based. We rarely think of the Hebrews as astronomers, and yet to a Greek observer, this was their characteristic. Theophrastus, a disciple of Aristotle, said: ‘The Jews converse with each other about the deity, and at night time make observations about the stars, gazing at them and calling on God in prayer’ (quoted in Porphyry de Abstinencia II.26). There are calendar observations in the menorah page.

There are also stars and star patterns on many of the lead books, and there is good reason to believe that Isaiah was an astronomer: he predicted the eclipse of the sun over Jerusalem in

August 701 BCE- the shadow on the sundial going backwards - and in the autumn of 731 BCE, his prophecy of the Virgin giving birth to a Son coincided with the constellation Virgo in the eastern sky from Jerusalem, in the house of the sun- 'clothed with the sun' – and the planet Venus, the Morning Star, passing through her. Since Venus was the planet of the crown prince, this heavenly configuration echoed the words of his prophecy: the Virgin would give birth to a royal Son.

The early Christians linked the menorah to the plan of the heavens. Irenaeus, the great defender of true Christian teaching, wrote in his *Proof of the Gospel* that Moses was shown how to make the menorah as a pattern for the seven heavens that were full of angels, and that the seven heavens were the seven degrees of wisdom that rested on the shoot from the tree of Jesse (Irenaeus, Proof 9). The other early Christian text that describes the seven heavens and how Isaiah went up through them to stand before the throne is *The Ascension of Isaiah*. On the menorah page, there are seven letters on each side, linking the letters at the top of the menorah, which represent heaven, and the letters below, which represent earth. All this must have been high priestly lore, one of the secrets of the holy of holies that they kept within the high priesthood.

The form of the writing.

The menorah page has only consonants, and even these are not written in lines as eventually became the custom. Jewish scholars in mediaeval Spain lamented that they lost their language when they went into exile, and so what we have in the Hebrew Bible is only a fragment of what would have been necessary for a living language.

This Hebrew is also very stylized: most verbal roots are formed from three letters, and there are many examples of related words that are formed by the rearrangement of those same three letters.

There are also examples of words formed by rearranging a set of letters that survive in ancient poetry. For example, Isaiah 53, the Servant poem, uses the imagery of the day of atonement where the offering was a goat, *ś'r*, but the Servant was linked in his death to the wicked, *rš'*, and to the rich, *šr*. The letters *š* and *ś* were written in the same way, and so this line of the poem - written as a line in the way we expect - is built around three letters, rearranged. If they were written as a triangle, and the reader knew the key to the triangle, the reader just had to read round the triangle from different starting points. The menorah page has to be read in this way.

The original language underlying what eventually became 'Biblical Hebrew' was an artificial construct rather than simply a record of everyday speech. The written language evolved *from*

this formal system, rather than evolved *into* this system. Further, the ancient Hebrew inscriptions- and there are very few – are often written defectively, and not in what we should now identify as ‘Hebrew’. It is therefore impossible to say what stage of the Hebrew language is represented by the writing on the menorah page. It could be very ancient indeed. It is certainly a form of Hebrew writing not known elsewhere, but implied by the poetry and wordplay found in the familiar linear writing, and perfectly suited to the three-letter roots of so many Hebrew words.

In the menorah page they are a series of triangles and other shapes that only acquired meaning when those who understood knew how to read them. This was a twofold process: first, the letters, read in various ways, represented a whole range of words and related ideas; second, each had to be ‘fixed’ by pronouncing it. This involved breathing the vowels into the consonants, and thus giving them life. The vowels IAO, which brought the letters to life, were also the sacred Name, Yahweh, which means ‘He who causes to be’. Letters came alive in the same way as Adam came alive when the LORD God breathed into him (Gen.2.7). All the Targum traditions, understood that when the LORD God breathed into Adam, he was given the power to speak. Since temple tradition remembered Adam as the first high priest, the gift of speaking and reading must have been a secret of the high priest. It was his wisdom.

The silence

Adam was the image of God, but he was a silent image until the LORD opened his mouth to speak. The gift of this special ‘divine’ speech is a frequent motif in the Bible. David knew that the LORD spoke through him (2 Sam.23.2); Isaiah’s mouth was purified by the burning coal (Isa. 6.6); the hand of the LORD touched Jeremiah’s mouth (Jer.1.9); Ezekiel ate the scroll (Ezek.3.1); St John ate the little book (Rev.10.8-10). In the system of evil counterparts that is characteristic of apocalyptic discourse, there was a beast that was the counterpart of Adam. He rose from the earth, just as Adam was formed from the earth, and he was given breath and the power of speech (Rev.13.15).

For the most part, the wise high priests simply gazed in silence on the mystery represented by the letters. There are enigmatic texts from Qumran about *gazing upon the mystery*, which implies looking at something that embodied the mystery e.g. 4Q 117.1.i.10; 4Q117. 2.i.18. The mystery was the *raz nihyeh*, a term found many times in the Qumran texts but not in the Hebrew Bible. The translation is uncertain; perhaps it means ‘the mystery of becoming’, or perhaps it meant how the mystery emerged from the sacred text. What is certain is that a key term in the Qumran wisdom texts is not in the Hebrew Bible, suggesting *that its root and context should be sought in texts outside the present Hebrew canon*.

The mysteries were preserved in silence, and became ‘the unspoken matters’. In Jewish tradition it was forbidden to expound to others the story of creation (Gen.1.1-2) or Ezekiel’s vision of the

throne ‘the chapter of the chariot’ (Ezek.1.4-28), unless it was clear that the other person already knew about them (Mishnah Hagigah 2.1). These were the two texts in the Hebrew Bible that touched on the mysteries of the holy of holies, which was the source of all life. Perhaps this was the *raz nihyeh*.

A ‘mystery, *raz*, is at the centre of the so-called Isaiah Apocalypse (Isa.24.1-23), which describes the collapse of a wicked land before the LORD comes in judgement to establish his kingdom. In the distance, the prophet hears songs praising the glory of the Righteous One, and he says: ‘My mystery is for me, my mystery is for me and my leaders’ [literally ‘the rams of the flock’] (Isa. 24.16). These same people are ‘the leaders belonging to the Righteous One’ who would restore the ruins (Isa.61.3-4, translating literally). They had been the mourners in Zion, people who would be restored again as priests of the LORD. Isaiah 61 was the prophecy Jesus said he would fulfil, which implies restoring the ancient priests and the mystery which they were keeping. (Luke 4.21). This saying about the mystery is found in a widely attested *agraphon* attributed to Jesus: ‘My mystery is for me and for the sons of my house’ (e.g. in Clement *Miscellanies* V.10; *Clementine Homilies* 19.20; John Chrysostom *On Corinthians* 7.2; also a similar saying in Acts of John 96, and Odes of Solomon 8.10). The saying is often linked to keeping silence. Perhaps this is why it is not in the New Testament gospels.

St Basil knew of something similar; it may even have been the same tradition. In *On the Holy Spirit*, he wrote about the unwritten tradition that had been handed down from the apostles, which gave the explanation of many liturgical customs that cannot be found in the Bible. ‘Do not these come from that teaching which is not made public, *adēmosieutos*, and is forbidden/secret, *aporrētos*, which our Fathers preserved in a silence out of the reach of curious meddling and inquisitive investigation’. It is likely that St Basil knew Origen’s exposition of Numbers 4, where he explained that the even the Levites who carried the furnishings of the tabernacle did not see them nor understand them (Homily 5, On Numbers). Both Origen and Basil linked these secret teachings to the holy of holies and thus to the high priests. Origen wrote that the Christian mysteries were ‘handed down and entrusted to us by the high priest and his sons’ (Origen *ibid.*). More than a century before Origen, Ignatius of Antioch wrote that he knew of heavenly secrets and angel hierarchies and the dispositions of the heavenly powers and much else both seen and unseen (Ignatius, *Trallians* 5). He also knew that ‘to Jesus alone as our high priest were the secret things of God entrusted’ (Philadelphians 9).

I suspect that the high priests themselves, the elite teachers of the temple, were known as the silent ones. Isaiah, when he stood before the heavenly throne and was called to be a prophet, cried out ‘Woe is me. I was silent’ (Isa.6.5), meaning that he had kept silent when there was false teaching ‘unclean lips’. In the face of this false teaching he had commanded his disciples to bind up and seal his teachings (Isa.8.16), and to wait for the light to return. The returning light was the birth of the royal child (Isa.9.2-7), and the Spirit anointing the new ‘shoot’ from the tree of Jesse (Isa.11.1-3). This is depicted on the menorah page.

No matter what the age of the examples we have, this sprouting menorah and its pattern of letters represent something very old indeed. The vocabulary suggests the Isaiah tradition that passed in the Church.

The Lady is very prominent in the 'text' on the page, but some of the results do not fit into our usual picture of the Lady.

I shall start with another topic - Adam and Eden - and show how this material is found in the text. Legends about Adam known from non-canonical texts can be found, and this shows that whoever formed this sprouting menorah page knew more than just the biblical material.

In the same way, whoever formed this sprouting menorah page knew more about the Lady than is in the Bible, and this may explain some of the attributes given to Mary.

A possible history of the sprouting menorah page.

The vocabulary of the page is characteristic of Isaiah, and also has links to St John's Gospel, Revelation and the Akathist Hymn.

Recent work by Stephen Shoemaker on some early Marian texts, especially the Dormition texts, has shown an early Christian tradition that Mary was the guardian of wise teaching.

Isaiah's teaching was rejected, and so he told his disciples to seal his teaching in a book (Isa.8.16). The sealed book became a feature of apocalyptic writing, e.g. Daniel 12.4; Revelation 5.1-5; Revelation 10.1-11. Isaiah describes how some people have been punished by a form of madness or blindness so that they cannot read the book (Isa.29.9-11). These people were rebel sons who rejected the prophets and would suffer because of this (Isa.30.8-14). Isaiah had to record this on a tablet,

The Ascension of Isaiah, a pre-Christian Jewish text preserved only by the Christians, describes how Isaiah and his disciples fled from the wicked people in Jerusalem and went first to Bethlehem and then to an unnamed mountain in the desert. This is usually understood as fiction, or as an account of the flight of the Christians from Jerusalem in 70 CE,

I think *The Ascension of Isaiah* preserves a true story about Isaiah and his disciples. They fled to a mountain place in the east and there they preserved their teachings and their skills, especially as scribes and astronomers.

They went to Bozrah, a name that also means sheepfold. Isaiah's contemporary Micah told the story of the wicked people in Jerusalem, and of the 'flock' of faithful people gathered in Bozrah/the sheepfold (Mic.1.1-2). He prophesied that the great shepherd would be born in

Bethlehem, from his unnamed Mother (Mic.5.2-4), and he described how the Mother [the Lady, the Daughter Zion] had been driven out but would return to her kingdom to judge the wicked people (Mic.4.8.13).

Isaiah tells the same story. He prophesied the Mother returning from Bozrah with good news for her children. Isaiah 40.9 is complex word play in the style of the Isaiah school, and the word ‘herald of good tidings’, *mbsrt*, can mean ‘woman who brings good news’, ‘woman who makes incarnate’, or ‘woman from Bozrah’. This implies a happy return to the city, but then things went very wrong.

Isaiah 63.1-6 describes the LORD coming from Bozrah to bring judgement on the evil city.

The archaeology of Sela [meaning Rock], about 3 miles north of Bozrah, shows that the mountain has been carved out into a series of cave chambers with an elaborate water system. There is a relief sculpture of an astronomer priest [?] looking at a winged sun and a seven – pointed star within a crescent moon. The relief has been identified as a Babylonian figure, Nabonidus, but the accompanying inscription is too damaged to read. ‘Nabonidus’ is a guess, it is not an established fact. My guess is that the relief depicted an astronomer-priest of the Lady, whose symbol was the winged sun, and her Son, who was depicted as the Morning Star within the moon. Such an astronomical conjunction prompted Isaiah’s oracle of the Virgin in Isaiah 7, in 731 BCE. This has been confirmed for me by the palaeo-astronomer at Cambridge.

There is also a relief carving of a cow’s head further up the mountain; one carved cave chamber that holds nothing but a huge rock throne; and pottery has been found with the cow and calf motif that is linked elsewhere to the Lady. All these are consistent with [but not proof of] a sanctuary of the Lady after her followers [Isaiah and his disciples] had been driven from Jerusalem.

There are inscriptions that the deity here was Allat, one of the titles found on the menorah page: ‘Allat smitten/suppressed’ is the top line on the page. She is also the Holy One, the Cloud, and she encloses the Servant. This suggests a link between the menorah page and this exiled community of Isaiah disciples.

There is also a little-known early Christian Syriac text *The Revelation to the Magi* which describes a community of learned people with royal roots who were preserving ancient traditions. They said that *people called them magi, but they were not magi*; their name meant ‘silent ones’ because they prayed in silence. Isaiah called himself ‘a silent one’ in his call vision, *ndmyty* (Isa.6.5a),

These wise people lived in ‘Shir’, near the Mountain of Victory, preserving their hidden mysteries which spoke of the Christ. They were waiting for a particular star to appear, perhaps

the star sign that Isaiah had seen. The story of the wise people who went to find Jesus is told very differently from the story in Matthew's gospel. In *The Revelation to the Magi*, the wise people are the central story, not Gentile visitors who come to find Jesus. They know the Hebrew scriptures, and criticize the Jews for not understanding their own prophecies.

I suspect that this tradition in *The Revelation to the Magi* preserves the memory of the people who wrote the original of the menorah page. They were the exiled descendents of the disciples of Isaiah, keeping alive their ancient mysteries by means of the enigmatic letter grid that only the initiated knew how to read. The menorah page is one example of their 'mystery' texts.

It could have been the mysterious Book of Hagu that was preserved by the Qumran community.

Reading the sprouting menorah page.

The page is written in what seems to be a mixture of scripts. Some letters are from the Greek alphabet, most are forms of Palaeo-Hebrew. On this page there is a *rho*, reversed as in the early *boustrophodon* writing, and an *omega*, which was used in Ionia before 600 BCE.

Several graphemes have more than one value:

א / י ; ד / ק ; ה / ה; ש / צ; ת / ו; ק / ר ; ד / ג

When the triangles are read in different ways, the letters can have their alternative values. Thus the triangle *sdq* is in fact a set of three letters, of which one has one value, one has two values, and one has three values: *q, g/d, ś/š/ş*. The triangle they form can be read as *qdś*, holy, or as *şdq*, righteous/Zadok, or as *şqd*, watching one. .

The sprouting menorah page uses only 17 of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. There is no *zayin*, no *teth*, no *kaph*, no *samekh* and no *pe*.

Using *mispar siduri*, the form of *gematria* that uses the letters and numbers in order, 17 is the number for *kbd*, glory: 11+ 2 +4. The menorah page says that glory of the LORD has departed.

The 5 missing letters represent the five signs of the glory that were not in the second temple, according to Jewish tradition, Numbers Rabbah XV.10.

Each letter is the beginning of one of the five Hebrew words for glory: *zhr, thr, kbd, snh, p'r*.

The letters at the top of the sprouting menorah page represent heaven, and those at the bottom represent earth.

The seven letters each side are the seven stages of ascent through the seven heavens. These stages are formed by making triangles with the central letters of the top lines. .

In this collection of illustrations, I shall show first those that represent well familiar words, names and themes, to illustrate the method of reading with simple examples. Then I shall show in some detail the readings about Eden and Adam, showing that the menorah page preserves old material known elsewhere only in legends outside the Bible.

There are also complex patterns for many other themes, for example, the Messiah, the Servant, the Tree of Life, the Covenant, the Calendar, but I do not include those here. I shall concentrate only on a few of the ways of finding the Lady Wisdom and Mary in the menorah page.

Each pair of triangles or other shapes is an exact match. The letters in each shape are read round in exactly the same order. There is nothing random about these ways of reading.

They depend upon the text being unpointed, and therefore being open to the possibility of many different meanings, each pair of which is a revelation.

When the text is pointed so that it can be read aloud, one meaning only is fixed, and so the richness of the older word patterns is lost. Only those who looked at the letters in silence- 'the silent ones'- were able to see the many meanings.

The older meanings of the texts were lost when they were spoken. In the *Revelation of the Magi*, Eve was deceived when Satan gave her 'a cup of sound filled with poison'. This means that she read the texts aloud, and so lost most of their meaning.

Later texts in this lead book tradition still wrote the Hebrew in triangles, but they were no longer the precise matching pairs of the original tradition. The later texts seem to deal with the Jewish wars against Rome. The ancient skill of wordplay can still be seen, but in a much less sophisticated form.

From this sprouting menorah page I have already more than 200 examples of significant pairs of words, but they are not produced here for copyright reasons. There are many about the Lady and her Son, interwoven in a very complex way, so that they letters themselves become pictures of what they represent.

Whatever this menorah page may prove to be, it is not a modern 'forgery' cobbled together for the tourist market.