

The Quest for Camels

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Media Philosophy Paper

## The Quest for Camels

*The Daily Mail*, Fox News, and National Geographic—these three media organizations and more passed along a peculiar headline. Splashed onto the front page of many online media sites February 2014, the juicy controversy concerned, of all things, camels. At first glance, archaeology had proven that the Bible is anachronistic (and thus false) as it concerns its reference to the presence of camels in the Levant during the lifetimes of the patriarchs. But was this *the truth*? After all, media professionals ought to have the ethics to report the facts and to report them *ingenuously*.

My personal philosophy in media touches on ethical, epistemological, and logical areas, as well as including a commitment to excellence (which I can also apply to aesthetics). My philosophy includes receiving God’s Word “with all readiness of mind” while searching “the Scriptures” to see whether “those things” are so (Acts 17:11). Furthermore, as a Christian, I am to “prove all things” and “hold fast [to] that which is good” (1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5:21). Therefore, I believe that Scripture supports investigative journalism and fact-checking practices. Through a *thorough* investigation of the facts, I can apply Scriptural principles in media situations such as the camel controversy; this means that in news that deals with Scriptural claims, I must also verify or disprove the claims that a news article makes about Scripture.

Several Bible passages are in question in the camel controversy. One passage states concerning the Egyptian Pharaoh, “and he entreated Abram well for her sake: and he had sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels” (Genesis 12:16). Another passage points to a patriarch having camels. “And the servant put his hand under

the thigh of Abraham his master, and [swore] to him concerning that matter. And the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master” (Genesis 24:9-10a). Historians typically dated the patriarchs to have lived sometime “between 2000 and 1500” years prior to Christ’s birth (Fox News; Zonszein).

Archaeologists “from Israel’s top university” employed “radiocarbon dating” to determine when “domestic camels” first entered the Levant area (Fox News). The Tel Aviv University researchers claimed to have found the camels at “the copper production sites of the Aravah Valley,” which is between the Dead Sea and the Red Sea (Griffiths). The camel fragments had originated about a thousand years before Christ’s birth. Furthermore, some people had even speculated that “the few camel bones found in earlier archaeological layers probably belonged to wild camels” (Fox News). According to some, “the findings... draw more attention to the disagreements between Biblical texts and verifiable history” (Griffiths). After all, if the oldest evidence of camels in the land arose merely a thousand years before Christ, how could Abraham and Egypt have domesticated camels nearly two thousand years before Christ?

Solid investigative journalism and fact-checking is where the media issue lies. *The Daily Mail* reported the story on the fourth day of February. In the case of Fox News, at least a day had passed before the news agency parroted the story’s claims. As for National Geographic, almost a week had passed. Apparently, neither agency bothered to do so much as check JSTOR or other old archaeological papers to see if the claims held water like camels do. Within days if not hours, many in the Christian apologetics community had discovered at least one document affirming that camels were in the region at about the time that Abraham lived. Responses ensued.

According to a JSTOR article, “during a geological survey of the Fayum basin, the skull of a camel was unearthed in a sequence of the so-called Pottery Phase I” in which “the

chronological designation for the deposits was 2000-1400 BC” (Ripinsky 138). So camels really were in Egypt during the era in which Abraham lived. The writer Ripinsky goes on to state, “about the same time comes the figurine of a recumbent camel unearthed at Byblos, and published by Pierre Montet” (138). So camels lived in the Lebanon area then too. But then there is an Egyptian rock inscription drawing that suggests *a domesticated camel*, pictured below (138-139). Of it, J. P. Free writes, “Since the inscription and the drawing are of the same technique, this would imply the knowledge of the camel in the period 2400-2200 B.C.” (Free 189). Given the long history of Egyptian knowledge of camels, readers should not be surprised that Abraham, who visited Egypt, would acquire some camels along the way.

#### THE CAMEL IN DYNASTIC EGYPT

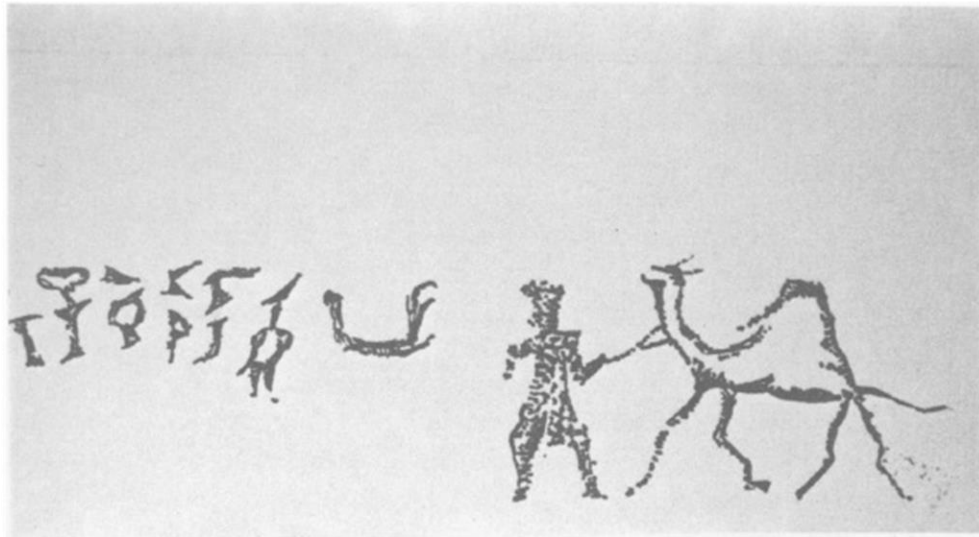
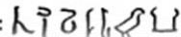


FIG. 2. A hieratic rock inscription, with a dromedary led by a man, found near Aswan by Schweinfurth, and assigned to the Sixth Dynasty. Part of the character on the left is missing on this photograph. The inscription was interpreted by Möller as: 

The *absence* of sound investigative journalism, fact-checking, and timely admissions of prior error are all *ethical issues* that media organizations face. If I were in charge of a news organization that published info that the news organization ought to have known to be false, I

would order the news organization to print, air, or (most likely) type an apology online for the error. As a media consumer with a few online resources, I have redirected questioners to the articles that prove that the news claim is false. Hypothetically, I could also write articles for online publication in a blog or other website.

However, the camel controversy touches upon *epistemological issues* as well. *How* could the media news outlets *have known* that the copper site camel findings *actually went against* the Bible? The presence of camel remains later in history *does not necessarily demand* that people were *not* already using camels earlier. Moreover, the location of the findings was *only a small fraction* of the region. Abraham would have travelled elsewhere in the region, perhaps even in locations where archaeologists have not done much digging. The media outlets could not have known. Personally, I believe that *knowledge*—not speculation—needs to be the basis for news reports. The Christian Apologetics Alliance, my WBJU experience, and my JMC classes have reinforced that epistemological belief. Scripture also advocates the element of certainty for one's reports, so that one's audience can have certainty. For example, John writes concerning Demetrius, “we also bear record, and ye know that our record is true” (3<sup>rd</sup> John 1:12).

In dealing with reports that I receive from other sources, I need to use *proper logic* to assess whether the reports and sources of reports are legitimate. For example, I should not trust parody sites such as *The Onion* and *The Daily Carrant* for legitimate news stories. In cases such as those of the camels, where Biblical inerrancy is also at stake, I need to use discernment and several different viewpoints in order to reach a conclusion. After all, as the Bible states, “in a multitude of counsellors, there is safety” (Proverbs 11:14b). Each independent resource is like another counsellor, whether from JSTOR or some other aggregator.

Moreover, when I produce news stories or other media content, I need to ensure that the content flows logically in a coherent manner, just as my education in my major has emphasized. After all, the Bible emphasizes that “all things be done decently and in order” (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 14:40).

Once more, I should not be “conformed to this world” when performing my work as a media professional but rather, be “transformed by the renewing” of my mind (Romans 12:2). Whether being conformed means accepting the flimsy claims of skeptics against my faith or promoting a sinful lifestyle, I must strive to redouble my efforts and commitment to Christ instead. Any advertising, video, and music recording that I help to produce should be compatible with my faith; and my conduct in a media job environment should reflect that of a renewed mind.

My experience with media at the university has stressed professional aesthetic quality in audio and visual productions. Graphic design and photography classes have stressed spacing, framing, and layout design. Video classes have pointed to the use of rule of thirds and leading lines. Audio classes have stressed quality in use of special effects, reverb, volume levels, and excess noise reduction. Advertising analysis has emphasized unifying elements, brand recognition, and creative selling points. The intentional effort put into each finished media product made each product become a cherished child, milestone, or stepping-stone enabling me to do something greater later. Therefore, with skills in production and critique of media content, I can confidently yet humbly progress to make an impact on others through my future work.

In summary, my commitment to excellence encompasses ethical delivery of media content, diligent epistemological investigation concerning the facts, logical analysis and content construction, and sharp intentional aesthetics. Concerning the camel controversy, I have endeavored to apply such epistemological investigation and logical analysis in this paper. Such a commitment to excellence, combined with a Christ-centered focus, fits in well with Scripture’s

admonition that, “Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 10:31b). Ultimately, I view my media work as part of an overall effort to glorify God and make a difference in the world. Such an effort affects the style and content of what media I produce, as well as my conduct on and off the job.

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