

the root *šr* and the noun *šāra'at*, "leprosy," respectively," most scholars agree with the ancient translations (Onkelos: *'ar'itā*; LXX: *spbēkia*; Vulgate: *crabro*) that the *šir'ā* is "an insect of the order Hymenoptera; actually a Wasp, but larger and more dangerous" (Frerichs 1962: 645), and try to identify it with the species *Vespa orientalis*. Some scholars accept the literal sense of the passages and believe that the Israelites were aided by a natural phenomenon of swarms of wasps. It has been recently suggested by Neufeld (1980) that the biblical references to the wasp/hornet are descriptions of biological warfare, but attractive as this suggestion is the author fails to produce any concrete evidence to support it.

Several scholars who identify the *šir'ā* as a hornet maintain that it is used metaphorically "as a symbol of *terror, panic*, sent from God upon the enemy . . . , by which they are agitated and put to flight as if stung to madness" (Gesenius 1854: 906), and "that the hornet represents the terror that the Lord sent to paralyze the land" (Wright 1953: 669).

John Garstang suggested the identification of the hornet with Egypt. According to him the Egyptians conducted against the Canaanite cities a policy "of tyranny and spoliation, calculated in the issue to break their individual strength," a policy which

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seems "to have removed one by one various . . . obstacles which beset the pathway of the tribes" (Garstang 1931: 259-60). Garstang assumed that the continuous campaigns of Egypt against Canaan from the time of Thutmose III (ca. 1475 B.C.E.) on prepared the ground for rebellion against Egyptian rule and a reorientation of the Canaanite cities toward the Israelites. The constant removal of raw materials, objects, and people from Canaan to Egypt by the victorious Egyptians had impoverished the country and forced the Canaanites to look for an alternative, which appeared to be the incoming Israelites.

Garstang's theory is based on the fact that he identifies the symbol of Lower Egypt with the hornet rather than the bee, as most scholars do; he discusses this matter at some length (Garstang 1931: 258-61). The theory has been rejected by many scholars as "ingenious but far-fetched" (Cohen 1959: 146). Recently, this hypothesis has been revived by Yadin, who has claimed that "the 'hornet' could refer to the Egyptian Pharaohs, whose title, denoting the kingship of Lower Egypt, was probably the hornet, commonly taken for a bee" (1979: 68). Yadin notes that whatever the force of *šir'ā*, "Canaan of the 13th century was ripe politically, economically, and militarily for a conquest of the type described in Joshua" (68), and this is the context of study.

The Garstang theory, I believe, cannot be lightly dismissed; furthermore, the references to the *šir'ā* should be considered seriously because they contain vital information for understanding the Israelite conquest. Neufeld, in his linguistic treatment of this topic, has demonstrated successfully that the biblical *šir'ā* is a hornet (1980: 34-36). That a country or a people can be symbolized in the Bible by an animal or insect is well known. Egypt was referred to as *tanīm* = *tanīn*, "crocodile" (Ezek 29: 3; 32: 2) and as *zēbūb*. "fly" (Isa 7: 18), while Assyria was called *dēbōrā*