

Chapter 10

WHERE WAS TARSHISH ([GENESIS 10:4](#))?

1. Introduction

[Genesis 10](#) gives us a list of about seventy names of nations and cities of the world, presented as the descendants of Noah's three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth. In part of the chapter attributed to the P source, we read the following concerning the descendants of Japheth: 'The descendants of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Rodanim' ([Gen. 10:4](#)). Javan is a Hebrew form of the name Ionia, the location of the eastern Greeks in western Anatolia.

The last named place, Rodanim, is generally agreed to denote the people of the island of Rhodes, off the south-west coast of Anatolia. Although the Masoretic text has Dodanim, it is generally accepted that this is a simple corruption from Rodanim. The correct form Rodanim is represented by the Septuagint and Samaritan versions and some Hebrew manuscripts, as well as in the parallel list of places in [1 Chron. 1:7](#).¹

The name Kittim certainly derives from Kition, a Cypriot city of Phoenician foundation and denotes Cyprus or a part of it in Old Testament passages ([Num. 24:24](#); [Isa. 23:1, 12](#); [Jer. 2:10](#); [Ezek. 27:6](#)), though it was subsequently used for Macedonia ([1 Macc. 1:1](#); [8:5](#)) and the Romans ([Dan. 11:30](#); Qumran), doubtless through later reinterpretations of [Num. 24:24](#), which speaks of 'ships of Kittim' coming to attack the Near East.

That Elishah reflects an older name for Cyprus, Alashiya, seems very likely. After many years in which it had been suspected that Alashiya was Cyprus, or a part of Cyprus, because of its abundance of copper (cf. [El-Amarna letters 33–36, 40](#), especially [35](#), and Papyrus Anastasi IV), this has been decisively proved by a petrographic analysis of the clay of the El-Amarna and Ugaritic tablets sent from Alashiya.² That the name Alashiya was still used in the first millennium is shown by a fourth-century BCE Cypriot inscription from Tamassos referring to Apollo Alasiotas. Since Cyprus is represented by two names here and we know that its population consisted of both Phoenicians and Greeks, it is plausible to suppose that J.C. Greenfield was right in conjecturing that Kittim and Elishah designated respectively the Phoenician and Greek parts of Cyprus.³

P probably sixth century BCE

¹ On G. Garbini's view that we should emend to Donanim, see below.

² See Y. Goren, I. Finkelstein and N. Na'aman, '[The Location of Alashiya. Petrographic Analysis of the Tablets](#)', *AJA* 107 (2003), pp. 233–55.

³ J.C. Greenfield, 'Elishah', in *IDB* 2, p. 92.

However, E. Lipiński,⁴ has suggested that Elishah reflects the name Ulysses, thereby denoting the island of Ithaca whence he came, but we have no evidence that Ithaca was ever called Ulysses. Older views now rejected include that of E. Meyer,⁵ who believed Elishah denoted Carthage, and that this was reflected in Dido's alternative name Elissa. However, we likewise have no evidence that Carthage was called Elissa and it is difficult to see why it should be attributed to the Greeks ([Gen. 1:4](#)), since it remained a Phoenician site for many centuries until becoming a Roman colony in 146 BCE. Again, F. Schmidtke⁶ equated Elishah with Elaiussa, a site on the coast of Cilicia, but this is not attested before the second century BCE. (Schmidtke identified it with Wilusa, a place attested in Hittite texts, but this is now equated with Ilios, i.e. Troy.) There is also nothing to be said for Josephus's equation of Elishah with the Aeolians ([Ant. 1.127](#)) or the view of P.-R. Berger⁷ that it was Lissa in Crete.

But where was Tarshish? This is the first of many references in the Old Testament to the place name Tarshish, the others being in [1 Kgs 10:22](#); [22:49](#) (ET [48](#)); [Pss. 48:8](#) (ET [7](#)); [72:10](#); [Jer. 10:9](#); [Ezek. 27:12](#), [25](#); [38:13](#); [Jon. 1:3](#); [4:2](#); [1 Chron. 1:7](#); [7:10](#); [2 Chron. 9:21](#); [20:36–37](#); [Isa. 2:16](#); [23:1](#), [6](#), [10](#), [14](#); [60:9](#); [66:19](#). Although a number of locations have been proposed, for a long time the consensus has been that Tarshish was located at Tartessos at the mouth of the Guadalquivir in southern Spain,⁸ but in recent years a number of scholars, including Arie van der Kooij and André Lemaire, have reargued the older view (first attested in Josephus, [War 7.23](#); [Ant. 1.127](#); [9.208](#)) that it should be equated with Tarsus in Cilicia.⁹ H.G.M. Williamson, while referring to Tarshish as being 'across the Mediterranean' in his Chronicles commentary, which possibly indicates that he had Tartessos in mind, has been persuaded that it was Tarsus in his more recent Isaiah commentary.¹⁰ The purpose of the present chapter is to reinvestigate this matter.

2. Tartessos or Tarsus?

⁴ E. Lipiński, 'Les Japhétites selon Gen 10, 1–4 et 1 Chr 1, 5–7', *ZAH* 3 (1990), pp. 40–53 (50–51).

⁵ E. Meyer, *Geschichte des Alterthums* (5 vols.; Stuttgart: J.G. Cotta, 1884–1902 [1884]), I, p. 341.

⁶ F. Schmidtke, *Die Japhetiten der biblischen Völkertafel* (Breslauer Studien zur historischen Theologie, 7; Breslau: Müller & Seiffert, 1926), pp. 69–70.

P probably sixth century BCE

⁷ P.-R. Berger, 'Elasar, Tarschich und Jawan, Gn 14 und Gn 10', *WO* 13 (1982), pp. 50–78 (57–60).

ET English Translation

ET English Translation

⁸ See, e.g., H. Wildberger, *Jesaja Kapitel 13–27* (BKAT, 10.2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978), pp. 869–70, ET [Isaiah 13–27](#) (trans. T.H. Trapp; Continental Commentary; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), p. [422](#); M. Koch, *Tarschisch und Hispanien* (Madrider Forschungen, 14; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1984); M. Elat, 'Tarshish and the Problem of Phoenician Colonisation in the Western Mediterranean', *OLP* 13 (1989), pp. 55–69; E. Lipiński, *Itineraria Phoenicia* (OLA, 127, Studia Phoenicia, 18; Leuven: Peeters, 2004), pp. 225–65. Although S. Bochart is often said to have been the first to equate Tarshish with Tartessus, this actually goes back much earlier to Hippolytus and others; see Lipiński, *Itineraria Phoenicia*, pp. 233–34.

⁹ A. van der Kooij, *The Oracle of Tyre: The Septuagint of Isaiah XXIII as Version and Vision* (VTSup, 71; Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 40–47; A. Lemaire, 'Tarshish-Tarsis: problème de topographie historique biblique et assyrienne', in G. Galil and M. Weinfeld (eds.), *Studies in Historical Geography and Biblical Historiography Presented to Zecharia Kallai* (VTSup, 81; Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 44–62. Cf. too A. Andrew Das, 'Paul of Tarsus: [Isaiah 66:19](#) and the Spanish Mission of Romans [15:24](#), [28](#)', *NTS* 54 (2008), pp. 60–73.

¹⁰ H.G.M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles* (NCB; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1982), p. 235; *idem*, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 1–27. I. Isaiah 1–5* (ICC; London: T&T Clark International, 2006), pp. 226–27 n. 109.

First I shall consider [Psalm 72](#), a psalm whose implication that Tarshish was in the far west has often been overlooked. Speaking of the universal extent of the king's reign, as ideally conceived, v. [8](#) declares: 'May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth'. This is further explicated in vv. [10–11](#): 'May the kings of Tarshish and the isles render him tribute, may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts. May all kings fall before him, all nations give him service.' Quite clearly Tarshish and the isles on the one hand and Sheba and Seba on the other represent the furthest known parts of the world ('the ends of the earth'). Sheba is Saba in southern Arabia (the modern Yemen) and Seba in east Africa certainly represent the most remote places in a southerly direction. Tarshish and the isles must correspondingly be located in the furthest known western part of the Mediterranean sea, seeing that the Old Testament regularly depicts Tarshish as being in the west (with the exception of the late Chronicler). This simply does not fit Tarsus, which could hardly represent one of the most distant parts of the world, being not so far away and more or less due north from Joppa. However, it does fit Tartessos, which was similarly regarded as the furthestmost known place in the west (cf. Strabo, [Geog. 3.2.12](#)). A number of places further west than Tarsus are cited elsewhere in the Old Testament, for example, Crete (Caphtor), Rhodes (Rodanim), Ionia (Javan), Libya (Lubim, Lehabim, Put) and Lydia (Lud), most of which are mentioned in passages that also refer to Tarshish, so we should certainly expect Tarshish to be further west than all of those. Similarly in the book of Jonah we read that in order to avoid his divine call to preach to the Ninevites, the prophet boarded a ship at Joppa going to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, was of course to the north-east of Israel, and if Jonah were heading for Tarsus he would actually have been going nearer to Nineveh than if he had stayed in Joppa! A voyage to the furthest known place in the Mediterranean, as indicated by [Psalm 72](#), would have been far more appropriate for Jonah's purpose. Curiously, the discussions by both van der Kooij and Lemaire of the location of Tarshish fail to discuss these implications of [Psalm 72](#) and Jonah.

The next piece of evidence bearing on the location of Tarshish which I shall consider is an inscription of King Esarhaddon of Assyria, c. 671 BCE,¹¹ which states that 'All the kings from amidst the sea—from Cyprus, Ionia, as far as Tarsisi—bowed to my feet and I received heavy tribute from them'. It is clear from this that Tarsisi (universally agreed to be Tarshish) must be the most distant place named, and west of Ionia, just as Ionia is west of Cyprus. Consequently it is impossible to equate it with Tarsus, which would rather have been the nearest of these places from Assyria's point of view. Van der Kooij's denial that this is the case is inadmissible, while Lemaire does not adequately discuss the implications of Esarhaddon's statement.¹² Moreover, we know that Tarsus was spelled *trz* (Tarz) in Aramaic on fifth-century BCE coins from Tarsus¹³ and Tarzi or Tarzu in Neo-Assyrian inscriptions,¹⁴ which further distinguishes it from Tarsisi. Furthermore Tarzi/Tarzu is designated a city and Tarsisi a country in Akkadian. Van der Kooij and Lemaire¹⁵ point out that the Hittite spelling was Tarsha, but this is a non-Semitic spelling dating from the pre-biblical

¹¹ Cf. R. Borger, [Die Inschriften Asarhaddons, Königs von Assyrien](#) (AfO, 9; Graz: Im Selbstverlage des Herausgebers, 1956), p. 86. The translation by A.L. Oppenheim in [ANET, p. 290](#) reads, 'All the kings from (the islands) amidst the sea—from the country Iadnana (Cyprus), as far as Tarsisi, bowed to my feet and I received heavy tribute from them', omitting the reference to Ionia, but this is clearly a slip.

¹² Van der Kooij, [The Oracle of Tyre](#), p. 43; Lemaire, 'Tarshish-Tarsis', pp. 49–50, 53.

¹³ E. Babelon, [Catalogue des monnaies grecques de la Bibliothèque Nationale: Les Perses Achéménides](#) (Paris: Rollin & Feuardent, 1893), pp. xxvi, 17–18.

¹⁴ S. Parpola, [Neo-Assyrian Toponyms](#) (AOAT, 6; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1970), p. 349.

¹⁵ Van der Kooij, [The Oracle of Tyre](#), pp. 44–45; Lemaire, 'Tarshish-Tarsis', p. 54.

period. Moreover, the Aramaic and Akkadian names (like the Hittite) confirm that—s at the end of the Greek form Tarsos (whence we get the form Tarsus) is simply a Greek ending, thus further heightening the difference from Tarshish. It might be thought that Tartessos in Spain was outside the Assyrian sphere of influence.¹⁶ However, reference to tribute being brought from Tartessos becomes intelligible when we recall that Esarhaddon mentions this in the context of his conquest of Tyre: Tartessos was a Phoenician colony, so in conquering Tyre Esarhaddon could lay claim to her dependent colonies as well, even if this was true only in a nominal sense.

It is interesting to observe that in [Isaiah 23](#), which very likely refers to the same fall of Tyre as Esarhaddon's inscription,¹⁷ not only are the ships of Tarshish told to lament (vv. [1](#), [14](#)), but Tarshish itself is somehow affected by the event (v. [10](#)). Moreover, the inhabitants of Tyre are encouraged to escape to Tarshish (v. [6](#)), just as they are told to flee to Kittim (v. [12](#)). Since Kition, whence the name Kittim derives, was a Phoenician (indeed Tyrian) colony, it makes excellent sense if Tarshish was so too. This was indeed the case with Tartessos, as both classical sources and archaeology attest,¹⁸ but not so with Tarsus, even though the Phoenicians had dealings with it.

It is sometimes claimed¹⁹ that an identification of Tarshish with Tarsus fits better with the references to the places mentioned alongside it in [Ezek. 27:12–14](#), [Isa. 66:19](#) and [Gen. 10:4](#). However, with regard to [Ezekiel 27](#), it should be noted that Tarshish is mentioned alongside Ionia (v. [12](#)), and Rhodes is mentioned shortly afterwards in v. [15](#), just as is Libya (Put) shortly before in v. [10](#). In the light of Tarshish's reputation as the furthest known western place ([Ps. 72:10](#)), Tarshish must be further west than all of these, which simply does not fit Tarsus. Furthermore, we should note that [Ezek. 27:12–24](#) is a distinct unit listing Tyre's trading partners, moving broadly from west to east. It is therefore significant that Tarshish is the very first place mentioned, suggesting it was indeed the furthest west. However, this pattern would be broken if we were to locate Tarshish at Tarsus rather than Tartessos. Moreover, as classical sources attest, the Phoenicians were famous for their trade with Tartessos, so it would be surprising for this place not to be mentioned in [Ezekiel 27](#). As for [Isa. 66:19](#), Tarshish is mentioned alongside Libya (Put²⁰) and Lydia (Lud), so Tarshish ought to be to the west of both of those, which again does not fit Tarsus but would cohere with Tartessos.

Finally, returning to [Gen. 10:4](#), I would argue that Tarshish—as the furthest known place in the west—must be to the west of Ionia, Rhodes and Cyprus, which are also mentioned in this verse. Interestingly, the names of the sons of Javan (Ionia) come in two pairs here, 'Elishah and Tarshish, Kittim and Rodanim'.²¹

¹⁶ Van der Kooij, *The Oracle of Tyre*, p. 43; Lemaire, 'Tarshish-Tarsis', p. 52.

¹⁷ So Wildberger, *Jesaja Kapitel 13–27*, pp. 864–66, ET *Isaiah 13–27*, pp. [417–19](#); R.E. Clements, *Isaiah 1–39* (NCB; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1982), pp. 191–92.

¹⁸ Cf. A. Schulten, *Tartessos* (Hamburg: W. de Gruyter, 1950); Maria E. Aubet, *The Phoenicians and the West* (trans. M. Turton; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edn, 2001); Ann Neville, *Mountains of Silver & Rivers of Gold: The Phoenicians in Iberia* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2007); M. Dietler and C. López-Ruiz (eds.), *Colonial Encounters in Ancient Iberia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

¹⁹ E.g. van der Kooij, *The Oracle of Tyre*, pp. 41–43; Lemaire, 'Tarshish-Tarsis', pp. 48–49; Williamson, *Isaiah 1–27*, I, p. 227 n. 109.

²⁰ The MT has 'Pul', which is otherwise unknown. It is widely accepted that we should follow the LXX in reading 'Put', which is several other times mentioned alongside Lydia (Lud or Ludim, [Jer. 46:9](#); [Ezek. 27:10](#); [30:5](#)), as in [Isa. 66:19](#).

²¹ The MT has Dodanim, but, as noted above, it is generally accepted that we should read Rodanim with the LXX, Samaritan version and some Hebrew manuscripts, as well as the parallel text in [1 Chron. 1:7](#).

As noted earlier, Elishah and Kittim refer to two different parts of Cyprus, so it is clear that the list is not in strict geographical order, since Tarshish intervenes between them. Rather, P has divided the names into two groups on the basis of their being singular or plural. With regard to these pairings, P.-E. Dion,²² suggested that Kittim and Rodanim are modernizing terms added by P to explain the preceding names Elishah and Tarshish. In this way he tries to account for there being two references to Cyprus here, but it also follows that he believes Rodanim (Rhodes) is a modernizing term for Tarshish.²³ However, the argument is weak. Not only are there no grounds for believing that Tarshish was regarded as an archaic term—it continued to be used in the post-exilic period in Jonah as well as in different parts of Third Isaiah (in addition to Chronicles)—but it clearly cannot be equated with Rhodes. This is not only because nowhere else in [Genesis 10](#) does P provide two names for the same place—as Dion himself concedes²⁴—but also because in [Ezekiel 27](#) the prophet (who is similar in date and outlook to P) refers to Kittim and Elishah as two distinct places (vv. [6](#), [7](#)), as he also does with regard to Tarshish and Rhodes (vv. [12](#), [15](#)).²⁵ On the other hand, G. Garbini²⁶ has argued that Tarshish in [Gen. 10:4](#) is to be equated with Tarsus, even though he admits that Tarshish was elsewhere equivalent to Tartessos (though he does not discuss which passages). Garbini regards both Elishah and Kittim as representing Cyprus and holds that it would be appropriate for Tarsus in nearby Cilicia to be mentioned alongside them. Dodanim, usually emended to Rodanim (Rhodes; see above n. 21), Garbini prefers to read as Donanim, supposing this likewise to be in Cilicia (cf. *dnnym* in the Karatepe inscription, [KAI 26](#)). However, this emendation is entirely conjectural, without supporting evidence. Moreover, we have already seen above that the Semitic forms of the name of Tarsus do not cohere with Tarshish. It is more natural to suppose that Tarshish in [Gen. 10:4](#) is the same Tarshish mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament.

It is to be noted that in [Gen. 10:4](#) Tarshish is listed under the sons of Javan (Ionia), whereas in [Isaiah 23](#) it is closely aligned with Tyre. This is to be explained by the fact that between the mid-seventh century and the time of the Priestly source Tartessos had come under Greek influence, as archaeology attests (cf. Herodotus, [Hist. 1.163](#); [4.152](#)).²⁷ Similarly Kittim is listed as a son of Javan in [Gen. 10:4](#), although its centre,

P probably sixth century BCE

²² P.-E. Dion, '[Les KTYM de Tel Arad: Grecs ou Phéniciens?](#)', *RB* 99 (1992), pp. 70–97 (84–85).

P probably sixth century BCE

²³ However, on p. 84 n. 84 Dion identifies Tarshish with Tarsus, at any rate probably for [Isa. 23](#); regarding this latter, see my arguments in favour of Tartessos above.

P probably sixth century BCE

²⁴ Dion, '[Les KTYM de Tel Arad](#)', p. 85.

P probably sixth century BCE

²⁵ In [Ezek. 27:15](#) it is generally agreed that we should read 'Rhodians' (*b^enê rōdān*) with the LXX rather than MT's Dedanites (*b^enê d^edān*). Dedan is mentioned a few verses later in [Ezek. 27:20](#) alongside other Arabian locations. It is therefore out of place in v. [15](#), where it is immediately followed by a reference to 'many coastlands/islands', phraseology associated elsewhere with the Mediterranean.

²⁶ Cf. G. Garbini, '[Tarsis e Gen. 10, 4](#)', *BeO* 7 (1965), pp. 13–19.

²¹ The MT has Dodanim, but, as noted above, it is generally accepted that we should read Rodanim with the LXX, Samaritan version and some Hebrew manuscripts, as well as the parallel text in [1 Chron. 1:7](#).

²⁷ See Y.B. Tsirkin, '[The Greeks and Tartessos](#)', *Oikumene* 5 (1986), pp. 163–71.

Kition, was originally a Phoenician colony. Contrary to Gordon Wenham,²⁸ therefore, there is no problem in Tartessos being attributed to the Greeks in [Gen. 10:4](#).

Although I have repeatedly noted above that Tarsus is much too far to the east to accommodate the Old Testament's references to Tarshish, since so many other places further west are also referred to (Libya, Crete, Rhodes, Lydia, Ionia), we still need to provide an answer to Lemaire's question why, if Tarshish is Tartessos, the Old Testament has no references to other western places like Malta, Sicily, Sardinia and Carthage.²⁹ The answer is, I think, fairly simple. It was only quite late that Carthage came to prominence, and Malta, Sicily and Sardinia were not well known to the Israelites. On the other hand, Tartessos was well known to the Israelites because of its important sources of silver and other metals procured by the Phoenicians. Interestingly, the metals referred to as being extracted from Tarshish agree perfectly with Tartessos. The Old Testament states that Tarshish was the source of silver, iron, tin and lead ([Ezek. 27:12](#)), and [Jer. 10:9](#) again singles out especially silver, and it should also be noted that a pre-exilic Hebrew ostrakon (variously dated to c. 800 or c. 620 BCE) refers to 'silver of Tarshish for the temple of Yahweh: 3 sh(ekels)'.³⁰ Probably [Isa. 60:9](#) also associates silver (as well as gold) with Tarshish. Similarly, ancient classical sources highlight Tartessos's wealth of silver in particular (Strabo, [Geog. 3.2.11](#); Diodorus Siculus, [Univ. Hist. 5.35](#)) but also other metals. In addition to silver, Pliny, [Nat. Hist. 3.3](#) mentions lead, iron, copper and gold, while Avienus, *Ora Maritima* 293 cites it as a source of tin. However, Lemaire points out that these same metals were also associated with the Taurus mountains north of Tarsus.³¹ Against this, however, it may be noted that while the Phoenicians were familiar with Tarsus, ancient classical sources nowhere single it out as a special trading place for metals used by the Phoenicians in the way they do with Tartessos.

Interestingly, the phrase 'ships of Tarshish' ([1 Kgs 10:22](#); [22:49](#) [ET [48](#)]; [Isa. 2:16](#); [23:1](#), [14](#); [60:9](#); [Ezek. 27:25](#); [Ps. 48:8](#) [ET [7](#)]) is a further indication that Tarshish was a very remote place. The implication of these references that the ships of Tarshish were particularly impressive, going to Ophir and other exotic places, indicates that they were large boats capable of going long distances. Since they are named 'ships of Tarshish' this suggests that Tarshish was a similarly remote place, which fits Tartessos admirably but does not cohere very well with Tarsus. Strikingly, Herodotus, [Hist. 1.163](#) informs us that the Phocaeans, 'the pioneer navigators of the Greeks', used special ships to go to Tartessos. He states: 'They used to sail not in deep, broad-beamed merchant vessels but in fifty-oared galleys'. Such special ships would not have been needed for a journey from Israel to Tarsus, which could be reached by coastal shipping.³²

²⁸ G.J. Wenham, [Genesis 1–15](#) (WBC, 1; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), p. [202](#).

²⁹ Lemaire, 'Tarshish-Tarsis', p. 52.

³⁰ P. Bordreuil, F. Israel and D. Pardee, '[Deux ostraca paléo-hébreux de la collection Sh. Moussaieff](#)', *Sem* 46 (1996), pp. 49–76 (49–61); H. Shanks, '[Three Shekels for the Lord: Ancient Inscriptions Record Gift to Solomon's Temple](#)', *BAR* 23.6 (1997), pp. 28–32.

³¹ See Lemaire, 'Tarshish-Tarsis', pp. 55–57.

ET English Translation

ET English Translation

³² Cf. Schmidtke, *Die Japhetiten der biblischen Völkertafel*, p. 71.

It has been widely accepted that the Semitic and Greek names Tarshish and Tartessos³³ are perfectly compatible philologically, though without spelling out why, Lemaire claims they are not. However,—*os* is readily understood as a Greek ending, and of course Greek does not have the letter *sh*, naturally rendering by *s* or *ss*. With regard to the *t* in the middle of Tartessos in place of *sh*, this can be explained if the name is indigenous in origin, with this sound being variously reproduced in Semitic and Greek renderings.

3. Other Minority Views

We have concluded that throughout the Old Testament Tarshish is Tartessos in Spain, not Tarsus in Cilicia. However, before we consider the variant location found in the Chronicler, we need briefly to note the objections to various minority viewpoints that have been suggested. Thus C.H. Gordon³⁴ proposed that Tarshish is not a place at all but a name for the sea. However, the contexts in which the word occurs clearly indicate a definite location, as real as the other places mentioned alongside it. It has also very occasionally been suggested that Tarshish was in India³⁵ or Ethiopia,³⁶ but both views conflict with the evidence of the Old Testament and Esarhaddon's inscription that it was somewhere in the west. One minority view that does locate it in the west is that of P.-R. Berger,³⁷ who thought it was Carthage, as did the Septuagint on a few occasions.³⁸ However, quite apart from its relative unimportance during the period of many of the Old Testament's allusions to Tarshish, it is difficult to understand why [Gen. 10:4](#) should represent Carthage as a son of Javan (Ionia), since it was a Phoenician site for many centuries until becoming a Roman colony in 146 BCE; furthermore, it was never noted for its silver. Another view, proposed by A. Knobel, identified Tarshish in [Gen. 10:4](#) and probably [Isa. 66:19](#) with the habitation of the Etruscans in Italy,³⁹ though elsewhere he saw Tarshish as Tartessos. However, apart from the fact that there is insufficient evidence to justify distinguishing more than one Tarshish, the name of the Etruscans (Greek Tursenoi), which seems to derive from that of the Tursha, one of the Sea peoples, lacks a final *s* or *sh*, unlike Tarshish. G. Bunnens⁴⁰ supposes that the name Tarshish was applied to various places in the far west. However, though the general location is correct, once again there is insufficient evidence to distinguish more than one Tarshish. W.F. Albright,⁴¹ while accepting that the biblical Tarshish and Assyrian Tarsisi are probably Tartessos,

³³ Lemaire, 'Tarshish-Tarsis', p. 52.

³⁴ C.H. Gordon, 'The Wine-Dark Sea', *JNES* 37 (1978), pp. 51–52; similarly S.B. Hoenig, 'Tarshish', *JQR* 69 (1979), pp. 181–82.

³⁵ J.M. Blázquez, [Tartessos y los orígenes de la colonización fenicia en occidente](#) (Acta Salamanticensia, Filosofía y Letras, 58; Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 2nd edn, 1975), pp. 15–21.

³⁶ Origen, Psalmus LXXI.9 (= LXXII.10), in *PG* 12 (1862), col. 1524, though he says Tarshish in Jonah is Tarsus.

³⁷ Berger, 'Ellasar, Tarschisch und Jawan, Gn 14 und Gn 10', pp. 61–65.

³⁸ Generally the Septuagint transliterates the name, but in [Isa. 23:1](#), [6](#), [10](#), [14](#) it renders it as 'Carthage' and in [Ezek. 27:12](#), [25](#); [38:13](#) by 'Carthaginians'. It is significant that in both [Isa. 23](#) and [Ezek. 27](#) the allusions are in connection with the Phoenician city-state of Tyre, which had extensive trading connections with the west. Moreover, Carthage had an importance in the second century BCE (up till its destruction in 146 BCE), which it did not have at the time of the original composition of [Isa. 23](#) and [Ezek. 27](#). It is therefore understandable how the Septuagint mistook the original meaning of Tarshish here.

³⁹ A. Knobel, [Die Völkertafel der Genesis](#) (Giessen: J. Ricker, 1850), pp. 86–94; *idem*, [Die Genesis erklärt](#) (Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament; Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 2nd edn, 1860), pp. 111–12.

⁴⁰ G. Bunnens, [L'expansion phénicienne en Méditerranée](#) (Brussels: Institut historique belge de Rome, 1979), pp. 347–48.

⁴¹ W.F. Albright, 'The Role of the Canaanites in the History of Civilization', in G.E. Wright (ed.), *The Bible in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of William Foxwell Albright* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), pp. [328–62](#) ([346–47](#)); *idem*, 'New Light on the Early History of Phoenician

believed that the root meaning was ‘refinery’ and that the name could be applied to various places, including Tarshish in the Nora stone, which he believed was Nora itself, in southern Sardinia. The Nora stone contains a Phoenician inscription dated palaeographically to the ninth or early eighth century BCE. Although the precise translation of the text as a whole is disputed, it is widely agreed that it contains a reference to both ‘in Tarshish’ and ‘in Sardinia’. It appears to refer to someone who was in Tarshish being banished to Sardinia,⁴² in which case Tarshish is being contrasted rather than equated with Sardinia. Incidentally, we have other evidence linking Tartessos with Sardinia,⁴³ which might favour Tarshish being Tartessos here.

4. *The Divergent View of the Chronicler*

However, an alternative location is presupposed in the Chronicler, who wrongly supposed that Tarshish was to be reached by going south along the Red Sea. This is clear from both [2 Chron. 9:21](#) and [20:36–37](#), where he misunderstood the references in his *Vorlage* in 1 Kings to ships of Tarshish to mean ships going to Tarshish. Thus, in [2 Chron. 20:36–37](#) King Jehoshaphat of Judah joined King Ahaziah of Israel in building ships at Ezion-geber (on the Red Sea) to go to Tarshish, but the ships were wrecked and so unable to go to Tarshish. The underlying *Vorlage* in [1 Kgs 22:49](#) (ET [48](#)), however, states explicitly that the ships of Tarshish destroyed at Ezion-geber were intended to go to Ophir, which was located somewhere on the coast of the Arabian peninsula (cf. [Gen. 10:29](#)).⁴⁴ Similarly, [2 Chron. 9:21](#) speaks of Solomon’s ships going with the servants of Hiram [*sic*] every three years to Tarshish, bringing back gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks. The nature of some of these objects again indicates a destination reached along the Red Sea, not the Mediterranean (probably Ophir; cf. [1 Kgs 9:26–28](#) = [2 Chron. 8:17–19](#)), but the Chronicler has again misunderstood a reference in his underlying source in [1 Kgs 10:22](#) to ships of Tarshish, taking it to mean ships going to Tarshish. This is rightly recognized in both cases by commentators such as H.G.M. Williamson,⁴⁵ but whereas Sara Japhet⁴⁶ rightly considers the Chronicler to have mislocated Tarshish along the shore of the Red Sea in [2 Chron. 20:36–37](#), she inconsistently assumes that he places it in the western Mediterranean in [2 Chron. 9:21](#). Raymond Dillard is worse in that he fails to comment on the location of Tarshish in [2 Chron. 20:36–37](#), merely referring the reader to his comment on [2 Chron. 9:21](#), where he states that ‘It is not necessary to conclude that the author was ignorant either of the type of the vessel or

[Colonization](#)’, *BASOR* 83 (1941), pp. 14–22 (21). Albright’s view that Tarshish means ‘refinery’, appealing to Akkadian *rašāšu*, ‘to melt’, has gained little following.

⁴² On the Nora stone see, e.g., B. Peckham, ‘[The Nora Inscription](#)’, *Or* 41 (1972), pp. 457–68; F.M. Cross, ‘[An Interpretation of the Nora Stone](#)’, *BASOR* 208 (1972), pp. 13–19; G.W. Ahlström, ‘[The Nora Inscription and Tarshish](#)’, *Maarav* 7 (1991), pp. 41–49; W.H. Shea, ‘[The Dedication on the Nora Stone](#)’, *VT* 41 (1991), pp. 241–45; A.J. Frendo, ‘[The Particles beth and waw and the Periodic Structure of the Nora Stone Inscription](#)’, *PEQ* 128 (1996), pp. 8–11.

⁴³ J.B. Tsirkin, ‘[The Phoenicians and Tartessos](#)’, *Gerión* 15 (1997), pp. 243–51 (247).

ET English Translation

⁴⁴ This is widely accepted and supported by the context of the reference to Ophir in [Gen. 10:29](#) and coheres with [1 Kgs 9:26–28](#) and [22:49](#) (ET [48](#)), which indicate that it was reached via the Red Sea. I am unconvinced by E. Lipiński, *Itineraria Phoenicia*, pp. 189–223, who dismisses these biblical allusions as unreliable and locates Ophir on the Mediterranean coast of North Africa. Since gold is not actually found there, he proposes that this North African Ophir was merely a distribution point for gold which had been brought overland from West Africa.

⁴⁵ Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, pp. 235, 303.

⁴⁶ Sara Japhet, [1 & II Chronicles](#) (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1993), pp. 641, 802.

of the geography'.⁴⁷ Dillard does not properly explain how this can be the case, but his comment in the Introduction that 'the Bible does not lie ... It is without error in all that it teaches'⁴⁸ shows where he is coming from. Anyway, what we have seen in the Chronicler demonstrates that by c. 300 BCE the location of Tarshish was being forgotten.

5. Conclusion

The place names mentioned in [Gen. 10:4](#), Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim and Rodanim, are not listed in geographical order; rather, the first two represent Mediterranean place names in the singular and the latter two Mediterranean place names in the plural, the first and third representing different parts of Cyprus and the second and fourth places further west. There is every reason to maintain the traditional view that Tarshish in [Gen. 10:4](#), as well as everywhere else in the Old Testament except in the late Chronicler (who thought it was to be reached down the Red Sea), is to be equated with Tartessos in southern Spain. The recent revival of the old view that Tarshish is Tarsus simply will not do. It is insufficiently far away to satisfy a number of the indications provided by the Old Testament and an inscription of Esar-haddon. It is true that it is rather remote compared with many other places mentioned in the Old Testament, but the Israelites became aware of it because it was an important source of silver and other precious metals brought back by the Phoenicians.

⁴⁷ R.B. Dillard, *2 Chronicles* (WBC, 15; Waco, TX: Word Books), pp. [73](#), [160](#).

⁴⁸ Dillard, *2 Chronicles*, p. [xviii](#).