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Farewell to Kenneth A. Kitchen

An obituary by Alexander Schick

(Bonn, 17.03.2025) On February 6, the well-known British Egyptologist and Bible scholar Prof. Kenneth A. Kitchen passed away. Below we publish an obituary by Alexander Schick, lecturer in Archaeology and the Environment of the Bible at Martin Bucer Seminary.

Obituary by Alexander Schick

Kenneth A. Kitchen (* 1932 in Aberdeen, Scotland; † February 6, 2025 in Liverpool, England) was a professor and researcher at the School of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology at the University of Liverpool. For decades, he had his office right next to that of his friend Prof. Alan Millard (1937–2024). Kitchen was (and is) one of the most internationally recognized Egyptologists of recent decades. He had been a member of the Egypt Exploration Society since 1950 and was its vice-president for decades.

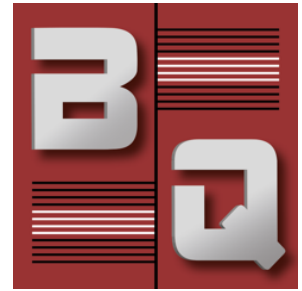


Beyond this field, Kitchen has made enormous contributions to the study of the history of the ancient Near East. He is best known for his translation and commentary of Egyptian hieroglyphs from the Ramses period. He has published over 200,000 inscriptions in a total of 18 volumes.

Prof. Kitchen was a linguistic genius. He learned Aramaic, Coptic, Elamite, Hebrew, Hittite, Hurrian, Phoenician, Sumerian, Ugaritic and also ancient South Arabian. When he went to a museum in Rio de Janeiro and discovered some Egyptian exhibits there, he set about publishing them, learning Portuguese along the way.

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When I met him twenty years ago in Liverpool, he told me that he had a box of notes during his active time at university. Whenever he found an argument for the credibility of the Old Testament, he made a note of it. This collection of notes was then to be turned into a book. The 600-page book was published after his retirement in 2003 under the title *'On the reliability of the Old Testament'* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing).

The work was published in German in 2008 under the title *'Das Alte Testament und der Vordere Orient: Zur historischen Zuverlässigkeit biblischer Geschichte'* (Brunnenverlag, Gießen). In 2023, the third edition (with 726 pages) was published, which I was allowed to edit. This work is always ready to hand in my reference library. An incredible treasure and a treasure trove for every exegete, but also for Christians interested in Bible history.

The work of Prof. Kenneth Kitchen cannot be praised highly enough. I can only agree with the following verdict: "Kitchen states that the writings and contents of the Old Testament were neither written exclusively in the late Persian period nor are they fiction. On the contrary: the biblical texts are highly historically reliable. However, Kitchen does not attempt to prove that the Bible is right [...]. He does not merely make assertions, but argues from a comprehensive knowledge of the primary sources. Kitchen basically opposes the negative prejudice of faith from which so much factual criticism has arisen, namely that where theologically interpretative historiography appears, it must be untrustworthy from the outset. According to Kitchen, history is interpreted by the writers, but not invented. Kitchen's work is a treasure trove." (Dr. Manfred Dreytza in *Ichthys* No. 25, 2009.)

Prof. James K. Hoffmeier (Professor Emeritus of Old Testament, History and Archaeology of the Ancient Near East at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) wrote in his obituary: "Professor Kenneth Kitchen was one of the most prolific Egyptologists of the past 50 years and his work on ancient Egyptian chronology remains the gold standard in the field. However, his expertise extended to other fields of the Near East. Though I was never formally his student, we connected in 1975 when I was a graduate student at the University of Toronto. From that time and for the next 50 years he was a mentor who inspired me to academic excellence and frequently offered helpful critique of my various research projects. Professor Kitchen was a faithful friend who enriched my life academically and spiritually through his exemplary Christian faith."

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Prof. Kitchen had already become known to the German public in 1965 with his book *'Alter Orient und Altes Testament. Probleme und ihre Lösungen, Aufklärung und Erläuterung'* (Verlag R. Brockhaus, Wuppertal).

His legacy is a three-volume work together with Dr. Paul J. N. Lawrence: *'Treaty, law and covenant in the Ancient Near East'* (Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 2012). Both authors show how treaties and covenants were structured in antiquity. The most comprehensive collection of its kind shows how the Old Testament accounts of treaties and covenants must be regarded as historically accurate.

Prof. Kitchen lived in simple circumstances. He had no internet (no virus can destroy my work, says Kitchen) and no fridge – his milk was delivered fresh every day – but he did have more than 20,000 books.

He collected and answered written inquiries. After his death, 60,000 inquiries (he had numbered them) were found in his estate. He had to spend the last four years of his life in a care facility. His health brought his work to an abrupt halt.

Now he can see what he believed. I am deeply indebted to him, even though I never attended one of his lectures. But his publications have left a lasting impression on me and strengthened my trust in the Old Testament as a historically credible document. I am very grateful for this influence. A great man has passed away. Thank the Lord that he has given him to us!

To all students, but also to all those who are skeptical about the Old Testament, I highly recommend his great work *'On the reliability of the Old Testament'*.

Prof. Kitchen is for me one of the teachers of whom it says in Hebrews 13:7: "Remember your teachers, who have spoken the word of God to you; the end of you look to them and follow the example of their faith."

Kenneth A. Kitchen, Paul J. N. Lawrence

Treaty, Law and Covenant

in the Ancient Near East

Part 1: The Texts

Harrassowitz Verlag

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Downloads and links:

- **Photo 1** (from left): Kenneth A. Kirchen, Alexander Schick and Alan Millard © Alexander Schick
- About the third edition of 'The Old Testament and the Near East':
https://www.bibelausstellung.de/home/info_buch1__1080_das-alte-testament-und-der-vordere-orient
- About 'Treaty, law and covenant in the Ancient Near East':
https://www.harrassowitz-verlag.de/title_4189.ahtml
- Obituary of Prof. James K. Hoffmeier:
<https://news.liverpool.ac.uk/2025/03/06/obituary-kenneth-kitchen-professor-emeritus-of-egyptology/>
- Obituary of Prof. K. Kitchen of Tyndale House:
<https://tyndalehouse.com/updates/news/kenneth-kitchen/>

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