Plague, rats and the Bible again

When discussing the 'plague' of the Philistines, I postulated that the black rat only reached Egypt, and hence Palestine, from southern India after the Greeks discovered the monsoon in the second or first century BC.¹⁻³ The new finds described by Freemon prove that the black rat and its fleas arrived in Egypt over a millennium earlier.⁴ Either they came the long coastal way round, or someone knew about the monsoon long before the Greeks. But, whether the epidemic was bubonic plague⁴ or bacillary dysentery,⁵ I must still insist that the rodents mentioned were not vectors but crop pests, being 'mice that mar the land' (1 Samuel, 6:5). The Philistines hoped that the God of

Israel would lighten his hand from off them and from off their land.

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Letters to the Editor

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