

# THE CHRONOLOGY OF EGYPT AND ISRAEL

David K Down

By the present chronological system of Egyptian history there are serious problems in synchronising the events described in the Biblical account with Egyptian history. Most scholars have therefore concluded that the Bible record is unreliable or distorted.

In 1 Kings 6:1 it is stated that “In the 480th year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign over Israel... that he began to build the house of the Lord”. Most scholars would accept a date of about 970 BC for the beginning of Solomon’s reign. His 4th year would be 966 BC, and this being the 480th year after the Exodus would place that event about 1445 BC.

## LACK OF EVIDENCE

The reasons advanced for rejecting this date concern both Egypt and Israel. In Egypt the 18th dynasty reigned from about 1550 to 1320 BC. This was the most powerful, most affluent and best-recorded dynasty that ever ruled the land of Egypt. During this dynasty there is no trace of any national disaster such as must have occurred as the result of the ten devastating plagues that fell on the land of Egypt prior to the Exodus. There is no sign of any military disaster such as befell the Egyptian army when it perished in the waters of the Red Sea.

It has been argued that the Egyptians only recorded their victories, not their defeats. True, but from the 18th dynasty have come so many inscriptions and papyrus documents that it is possible to map the movements of the whole dynasty, and there is no trace of a large number of Semitic slaves or of any national disaster such as would have resulted from the ten plagues and the loss of the entire army in the Red Sea.

Moreover, all the mummies of the Pharaohs of that era are in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. If Thutmosis III or Amenhotep II was the Pharaoh of the Exodus his body should have been in the Red Sea, not in the Cairo Museum.

Another problem is the fact that the capital of the 18th dynasty was in Luxor, 1,000 km away from the Land of Goshen where most of the Exodus action took place. It is irreconcilable with the Exodus account to have Moses commuting back and forth from the Delta to Luxor to implore Pharaoh to “let my people go.” The picture at right shows the entrance pylon to the Temple of Karnak, at Luxor.



The temple of Karnak, Luxor

In the Land of Canaan there is also a lack of evidence for an invasion by a foreign army. The biblical date of the invasion, about 1400 BC, falls in the middle of the Late Bronze Period, but there is no archaeological evidence for the destruction of Jericho and Ai, the arrival of a new people with a different culture, or the annihilation of the old population during this period. There is continuity of pottery styles and no indication that a dramatic change of population had taken place.

So, because of the lack of archaeological evidence both in Egypt and Israel to support this date, most scholars have rejected the information supplied in 1 Kings 6:1, and have accepted a date closer to 1200 BC for the Exodus, though there is only flimsy circumstantial evidence to support that date. Time magazine December 18, 1995 carried a front cover heading “IS THE BIBLE FACT OR FICTION?” and on page 54 answered their own question by saying that there are “parts of the Old Testament where the evidence is contradictory or still absent, including slavery in Egypt, the existence of Moses, the Exodus and Joshua’s conquest of the Holy Land.”



Excavations at Jericho

Concerning Palestine the article said, "Kathleen Kenyon, who excavated Jericho for eight years, found no evidence for destruction at that time." The expression "at that time" is most significant. Actually there is plenty of evidence for slavery in Egypt, the dramatic incidents of the Exodus, and Joshua's conquest of the Holy Land, but not AT THAT TIME.

## **DEBATE OVER CHRONOLOGY**

There is however growing concern in archaeological circles over the dates of Egyptian history. Chronology is probably the hottest issue in archaeological debates, which sometimes bicker over decades, and sometimes over centuries of error. In 1991 Peter James published his book "Centuries of Darkness." He claimed that the TIP (Third Intermediate Period of Egypt, dynasties 21-23) was contemporary with other dynasties and that Egyptian dates for this period should be reduced by 250 years. Page 318.

His book could not be classified as a cheap paperback. He and the four other lecturers in archaeology who wrote the book were respected scholars and the book carried a forward by Professor Colin Renfrew, lecturer at Cambridge University, who has written a scholarly book called "Archaeology- Theory Methods and Practice." In his forward Professor Renfrew wrote, "This disquieting book draws attention, in a penetrating and original way, to a crucial period in world history, and to the very shaky nature of the dating, of the whole chronological framework, upon which our current interpretations rest... The revolutionary suggestion is made here that the existing chronologies for that crucial phase in human history are in error by several centuries, and that, in consequence, history will have to be rewritten... I feel that their critical analysis is right, and that a chronological revolution is on its way." Pages xiv, xvi.

David Rohl received his degree in Egyptology and Ancient History from University College in London and he was involved in excavations at Kadesh in Syria. Numerous papers by him have been published by academic journals and in 1995 he published his book "A Test of Time." This was subsequently put to air on BBC television. In this book, he also claims that there has been a mistake in calculating the TIP, and that Egyptian chronology needs to be reduced by 350 years. Page 143.

As with Peter James, David Rohl is not trying to defend the Bible. He wrote, "I have no religious axe to grind- I am simply an historian in search of truth." Page 11. He simply acknowledges his "preparedness to accept that the Old Testament narratives are as valid a source for ancient history as any other ancient document." Page 38.

## **REDUCTION IN DATES**

This reduction of dates would then bring the 12th dynasty down to the time of Joseph and Moses, and the Exodus would have occurred in the early 13th dynasty rather than the 18th or 19th dynasty as is now generally believed. When this system is adopted there is found to be remarkable agreement between the histories of Egypt and Israel.

Professor Bryant Wood, who lectures at the University of Toronto in Canada, has now also joined the ranks of those who consider that the Exodus events should be found in the 12th dynasty, though he arrives at this conclusion by manipulating the Bible dates rather than revising the Egyptian dates. He presented his views on the subject at Andrews University in Michigan. Horn Archaeological Museum Newsletter, Winter-Spring 1999.

## **THE STORY OF JOSEPH**

Joseph, the son of Jacob, was sold into Egyptian slavery by his jealous brothers. In Egypt he was able to interpret Pharaoh's dream to mean that there would be 7 years of plenty and then 7 years of famine. Pharaoh appointed Joseph as vizier of Egypt, and entrusted him with the task of collecting the grain in preparation for the famine. Genesis 41. This was an event of national importance, and there should be some record of it in Egypt. In the time of Sesostri I, second king of the 12th dynasty, there is such a record. Ameni was an official under Sesostri I. In his tomb at Beni Hassan he left an inscription which is very relevant. It reads, "No one was unhappy in my days, not even in the years of famine, for I had tilled all the fields in the nome of Mah, up to its

southern and northern frontiers. Thus I prolonged the life of its inhabitants and preserved the food which it produced. No hungry man was in it. I distributed equally to the widow as to the married woman. I did not prefer the great to the humble in all that I gave away.” Egypt under the Pharaohs, by Brugsch, page 158.



Sesostris I of the 12th Dynasty

Ameni could well be one of Joseph’s deputies who “gathered up all the food of the seven years...and laid up the food in the cities.” Genesis 41:48. Brugsch recognized the significance of the inscription, and if it had not been for his adherence to the traditional chronology would have readily identified it. He wrote “The concluding words of this inscription, in which Ameni sings his own praises, have given rise to the idea that they contain an allusion to the sojourn of the patriarch Joseph in Egypt, and to the seven years of famine under his administration. But...there is the difference in time, which cannot be made to agree with the days of Joseph.” Page 158. But freed of this limitation, the inscription assumes great significance.

The heart of the twelfth dynasty was in the Delta. There were palaces at Memphis, Avaris and the Faiyyum, which provide a suitable setting for the establishment of the Israelites in the Land of Goshen. The religious centre was Heliopolis, the city of the sun then known as On. An obelisk still stands at Heliopolis, now a suburb of Cairo. This obelisk was erected by Sesostris I, and is today known as the Pillar of On. If we understand that Sesostris I was the Pharaoh under whom Joseph was vizier, Genesis 41:45 is very meaningful. “And Pharaoh...gave him to wife Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On.”

The Faiyyum is a vast oasis in the desert west of Meidum. It today supports a population of two million people. This great oasis was developed during the period of the twelfth dynasty. A canal dug during the 12th dynasty waters the whole area. This canal is today known as Bar Yosef or Joseph’s Canal. No one seems to know how it got this name. It may have carried this name ever since it was dug in the twelfth dynasty. It could have been the work of Joseph in preparation for the seven years of famine.

As for Joseph himself, there was a vizier under Sesostris I who had extraordinary powers. His name was Mentuhotep, shown at right. Of him Brugsch wrote, “In a word, our Mentuhotep, who was invested with several priestly dignities and who was Pharaoh’s treasurer, appears as the alter ego of the king. When he arrived the great personages bowed down before him at the outer door of the royal palace.” Egypt under the Pharaohs, page 162.



Mentuhotep

The Bible record states, “Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph’s hand... and he had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him ‘Bow the knee.’” Genesis 41:42,43. This was an unusual honour to be bestowed on an Egyptian vizier but that was the way it was with Mentuhotep. The fact that he is not named as Joseph is of little consequence. The Egyptians, as well as Bible characters, frequently had more than one name.

Following the death of Joseph “the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them” Exodus 1:7. No doubt the heaviest concentration of the Israelite immigrants was in the land of Goshen in the Delta, but knowing the Hebrew capacity for industry, trade and enterprise, there is no reason to conclude that they would all confine themselves to the same location

At Beni Hassan, 240 km south of Cairo, is the tomb of a nobleman named Knumhotep of the 12th dynasty. on the walls of his tomb are some paintings depicting the visit of some Asiatic people to Egypt. At present this is placed closer to the time of the visit of Abraham to Egypt, but if the migration of Jacob and his large retinue took

place during the 12th dynasty, as is claimed here, then this wall painting should be related to this migration. It is indicative that such a migration did occur at this time and that they had spread as far as Central Egypt. The Hebrews have always had a remarkable ability to maintain their identity, and this would also explain the foreign settlement at Kahun which Petrie investigated.

### **THE OPPRESSION OF ISRAEL**

“Now there arose up a new king over Egypt which knew not Joseph.” Exodus 1:8. Not that he was ignorant of Joseph’s services to the nation, but he wished to make no recognition of them, and, so far as possible, to bury them in oblivion. Josephus wrote, “having in length of time forgotten the benefits received from Joseph,

particularly the crown being now come into another family, they became very abusive to the Israelites, and contrived many ways of afflicting them.” Antiquities of the Jews, book 1, chapter IX, paragraph 1.



Sesostris III

By this revision this Pharaoh would have been Sesostris III. His predecessor, Sesostris II had no living sons at the time of his death. Sesostris III may have been related to this predecessor but he was not in direct line to the throne, so could be classified as belonging to ‘another family,’ as Josephus says. From his statues and inscriptions we may conclude that he was a harsh despot quite capable of inflicting cruelty on the Israelite slaves.

### **THE BIRTH OF MOSES**

The last ruler of the 12th dynasty was Queen Sebekneferu who had no children. She would have been the daughter of Pharaoh who “came down to wash herself at the river.” Exodus 2:5. She was not down there to get clean. She would have had a sumptuous bathroom at her palace for that. She would have been taking a ceremonial bath, praying to the fertility river god Hapi for a baby, and when she saw this beautiful Hebrew baby in the ark she would have regarded it as an answer to her prayers. How else can we explain an Egyptian princess adopting a slave child and planning to make him the next Pharaoh?

But when Moses was 40 years of age he killed an Egyptian while defending one of his own people. Exodus 2:11-15. When Pharaoh heard of the incident Moses was forced to flee to the land of Midian, and when Amenemhet III died Sebekneferu assumed the throne and ruled for 4 years, but when she died the dynasty died and was succeeded by the 13th dynasty. “Her reign, occasioned presumably by the absence of a male heir to the throne, marks the virtual end of a great epoch in Egyptian history.” The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol II, part 1, page 43.

From the historical records we learn that Asiatic slaves were used during the 12th dynasty. “The Asiatic inhabitants of the country at this period must have been many times more numerous than has generally been supposed. Whether or not this largely slave population could have played a part in hastening, or in paving the way for, the impending Hyksos domination is difficult to say.” Cambridge Ancient History, volume II, part 1, page 49. “Asian slaves, whether merchandise or prisoners of war, became plentiful in wealthy Egyptian house holds.” 1964 Encyclopaedia Britannica volume 8, page 35.

Sir Alan Gardiner wrote, “it should be noted, however, that on stelae and in papyri Asiatic slaves are increasingly often mentioned, though there is no means of telling whether they were prisoners of war or had infiltrated into Egypt of their own accord.” Egypt of the Pharaohs, page 133. From the Scripture records, we can say that they did infiltrate into Egypt of their own accord, but were subsequently enslaved.

There was an extensive building programme carried on in the Delta where most of the Israelites were located during this dynasty. The temples of the 18th dynasty at Luxor were too far away from the delta to have been built with Israelite slave labour, and they were built of stone. The buildings constructed in the delta under the twelfth dynasty were made of mud brick. Mountains of such bricks went into the city of Avaris and nearby cities.



Moreover the pyramids of Sesostris III and Amenemhet III were also made of mud bricks. The early dynasties' burial places were made of mud brick. The magnificent third and fourth dynasty pyramids were built of stone. For some strange reason these 12th dynasty rulers reverted to mud brick. Josephus wrote, "they (the Egyptians) set them (the Israelites) to build pyramids." Antiquities of the Jews book 2, chapter IX, par 1.

On the assumption that the oppression took place during the 18th or 19th dynasty, scholars regard this as a glaring blunder by Josephus, for by this time the pyramid age had ended. The Pharaohs of these dynasties were buried in the Valley of the Kings near Luxor. But maybe it is the scholars who have blundered, for the kings of the 12th dynasty did build pyramids, and what is more, they built them of mud bricks laced with straw. "Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their officers, saying, 'You shall no longer give the people straw to make brick as before. Let them go and gather straw for themselves.'" Exodus 5:6,7.

Especially relevant is the research done by Dr Rosalie David whose book "The Pyramid Builders of Ancient Egypt" was published in 1986. She researched the work done by Sir Flinders Petrie in the Faiyum. Petrie worked in the Faiyum in 1889 and he explored the pyramids of the 12th dynasty and identified their owners.

### EXCAVATIONS AT KAHUN

He also excavated the remains of a town that had been occupied by the workmen who actually built these pyramids. He wrote, "The great prize of Illahun was unknown and unsuspected by anyone. On the desert adjoining the north side of the temple, I saw traces of a town, brick walls, houses and pottery; moreover, the pottery was of a style as yet unknown to me. The town wall started out in a line with the face of the temple; and it dawned on me that this could hardly be other than the town of the pyramid builders, originally called Ha-Usertes-en-hotep, and now known as Kahun. A little digging soon put it beyond doubt, as we found cylinders of that age, and no other; so that it was evident that I actually had in hand an unaltered town of the twelfth dynasty, regularly laid out by the royal architect for workmen and stores, required in building the pyramid and its temple. After a few holes had been made, I formed up the workmen in a line along the outmost street, and regularly cleared the first line of chambers, turning the stuff into the street; then the chambers beyond those were emptied into them; and so line after line, block after block, almost every room in the town was emptied out and searched." Ten Years Digging In Egypt, pages 112-113.



Kahun excavations

From the unidentified pottery and other evidence, Petrie concluded that the occupants had been foreigners. Expanding on this thought Rosalie David has an entire chapter headed "The foreign population at Kahun." She wrote, "From his excavations at Kahun, Petrie formed the opinion that a certain element of the population there had come from outside Egypt." The Pyramid Builders of Ancient Egypt, page 175. "It is undeniable that the inhabitants used foreign wares which were derived from the Aegean islands or from Syria- Palestine." Page 188. "It is apparent that the Asiatics were present in the town in some numbers, and this may reflect the situation elsewhere in Egypt. It can be stated that these people were loosely classed by Egyptians as 'Asiatics', although their exact homeland in Syria or Palestine cannot be determined... The reason for their presence in Egypt remains unclear." Pages 190-191.

Neither Petrie nor David guessed that these Asiatics were the Israelites because they clung to the traditional chronology, but obviously the evidence fits the Biblical records in a remarkable way.

The book of Genesis tells how and why they got there, and what they were doing in Egypt. "Then Jacob arose from Beersheba; and the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob, their little ones, and their wives, in the carts which Pharaoh had sent to carry him. So they took their livestock and their goods, which they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and went to Egypt, Jacob and all his descendants with him." Genesis 46:5-7.

Evidence is not lacking to indicate that these Israelites, called by the Egyptians Asiatics, became slaves. “A famous papyrus (the Brooklyn Papyrus) was left to the Brooklyn Museum... On the verso of this papyrus, a woman named Senebtisi attempts to establish her legal rights to the possession of Ninety-five servants. A list of them is included which states their titles, names and surnames, and their occupations. Of the seventy-seven entries that are presented well enough to enable the individual’s nationality to be read, twenty-nine appear to be Egyptian while forty-eight are ‘Asiatics’... Although the foreign names were not precise enough to enable the exact homeland of these Asiatics to be identified it can be said that they were from a ‘Semitic group of the north west... The Brooklyn Papyrus is important here because it shows that one household employed a large proportion of Asiatics and this household was situated in Upper Egypt (The south) and not in the Delta; therefore it is apparent that Asiatic servants were by now disseminated throughout the community.” pages 189-190. “Asian slaves, whether merchandise or prisoners of war, became plentiful in wealthy Egyptian households” [during the 12th dynasty]. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1964, volume 8, page 35.

“The Asiatic inhabitants of the country at this period must have been many times more numerous than has generally been supposed. Whether or not this largely slave population could have played a part in hastening, or in paving the way for, the impending Hyksos domination is difficult to say.” Cambridge Ancient History, volume II, part 1, page 49.

Josephus, the Jewish historian of the first century AD, wrote that the Egyptians “became very abusive to the Israelites, and contrived many ways of afflicting them... They set them to build pyramids.” Antiquities of the Jews, page 55. It is generally considered that Josephus blundered in this statement, because it is assumed that the Exodus took place in the eighteenth or nineteenth dynasties, and by then the Pharaohs were being buried in tombs in the Valley of the kings, not in pyramids. But the kings of the 12th dynasty built pyramids, and they built them of mud bricks mingled with straw.

## INFANT BURIALS

An intriguing aspect of Petrie’s discoveries was the unusual number of infant burials beneath the floors of the houses at Kahun, a tragic reminder of the harsh edicts issued by the cruel tyrants of the oppression. “Beneath the brick floors of the rooms was, however, the best place to search; not only for hidden things, such as a statuette of a dancer and a pair of ivory castanets, but also for numerous burials of babies in wooden boxes. These boxes had been made for clothes and household use, but were used to bury infants, often accompanied by necklaces and other things. On the necklaces were sometimes cylinders with the kings’ names; and thus we know for certain that these burials, and the habitation of the town, is of the twelfth dynasty, from Useratesen (Sesostris) II onward.” Ten Years Digging in Egypt, pages 116-117.



Box used for infant burial, Kahun

We have in the Bible what is probably a partial record of the efforts of the Pharaohs of the oppression to curb the growth of the Israelites. “Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of the one was Shiprah and the name of the other Puah; and he said, ‘when you do the duties of a midwife for the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstools, if it is a son, then you shall kill him’” (Exodus 1:15,16).

These were probably only the midwives in the vicinity of the royal palace. Obviously a large population such as the Israelites then were, scattered all over Egypt, would require more than two midwives. These two midwives evaded their grim responsibility to Pharaoh by claiming that the Hebrew women gave birth before they arrived. But we do not know how many other midwives were obliged to carry out the edict.

Later, when Pharaoh found that these measures were not effective, he ordered the Egyptian neighbours to see that the babies were killed. “Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, ‘Every son who is born you shall cast

into the river” (Exodus 1:22). Some parents managed to conceal their newborn babies for some months. Moses mother “when she saw that he was a beautiful child, she hid him three months” (Exodus 2:3).

But many babies must have been drowned. Whether the parents retrieved the bodies, or whether some babies were put to death by other means we do not know. There must have been many traumatic scenes as hostile neighbours tore babies from their mothers’ arms. But this could account for the many infant burials at Kahun.

In her book, beneath a picture of a wooden box, Dr David says, “Larger wooden boxes, probably used to store clothing and other possessions, were discovered underneath the floors of many houses at Kahun. They contained babies, sometimes buried two to three to a box, and aged only a few months at death...interment of bodies at domestic sites was not an Egyptian custom, although such practices occurred in other areas of the ancient Near East.”

### **MOSES IDENTIFIED?**

The son and successor of Sesostris III, Amenemhet III, was no less grim. He built a mud brick pyramid at Hawarra in the Faiyum and ruled for 48 years. He had two daughters, one of whom apparently died prematurely, and possibly one son, the shadowy figure of Amenemhet IV. Some scholars place this son after Amenemhet III though he may have been a co-regent of Amenemhet III in his closing years. His fate seems uncertain and Dr Donovan Courville of Loma Linda University, who wrote a two-volume book “The Exodus Problem” considers that he could have been Moses.



Pyramid of Amenemhet III

### **THE EXODUS**

Finally there is the striking evidence pointing to the slaves’ sudden departure. Up to the time of Khasekemre-Neferhotep I of the middle thirteenth dynasty, who would thus be identified as the Pharaoh of the Exodus, there was evidence of continuous occupation. Then it suddenly all stopped. “There is every indication that Kahun continued to flourish throughout the 12th dynasty and into the 13th dynasty...It is evident that the completion of the king’s pyramid was not the reason why Kahun’s inhabitants eventually deserted the town, abandoning their tools and other possessions in the shops and houses...There are different opinions of how this first period of occupation at Kahun drew to a close...The quantity, range and type of articles of everyday use which were left behind in the houses may indeed suggest that the departure was sudden and unpremeditated.” The Pyramid Builders, pages 195,199.

“And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years—on that very same day—it came to pass that all the armies of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt” (Exodus 12:41).

A period of instability followed the demise of the 12th dynasty. Fourteen kings followed each other in rapid succession, the earlier ones probably ruling in the Delta before the 12th dynasty ended. Khasekemre-Neferhotep I restored some stability ruling for 11 years, and his was the last scarab to be found at Kahun before the city was deserted. He was the last king to rule before the Hyksos occupied Egypt “without a battle” according to Manetho. Without a battle? Where was the Egyptian army? It would have been at the bottom of the Red Sea (Exodus 14:28). Khasekemre-Neferhotep I was probably the Pharaoh of the Exodus. His mummy has never been found.

Pharaoh at last yielded to Moses’ demands to allow his slaves to leave because of the ten devastating plagues that fell on Egypt. Exodus 7-12. The waters of the sacred River Nile were turned to blood, flocks and herds were destroyed, hail flattened the crops and wrecked the trees, lightning set combustible material on fire and the firstborn of every Egyptian family died. The economy of Egypt must have been shattered and there should be some record of such a catastrophe. There is.

## **THE IPUWER PAPYRUS**

In the Leiden Museum in the Netherlands is a papyrus written in a later period but most scholars recognize it as being a copy of a papyrus from an earlier dynasty. It could have been from the end of the 13th dynasty describing the conditions that prevailed after the plagues had struck. It reads, "Nay, but the heart is violent. Plague stalks through the land and blood is everywhere... Nay, but the river is blood. Does a man drink from it? As a human he rejects it. He thirsts for water... Nay, but gates, columns and walls are consumed with fire... Nay but men are few. He that lays his brother in the ground is everywhere... Nay but the son of the high-born man is no longer to be recognized... The stranger people from outside are come into Egypt... Nay, but corn has perished everywhere. People are stripped of clothing, perfume and oil. Everyone says "there is no more." The storehouse is bare... It has come to this. The king has been taken away by poor men. Ipuwer Papyrus. Leiden Museum. Quoted from "The Ancient Egyptians, a source book of their writings", pages 94-101.

So there is plenty of evidence for Israelite slavery in Egypt, the sudden disappearance of these slaves, the devastation of Egypt by the ten plagues, the destruction of the Egyptian army, if we look for it **AT THE RIGHT TIME.**

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*Archaeological Diggings*