

ISRAEL AND EGYPT: A CHRONOLOGY PROBLEM

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In light of numerous inconsistencies between the ancient histories of the Hebrews and the Egyptians within the current chronological framework, some alternative proposals¹⁻² have been advanced recently which claim to resolve many if not most of these difficulties. This paper seeks to review in a brief way some points in one of these proposals.

The work to be considered is that of Donovan A. Courville entitled The Exodus Problem and Its Ramifications published in 1971 in two volumes. As implied by the title, this work touches upon Hebrew history, but its primary focus is on the history and chronology of ancient Egypt. The time span under consideration is from the beginning of the dynastic period until the Persian domination. After sketching some of the more obvious inconsistencies in the currently popular chronology, Courville sets forth his proposed revision. Most of the remainder of the work consists of a defense of this revision and consideration of the manifold ramifications it has upon the whole of ancient Middle Eastern history and archeology.

This paper will follow somewhat the same outline. It will start with a summary of a few of the difficulties in the current framework as it connects Hebrew and Egyptian history. It will then briefly outline Courville's proposed revision. Lastly some consequences of the alternate scheme will be reviewed.

Among the most significant and best attested events in the history of the Hebrew people which connects with the history of Egypt is the Exodus under Moses. The Hebrew record indicates that a population of at least two million (603,550 adult males twenty years of age and above, not including the tribe of Levi), most of whom had been in slavery, migrated from Egypt following

a sequence of natural catastrophes which had left the agriculture in a state of ruin and a considerable fraction of the livestock and human population dead.³ The ensuing attempt by the Pharaoh to stop this migration resulted in Pharaoh's death and the destruction of his army (involving 600 select chariots and an unspecified number of additional chariots with their horses and officers).⁴ In addition the Israelites carried out of Egypt a vast quantity of gold and silver. Events of such character and magnitude surely constitute an unconcealable crisis in Egyptian history. And if these events within Egypt would not be momentous enough in themselves, they would also have served as a signal for revolt for the tributary peoples throughout the empire. Without going into detail, the placement of such a crisis during the reign of Thutmose III or Amenhotep II of the 18th Dynasty, as some scholars have done,⁵ or in the reign of Ramses II in the 19th Dynasty, as is more popular,⁶ presents a notable difficulty.

A further problem arises with the setting in Palestine following the Exodus at the time of the Conquest by Joshua. The Hebrew record indicates a rapid and extensive destruction of the cities and population in Palestine at this time.⁷ Regarding the early campaign in southern Palestine the record states, "Thus Joshua struck all the land, the hill country and the Negev and the lowland and the slopes and all their kings. He left no survivor, but he utterly destroyed all who breathed, just as the LORD, the God of Israel had commanded."⁸ In the case of the territory allocated to the tribe of Judah, the names of some 115 cities are specifically listed.⁹ By the end of Joshua's life, only a few decades after the entrance of Israel into Canaan, the territory from the river of Egypt in the south to beyond Tyre in the north and from the Jordan River on the east to the Mediterranean,

as well as the lands of Sihon, an Amorite king, and Og of Bashan east of the Jordan had been divided among the twelve tribes.

This record of the Conquest bears witness to a major cultural break in the history of Palestine which would appear unmistakably in the archeology of the region. Although evidences of extensive destructions of cities in Palestine may be pointed to, corresponding, according to the popular chronology, to the era between Thutmose III and Rameses II, these destructions are not followed by a change in culture. In regard to the cultural continuity from the end of Middle Bronze I through Late Bronze (popularly dated c. 1900-1200 B.C.), Miss Kathleen Kenyon writes¹⁰

With Canaanite Phoenicia, the ties which were established about 1900 B.C. were permanent, and on the evidence of the pottery we can say that the same basic culture grew up in an area stretching from Ras Shamra in the north to the desert fringes of Palestine in the south. Moreover, the culture now introduced into Palestine was to have a very long life. In spite of the fact that a series of events took place of major political importance, there is no cultural break until at least 1200 B.C. Archeology can show a recognizable progression of artifacts such as pottery, and can show that towns suffered a succession of destructions, but after these destructions the old culture was re-established.

Hence, the cultural discontinuity required by the Conquest of Joshua during the fifteenth century B.C. according to Hebrew history is in clear disagreement with the popular scheme.

Yet another difficulty with the popular framework is the anachronistic background for the period of the Judges in Hebrew history. Although the tribes of Israel are involved in numerous military incidents during this 330-year period with many peoples from Mesopotamia, Ammon, Moab, indigenous Canaanites (who had not been driven out but put under forced labor), Amalekites, Midianites, and Philistines, no mention whatever is made of any contact or interaction with Egypt. This would tend to suggest that Egypt undertook no military campaigns of any consequence into Asia during this extended period.

The period of the Judges according to the popular chronology coincides with the late 19th and 20th Dynasties in Egypt, during which time Egyptian activity in Asia, though on the decline, certainly was not absent. But the popular framework does not have room for this 330-year period. Yet the evidence from the Hebrew record seems clear. I Kings 6:1 states that it was in the 480th year after the sons of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, that Solomon began to build the temple in Jerusalem. Subtracting the time in the wilderness, the Conquest, and the reigns of Saul and David leaves very close to 330 years. The chronology within the book of Judges itself also gives this period of time. Again, a major segment of Hebrew history fails to fit the chronological framework currently accepted in most of the scholarly world.

If we now move back in time to the period of the Oppression, the era when according to the Hebrew record Israel was in slavery in Egypt, we find a large Hebrew population concentrated in the eastern Delta region engaged in extensive building projects in mud brick.¹¹ If the Exodus is placed in the 19th Dynasty, this period of the Oppression fails to agree with the historical setting in Egypt. The inscription of Merneptah dated in his fifth year which refers to Israel's desolation in Palestine and indicates Israel's presence there requires a date for the Exodus before his reign (actually considerably before). This in itself, incidently, presents problems in identifying Rameses II as the Pharaoh of the Exodus. At the time of the Exodus Moses was eighty years old, and the Oppression was under way at the time of his birth. This together with the Merneptah inscription requires the Oppression to extend well back into the era of kings preceding Rameses II, none of whom did any building in the Delta nor ruled from this area. So again we see evidence of mismatch between the Hebrew and Egyptian histories within the popular framework.

As a final example of this general pattern we can consider the period of the Descent into Egypt of Jacob and his family. According to the popular chronology the Descent falls during the Hyksos period. Yet the setting in Egypt when Joseph is elevated to the position of second in authority to Pharaoh himself is one of stability and prosperity and, by all means, one of Egyptian rule and power. The priesthood is centered in On. Great storehouses exist. The Pharaoh has the economic authority to exact for the state twenty percent of the agricultural production throughout Egypt in advance of the predicted seven years of famine. Despite the paucity of records from the Hyksos period, it seem clear that such a set of circumstances is completely out of character with the years of nightmare of the Hyksos domination of Egypt.

These are but a few of the more obvious inconsistencies between the histories of Egypt and the Hebrews that exist in the current chronological scheme. Dr. Courville treats these in much greater detail and with much more sophistication. He also considers a host of other difficulties involving, for example, the Greek and Hittite histories as well as the internal affairs within Egypt itself.

Of course it does not require extraordinary genius to call attention to deficiencies in a framework, especially one involving such an incredibly complex array of data from the cultures of the ancient Middle East. Where genius is required is in the illumination of some better framework which causes the former deficiencies and inconsistencies to vanish while at the same time not introducing new and more perplexing ones. This, in the opinion of the writer, is what makes Courville's work so deserving of attention.

Since Courville treats in considerable detail the events in Egypt associated with almost every known king from the First Dynasty through the 22nd

Dynasty, even a summary of his revised chronology feasible for this short paper must be selective and extremely abbreviated. The key proposal of his revised framework is the moving of the date for the end of the Early Bronze age forward on the B.C. time scale by approximately 600 years, from shortly before 2000 B.C. to a point coincident with the conquest of Canaan by Joshua about 1400 B.C.¹² Once this change is made new time relationships among Manetho's dynasties for Egypt emerge. These may be summarized as follows:¹³

1. Dynasties 24 to 26 retain their positions on the time scale, corresponding to the period between the fall of Israel to Assyria in 721 B.C. and the fall of Egypt to the Persians in 525 B.C.
2. As the (original, non-Indo European) Hittites migrated to Asia Minor at the time of Joshua's Conquest (c. 1400 B.C.) and the Hittite history lasted about 700 years until shortly after the rule of Rameses II of the 19th Dynasty, this dynasty ends just prior to the beginning of Dynasty 24.
3. Dynasties 18 and 19 span the 350 year period before the fall of Israel. Hence Dynasty 18 begins about the time of the beginning of the Kingdom of Israel under Saul.
4. The Hyksos period covers the 400 years preceding the 18th Dynasty and corresponds to the period of the Judges in the Hebrew history.
5. The 1st and 2nd Intermediate periods of the popular chronology are one and the same, namely the period of Hyksos domination. Hence Dynasties 14 to 17 as well as 7 to 10 fall into this time span.
6. Dynasty 12 and most of 13 are parallel with Dynasty 6; that is, the so-called Middle Kingdom coincides with the latter part of the Old Kingdom.
7. Dynasty 4 follows Dynasty 1 with Dynasty 2 parallel with 4 and 5 and Dynasty 3 beginning during Dynasty 1.

8. The time span from the beginning of the dynastic era until the Persian era is then approximately filled by Dynasties 1, 4, 5, 12, the Hyksos period, Dynasties 18, 19, 24, 25, and 26. All other dynasties for this period are parallel to these.

Needless to say, such a radical revision of the historical framework for Egypt requires, in the context of current scholarship, significant defense on hundreds, if not thousands, of points! Yet Courville has undertaken this task in a serious and careful fashion. Anyone whose philosophical commitments do not preclude his considering the history of the Hebrews as admissible data should find this work extremely stimulating and fascinating. Not only do amazing synchronisms between Egypt and Palestine appear, but many important synchronisms not previously recognized in many other Near Eastern civilizations of antiquity are also unveiled.

A few of the synchronisms which result from the revision will now be reviewed. One of the more apparent ones, of course, is the coincidence of the Exodus with the beginning of the Hyksos era. The Hebrew record indicates the plagues which fell on Egypt as Pharaoh refused to permit the Hebrews to leave under Moses left the country in a state of ruin and devastation. The loss of the Pharaoh and a large portion of the Egyptian army at the Red Sea added to the confusion. It becomes conceivable how the Hyksos could come into Egypt, "a people of ignoble origin from the east, whose coming was unforeseen," and take over the country "without difficulty or even a battle."¹⁴ (Manetho as quoted by Josephus) Indeed the Ipuwer papyrus appears to record the lamentation of an Egyptian eyewitness of this calamity. As mentioned earlier, the events surrounding the Exodus constitute an unconcealable crisis of major proportions in Egypt. The greatest crisis in Egyptian history is that associated with the Hyksos takeover. Thus in this point in the two histories we have a good fit. Furthermore, the ensuing period of darkness

in Egypt synchronizes with the 400-year period in Hebrew history during which there are no recorded military or political interventions by Egypt in Palestine.

The identification of the Conquest of Palestine by the Hebrews under Joshua with the end of the Early Bronze age correlates the expected major cultural discontinuity with the archeological data for the region. Of special note in this context are the sites of Jericho and Ai. The stratum at Jericho in which the city's double walls had been thrown down violently with bricks scattered down the slope of the mound and the base of the outer wall tilted outward and which showed burned debris inside the city as much as two feet thick dates to the end of the Early Bronze.¹⁵ Investigations at nearby Ai indicate that the ruins of this city dated at the end of the Early Bronze represent a total destruction after which the city was never rebuilt.¹⁶ This agrees with the Hebrew account, "And Joshua burned Ai and made it a heap forever, a desolation until this day."¹⁷

In the context of these data from the late Early Bronze Courville states:¹⁸

These evidences of destruction [of Jericho] by violent and natural means coincide with evidences of a conquest of the entire territory of Palestine by a new people, evidences that encompass every town in Palestine thus far investigated. No more unique incident could be hoped for as an anchor point for properly correlating the archeology of this area with its true history--unique because the incident belongs in the category of a general invasion following a natural catastrophe and followed by evidences of occupation of the entire territory by a new people--and even further unique because of the peculiar nature of the destruction at Jericho.

Courville quotes Miss Kenyon in this regard:¹⁹

The final end of the Early Bronze Age civilization came with catastrophic completeness. The last of the Early Bronze Age walls of Jericho was built in a great hurry, using old and broken bricks, and was probably not completed when it was destroyed by fire. Little or none of the town inside the walls has survived subsequent denudation, but it was probably completely destroyed for all the finds show an absolute break, and that a new people took the place of the earlier inhabitants. Every town in Palestine that has so far been investigated shows this same break.

It is to be observed that this correlation is of a general nature, not one involving only a few fragmentary data.

Another consequence of the revised framework is that the long-standing mystery concerning the identity of the Hyksos is apparently solved. The destruction of the city of the Amalekites by Saul and an army of 210,000 men at "Havilah, as you go to Shur, which is before Egypt"²⁰ in Hebrew history coincides in time with the expulsion of the Hyksos from Egypt. Velikovsky²¹ has pointed out the unusual wording of the account of the siege of Avaris in the inscription in the tomb of the Egyptian officer Ahmose which implies that foreign warriors were the actual conquerors of the Hyksos fortress of Avaris. The additional fact that the Hebrews encountered large numbers of Amalekites just after they left Egypt in the Exodus²² provides even stronger support for the suggestion that the oppressors of Egypt for those dark centuries were indeed the Amalekites.

Moving forward two generations we have as a major event during the reign of Solomon the visit of the queen of Sheba with a large retinue of camels with spices and much gold and precious stones.²³ During this time in Egyptian history, Queen Hatshepsut is reigning in Thebes. Among the major events of her career as recorded in the bas-reliefs in her temple, The Most Splendid of Splendors, at Deir el Bahari is her visit to the land of Punt or God's Land. The Punt reliefs narrate the marvels she experienced and the great quantities of rare and precious gifts she received: "Never was seen the like since the world was."²⁴ The correlation seems obvious as the Hebrew and Egyptian accounts are compared; the queen of Sheba was Queen Hatshepsut.

In this connection it is of further interest to note that the design of The Most Splendid of Splendors with its striking foreign elements has led to the suggestion that the original of this imitation had been seen in Punt. The queen even claims in the reliefs that she built a "Punt." The clear inference to be drawn from the synchronism of Queen Hatshepsut with Solomon and her visit to God's Land is that the original was the temple in Jerusalem!

In the generation following Solomon and Hatshepsut another significant synchronism is evident. The Egyptian Pharaoh Thutmose III who succeeded Queen Hatshepsut conducted a massive military campaign into Palestine and Syria. Inscribed on the walls in his temple at Karnak is a list of 119 cities which he took in Palestine. Some cities were taken by force; others surrendered without a battle and became tributaries. Also shown in bas-relief²⁵ is a vast treasure of articles of gold, silver, bronze, and precious stones that he brought back as booty. The corresponding events in Hebrew history involve the invasion of Palestine by Shishak. "And it came about in King Rehoboam's fifth year, because they had been unfaithful to the LORD, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem with 1,200 chariots and 60,000 horsemen. And the people who came with him from Egypt were without number--the Lubim, the Sukkiim, and the Ethiopians. And he captured the fortified cities of Judah and came as far as Jerusalem...So Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem and took the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's palace. He took everything; he even took the golden shields which Solomon had made."²⁶ The correlation between the items brought back by Thutmose III as depicted in bas-relief on a wall in his temple in Karnak and the vessels, utensils, and furnishings of the temple of Solomon as described in the Hebrew record is astounding, as pointed out by Velikovsky.²⁷

If we go back in time prior to the Exodus and Hyksos period to the era of Joseph's sale into slavery in Egypt, the seven years of famine, and the descent of Jacob and the rest of his sons and their families into Egypt, we also find striking correlation in Egyptian history according to the revised chronology. The time would correspond to 215 years before the Exodus, since this was the length of Israel's sojourn in Egypt.²⁸ A famine inscription from the reign of Sesostri I, the second king of the 12th Dynasty, in

correspondence with this date appears in the tomb of Amen²⁹. It indicates that the famine during his time of service under Sesostris I lasted a plurality of years, that preparation for it was made in advance, and that food was distributed to all classes of the population ("I did not prefer the great to the humble in all I gave away."). The Hebrew record states that Joseph was elevated to the position of the second in the kingdom after Pharaoh. "So Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Since God has informed you of all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you are. You shall be over my house, and according to your command all my people shall do homage; only in the throne will I be greater than you.'"³⁰ The office referred to here is that of vizier. Perhaps the most famous vizier of all Egyptian history is the vizier of Sesostris I, known as Mentuhotep to the Egyptians. Given the correspondence between the remarkable list of titles in Mentuhotep's inscriptions and the titles ascribed to Joseph in the Hebrew record, it seems likely that Joseph and Mentuhotep were one and the same person.

Another evidence that this is the case is the initiation during Mentuhotep's administration of a vast irrigation project involving a canal known to this day as the Canal of Joseph which permitted flood waters of the Nile to flow into a natural basin which served as an irrigation reservoir and approximately doubled the cultivated area of Egypt.³¹ What better reason can be imagined for such a project than the anticipation of an extended and grievous famine?

The revised framework also provides a setting for the period of the Oppression which agrees with the Hebrew record. During the reigns of Sesostris III and Amenemhet III, his successor, an enormous building program was carried out in the eastern Delta region in brick. This is, of course, the area that comprised the land of Goshen where the Hebrew slaves built the cities of Pi-Rameses and Pi-Thom for the Pharaoh. Also of note is that

following Amenemhet IV, who succeeded Amenemhet III, the rule passed to a woman, Sebek-nefru-re, who reigned but a brief four years before she died, bringing to an end the 12th Dynasty. This situation suggests that there was no male heir during the latter part of this period. It happens that this era corresponds to the time in the Hebrew account when the Hebrew child Moses is taken from the Nile by Pharaoh's daughter and it is said that "he became her son."³² The Biblical record intimates that Moses indeed was being groomed for the throne of Egypt. In the revised framework these circumstances fall into the appropriate setting in Egyptian history.

These examples should suffice to demonstrate that something approximating Courville's revised chronology must have some validity, at least for the period from the 12th Dynasty in Egypt through the 18th Dynasty. It remains beyond the scope of this paper to deal with the remainder of Egyptian history which Courville addresses. However it should be of interest to consider quite briefly a few of the ramifications of the revised scheme on cultures other than those of Egypt and Israel.

In the case of Greek history Courville points out that because the Trojan war is linked with the 19th Dynasty in Egypt it has been assigned by modern historians dates ranging between 1180 and 1209 B.C.³³ After the Dorian invasion which followed the fall of Troy by a few decades, Greek history becomes a blank until about 750 B.C. Modern historians have been unable to account for this long hiatus. Courville provides some evidences from earlier sources that the fall of Troy belongs to the eighth century instead of the twelveth century B.C.:³⁴

Philo-Byblius, according to Stephen, considered Semiramis contemporary to or slightly prior to the Trojan war. The Semiramis of history was the mother and coregent of Adad Nirari of Assyria (805-752 B.C.). Since the coregency was at the beginning of the reign and slightly before the fall of Troy, this evidence dates the incident in the early 8th century and not in the 12th, as is currently done.

...The ancient writer, Virgil, makes Aeneas of the Trojan war era a contemporary of Dido, the sister of Pygmalion, a Phoenician king of the mid-9th century. This date is a full three centuries later than the date attributed to the fall of Troy traditionally. The anachronism has been explained by presuming that Virgil is taking characters from widely different eras and placing them in the same story as an example of poetic licence.

...Philistus placed the fall of Troy 37 years after the founding of Carthage. Justin and Orosius agree in placing the founding of Carthage 72 years before the founding of Rome. The date for the founding of Rome is now set at 753 B.C., thus yielding a date of 825 B.C. for the founding of Carthage by the statements of Justin and Orosius. The fall of Troy then occurred in 788 by the statement of Philistus. This date is in excellent agreement with the less definite statement of Philo-Byblius, who placed the event shortly after 800 B.C.

In the revised chronology this gap of three centuries vanishes, and many other problems of early Greek history disappear as Courville proceeds to point out.

A more significant issue for Near East chronology concerns the dating of the Hittites. Courville states:³⁵

...there are serious anachronisms that result from the popular dating of the beginnings of the Hittites in Anatolia about the beginning of the 19th century B.C. The dating of their demise at the hands of the Sea Peoples, dated c. 1200 B.C., leaves an incredible gap of 500 years between the end of the Hittite empire and the eventual disappearance of the Hittite culture. During this "blank" interval, the Assyrian inscriptions continue to refer to the Hittites as an organized people with kings over them and with armies capable of waging war with neighboring peoples. Even the names of some of these Hittite kings are given in the Assyrian inscriptions. These data provide a strong suggestion that all is not well with the currently accepted placement of the Hittite era on the B.C. time scale.

Courville contends that much of the problem arises from the failure of modern scholars to recognize the relationship between the Hittites of archeology and the Hittites from the Hebrew sources. Clearly the Hebrew record shows the Hittites to be among the peoples living in Palestine at the time of the Exodus. Courville proceeds to state:³⁶

Some 40 years later, the Israelites conquered the territory of Palestine under Joshua. Among the displaced peoples were the Hittites. The Hittites were driven out of Palestine at that time,

but were permitted to find a new home for themselves. This they did by migrating northward into the territory now known as Anatolia in Asia Minor, where the home of the Hittites has been discovered archeologically. However, the Hittites of archeology were an Indo-European race, coming into this territory from the west and not from Palestine to the south. The Hittites of archeology should then be recognized as this race which absorbed the culture and the name of the Hittites, who had been driven out of Palestine at the time of the Conquest.

Courville considers the well-established synchronisms between the Hittites and other peoples such as that between the Hittite king Muwatallis and Rameses II, dated 1293-1227 B.C. He shows that shifting the Hittite history forward 500 years consistent with the revised framework for Egypt reveals additional synchronisms, such as that of the record of Shalmaneser III (858-824 B.C.) of war against the Hittite king Supilulme, who must be Suppiluliumus of the Hittite king list, dated currently about 1375 B.C.³⁷ Another correspondence is that of Ilu-Teshup, a Hittite king during the reign of Tiglath-pileser, with Telipinus of the Hittite king list. This identification reveals that it was Tiglath-pileser I who was responsible for bringing an end to the Hittite Old Kingdom about 1110 B.C.³⁸

Because of the well-established synchronisms between Hittite and Babylonian histories, this revision in the Hittite chronology must also affect the Babylonian. In particular, the bold conquest of Babylon by the Hittite king Mursilis I, marking the end of the First Dynasty of Babylon, falls about 1230 B.C., instead of some three and a half centuries earlier as currently assigned.³⁹ Hammurabi's reign then falls in the period c. 1411-1368 B.C., for the most part after the beginning of the Hebrew Conquest of Palestine!

These few examples are but a small sampling of the treatment Courville gives to the much larger problem and are intended to provide but a flavor of his solution.

It is the opinion of the writer that despite the attention and labors of many scholars over the last century, there exist some key pieces of the

puzzle of ancient Middle East history which, by the current scheme, simply do not fit. The spectacular correlations that appear when some rather simple adjustments are made in the Egyptian chronology and in the dating of the Archeological Ages of Palestinian archeology lead this writer to suspect there to be validity in such proposals. It is the writer's conclusion that the necessity of such adjustments will become more apparent as further data are uncovered which have direct bearing on the problem, as has been done recently at Ebla.

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