

The Place of the Exodus in Egyptian History: Comments

A. John M. Osgood, Independent Scholar, Bunjurgun, Queensland, Australia.

Abstract

In attempting to correlate biblical and Egyptian records, it will be maintained that there has been a failure to understand that while the Egyptian king lists have been arranged sequentially, as was common in the ancient world, they often were listing parallel and with overlapping dynasties. Egypt was a nation which was composed of multiple administrations which were usually but not always under one dominant ruler. It will be maintained that, in understanding this principle, a radical revision of the chronology is possible without contradicting the king list details, and a correlation of the Bible with secular records is then possible.

Keywords: Biblical timelines, cartouche, Egypt, Egyptian chronologies, Egyptian dynasties, king lists, Manetho, parallelisms, pharaohs, subservient dynasties

Introduction

Since I have been significantly quoted in Porter (2022), I feel some amicable comments would be appropriate.

Porter has clearly shown his commitment to the historicity of the scriptural narrative and has clearly spent much time attempting to seek a correlation of the Egyptian record with the biblical history, as have many before him, with varying success.

He also is aware that the presently held Egyptian chronology bears no relationship to the scriptural narrative, and that many of the biblical archaeologists themselves seem lost in confusion.

Significantly, he has also referred to the conclusions arrived at by Donovan Courville (1971) some years ago, who presented a well-reasoned discussion which I believe solved some, but certainly not all, of the problems of correlation.

I will outline some basic principles here.

Cartouche

All Egyptian kings put their name in a cartouche symbolising kingship, but this did not mean that they were sole pharaohs or that they ruled over the whole land.

Sequential Assumptions

The first and major mistake made by Egyptian

chronologists was to assume that the king lists were overall sequential. This has been a little modified in recent years, but the fallacy essentially remains.

The King Lists

As difficulties have revealed themselves—without satisfactory solutions—many have tended to dismiss these as untrustworthy, and Porter appears to have suggested such to some extent. While accepting the many difficulties inherent in these lists, it is my contention that they are for the most part trustworthy, but the basis for their arrangement has been sadly misunderstood.

Manetho and His Sources

Manetho, an Egyptian priest during the early Ptolemaic period, compiled from various source materials his king list, and with this even his worst critic—Josephus—admitted success. Because of anti-Jewish sentiment expressed in other areas, however, Josephus roundly criticised him. Many later commentators have also tended to denounce him because of their own biases.

What has not been appreciated is that Manetho presented his sequential chronology on the basis of geography, and on realisation of this, a totally new perspective reveals itself. Let me explain (see table 1):

Manetho’s first unit—Dynasties 1–2:

Originating from *Thinis* (in the south) and sequentially arranged.

Years: Dyn. 1 = 252 years; Dyn. 2 = 297 years. Total of 549 sequential years.

Manetho’s second unit—Dynasties 3–8:

Associated with *Memphis* and essentially sequential.

Years: Dyns. 3–6 (those associated with the “Old kingdom”)=942 years.

Dyns. 7–8=An assumed 146 years and 70 days.

Manetho’s third unit—Dynasties 9–10:

At *Heracleopolis*.

Years: Dyn. 9=409 years; Dyn. 10=185 years. Total of 594 years.

Manetho’s fourth unit—Dynasties 11–12

Originating from *Thebes*.

Years: Dyn. 11=43 years; Dyn. 12= 243 years. Total of 286 years.

Table 1. Manetho’s Four Units.

	Manetho’s First Unit	Manetho’s Second Unit	Manetho’s Third Unit	Manetho’s Fourth Unit
<i>Dynasties</i>	1–2	3–8	9–10	11–12
<i>Years</i>	Dyn. 1 = 252 Dyn. 2 = 297 Total: 594	Dyns. 3–6 = 942 Dyns. 7–8 = 146 years and 70 Days Total: 1,088 years and 70 days	Dyn. 9 = 409 Dyn. 10 = 185 Total: 549	Dyn. 11 = 43 Dyn. 12 = 243 Total: 286
<i>Region</i>	Originating from THINIS in the South	Associated with MEMPHIS	At HERACLEOPOLIS	Originating from THEBES
<i>Notes</i>	Sequentially arranged	Essentially sequential; Dyns. 3–6 are associated with the ‘Old Kingdom’		

Manetho continues, the Turin Canon adds other dynasties until the beginning of the 18th Dynasty, but the Sakkara and Abydos lists stop here.

The figures (table 1) given are essentially simply additions of all known reigns, without comment as to parallelisms or co-regencies, and his format therefore is as with several ancient lists (for example, the Sumerian King List, which is known to list sequentially dynasties who were often contemporary).

It is also now recognised that Egypt was firstly two countries with regional administrations, and at certain times Egypt was recognised as having up to 20 kings at once (for example, during the Cushite 25th Dynasty and the Assyrian hegemony). But the pattern was set in motion from the predynastic period. It is therefore then remarkable that a rigid sequential system is still religiously held by the majority of scholars, a fact that resists Bible correlation.

Discussion

In fig. 1 is an arrangement that both I and the late Donovan Courville would see as likely, showing possible parallelisms (not to scale).

As the Bible from the Dispersion to the end of the Cushite Dynasty (25th) 664BC allows only circa

1,700 years of Egyptian history at the very most, it becomes patently obvious that the total sequential arrangement is impossible (for example, Dyn. 1+2 occupy at least one third of that time). So, a radical revision is the only option if we are to believe the Bible’s history, and if we do not, then we undermine the reality of the promises and covenants on which our hope depends.

While I commend Porter’s attempt to shorten the timeline, I find that the shortening of individual reigns has little to commend it and involves many unproven assumptions. Secular historians also shorten individual reigns, often because they simply doubt the king list figures.

I feel also that Porter has not yet fully grasped the arrangement suggested by Courville (1971), some of which I agree with. An example of dynasties overlapping is well illustrated by the conquests of the 11th Dynasty pharaoh Mentuhotep II, who was later looked on as the great unifier in the same way as Menes and Ahmose. But to unify, he actually took control of four other administrations: part of the 5th at Elephantine, the end period of the 2nd at Asyat/Thinis, he extinguished the 10th at Heracleopolis and then took control of the early 6th (?) at Memphis, and another residual part of the 5th at Heliopolis.

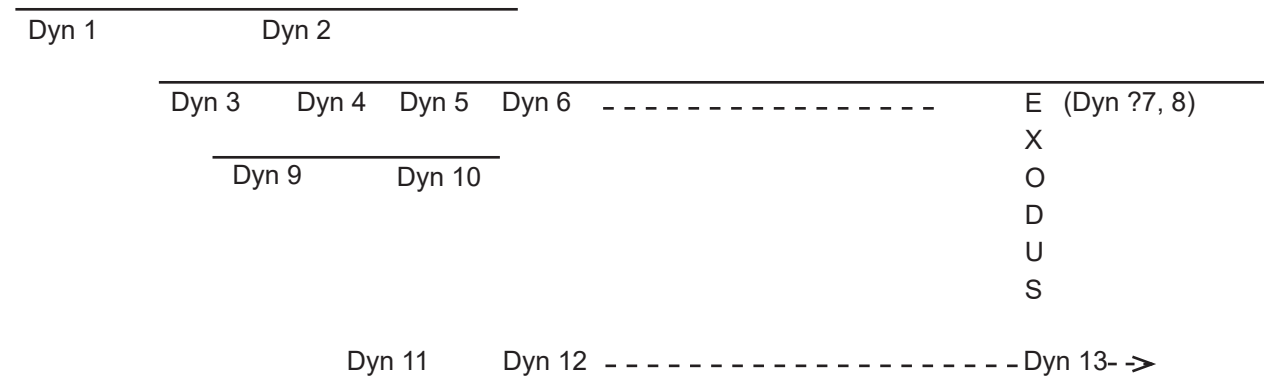


Fig. 1. A possible scenario of overlapping Egyptian dynasties, as proposed by Courville (1971), with which this author agrees.

Leaving most of those administrations in place as subservient, his soon-to-be usurper Amenemhet 1 then founded a new capital at It-Towe as the dominant pharaoh, first of the 12th Dynasty of the Middle Kingdom. Such an arrangement (as in fig. 1) slices 1,400 years off the total claims of a sequential chronology without having to alter any of the claims of individual reigns.

The 12th Dynasty is the only dynasty which gives real clarification to the biblical claims of Israel’s sojourn, and when it ends, very soon afterwards Egypt collapses during the early 13th Dynasty into the only collapse that fits the biblical story. But both Courville and I came to realise that the 6th Dynasty had to be largely parallel, albeit subservient to the 12th Dynasty.

Porter, like a number of researchers, has obviously become frustrated with the chaotic presentation of the 13th Dynasty. However, on the basis of two reasonable pieces of evidence, I have concluded that it is not so chaotic as first thought. It shows evidence initially (pre-Hyksos) of three lines of contemporary kings, ruling in different cities but usually one dominant, until the collapse, which left only one line in Thebes after the Hyksos invasion. This arrangement also strangely brings many of the apparently contradictory assessments of the time of collapse into line and full agreement.

The Third Intermediate Period is also a thorn in the side of many researchers. But, again, a series

of parallelisms beginning during the last 30 years of Ramses II’s reign, when he seems to disappear from view (perhaps with some incapacity), and the arrangement of a series of parallel dynasties which is alluded to in a garbled account of Herodotus (1968, 160), allows the identification of Sheshonk III of Tanis as the king ‘So’ of 1 Kings 17:4, and contracts the events to a length of time which allows a better match to the time of Israel’s kingdom period.

This period I have recently outlined in detail (Osgood 2020). The possible arrangement of this period which I have rather called the “Period of Fragmentation,” cuts another 250 years off the secular chronology and gives what I believe is a coherent correlation. There is no need to interfere with the given reigns of the king lists.

References

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