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The Egyptian Problem

In 1971 appeared a privately published book dealing with the problems surrounding the chronology of Egypt as it relates to the Bible: *The Problem Its*

by Donovan A. Courville (Loma Linda, CA: Challenge Books). At the time, Dr. Courville (Ph. D., Chemistry) was emeritus professor of Bio-chemistry at the School of Medicine at Loma Linda University. A practicing Seventh-Day Adventist, Courville had made this chronological problem his avocation for many years, and his 700-page study was the result.

Courville pointed out what we saw in our previous essay, which is that if the Bible is even faintly correct about the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt, there should be evidence of a serious catastrophe in Egyptian history at that point. The present Current Consensus Chronology (CCC) of the ancient world places the exodus at a time when Egypt was very strong, and becoming stronger. Moreover, according to the CCC there is virtually no evidence of an Israelite conquest of Canaan.

Courville's solution involved shifting the entire CCC forward by several centuries. The CCC tells us that the Hyksos dynasty in Egypt ruled during Joseph's day, and that the Israelites left Egypt during the reign of Thutmose III, Amenhotep 11, or Rameses II. Courville shifted this forward so that the Hyksos were the Amalekites who conquered Egypt after God devastated it, and who were kicked out during the time of Saul (which is why Saul had to fight them). The "Shishak" who sacked Solomon's Temple in the days of Rehoboam was Thutmose III, according to Courville.

The general elegance of Courville's solution can be seen in that its redating forces a redating of the archaeological chronology of Palestine and provides clear evidence of the Israelite conquest of Canaan. Moreover, and this is very important, Courville's solution eliminates a 300-year "dark age" that supposedly occurred in every part of the Mediterranean world between about 1100 and 800 B.C.

Courville's work was generally ignored. After all, he was not an insider to the world of archaeology and ancient history. Also, he was a Seventh-Day Adventist. His book was privately published. Gradually however, his efforts came to the attention of the catastrophic revisionists.

he decided that the fantastic events recorded in the Bible probably had some basis in fact. Thus, he posited that the planet Venus was traveling around the solar system during the ancient world, causing disruptions on the earth. He used this and other astral catastrophes to explain the plagues on Egypt, the manna, the parting of the Red Sea, Joshua's long day, etc. His followers have come up with many more odd catastrophic schemes to explain ancient events. Velikhovsky maintained that the Hyksos were the Amalekites, and his general scheme is the same as that of Courville, who gives him credit for being the first to suggest it. It is noteworthy that over the years, the Velikhovskian catastrophists have become less interested in Venus fly-bys and Mars fly-bys, and more interested in chronological and archaeological revisionism. Interaction with Courville's work has to some extent displaced fascination with Velikhovsky's.

This was the situation until 1991. In that year a book was published by scholars working within accepted academic circles that challenged the CCC: *Centuries*

World

(London: Jonathan Cape, Ltd.,

1991). The primary author is Peter James, who graduated in ancient history and archaeology at Birmingham University and at the time of publication was engaged in post-graduate research at University College, London. The thesis of the book is that there was no 300-year "dark age" in the ancient world, and that the myth of the 300-year dark age is based on a misreading of Egyptian history. In order to make this point, James teamed up with specialists in various areas of Mediterranean archaeology and history, who wrote various chapters of the book: 1. J. Thorpe, Nikos Kokkinos, Robert Morkot, and John Frankish. Their manuscript was read and critiqued by well over two dozen scholars before publication. The book was picked up by Rutgers University Press in 1993. Publication by a university press has guaranteed that the book will receive serious attention. It was an "Editor's Choice" selection of the Ancient and Medieval History Book Club. With the publication of this revisionism has entered the mainstream of discussion.

It takes note of Velikhovsky's work, but finds it wanting in substance. There is no reference to

it means that the authors have developed their thesis out of a thorough familiarity with existing "in house" archaeology and history, and for this reason their work must be taken seriously by the academy.

The Development of the CCC

The first chapter of *of* is a discussion of the evolution of old world chronology. At the time of the Reformation, the chronology of the Bible was taken seriously, and those who sought to reconstruct the history of the ancient world did not depart from the boundaries provided by the Bible. The leading Protestant scholar in this area was Joseph Scaliger (1540-1609). He was the first to make a systematic and critical study of the chronological material in the Bible together with that from the pagan classical world. James tells us that "he developed a chronology which, for the time, was both coherent and comprehensive" (p. 6).

Scaliger ran into a problem, however. He recovered a Byzantine summary of the writings of Manetho, a Graeco-Egyptian priest of the 2nd century BC who had recorded a history of Egypt back to its first kings. Computing the information given by this source for the lengths of the thirty Egyptian dynasties, Scaliger set the start of the 1st Dynasty at 5285 BC. Much to his dismay, it lay 1336 years before his own date for the Creation (3949 BC). Many scholars sought to reconcile Manetho's dynasties with the Bible by assuming that many of these dynasties ran concurrently.

With the decline of belief in the Bible, secular scholarship began to depend more heavily on Manetho and to revise the Bible to fit Manetho's chronology. Out of this dependence on Manetho arose the great error that we have been discussing, the error that both created the mythical "dark age" between 1100 and 800 BC throughout the Mediterranean, and also completely obscured the connections between Biblical and Egyptian history.

As we discuss the development of this error, we have to take note of the work of Christian Thomsen (1788-1865), a wealthy Danish businessman and collector, who developed the "Three-Age System," a technological succession from Stone to Bronze to Iron. This framework provided a sensible way of ordering archaeological finds. James points out that this system now has a much more technical meaning, however: "Thomsen's simple division of history into ages of Stone, Bronze, and Iron is still the basis of archaeological classification throughout the world—though, of course, the various cultures around the globe went through these three stages at different times. Since Thomsen's day the sheer convenience of this terminology has often caused it to stray far from the original meaning: thus, in the Eastern Mediterranean such terms as 'Early Iron Age' were long ago adopted to describe cultural phrases which are now in fact defined by their pottery. It should not be supposed that iron was first introduced, or even became predominant, at the beginning of the 'Iron Age'" (p. 10).

In 1880, W. Flinders Petrie made an expedition to Egypt to survey the Great Pyramid at Giza. Petrie was from a Plymouth Brethren family, and was committed to the strange view of Charles Piazzi Smith that the geometry

it was nonsense and dropped it. He developed, however, a life-long commitment to Egyptian archaeology and made numerous scientifically-controlled excavations. He established a pottery sequence, and tied these to Manetho's dynasties.

Confirmation of the Manetho chronology was seemingly found from another source as well: Sothic dating. The Egyptians called the star Sirius (the Dog-Star) Sothis. There are references to Sothis in various papyri from ancient Egypt. James summarizes: "The 'ideal' Egyptian year was one in which the rising of Sothis just before dawn coincided with the annual flooding of the Nile. Because the Egyptians never introduced a Leap Year, the New Year festival linked to the rising of Sothis inevitably slipped round the calendar; only after 1460 years had passed would the cycle be completed by another 'ideal' year. It therefore appeared possible to calculate where a given text fell within a 'Sothic cycle' if it mentions a rising of Sirius on a particular calendar day.

"Schemes for the 'Sothic dating' of Egyptian history were experimented with from the mid-17th century onwards, but all these were highly speculative. The system still used today is essentially that established by the chronologist Eduard Meyer in 1904, hinging on two recently discovered Sothic references—one around 1870 BC during the 12th Dynasty and another of 1540 BC for the 18th Dynasty. In general, Egyptologists were impressed by the scientific aura which astronomy apparently lent to the Sothic theory. Different calculations produced slightly varying results, but they were close enough to convince the vast majority on the central issues. For example, the 'New Kingdom' period of the 18th to 20th Dynasties could be confidently placed between 1600 and 1100 BC" (p. 12f.).

All of this was very "scientific" and seemed quite secure. It provided a history of Egypt, and the fact that it contradicted the Bible was unimportant. It also contradicted, however, some important finds in the Aegean.

In 1870 Heinrich Schliemann began his excavations of Troy and later of Mycenae. Cities turned up under the rubble that predated the classical and Archaic remains of known history. The question that needed to be answered was, therefore: how much earlier were these cities? When did the Mycenaean and Trojan civilizations, celebrated in Homer, exist?

Flinders Petrie discovered the "answer." He discovered pottery sherds in Egypt identical to those Schliemann had uncovered, sherds mixed with Egyptian remains of the 18th and 19th dynasties. Thus, he fixed the destruction of Troy around 1100 BC. James comments that Petrie's "Egyptian-derived dates had the extremely unwelcome result of producing an enormous void between the Mycenaean world and that of the early Greek city-states of the 8th century BC. Previously it was common practice to date the end of Mycenaean civilization as late as 800 BC, allowing continuity, or even an overlap" with the following period of pottery and other remains (p. 16).

Here's the problem: the pottery styles of Mycenae and the style of Greek, even the shape of the letters of the alphabet, are virtually the same as that of the Greek city-states. We are asked to believe that Greek civilization after

Classical scholar Cecil Torr argued against Petrie on two grounds. First, he disputed the claim that Petrie's Egyptian sherds were contemporary with Mycenaean ones. Second, and more importantly, he challenged the notion that Manetho's dynasties were successive, and lowered Egyptian chronology to make it fit. Thus, he argued, even if Petrie were correct about the pottery sherds, it would only mean that Egyptian chronology needed to be shortened.

The founding father of Swedish Egyptology, Jens Lieblein, agreed with Torr. He pointed out similar problems in others areas of history in the Near East and even in Egypt, pointing out that Petrie's error was producing another unnecessary "dark age" in Hittite chronology. He also argued for a lowering of Egyptian chronology, stating: "I have never understood the obstinacy with which scholars have hung on to the regular succession of the thirty dynasties of Manetho. However many voices of incontestable authority have protested, the error still seems to be fashion in our days" (p. 17').

Petrie's view won out, however, for three reasons. First, Torr was wrong to challenge the pottery sherds. It is clear that the 18th and 19th Dynasties of Egypt were contemporary with Mycenae.

Second, the short chronology was simply out of step with the trend of the time, which was to ascribe the highest antiquity to Egypt and its neighboring civilizations. The myth was that civilization arose in the Near East and then spread over Europe. Evidence against this notion arising from European archaeology (evidence like Stonehenge) was simply ignored. High dates were also being ascribed to the Mesopotamian civilizations as well; Hammurabi was placed around 2100 BC.

Third, correspondence was uncovered that linked Egyptian civilization with Mesopotamian. Since both were said to be old, this linkage produced seeming confirmation of the age of each. In a somewhat circular fashion, the long chronology of each supported the other.

Based on the great error in Egyptian chronology, the Current Consensus Chronology has produced one "dark age" after another in the history of the ancient world. The purpose of _____ of _____ is to close the gap, and in 400+ pages of close reasoning the authors do so admirably. For anyone interested in this subject, _____ is must reading.

Manetho's Dynasties

As mentioned above, Manetho was an Egyptian priest who wrote in the 2nd or 3rd centuries BC. His history of Egypt, the *Aegyptiaca*, is now lost, but "summaries and ostensible extracts survive in a number of later works, notably those of Josephus (1st century AD), Julius Africanus (3rd century AD), Eusebius (4th century AD), and Syncellus (c. 800 AD). These preserve, in different and often contradictory versions, an Epitome, giving the names and reign-lengths of the Egyptian pharaohs, arranged into a system of thirty Dynasties or ruling houses. The sequence begins with the unification of Egypt by King Menes, founder of the 1st Dynasty, and ends with Nectanebo II, the last native pharaoh" (p. 223). Everything we have of Manetho is found in *Manetho*, translated and annotated by W. (_____)

utive, but allows for some overlap when it becomes necessary. That is, the CCC starts with the assumption of consecutiveness, and then makes necessary modifications. Thus, the earliest kings of the 26th Dynasty ruled at the same time as the later kings of the 25th. Also, the early 25th overlapped with the later 22nd and 23rd. James comments: "Whether Manetho understood sources as meaning that a given dynasty began only after its predecessor had finished will probably never be known, as his original work is lost. The Church Father Eusebius, who transmitted one of the major recensions of Manetho's work, certainly had a different understanding:

"It seems . . . that different kings held sway in different regions, and that each dynasty was confined to its own nome [province]; thus it was not a succession of kings occupying the throne one after the other, but several kings reigning at the same time in different regions" (p. 233). [Loeb edition: *Manetho*, p. 9.]

There is another very important reason to question Manetho's list, and that is the probable reason for his writing it in the first place. Virtually every civilization in the ancient world sought to claim the greatest antiquity and histories were produced to show that each was the oldest. The reason for this is not only to glorify the nation, but also to establish imperial claims.

This is not just an ancient phenomenon. Not too long ago, German historians were diligently falsifying and inventing history in order to prove the seniority and superiority of the Aryan race. The rulers of England have often supported the absurd notion that the English and Saxon races are descended from the "lost tribes of Israel." Today, the Israeli claim to the land of Palestine is grounded in events 2000 years old.

When the Greek politician Solon visited Egypt in the 6th century BC, he was chided as a citizen of such a youthful culture, and was told that Egyptian history ran back 8000 years. Herodotus was told a century later that Egyptian history ran back 11,340 years before his time (p. 292).

The Babylonian priest Berossus presents us a dynasty of 86 kings who reigned for no less than 33,091 years. His contemporary, Manetho, produced a similar claim regarding the earliest, divine rulers of Egypt. Manetho expert W. G. Waddell suggests that _____ "The works of Manetho and Berossus maybe interpreted as an expression of the rivalry of the two kings, Ptolemy and Antiochus, each seeking to proclaim the great antiquity of his land" (p. 292). [Loeb edition: *Manetho*, p. x.]

Everyone admits that these are fictional exaggerations, but when it comes to Manetho's dynasties, the admission is not so forthcoming. Moreover, no such skepticism is found concerning the Assyrian King List, on which so much of ancient near eastern chronology currently depends.

The reason for this blindness is not hard to discern. It lies in the presuppositional hostility of secular scholarship for the Bible. If Manetho cannot be trusted, scholarship must rely much more heavily on the Bible, and that is not regarded as acceptable. That evangelical scholars have been so willing to play along with the palpable errors of secular scholarship is a monument to their unwillingness

We shall let W. G. Waddell, the editor of Manetho, have the last word:

"But there were many errors in Manetho's work from the very beginning: all are not due to the perversions of scribes and revisers. Many of the lengths of reigns have been found impossible: in some cases the names and sequence of kings as given by Manetho have proved untenable in the light of monumental evidence. If one may depend upon the extracts preserved in Josephus, Manetho's work was not an authentic history of Egypt, exact in its details, as the *Chaldaica* of Berossus was, at least for later times. Manetho introduced into an already corrupted series of dynastic lists a number of popular traditions written in the characteristic Egyptian style. No genuine historical sense had been developed among the Egyptians, although Manetho's work does illustrate the influence of Greek culture upon an Egyptian priest." (Loeb edition: *Manetho*, pp. xxv-xxvi.)

Sothic Dating

But what about the "proof" that comes from Sothic dating? As we saw above, testimony from 12th and 18th dynasty establish dates of about 1870 and 1540 BC respectively. How reliable is this?

James explains the Sothic dating by citing from 1. E. S. Edwards:

"The 12 months were divided into 3 seasons bearing names which are generally rendered Inundation, Winter, and Summer, each season consisting of four months. The year began in the season of Inundation, and in the ideal year the first day of the first month of the season of Inundation coincided with the first day on which the dog-star Sirius [Sothis] should be seen on the eastern horizon just before the rising of the sun (i.e., roughly about 19 or 20 July in the Julian calendar). Since the dynastic Egyptians never introduced a leap year into their civil calendar, New Year's Day advanced by one whole day in relation to the nature year in every period of four years. As a result of this displacement New Year's Day and the day on which Sirius rose heliacally actually coincided for no more than four [consecutive] years in every period of approximately 1460 years (i.e., 365×4), the so-called Sothic cycle.

"Thus," continues James, "according to the theory, the heliacal rising of Sirius (Sothis), together with the seasons, gradually revolved around the civil calendar. After 730 years they would have completely reversed with respect to the solar year, returning to their original position only after a period of some 1460 years:

"Dates in Egyptian records were generally set out according to a fixed formula: . . . If in addition to this formula, a document tells us that Sirius rose heliacally on that day it is only necessary to count the number of days which had elapsed since the first day of the year given in the formula and multiply the total by four to

obtain the number of years since the beginning of the particular Sothic cycle." (p. 225)

Now the fact is that we only have two such Sothic dates, and one of them is no good. The first is provided by papyrus fragments "found at el-Lahun, dated to year 7 of an unnamed pharaoh, but reasonably attributed to Senusret III on paleographic grounds. This document does not give the beginning of a Sothic cycle, but a calendar date for the rising of Sirius, which can be retrocalculated as 1872 BC if the sighting of Sirius was made in the Memphis-Lahun region. If, however, the sighting was made at the lower latitude of Elephantine, as Rolf Krauss has recently advocated, the date would be reduced to 1830 BC" (p. 226).

The only other Sothic date comes from the Ebers Papyrus for year 9 of Amenhotep 1. There is a problem with this one, though, since while the "emergence of Sothis" is referred to in the text, no calendar day is specified. Thus, no calculation of a New Year's Day starting point can be made, and this Sothic date is of no use.

So we have one date: year 7 of (probably) Senusret III, from which we can calculate back to either 1872 or 1830 BC, and then forward again to the BC date of Senusret III year 7. But how reliable is even this?

James points out that "there are good reasons for rejecting the whole concept of Sothic dating as it was applied by the earlier Egyptologists, simply on the grounds that it did not make allowance for any calendrical adjustments. It is assumed that the Egyptians allowed the civil calendar and the seasonal cycle, to which the lunar-religious calendar was tied, to progress further and further out of alignment" (p. 227). There is no evidence to support this. In fact, we know from "the much better documented (calendrically speaking) Hellenistic and Roman periods [of Egyptian history] that several major reforms were put into effect within the space of only three centuries" (p. 228). If the Egyptians were willing to revise the calendar during this period, who is to say that they did not revise it at other periods as well?

James puts the conclusion in italics: "*If a calendrical Ptolemies, Sothic calculations*" (p. 228).

Conclusion

The 20th century will go down as an era of tremendous error as regards the history and chronology of the ancient world. The consensus chronology, used by secular scholars and Christian scholars alike, is built on fiction, creates huge problems with the history of every culture of the ancient world, and is collapsing today. Believing Christians can rejoice at this development, but students must be aware that virtually every Bible Dictionary article, Bible Encyclopedia article, and Old Testament commentary written in this century is replete with error wherever it discusses links between Bible history and the history of the ancient world.