



*Praise be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the
Worlds;*

Quran English Translation & Commentary

By

Abdullah Yusuf Ali

Appendix IV

Egyptian Chronology And Israel

(see 7:104, n. 1072)

In order to get some idea of the comparative chronology of Egypt and Israel, we must first consider what data we have for Egyptian chronology. Israel's surviving records date from a time many centuries later than Israel's contact with Egypt. On the other hand, Egypt's records in monuments, inscriptions, tombs, etc., are rich absolutely reliable as far as they go.

Of the surviving civilizations, Egypt and China go back furthest in time with historical material. Egypt has more interest for us, because geographically it was centrally

situated, and it influenced and was influenced by almost every important cultural movement in Asia, Europe, and Africa, nothing happened in Mediterranean history that had not some points of contact with Egypt.

The first broad division in Egyptian chronology is between the pre-Dynastic and the Dynastic periods. The pre-Dynastic period is all prehistory. But recent researches have shown a great deal of light on the culture of that period, and we know many more details about the arts and tools of that period in Egypt than we do for the corresponding periods of prehistory in other countries.

With the first Egyptian Dynasty of rulers begins the Dynastic period.

What were the Egyptian Dynasties, and why is so much prominence given to them in Egyptian chronology?

The reason is that though we can form a graphic idea of the sequence of events and in many cases of the details of events, arts, and crafts, manners and customs, cults and ceremonies, and social and economic conditions in the dynastic period, we are not yet able, except for occasional and isolated glimpses, to give any accurate figures of early dates to connect them with our chronology B.C.

On the other hand, we have abundant materials to justify us in placing certain events or personages or ideas in some division of the Dynastic scheme. We can say that such and such ideas held sway under the 18th Dynasty or that such and such invasion, outwards or inwards, took place at the close of the 14th Dynasty.

The Dynastic scheme rests mainly on the lists and fragments preserved from the writings of one Manetho, an Egyptian priest and annalist, who lived under Ptolemy I and Ptolemy II (B.C. 313-246), the inheritors of the Egyptian portion of Alexander's Empire. For his Egyptian history in Greek he had access to Egyptian records. His scheme of Dynasties therefore supplies a rough chronological framework into which can be fitted our ever-increasing detailed knowledge derived from Egyptian monuments, tombs, and excavations. His first Dynasty begins with the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt, but its actual date

B.C. has been placed at between such wide margins as 5500 B.C. and 3300 B.C.

The two Egypts may be considered distinct ethnical and perhaps geographical divisions, which tend to assimilate when they are united politically, but whose physical characteristics are different, as also their outlook when there is political division. Lower Egypt looks to the Mediterranean, and its population is mixed, containing almost all the Mediterranean and Arab elements, while Upper Egypt looks to interior Africa (Nubia, Sudan, Abyssinia, etc.), and its population tends to have more and more African characteristics.

The whole of Egypt has had a ribbon development, the population and cultivation being confined to the banks of the Nile. Without the Nile Egypt would be just a desert forming a link in the long chain of tropical and subtropical deserts stretching from the Sahara, the Libyan desert, the Arabian deserts, through the Persian, Baluchistan, Sindh, and Rajputana deserts, to the Turki and Gobi deserts in central Asia.

But Upper Egypt is purely a long irregular line along the banks of the Nile, while lower Egypt has the broad fan-like delta in which the many mouths of the Nile run into a very irregular coastline extending over about 200 miles. Lower Egypt had (and has) much marshland, and its low-lying configuration was subject to many physical changes, in the same way as invasions and foreign immigrations gave its population a less stable character. Its cities as Sais and Tanis (Zoan), were also less stable in character, and Memphis (near the site of modern Cairo) has to be just above the Delta.

On the other hand the Capitals in Upper Egypt, such as Thebes (or NO), with their magnificent temples and tombs were safe above Nile waters in the highest inundations until the modern dam of Aswan was built many miles above them.

Even after the union of the two Egypts, the king wore a double crown. The boundary between Upper and Lower Egypt was never clearly defined, because in spite of frequent interruptions in the unity of the country, the

identification of Egypt with the Nile made the unity of Egypt a political and economic necessity, the present boundary of Lower Egypt is just south of Cairo, making Lower Egypt include just the Delta. The tract between Cairo and Assyut is sometimes called Middle Egypt and is distinguished from the rest of Upper Egypt, which is higher up the river.

There being such wide variations in the estimate of ancient dates by component authorities, the only practicable course is to refer ancient events to Dynasties according to Manetho's scheme. In the later dates it is sometimes possible to express a date in approximate figures B.C., but such figures are uncertain, whereas the sequence of Dynasties may be taken to be a stable fact in Egyptian history. Although some of Manetho's material, when it can be tested, has proved to be inaccurate. But we have only Manetho secondhand. The inaccuracies may be due not to Manetho but to his transmitters. Thirty-nine such Dynasties are reckoned, and they may be grouped into Periods as follows:

1. The Old Kingdom, Dynasties I to VII, including a. the first three Dynasties, with a new orientation in Egyptian Art, and b. Dynasties IV VI, the Pyramid Period, during which the Great Pyramid and the second and third Pyramids of Ghizeh were built. The capital now came to Lower Egypt, to the site of Memphis, near modern Cairo.
2. The Middle Kingdom, Dynasties IX to XVII. In Dynasties IX and X the centre of gravity moved from Memphis in Lower Egypt to Middle Egypt. In the XIIth Dynasty many of the great monuments of and near Thebes (Karnak, Luxor, etc.), were constructed. Perhaps the movement higher up the river was necessitated by foreign invasions in Lower Egypt. Dynasties XV to XVII are called the Hyksos Period, when a Syrian Dynasty was established in Lower Egypt, with a sort of lordship over the native Dynasties of Upper Egypt, and international connections in other Mediterranean countries. We shall presently speak of the Hyksos Pharaohs, who

have been placed in the 17th, 18th, and even 26th century B.C.

3. The New Empire, Dynasties XVIII to XX, crowded with events. The dates now begin to be more definite: the period may be placed about 1580 B.C. and about 1200 B.C. the foreign Hyksos were driven out; the empire was extended to Syria and Nubia; perhaps even the Euphrates was reached. Some of the most wonderful works of Egyptian art date from this period.
4. The Dynasties of the Delta. Dynasties XXI to XXXI, including a Dynasty at Sais (on one of the western branches of the Deltaic Nile). But Assyrian and Persian invasions were now weakening the power of Egypt. The dates now became more certain. The XXIst Dynasty was roughly about 1100 B.C. the XXVIIth Dynasty was ended by the invasion of the Persian under Cambyses in 525 B.C. the Persians held sway (with Egyptian local dynasties under them) until the XXXIst Dynasty, when the last Pharaoh fled to Ethiopia about 340 B.C.
5. The Egyptian Dynasties have now ended, we are in firm history: the Macedonian Period after Alexander's conquest, 332 B.C., and the Dynasty of the Ptolemies 323 B.C. to 30 B.C.; and the Roman Period 30 B.C. to 639 A.C. after which the Arab and Turkish conquests evolved modern Egypt and Muslim Egyptian civilization.

Having cleared the chronological background, we are now in a position to examine the data about Israel's stay in Egypt in order to see if we can get some idea of the time in Egyptian history when the contact took place. We saw that Dynasties XV to XVII were concerned with the Hyksos (or Shepherd) kings. They were foreigners from Asia, but it is not quite clear exactly what race they belonged to. Josephus supposed that they were Israelites, but that theory is untenable. It has been conjectured that they were Phoenicians, or Amalekites, or Hittites. In any case they were Semites. They founded a city called Zoan (Tanis) on one of the eastern branches of the Deltaic Nile, and were in

close communication with the Hittite city of Hebron in the south of Palestine. That would be their own city, but their capital would probably be the same as the old Egyptian capital at Memphis when they were well-established.

They were credited with having invented the Semitic alphabet of 22 letters, which (through the Phoenicians) is the parent of all modern alphabets. Their invention probably helped in the process of converting old Egyptian Hieroglyphics from picture-writing to phonetic writing. As the Hyksos had close relations with Hebron in Palestine, and Abraham and Israel had settled in the Palestine country, a nexus would be established, by which the first Israelites would be attracted to Zoan in Egypt.

It must also be remembered that southern Palestine was a poor country and subject to frequent famines, while Deltaic Egypt was well-watered by the Nile, and suffered famines only on the rare occasions when the Nile failed to inundate. The attraction of Egypt for the famine-stricken lands of the neighborhood would therefore be strong. And this is proved in the story of Joseph and his brethren.

Can we form even a rough idea of the dates of the Hyksos occupation?

At the latest the Hyksos period ended about 1600 B.C. Renan is therefore probably not far wrong when he places the Hyksos occupation about 2000 B.C. Possibly a date between 2000 B.C. and 1600 B.C. may be nearer the mark. If we suppose Joseph to have been the Wazir of one of the Hyksos Pharaohs in the Delta, there is no great violence of probabilities in the suggestion, as Joseph and the Hyksos would be of kindred races. In that case Joseph's date would fall somewhere between the 19th and 17th century B.C.

No reference to Joseph or Moses has been found in Egyptian records. The solitary reference to Israel (Ysraer, r-I) in stele of Mer-en-Ptah or Mineptah (about 1225 B.C.) seems to refer to Israel in Palestine rather than to Israel in Egypt. At this we need not wonder, as the Pharaoh who honored Joseph was, strictly speaking, only a foreigner. When the reaction against the Hyksos took place and the Hyksos were overthrown, the Egyptian would not probably be anxious to remember the interrupted period or to

preserve its memory. The Pharaoh who "knew not Joseph" looked upon Israelites as contemptible slaves, nor worthy of a thought except when they revolted, and then only as a despised race fit to be punished and kept in its place. It may be noticed, however, that the land of Goshen in which Israel dwelt and multiplied between the time of Joseph and the time of the Exodus, was a frontier tract of Egypt in the neighborhood of the Hyksos city of Zoan in the Delta.

In seeking the approximate date of Moses, we must again look to the probabilities of Egyptian history. It was formerly the received opinion that Rameses II (say about 1250 B.C.) was the Pharaoh who oppressed Israel in Egypt, and that the exodus may have taken place under his immediate successor Mineptah (say about 1225 B.C.). the vigorous policy of Rameses II and the spirit of his time would be consistent with this view.

But this date is almost certainly too late. There are indications pointing to the Israelites having already been settled in Canaan by this time. The Hyksos were turned out by the XVIIIth Dynasty, which established the New Empire in the 16th century B.C. Thothmes I (Tethmosis I, about 1540 B.C.) is more likely, in the first flush of his nationalist campaign, to have oppressed the Israelites and led to the exodus. His date fits in better. And his character also accords with the description in sacred history,. He centralized the monarchy and made it a military autocracy. Militarism went with the lust of war and foreign conquest. He carried his arms as far as the Euphrates. Slaves, plunder, and foreign tribute made Egypt opulent and arrogant, and he added many monuments to Thebes. We can imagine him in his splendid Court, scarcely paying any attention to Mosses, and viewing all his complaints with an amusement mingled with contempt and impatience. But retribution was to come in Allah's good time. The men who followed Allah's message- Israel in the time of Solomon (a little after 1000 B.C.), and more completely, the Muslim in the time of 'Umar and his successors-became lords of the East and the West (Quran 7:137), and ancient Egypt's were eventually buried in the sands.

It was this same Pharaoh, Thothmes I, who took for his partner on the Throne his daughter Hatshepsut. If

Thothmes was the Pharaoh in Moses' story, we may suppose that it was this same celebrated strong-minded lady, pharaoh's daughter, who found the child Moses ([Exod. 2:10](#)), and brought him to her mother to be adopted into the family ([Quran 28:9](#)).

Like her father, she was a great supporter of the national cults. Moses was nurtured in the palace, and learned all the wisdom of the Egyptians, then reputed to be the wisest of nations. With their own wisdom he foiled them. Thus in Allah's Plan the enemies of Allah and the enemies of Israel ([Quran 20:39](#)) were the very ones who were used as instruments for the purpose of Allah and the salvation of Israel.

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Zahid Javed Rana, Abid Javed Rana

Lahore, Pakistan

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