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ARCHAEOLOGY SUPPORTS EXODUS NARRATIVE

BY JOE SPEARS

Who was Pharaoh when Joseph was in Egypt?
Who was Pharaoh when Moses was there?

Egyptian records tell a story—does it jibe with (agree with) the story of the Bible? The answer is exciting. If the time line given below is accurate (and there is evidence that indicates it is), then we may have identified the Pharaoh who was the step-father of Moses, the Pharaoh who dreamed of seven lean years and was advised by Joseph to store up grain, and more! What is more, we can even see what these Pharaohs looked like, since statues of them (or other depictions) exist.

We shall examine in this article the dates upon which time lines of ancient history are based, and a new time line, based on modifications of these “pillar” dates. We shall see how this modified time line of Egyptian events and persons relates to biblical events and persons.

We use dates with a reference point of (assumed) time of the birth of Christ. The year 1943 is 1943 AD, where AD means “Anno Domini”, which is Latin for “the Year of the Lord.” The reference date is the birth of Christ, and therefore this date refers to a year approximately 1943 years after Christ was born.

An event which occurred about 200 years *before* Christ's birth is given the date 200 BC. But how was it dated at the time it occurred? Could people see forward into time and know that 200 years in the future Christ would be born? Or did they use some other reference date?

Ancients used the *regnal* dating system, in which events are dated by the number of years into a monarch's reign at which they occurred. So, the Bible mentions an event's occurring in “year X” of the reign of some king, as do other ancient documents.

One king's reign is sometimes given as starting in year “X” of some other king's reign, or something similar, so we can correlate dates and events and come up with dates for both kings. This has been done for Egyptian history. We call this time line the *conventional chronology*. Below we shall look at it, and we shall also look at an



Sobekhotep IV may have been the step-father of Moses, if modified dates in Egyptian chronology are correct.

alternative time line, or chronology, that we shall call the *new chronology*.

This article is largely based on the work of David Rohl, which is described in his book, *Pharaohs and Kings*.¹ Rohl says that Egyptologists have devised a dating framework, or chronology, which is in error. Rohl states, ...“I did not originally set out to challenge our current understanding of the Old Testament narratives. ...I have no religious axe to grind.” He says he was led to Old Testament chronology due to his efforts to correct errors in the chronology of the Third Intermediate Period of conventional Egyptian chronology.

The details of the new corrected reference dates and the problems with the conventional chronology's “Pillars” will be given later towards the end of this article. But now let us look at the effect of this new chronology on

¹ Rohl, D (1995) *Pharaohs and Kings*, Crown Publishers, Inc. New York, NY

the histories of biblical events and personages. We start with Joseph.

Joseph

Based on the new chronology, Joseph would have been appointed a vizier in Egypt about 1670 BC. Senuseret III and his son Amenemhat III ruled during the time that Joseph was in Egypt. Statues of these rulers are known for their sad countenances. According to Egyptologist William Smith, "The dominating quality of these (statue) heads is that of an intelligent consciousness of a ruler's responsibilities and an awareness of the bitterness which this can bring ... A brooding seriousness appears even in the face of the young Amenemhat III ..."

Rohl suspects that the concern expressed by these rulers is due to the prediction of Joseph of the seven lean years and the actual famine which did occur. Barbara Bell, a specialist in ancient climates, claims that there would almost certainly have been famine at this time, due to flooding of the Nile.²

According to the Biblical account, the Pharaoh stored grain in preparation for the lean years. However, the other local chieftains did not and were forced to sell their land to the Pharaoh for grain. Thus the Pharaoh gained the land of these local rulers and thereby gained political power over these local rulers.

According to the Egyptian evidence, during the reign of Senuseret III, the building of tombs of these local chieftains was discontinued. This seems to indicate a loss of political power for these rulers, in agreement with the biblical account in the preceding paragraph. (They lost their political power because they had to sell their land for grain.)

King Amenemhat III is known for having successful policies, as attested by his spectacular building projects and his long reign. Rohl attributes this success to his advisor, Joseph.³ The Bible tells us that Joseph asked that his body be taken with the Israelites when they left Egypt. Moses took the bones of Joseph with him out of Egypt according to the Bible. Rohl mentions the discovery of a tomb which might be the tomb of Joseph. Was this tomb the tomb of Joseph?

Rohl says we should expect to find, in the tomb of Joseph, the following:

1. There should be evidence of the body's removal, but without signs of plundering by grave-robbers.

² Ibid., 340

³ Ibid., 343

2. The tomb should be a typical Egyptian one, since Joseph was "Egyptian-ized" to the extent of joining the government of Egypt.

3. Yet there might be evidence of his Asiatic origins, since Joseph was originally not Egyptian.

4. The tomb should be impressive, or large, due to his high office (only the Pharaoh was higher).

The tomb that was found was the largest sepulcher found at Avis. There was evidence that a pyramid once crowned the tomb. It was the only grave in the complex to have a funerary chapel. This agrees with points 2 and 4 above.

A large statue was found at this site. The statue was not a Pharaoh—in fact, the evidence shows it was a statue of a foreigner. Bietak, who discovered the tomb, said that it was "unthinkable" for a giant statue to be made for one who was not a pharaoh (and we might add, not even a native Egyptian). But, if this statue was Joseph, then it becomes more "thinkable", for Joseph *did* receive great favor from the Pharaoh and was made ruler of Egypt, second only to the Pharaoh himself. This is consistent with Rohl's point 4.

In every other grave of the cemetery where this tomb was found, there were skeletons. But not in this one! The evidence indicated the body had been removed while the chapel was still in use. This does not sound like the work of typical grave robbers. This agrees with Rohl's point 1 above.

This statue holds the hieroglyphic symbol used to indicate a foreigner! The statue is also clothed with a coat of many colors: red, blue, black, and white. The Bible, of course, also makes mention of Joseph's famous coat of many colors. Here we see Rohl's point 3 confirmed.

Israelites in Egypt

The Israelites resided in Egypt before they were led out of Egypt by Moses. (The famous ten plagues and the parting of the Red Sea are part of the Biblical account.)

A site, Tell ed-Daba, and other sites nearby have been excavated in Egypt. Buried Asiatics, not Egyptians, were found. Sixty-five percent of all burials at Tell ed-Daba were infants, less than a year and a half of age! This statistically should have been 20-30 percent. Why the infant graves?

A possible explanation is given in the Old Testament: all male children under two years of age were to be destroyed at the orders of the Pharaoh.

Also, at Avaris in the strata just before (below) a settlement break (which could be explained by the Exodus) it was found that more adult women were buried than adult men. Why more women? This also might be explained by the Bible. If male infants were killed earlier, there would be more women.

We see the archaeological evidence is consistent with the Biblical accounts.

Moses

Now let us shift our attention to Moses. Based on a chronology of Israelite kings by Thiele, Rohl assigns the birth date of Moses as approximately 1527 BC.

According to fragmentary accounts in the writings of Eusebius and Clements of a Jewish historian, Artapanus, Moses was raised by a daughter of a Pharaoh. She married Pharaoh Khenephres, who can be equated with Khaneferre Sobekhotep IV. Artapanus' story is very similar to the account of Moses in the Bible; for instance he names Moses' father-in-law as Raguel, while the Bible calls him Reul.

Artapanus, and also Flavius Josephus, tell of Moses (under Sobekhotep) leading a campaign against Ethiopia. The only reference by Egyptians to a military campaign into this region occurs on a stela fragment with the name of Sobekhotep IV, the same Pharaoh named by Artapanus!

The city of Kerma is where Moses would have fought, for this was a capital city of the Ethiopians at the time of Sobekhotep. A statue of Sobekhotep has been discovered near Kerma, and archaeological research has determined that Egyptians were present at Kerma. But when? Although the precise date is not known, it was during the Second Intermediate Period of Egypt, during which time Sobekhotep ruled and during which time Moses lived, according to the new chronology. This agrees with the accounts of the campaign from Egypt under Moses given by Artapanus and Josephus.

Based on the dating of the reign of Neferhotep (see the Ugarit Solar Eclipse below), the reign of Sobekhotep was approximately 1529-1510 BC. This amazingly correlates with the date of Moses' birth as given above, 1527 BC! Thus, based on Thiele's chronology of Israelite kings and the new Egyptian chronology, Moses was indeed born during the reign of Sobekhotep. This has support from the account of Artapanus, who refers to Khaneferre Sobekhotep, which is a rather uncommon name for a Pharaoh. There have been several Thutmose's, several Ramesses, etc., but there was only a single Khaneferre. Thus, it seems highly unlikely that Artapanus made up a fictitious account. Rather it appears that Khaneferre

Sobekhotep IV was the actual Pharaoh step-father of Moses. We thus see that evidence from the new chronology indicates that Moses was a real historical person.

Jericho

Archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon found that the walls of the Middle Bronze Age Jericho indeed did fall down.⁴ She also found the city had been burned, and according to the Bible, Joshua 6:24, the city of Jericho was burned. However, this was not, according to the conventional chronology, at the time of Israel's presence. But, the corrected chronology *does* put Israel in the area at this time. The Bible also says the fall of Jericho happened during harvest season. Large storage jars *filled with grain* were found in Jericho.

John Bimson's research has shown that, using the new chronology to date events, the cities that the Bible says were burned were actually burned, and the ones the Bible says were not burned were not.⁵

Dating Reference Points and the Four Pillars

There are four reference points or pillars, as Rohl calls them, from which the dates of the conventional Egyptian chronology are derived.⁶

- **Pillar 1** – the sacking of Thebes by Ashurbanipal in 664 BC, the last year of Pharaoh Taharka's 26 year rule, which is Year 1 of Psamtek I
- **Pillar 2** – the identification of Shishak, King of Egypt who was mentioned in the Bible (I Kings 14:25-26, II Chronicles 12:2-9) with Shoshenk I, founder of the 22nd Dynasty of Egypt. This leads to the date of 925 BC as Year 20 of the reign of Shoshenk I.
- **Pillar 3** – the date of 1517 BC, being Year 9 of Amenhotep I's reign. This allows us to date the Egyptian New Kingdom as beginning in 1550 BC with the accession of Ahmose.
- **Pillar 4** – the accession of Ramesses II in 1279 BC

Rohl states that not only the chronology of Egypt, but also the chronologies of Mycenaean Greece, Minoan Crete, Hittite Anatolia, and pre-Solomonic Israel are all based on these four pillars or reference dates. Thus any errors in these "Pillar" dates can have far-reaching consequences.

⁴ Ibid., 302

⁵ Ibid., 306

⁶ Ibid., 132

The following are Rohl's assessment of the soundness or problems with these pillars.

Pillar 1: No problems. Sound!

Pillar 2: The main reasons for equating Egyptian Shoshenk with biblical Shishak are given below:

1. the similarity in the sound of the names
2. Egyptian records indicate that Shoshenk invaded Judah, while Bible records show that Shishak was an Egyptian ruler who also invaded Judah

But, their military campaigns are different! Information from Egyptian records and from the Bible are not consistent in their descriptions of the military campaign of these two individuals.⁷

Ramesses II *did* reach Jerusalem, but Shoshenk apparently *did not*. Ramesses II is the only Pharaoh known to have recorded a defeat of Jerusalem. The Shishak of the Bible *did* reach Jerusalem. Thus, biblical Shishak has more in common with Ramesses II than with Shoshenk.

Also, even though the two names may sound somewhat similar, it has been found that Ramesses II was also referred to by a name written Ss, Sysw, or Ssy.⁸ Rohl states the name must have been pronounced something like "Sesy", "Sesa", "Sysu", or "Sysa". According to Rohl, "There are many biblical examples where we see the Egyptian 's' (Heb. Sin) rendered as 'sh' (Heb. Shin). Just as Egyptian Askelon is biblical Ashkelon..."⁹

So, now, we need to compare the sound of Shishak with Shisha, not just Shoshenk! On the basis of the similarity of the sound of the names, Ramesses II could be Shishak just as well as Shoshenk. There are more details showing the similarities of biblical Shishak with Ramesses II, and showing the differences between biblical Shishak and Egyptian Shoshenk.

Thus, Pillar 2's equating of Shishak with Shoshenk is not trustworthy. Based on the match of his military campaign and the sound of his name as "Shisa", Ramesses is a much better match to Shishak than Shoshenk.

Pillar 3: Pillar 3 is based on astronomy. Pillar 3 is based on a date in the Ebers Papyrus for an event which occurs only once a year. However, the Ebers Papyrus states this event happened during every month of the year! This is based on documents giving the date of the rising of the Dog Star.

Rohl quotes the Director of the Austrian Institute for Egyptology in Vienna, Professor Manfred Bietak, as fol-

lows, "The chronology of the New Kingdom therefore no longer depends on the Sothis-date of the Year 9 of Amenhotep I, which is insecure and should not be used."

Pillar 4: Pillar 4 is also based on astronomy. I spare you the details. Pillar 4 itself depends on the dates of Pillars 2 and 3. So, it as much in doubt as they are.

Another Erroneous Dating of an Event

Another error was the assumption that the Pharaoh of the Exodus in the Bible was Ramesses II, simply because the name of a store city, Ramesses, was mentioned in the Bible.⁷ We could imagine we have traveled in a time machine many years into the future. Looking at "ancient" documents, we might see that the newspapers of the 20th century mentioned a city named Washington, D.C. This city was named after George Washington. So, we might conclude that George Washington lived during the 20th century—and be wrong. The Israelites might have built a city at Ramesses, but this need not have been the original one built at the time of Ramesses II. Archaeologists have uncovered multiple layers—cities built on top of cities.

Ugarit Solar Eclipse: Another Reference Date

This section details the determination of the date at which Neferhotep I took the throne. (This is used above in the section on Moses.)

A letter was written to Pharaoh Akhenaten by Abimilku, a ruler of Tyre. This letter referred to the burning of a palace at Ugarit. Near the palace was found an inscription which stated, "The day of the new moon of Hiyaru was put to shame as the sun [goddess] set, with Rashap as her gate-keeper."¹⁰ The putting to shame of a day refers to a total solar eclipse, making day as night. The month Hiyaru is mid-April to mid-May. The eclipse occurred as "the sun set" or at sunset. The reference to a "day of the new moon" refers to the first day of a lunar month.

There was another celestial occurrence, referred to in the phrase "with Rashap as her gate-keeper." According to Rohl, "The priest-astronomers viewed Rashap as the gatekeeper or guardian of the entrance to the underworld towards which the solar disc was descending..."¹¹ Given the above information, using astronomical retrocalculation software, it was found that during the second millennium BC there was only a single candidate date for this eclipse. The eclipse occurred 6:09 PM May 9, 1012 BC. It was found that near the eclipse was a star, a

⁷ Ibid., 138

⁸ Ibid., 161

⁹ Ibid., 162

¹⁰ Ibid., 237

¹¹ Ibid., 238

giant star that would explode as a supernova 2,000 years later to form the Crab Nebula. This pins down a date quite accurately. This then gives a sound anchor or reference point; from this point other dates can be calculated. Based on other documents, this puts the date of the beginning of the 18th Dynasty, with Ahmose, at 1194 BC.

Using the new chronology herein described and using the 1012 BC Ugarit eclipse as one reference point and a date of 1419 BC for Year 1 of Ammisaduga of the 1st Dynasty of Babylon, it was determined that 30 out of 31 ancient eclipses recorded in ancient times matched perfectly with the new chronology. Two other chronologies matched only 20 and 19 of the eclipses.

This dating of Ammisaduga allows us to date Hammurabi, one of the most famous Babylonian rulers. His reign begins in 1565 BC. Hammurabi destroyed the palace of King Zimrilim of the city of Mari in Syria. King Zimrilim had received a gold cup from Yantin-Ammu, King of Byblos, according to a tablet found at Mari. Thus, Yantin-Ammu, ruler of Byblos, was contemporaneous with Zimrilim and Hammurabi. We can thus date the reign of Yantin-Ammu to roughly 1550-1530 BC, since he reigned at approximately the same time as Hammurabi.

A hieroglyphic inscription was found at Byblos which referred to both Yantin-Ammu and Pharaoh Neferhotep I of the 13th Dynasty of Egypt. Thus we may conclude that Neferhotep I was a contemporary of Hammurabi, Zimrilim, and Yanti-Ammu. He would have taken the throne approximately 1540 BC.

There is more: Egyptian records giving evidence of the existence of King Saul and King David, for example. To discover the rest, you can read Rohl's book.

Summary and Conclusion

We have seen that there are dates in history, from which other dates are calculated. If these foundation dates are wrong, then so are the ones derived from them. Some pillars of the dating of events were examined and seen not to be supported very strongly. These pillars influenced the setting of dates of events in the ancient history of Egypt, Israel, and other nations.

These pillar dates were corrected, and the evidence was summarized. This resulted in a new chronology, a new history, a new time line. Astronomical evidence using dates of eclipses was utilized, which indicated the new chronology holds up well. Then, using this new corrected and updated chronology, we found that Jericho indeed did fall at the time the Bible said it did. We also found evidence from Egypt that was consistent with the

Biblical account of Joseph and also that of Moses. We also saw evidence of Israel's persecution in Egypt, the murder of male infants under two years old.

In spite of this evidence, according to David Rohl, there is a school of biblical exegesis which maintains that the Old Testament has no value as a historical source.¹² Why?

Some researchers have not found evidence to support the events described in the Bible, because they were looking in the wrong "place", more accurately, in the wrong time! Errors in archaeological dating of some events have led to erroneously concluding that the Bible is not accurate historically. When these errors are corrected, the Bible is supported by archaeological evidence. Perhaps there is a lesson here: not to rush to discount Biblical histories on the basis of archaeological research or other research.

Einstein pointed out that we must question our scientific assumptions. Is this new chronology absolutely correct? I don't think even Rohl would claim that, but instead he would see it as an effort at improving existing dates.

In conclusion, when the Egyptian chronology is examined and attempts are made to improve it, we see a change from less archaeological support of the biblical narratives, to more support. Interestingly, as efforts to improve the chronology lead to updates of the chronology, there is increasing consistency with the Old Testament history. ☺

COMING EVENTS

Thursday, April 12, 7:00 P.M., Providence Baptist Church, 6339 Glenwood Ave., Raleigh.

David Plaisted, PhD will talk about some recent developments in genetics and their implications for the creation/evolution controversy.

Thursday, May 10, 7:00 P.M., Providence Baptist Church, 6339 Glenwood Ave., Raleigh

Joe Spears will present Egyptian archaeological research that has yielded evidence supporting the historicity of the Bible. The research looks at problems with conventional dates in Egypt's history and attempts to improve their accuracy. The result is that Egyptian history confirms much of the Bible accounts. Potential identities of the Pharaoh who made Joseph vizier and the Pharaoh who was Moses stepfather are named.

¹² *ibid.*, 7

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