

A COMMENTARY ON
EXODUS

KREGEL EXEGETICAL LIBRARY

A COMMENTARY ON
EXODUS

DUANE A. GARRETT



A Commentary on Exodus

© 2014 by Duane A. Garrett

Published by Kregel Publications, a division of Kregel, Inc., 2450 Oak Industrial Dr. NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505-6020.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without permission of the publisher, except for brief quotations in printed reviews.

The English translations of the original Greek or Hebrew texts of the Bible are the author's own.

The Hebrew font used in this book is NewJerusalemU and the Greek font is TeubnerLSCU; both are available from www.linguisticsoftware.com/lgku.htm, +1-425-775-1130.

ISBN 978-0-8254-2551-6

Printed in the United States of America
14 15 16 17 18 / 5 4 3 2 1

For Patty

CONTENTS

Preface / 9

Abbreviations / 11

Introduction / 15

PART I: Until Moses (1:1–2:10) / 147

PART II: An Unlikely Savior (2:11–7:7) / 175

PART III: The Twelve Miracles of the Exodus (7:8–15:21) / 269

PART IV: The Journey to God (15:22–19:25) / 409

PART V: The Sinai Covenant (20:1—24:11) / 469

PART VI: The Worship of God (24:12–31:18) / 547

PART VII: Sin And Restoration (32:1–40:38) / 615

Appendix: The Songs of Exodus / 715

Bibliography / 723

PREFACE

I owe thanks to many people for seeing this commentary through to completion. I must first thank my wife Patty for her patience as I spent many hours closeted away with my research. Paul Hillman of Kregel shepherded the manuscript through the typesetting and proofing process. My student Andrew King read through an early set of proofs and spotted many problems and errors. Lori Shire did a heroic job of editing, proofing, and generally improving the work. I also owe a debt of gratitude to the students who took my class, “Hebrew Exegesis: Exodus,” at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Their enthusiasm encouraged me greatly, convincing me that the project really was worth the time and effort. Many fine commentaries on Exodus are readily available, but I have intentionally written this work to fill certain gaps within the literature. To this end, I have been selective and have not dealt with every possible issue.

First, I have sought to give readers a short, basic introduction to Egyptian history, culture, language, and geography. I studied this material first to educate myself, and then I endeavored to communicate it to my readers. My desire is that they would appreciate the context of the biblical story. It has astounded me that many treat Egyptology as a matter of no importance whatsoever for the interpretation of Exodus.

PREFACE

Second, I have sought to convey to readers the state of the evidence and arguments over crucial historical questions. Difficult issues include but are not limited to the following: the date of the exodus, the genealogy of Moses (Exodus 6), the location of the sea that Israel crossed, and the location of Sinai. I have argued for a specific solution where I thought it was warranted, but I have tried to treat evidence as even-handedly as possible. Critical scholars tend to dismiss these questions as meaningless (asking about the location of Mount Sinai being on a par with asking where Calypso's island is located). Confessional interpreters tend to grasp at solutions too quickly (there are some noteworthy exceptions). My goal has been to try to walk readers through the complexities involved, affirming the reliability of the text without dismissing or distorting pieces of evidence.

Third, I have tried to illustrate the importance of analyzing Hebrew prose on a clause-by-clause basis. To this end, I have translated every clause on a separate line. This commentary is not a full discourse analysis of the Hebrew text, but it does seek to demonstrate that by considering each clause and its predicate separately, one can gain a better appreciation of how the language flows and communicates.

Fourth, I have sought to demonstrate that Exodus contains a series of poems (and not just the one “Song of the Sea” at Exodus 15). This entails proving that the various texts are indeed poems and showing how they work and why it matters.

Fifth, I have sought to make this commentary useful for pastors and Bible teachers without neglecting to deal with thorny problems. To this end, readers will find that reflection on the biblical text within the main body of the commentary is often fairly short. I do not want anyone to have to wade through pages of discourse to find out what I think a passage means. I have placed a great deal of the technical discussion in the footnotes. Thus, the reasoning behind my interpretation is often found in the notes.

Sixth, I have tried to read Exodus as a Christian theologian. To this end, I have given a good deal of attention to relating the book to the New Testament and to Christian doctrine. This, too, reflects my desire that the commentary be serviceable to Christian ministers.

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
AEL	<i>Ancient Egyptian Literature</i>
ANE	Ancient Near East
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i>
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AYBD	<i>Anchor-Yale Bible Dictionary</i>
BA	Biblical Archaeologist
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca sacra</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CEV	Contemporary English Version
COS	<i>The Context of Scripture</i>
CTA	<i>Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques découvertes à Ras Shamra-Ugarit de 1929 à 1939.</i> Edited by A. Herdner. Mission de Ras Shamra 10. Paris, 1963.
CTJ	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
D	Deuteronomist
E	Elohist source
ECC	Eerdmans Critical Commentary
ESV	English Standard Version
ExpTim	Expository Times
GKC	Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar. Edited by E. Kautzsch, translated by A. E. Cowley. 2 nd ed. Oxford, 1910.
H	Holiness Code source

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>HALOT</i>	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament.</i> L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994-1999.
<i>HAR</i>	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
<i>HCSB</i>	Holman Christian Standard Bible
<i>HS</i>	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>IBHS</i>	<i>Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i>
<i>IBC</i>	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>ISBE</i>	International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. Edited by G. W. Bromiley. 4 vols. Grand Rapids, 1979-1988.
<i>J</i>	Yahwist source
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBQ</i>	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JITC</i>	<i>Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JNSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
<i>K&D</i>	Keil, C. F., and F. Delitzsch, <i>Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament</i>
<i>KJV</i>	King James Version
<i>KTU</i>	<i>Die keilalphabatischen Texte aus Ugarit.</i> Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín. AOAT 24/1. Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1976.
lit.	literally
<i>LXX</i>	Septuagint
<i>MT</i>	Masoretic Text
<i>N</i>	Nomadic source
<i>NAC</i>	New American Commentary
<i>NASB</i>	New American Standard Bible
<i>NEAEHL</i>	<i>The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land.</i>

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis.</i> Edited by W. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997.
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NJPS	<i>Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
P	Priestly source
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>ResQ</i>	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
<i>SEAJT</i>	<i>South East Asia Journal of Theology</i>
SOTSMS	Society for Old Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra pagina
<i>TJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
TNIV	Today's New International Version
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
Vulg.	Clementine Vulgate
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

INTRODUCTION

Exodus is the true beginning of the story of Israel. Genesis is essential to the story, but it is a prologue, describing the lives of individual patriarchs rather than the history of a people. With Exodus we begin the story of the national entity called Israel. Exodus is also where the reader comes to understand the nature of YHWH. He keeps his covenant to the patriarchs, he reveals himself as “I AM,” and he shows his power as the deliverer of his people, breaking the power of Egypt in the plagues. Exodus contains the initiation of the Sinai covenant, the governing document in the relationship between YHWH and Israel. With that, the nation receives the first presentation of the laws, statutes, and ordinances that were to be normative for every aspect of Israelite life. Finally, Exodus includes the establishment of the fundamental institutions of Israelite worship, the Aaronic priesthood and the central shrine. In short, Exodus is the beginning of everything that is distinctively Israelite, and it is the fountainhead of most of the literature of the Old Testament that follows, including the rest of Torah, all of the Prophets, and a good deal of the Writings.

THE SOURCES AND COMPOSITION OF EXODUS

Since the development of the documentary hypothesis, scholars have expended much effort attempting to show what sources lay behind

INTRODUCTION

Exodus. They are concerned to show whether a given text is from J, or E, or P (or even D),¹ or whether it is from a source outside of the standard four documents. In a study that combines source criticism with tradition criticism, George Coats attempts to untangle what he believes are the threads of the traditions about Moses in Midian narratives.² William Propp subjects every passage in Exodus to a documentary hypothesis-driven source analysis, and he generally sticks with the traditional J, E, and P. Unlike many contemporary scholars, he believes it is possible to distinguish Exodus E from Exodus J.³ Thomas Dozeman, on the other hand, rejects the existence of E altogether (at least for Exodus), and in his source analysis he focuses primarily on P and the “Non-P History.” The latter is a kind of amalgamation of more recent interpretations of J and of the Deuteronomist; it is said to have been completed in the postexilic era. He essentially divides all of Exodus between these two sources, the “P History” and the “Non-P History.”⁴

Some parts of Exodus come in for more severe documentary dissection than others. Considerable attention, for example, is devoted to the attempt to discern what sources lay behind the plague narratives.⁵ For example, J is said to refer to the hardness of Pharaoh’s heart with the

-
1. For example, Anthony C. Phillips, “A Fresh Look at the Sinai Pericope, Part 1,” *VT* 34, no. 1 (1984):39–52 and Phillips, “A Fresh Look at the Sinai Pericope, Part 2,” *VT* 34, no. 3 (1984): 282–94, in a study of the Decalogue and the Book of the Covenant, seeks to distinguish what in the text is pre-Deuteronomic, what was contributed to Exodus by the “Proto-Deuteronomists,” and how the theology was recast by the Deuteronomists. On the other hand, Thomas B. Dozeman, *God at War: Power in the Exodus Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) argues that an ancient liturgy on YHWH as a God of war was refashioned by Deuteronomistic tradents into the salvation history of the Exodus.
 2. George W. Coats, “Moses in Midian.” *JBL* 92, no. 1 (1973): 3–10.
 3. William H. Propp, *Exodus 1–18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), see especially pp. 47–52; and Propp, *Exodus 19–40: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 2A (New York: Doubleday, 2006).
 4. Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, ECC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 35–43. Dozeman gives two lists describing, respectively, which texts he believes to be from the “Non-P History” and which texts he believes to be from P on pp. 48–51.
 5. For such a study, see Samuel Loewenstamm, “An Observation on Source-Criticism of the Plague Pericope (Ex. VII–XI),” *VT* 24, no. 3 (1974): 374–8.

INTRODUCTION

verb כָּבֹד, while E uses the verb חִזְקָה.⁶ Stephen Geller believes that there are two sources and two distinct theologies, one “covenantal” (C) and one “priestly” (P), behind the Sabbath legislation in Exod. 16.⁷ In another intramural squabble, scholars wrestle over the relationship between P and H,⁸ a debate that to me seems analogous to rivals within a millenarian group heatedly arguing out fine points of eschatology.

Much of this discussion is of doubtful value, either in terms of gaining better tools for interpreting the text or in terms of finding criteria for dividing it into its supposed sources.⁹ It maintains only a shell of intellectual coherence; scholars continue to use the terms P and J (unless the latter is jettisoned in favor of the “Non-P History”) while no longer holding to anything that may be meaningfully called a consensus. The theory is not based in any ancient Near Eastern analogies but is from start to finish an analysis based in extrinsic and peculiar criteria. For example, it is supposed that an ancient author who believed that the divine name YHWH was not revealed until the time of Moses would never use that name in his narrative until after he had reached the point in his story where the name is revealed. But as long as his readers knew the name, there is no reason for the narrative to have avoided it. Similarly, the whole concept of “doublets” as evidence of multiple sources shows no appreciation for the importance of repetition and “seconding”¹⁰ as a literary device in the ancient world. Many particulars of source criticism are unpersuasive or even odd. Even if one accepts the idea that both J and E had a plague tradition, is it not

-
6. Robert R. Wilson, “The Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart,” *CBQ* 41, no. 1 (1979): 22–3.
 7. Stephan A. Geller, “Manna and Sabbath: A Literary-Theological Reading of Exodus 16,” *Int* 59, no. 1 (2005): 5–16.
 8. See Saul M. Olyan, “Exodus 31:12–17: The Sabbath according to H, or the Sabbath according to P and H?” *JBL* 124, no. 2 (2005): 201–9.
 9. Against John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC 3 (Waco: Word Books, 1987), xx–xxi; and Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), throughout his commentary.
 10. The term refers to what is often called “parallelism.” It is a poetic device based on repeating or restating points that have already been made, often with additional information given in the second line. James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and its History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), developed the notion of seconding in his analysis of Hebrew poetry. The poetic use of seconding points to how important repetition was in the rhetoric of ancient Israel, but it is not evidence for multiple sources.

INTRODUCTION

peculiar that both had a tradition that Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and yet that they used different verbs to describe this?

The Book of the Covenant is widely supposed to be a collection of various laws from different times and places in the history of Israel. Here again, however, this consensus was reached without real reference to the analogies in ancient Near Eastern law. Raymond Westbrook's arguments on this issue are worth hearing:

Conventional wisdom regards the Covenant Code as an amalgam of provisions from different sources and periods, the fusion of which has left tell-tale marks in the form of various inconsistencies in the text. . . . Interpreters of the Covenant Code need to come to terms with the fact that it is part of a widespread literary-legal tradition and can only be understood in terms of that tradition. The starting point for interpretation must therefore be the presumption that the Covenant Code is a coherent text comprising clear and consistent laws, in the same manner as its cuneiform forbears.¹¹

Joe Sprinkle, similarly, demonstrates that one may read the Book of the Covenant as a coherent whole without recourse to explaining difficulties via competing sources.¹²

Finally, the whole effort is fraught with contradictory conclusions and a general lack of clarity. Whatever consensus there once was has only diminished with the passage of time. T. D. Alexander, for example, demonstrates that there is more unity to Exod. 19:1–24:11 than earlier scholars recognized, and along the way he describes the conflicting conclusions of scholars committed to the documentary hypothesis.¹³

Beyond being a dubious enterprise, source criticism of this kind is of doubtful heuristic value.¹⁴ That is, it does not help us to understand

-
11. Raymond Westbrook, "What is the Covenant Code?" in *Theory and Method in Biblical and Cuneiform Law: Revision, Interpolation and Development*, JSOTSup 181, ed. Bernard M. Levinson (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 36.
 12. Joe M. Sprinkle, *The Book of the Covenant: A Literary Approach*, JSOTSup 174 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994).
 13. T. Desmond Alexander, "The Composition of the Sinai Narrative in Exodus XIX 1–XXV 11," VT 49, no. 1 (1999): 2–20.
 14. Curiously, Daniel B. Mathewson, "A Critical Binarism: Source Criticism and Deconstructive Criticism," JSOT 98 (2002): 3–28, argues that source criticism and deconstructive criticism are very compatible. That,

INTRODUCTION

what the book means.¹⁵ To the contrary, source analysis has often hindered the literary and theological interpretation of the text. A distressing and inevitable outcome of analysis based on some version of the documentary hypothesis is that it leads to commentaries that have more to say about the supposed sources of Exodus than they do about the canonical text. That is, we come away with little in the way of an interpretation of the one document that we know to be real, the book of Exodus.

Yet another unfortunate aspect of documentary analysis is its tendency to date texts very late. John Van Seters, an adherent of the documentary hypothesis who nevertheless has revised many of its once established conclusions, maintains that the simplicity of the Exodus covenant code argues against it having an early date (the older documentary hypothesis considered this to be a mixture of J and E material and therefore from relatively early in the Israelite monarchy). In his view, the more streamlined covenant code of Exod. 21–23 implies a postexilic date and indicates that it was meant for diaspora Jews without priesthood or temple.¹⁶ But this is only one example of a trend in recent studies to push more and more of the material of Exodus into the postexilic.

A discussion of the origin or sources of Exodus should not remain trapped in the nineteenth century, continuing to talk about J, E, D, and P as though those terms actually mean something real and historical. That path is a dead end. If one wishes to speak of the origin of the book, one should look in a new direction. One newer analysis is that of David Wright. He argues that the laws of Hammurabi and the laws of the Covenant Code of Exod. 21–24 so strongly parallel each other in content and structure that the similarities cannot be coincidental or a reflection of general similarities in the ancient Near Eastern legal traditions. Rather, the author(s) of the Covenant Code must have had direct access to the Hammurabi texts. Wright accepts a late date for the Covenant Code (740–640 B.C.) and argues that Israelite scribes could have come into contact with the code during the period of domination

in my view, can hardly be considered an endorsement for either method. Mathewson uses Exod. 14 to try to demonstrate his point.

15. For example, the lengthy discussion over sources (J, E, P, or N) behind the Passover text (Exod. 12:1–13:6) found in Childs, *Exodus*, 184–95, contributes little to our understanding of the passage or even of the origin of Passover.
16. John Van Seters, *A Law Book for the Diaspora: Revision in the Study of the Covenant Code* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

INTRODUCTION

under the Neo-Assyrian Empire.¹⁷ This latter point is certainly debatable. Evidence for knowledge of Akkadian cuneiform by Israelite scribes during this period is very thin, and is there little reason to suppose that Neo-Assyrian archivists would have shared Hammurabi's text with subjugated provinces on the western frontier of their empire. Furthermore, it is not at all clear why orthodox Israelite scribes from this period would want a copy of a thousand-year-old Babylonian text as the basis for their religious law. One could argue, to the contrary, that the evidence from Hammurabi points to a much earlier provenance for the Covenant Code (although I shall attempt no such project here).

The main point I wish to make is that investigation of the sources of Exodus, if such is to be attempted at all, should be done by an avenue more up-to-date and potentially more fruitful than what we see now. Continually flogging the dead horse of the documentary hypothesis is pointless. At any rate, I am already on record with my reasons for abandoning the documentary hypothesis,¹⁸ and I will proceed no further in this vein. I will, however, from time to time in the commentary discuss passages that are thought to be evidence for various sources.

The authorship of Exodus is traditionally assigned to Moses, but the book is anonymous. It never states who wrote the book, although it often asserts that the legislation within the book was given by God to Moses, and that should be the starting point for a confessional view of the origin of the book. From that perspective one may reasonably contend that Moses was responsible for the compilation of this book. This does not reject the possibility that sources were used or that there has been editing; for example, it is reasonable to assume that Exod. 6:14–25 is based in preexisting and extrinsic genealogical records. But for the most part, there is very little basis for distinguishing sources within Exodus, and the effort gives few benefits in terms of an enhanced understanding of the book. The full process whereby the book was composed is unknown to us, but it is a unity. It bears the marks of being a late second millennial text (see “The Suzerainty Treaty Form” below), and it was written by someone who was familiar with the circumstances of Israel in Egypt. We may continue to view Exodus as the “Second Book of Moses.”

-
17. David P. Wright, *Inventing God's Law: How the Covenant Code of the Bible Used and Revised the Laws of Hammurabi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
 18. See Duane A. Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991).

INTRODUCTION

THE TEXT OF EXODUS

In describing the state of the text of a book of the Hebrew Bible, we must first describe the general characteristics of the language (whether it has marks of being a particular Hebrew dialect, or has a large number of loanwords, or is marked by a high number of difficulties and idiosyncrasies). Then, we must take note of how well it has been transmitted (whether there are indications of a high number of scribal errors, so that there are grounds at various points for emending the text, and whether the Masoretic Text is generally in agreement with the versions). Finally, because this commentary includes an original translation of the Exodus, I also describe the translation method I have followed. The translation is clause-by-clause for prose, but for poetry it breaks the Hebrew text down according to its stichometry as I understand it.

The Hebrew Of Exodus

Exodus is written in classical Hebrew in a clean, narrative style using what is often described as “standard biblical Hebrew.” It is grammatically consistent with what we see in preexilic texts of biblical Hebrew, and it has no particular idiosyncrasies. The vocabulary consists primarily of common words, and rare or obscure words seldom stand as the *crux interpretationis* of a passage. A few common words, in addition to a fair number of toponyms and personal names, may be of Egyptian origin. Even these words are generally not exotic, and they pose little difficulty in translation (for example, the Hebrew measure פָּנָס [“span,” Exod. 28:16] is probably derived from the Egyptian *drt*).¹⁹ Technical vocabulary relating to the construction of the tabernacle and of the priestly vestments naturally poses something of a challenge. On the whole, however, the Hebrew of Exodus is straightforward. This is not to say that there is no room for disagreement about the precise significance of a given passage, but in contrast to a book such as Hosea or Job, few passages in Exodus are truly obscure.

Text-Critical Issues

The transmission of Exodus appears to have been remarkably clean. Fragments of the book found in the Judean desert (the Dead Sea Scrolls and related texts) are generally in agreement with the MT.²⁰

19. James K. Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 220.

20. Durham, *Exodus*, xxvii.

INTRODUCTION

In the scholarly treatment of Exodus, the text receives a fairly small number of suggested emendations. In a study of the text of the plague narratives (7:14–11:10), B. Lemmelijn found that in the overwhelming majority of cases, variants in the ancient versions could be explained by contextual consideration (and not by a different Vorlage) and that the MT was the preferred reading.²¹ There are minor differences between the MT and the ancient versions such as the LXX, but it is not the purpose of this commentary to list them. In comparison with what we see in many other books of the Bible (Jeremiah or Job, for example), differences between the MT and the LXX are minor indeed. As a rule, text critical issues will be discussed only in the rare cases where, in my judgment, emendation may be called for. For those who desire a catalogue of significant variant readings that occur in the Hebrew manuscripts and in the ancient versions, Propp's two-volume Anchor Bible commentary is highly recommended.²²

The Translation Method of This Commentary

In interpreting a book of the Bible, the most important single issue is the obtaining of an accurate translation. As such, the translation occupies a major place in this commentary. The procedures I have adopted are as follows:

- In prose, each clause is translated on a separate line. These lines are numbered by chapter, verse, and lower case letter. Thus, “1:12c” is chapter 1, verse 12, clause c.
- Relative clauses, which function grammatically as adjectives, direct objects or prepositional phrases within a larger clause, are not put on a separate line.
- Narrative is distinguished from “reported speech” (a direct quotation of a character in the narrative). Reported speech is indented in the text to distinguish it from the main narrative. Furthermore, a quote within a quote is further indented (as when the text says something like, And YHWH said, “You shall say to them, ‘Do not come up the mountain.’”). See, for example, the translation of 3:13.

21. Bénédicte Lemmelijn, *A Plague of Texts? A Text-Critical Study of the So-Called ‘Plagues Narrative’ in Exodus 7:14–11:10* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), see especially p. 212.

22. Propp, *Exodus 1–18* and *Exodus 19–40*.

INTRODUCTION

- In footnotes, I have explained the translation wherever necessary, commenting on grammatical and lexical features in the text. I have also made some comments about the discourse-level function of various clauses.
- For poetry, I have given the entire text of the poem in English and Hebrew. I have divided the poems into lines according to the following rules.
 1. The major disjunctive marks of the cantillation system are taken into account.²³ In the majority of cases, line breaks occur at the *silluq*, the *athnach*, and the *zaqeph qaton*, with some breaks occurring at the *pashta*, *revia*, or *tifha*. As a general rule, when a disjunctive accent serves to mark a line break, it will have a weaker disjunctive accent within its domain. As is done here, names of accents are given in italics in a simplified transliteration.
 2. The “line constraints” as described in O’Connor²⁴ and refined in Holladay²⁵ are taken into account. These constraints state that in any Hebrew line of poetry, there must be:
 - *From 0 to 3 clause predators.* A line may have no predicate, but it should have no more than three. A clause predator may be a finite verb, an infinitive absolute that functions as a finite verb, an infinitive construct phrase functioning as a finite verb (for example, an infinitive construct that has a suffix functioning as the subject of the action), a participle functioning as a periphrastic finite verb, and the particles יְהִי and וְהִי. O’Connor also counts the vocative as a predictor, and I have followed that rule.

23. See Raymond de Hoop, “The Colometry of Hebrew Verse and the Masoretic Accents: Evaluation of a Recent Approach”; “Part 1,” *JNSL* 26, no. 1 (2000): 47–73; “Part II,” *JNSL* 26, no. 2 (2000): 65–100.

24. Michael P. O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1980).

25. William Holladay, “Hebrew Verse Structure Revisited (I): Which Words ‘Count?’” *JBL* 118, no. 1 (1999): 19–32; Hebrew Verse Structure Revisited (II): Conjoint Cola, and Further Suggestions.” *JBL* 118, no. 3 (1999): 401–16.

INTRODUCTION

- *From 1 to 4 constituents.* A constituent is a word or phrase that fills one grammatical slot. Examples would be a subject, a predicate, or a prepositional phrase. Although it has more than one word, a construct chain functioning as a subject or vocative, for example, is a single constituent.
 - *From 2 to 5 units.* A unit is basically a word, but small particles such as פִּי or מִן or prepositions such as בְּנֵי do not count as units. One may debate what does or does not count as a unit. I treat אֶלְּאַ as a non-unit, and only count בְּלָא as a unit if it is absolute.
3. In the presentation of the poems, the number of predators, constituents, and units is indicated. For example, in the poem that I believe exists in Exod. 6, the line 6:5c is said to be “1–2–2” (1 predictor, 2 constituents, and 2 units).
 4. Comments are made in footnotes if, in my opinion, the line structure of a poem does not agree with what one would expect from the accentuation or line constraints.
 5. Poems are also divided into “stanzas” and “strophes.” Stanzas are here understood to be the major divisions of a poem, and strophes are the major divisions of a stanza. I use the term “verse” only in reference to numbered verses, not in reference to poetic subdivisions.

EGYPT

Exodus opens its story in Egypt, and the history and culture of Egypt form the backdrop for the whole of the book. But the average person, and this surely includes the average pastor or Bible teacher, knows no more about ancient Egypt than that they built the pyramids, wrote in hieroglyphs, and oppressed the Israelites. Beyond that, what most people know about Egypt comes from watching motion pictures such as *The Ten Commandments*, or *The Prince of Egypt*, or even *The Mummy*. It is essential, however, that anyone who seeks to teach or proclaim Exodus have some understanding of the nature of the land, its history, and the possible setting for the exodus events.²⁶ Some treatments of

26. For an understanding of Egyptian history and culture beyond the limited survey presented here, the following texts are recommended. John Barnes and Jaromír Málek, *The Cultural Atlas of the World: Ancient Egypt*,

INTRODUCTION

Exodus, even some major and scholarly commentaries, treat the book as though awareness of its Egyptian setting were a superfluous matter. This is surely misguided.

The Land

The Nile River made human habitation of Egypt possible. With its annual floods, the Nile not only provided water for drinking and agriculture but also cast up black, alluvial soil on its banks to provide fertile ground for the planting of crops. Thus, Egyptians called the land immediately adjacent to the Nile the “Black Land,” and the desert beyond the reach of its flood waters the “Red Land.” Except at a few oases, human civilization was impossible in the harsh desert away from the Nile. It is important for the modern reader to realize that the Nile River valley *was* Egypt; almost everything else was wasteland. This means that a large part of the ancient kingdom of Egypt—everything south of the Delta—was hundreds of miles long but only about five miles wide! The Nile also neatly divided Egypt into two parts. The Delta region (in northern Egypt) is known as Lower Egypt, while the Nile south of the Delta is known as Upper Egypt (so-called because it is upriver since the Nile flows from south to north).²⁷

rev. ed. (New York: Checkmark Books, 2000); Rosalie David, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Rita E. Freed, Yvonne J. Markowitz, and Sue H. D'Auria, eds., *Pharaohs of the Sun: Akhenaten, Nefertiti, Tutankhamen* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1999); Nicolas Grimal, *A History of Ancient Egypt*, trans. Ian Shaw (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Pharaoh Triumphant: The Life and Times of Ramesses II, King of Egypt* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1982); J. E. Manchip-White, *Ancient Egypt: Its Culture and History* (New York: Dover, 1970); Barbara Mertz, *Red Land, Black Land: Daily Life in Ancient Egypt* (New York: William Morrow, 2008); Barbara Mertz, *Temples, Tombs & Hieroglyphs: A Popular History of Ancient Egypt* (New York: William Morrow, 2007); Ian Shaw, ed., *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Ian Shaw and Nicholson, *The Dictionary of Ancient Egypt* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995); David P. Silverman, ed., *Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); William K. Simpson, ed., *The Literature of Ancient Egypt: An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, Stelae, Autobiographies and Poetry*, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

27. Sometimes Egypt is divided into three parts: Lower Egypt (the Delta), Middle Egypt (the northern half of the Nile valley below the Delta), and Upper Egypt (the southern half of the Nile Valley).

INTRODUCTION

Egypt enjoyed great security within its environment. It was all but impregnable from the east, where deserts and harsh, rocky mountains terminated at the Red Sea. Similarly, to its west was the vast Sahara Desert. To the south, Nubia could and occasionally did pose a threat, but for the most part Egypt dominated Nubia. Also, the cataracts (waterfalls in the southern part of the Nile) made riverborne invasion or migration from the south difficult. To the north was the Mediterranean, a fairly secure border since seaborne invasion was very difficult in the ancient world. Threats could come in from the northwest, from Libya, but the most vulnerable spot for Egypt was the narrow corridor to its northeast linking Egypt with Canaan and beyond that with the great powers of Mesopotamia, Syria, and Anatolia. This land bridge did provide access for trading and diplomatic contacts. Still, migration and invasion by Semitic peoples via the northeastern corridor would be a standing concern for Egypt throughout its history.

The agricultural benefits of the Nile were enormous. Every year the river would flood and, besides providing the water that was essential for life, cast up alluvial soil along its banks, making the land extremely fertile. The annual inundation did not render the land invulnerable to famine (a flood that was too high or too low could be catastrophic), but for the most part this resource allowed the Egyptians to grow grain and vegetables in an abundance that was the envy of the rest of the world. It is not without reason that the hungry Israelites in the wilderness longed for the Egyptian Delta. This land was, by comparison with the wilderness, a paradise providing food without end. Egypt also had relatively easy access to precious metals (especially gold²⁸) and semi-precious stones. Using these materials, together with pigments available for making paint, the Egyptians produced works of art of great dignity, delicacy, and beauty.

On the other hand, Egypt had virtually no hard metal (iron, or copper and tin for bronze) for making tools and weapons, and very little timber for construction. Buildings were thus made of sun-dried brick or, in the case of great monumental structures, of stone. The remains extant from ancient Egypt today are thus almost entirely monumental, as mudbrick buildings would eventually dissolve back into the soil (especially those that were located in the wet Delta region). This feature of Egyptian archaeology has a parallel in what remains of Egyptian writings. Many texts were carved into stone monuments, but the vast

28. For a summary on the mining and use of gold in ancient Egypt, along with a brief survey of relevant geological data, see Colin Reader, "Pharaoh's Gold," *Ancient Egypt* 9, no. 2 (2008): 15–21.

INTRODUCTION

majority of Egyptian texts were written on papyrus, a paper made from the papyrus plant, which grew along the Nile. Papyrus was a great benefit to Egyptian scribes, but it, too, was perishable. Thus, a large number of surviving texts from ancient Egypt are monumental; almost all of the papyrus documents have disappeared. By contrast, the clay tablets popular for documentation in Mesopotamia could last for millennia.

Egypt was divided into 42 “nomes” (provinces or districts), with 22 in Upper Egypt and 20 in Lower Egypt. The word “nome” comes from Greek; the Egyptian equivalent is *sepat*. The local lords that governed the nomes, traditionally called “nomarchs,” could pose a challenge to royal authority and at various times contributed to the breakdown of an effective central government.

There are a few places in Egypt that every reader of Exodus ought to know. These include:

- *The Delta.* Already described above, this triangular, northern part of the Nile is where the river breaks into several smaller streams. It is the focal point of Lower Egypt, and its southern point is at about 30° N.
- *The Faiyum.* This is a fertile oasis area located west of the Nile and about 60 km (37 miles) southwest of modern Cairo. It includes Lake Moeris, which is connected to the Nile by a stream called the Bahr Yusuf (“River of Joseph”).
- *The Great Bend of the Nile.* This is a place in Upper (southern) Egypt where the Nile, as it flows north, suddenly turns east, then bends back to north, then back to west, and finally resumes its general northward flow. It is in the vicinity of 26° North.
- *The First Cataract.* This is the first of a series of cataracts (waterfalls and rapids) as one goes up the Nile toward the south. It marks the boundary between Egypt and Nubia, and is located at 24° N. Elephantine, a city near the first cataract and at the southern edge of the first nome, marks the traditional southern border of Egypt.
- *The Gulf of Suez.* The Red Sea forms a great “Y,” with one arm to the west of the Sinai Peninsula and one arm to the east. The Suez is the elongated gulf that is west of the Sinai.

INTRODUCTION

- *The Gulf of Aqaba.* This is the other arm of the Red Sea's great "Y," on the east side of the Sinai Peninsula.
- *The Wadi Tumilat.* This is a wadi (a seasonal stream) that goes from the Nile Delta toward due east at about 30°5' N. It empties into Lake Timsah, north of the Gulf of Suez. The Israelites took this route out of Egypt, and Pithom, one of the store cities that they built, was located on the wadi.
- *Thebes.* Sometimes the capital city of Egypt, this was the cult center of the god Amun and contains the most extravagantly built-up temple complex from the ancient world, at Karnak. It was located in the southern part of the Great Bend, at 25°4' N.
- *Memphis.* This was the traditional capital city of unified Egypt. It was at the junction of Lower and Upper Egypt, just south of the Delta, at 29°45' N. It is at the southern edge of modern Cairo.
- *Saqqara.* This is the site of some of the oldest (3rd dynasty) pyramids, such as the step pyramid of Djoser. It is west of Memphis.
- *Giza.* This is the site of the great pyramids and the sphinx. It is west of modern Cairo.
- *Avaris / Pi-Ri'amsese / Tell el-Dab'a.* This is the vicinity of the Hyksos capital (Avaris), and later of the capital city of Ramesses II (Pi-Ri'amsese; it is the biblical "store-city" Raamses). The modern name of the site is Tell el-Dab'a. The Israelites lived in this general area during their sojourn in Egypt. It is in the eastern Delta at 30°47' N and 31°50' E.

Chronology and History

It is astounding that pharaonic Egypt endured more or less unchanged for some 3,000 years, and that for much of that time it was a dominant world power. One could almost say that the history of Middle Eastern and Western civilization is divided into two parts: first, Egypt, and then, everything else.

There are two methods of breaking up the 3,000 years of ancient Egyptian history into manageable segments. The first, following the work of the Egyptian historian Manetho (3rd century B.C.), is to break

INTRODUCTION

the history up according to the dynasties (Manetho said there were 30 dynasties of pharaohs; today that is extended to include a “dynasty 0” and then up to the 33rd dynasty).²⁹ The second method is to partition Egyptian history into major eras that describe whether the nation was powerful and united or was weak and divided, or was under foreign domination. The major eras of Egyptian history with their respective dynasties are described in Table 1.

Establishing the chronology of ancient Egypt is difficult and complex, but one can appreciate the rudiments of how this is done by getting acquainted with the Sothic calendar. The ancient Egyptian civil calendar consisted of twelve months of 30 days each. In addition, there were five intercalary days added every year, bringing the total to 365. But there were no leap years to correct for the additional $\frac{1}{4}$ day of the solar year, and thus every four years the civil year fell one day behind the solar year. This meant that the civil calendar would progressively be further off from the solar year, until it had gone through a cycle of 1,460 years (4×365), bringing it back, for one year, into agreement with the solar year.

But the Egyptians did have a way of recognizing when one solar year had passed: it was marked by the first rising of Sirius, the “dog star,” as a morning star. Sirius disappears from the Egyptian sky for about 70 days per year. Its annual reappearance marks one full solar year. This event is called a “heliacal rising” of Sirius (or, after “Sothis,” the Egyptian name for Sirius, a “Sothic rising”). Thus, the New Year’s Day of the civil calendar would correspond to the Sothic rising once every 1,460 years (this lengthy period of time is a “Sothic cycle”). From Roman records, we know that a New Year’s Day and a Sothic rising were on the same day in A.D. 139. Working backwards through one Sothic cycle, therefore, we know that another such year was at about 1321 B.C., and that the prior convergence of New Year’s Day and the Sothic rising was in around 2781 B.C. (we cannot be precise because we don’t know exactly from what latitude in Egypt Sirius’ rising was observed in the various records, and this can make a difference of more than a decade). But if, for a given year of a pharaoh’s reign, a record tells on what day in what month the Sothic rising took place, one would know where that specific year was set within the Sothic Cycle, and one could determine reasonably accurately what year that was according to the Gregorian Calendar. We do have two such Sothic risings recorded; these come from Year 7 of Sesostris III (about 1856 B.C.) and from

29. The total number of dynasties may vary; not all scholars include up to a 33rd dynasty.

INTRODUCTION

Year 9 of Amenhotep I (about 1516 B.C.).³⁰ These years then become linchpins that hold the chronology of Egypt, as it is known from king lists and other official records, to an absolute chronology based on the modern calendar.

The Sothic cycle is but one tool that Egyptologists use, and it sets the timeline on a fairly solid footing. One should not, therefore, treat Egyptian chronology with undue skepticism. There are still uncertainties about Egyptian history, and it is not possible to be absolutely precise, but the chronology of Egyptian history is not arbitrary. Except for the early dynasties, it is not likely to be off by more than a few decades, at most. The dates listed in Table 1 follow the low chronology of K. A. Kitchen;³¹ other chronological reconstructions of the history of Egypt will have slightly higher dates. As a general rule, uncertainty about the dating of Egyptian epochs becomes greater as one goes further back in time. Thus, the dates for the Ptolemaic period are quite precisely known, but the dates for the Archaic period are less precise.³² On the other hand, a recent study that applied carbon-14 dating to Egyptian artifacts supplied by major museums from around the world largely confirmed the standard dating system for Egyptian chronology.³³ Skepticism about the reliability of standard Egyptian chronology is unwarranted.

We should also note that not all scholars agree regarding what dynasties belong in what eras. Thus, for example, some place the 3rd dynasty in the Archaic period, but others, as is done below, place it in the Old Kingdom.³⁴

-
30. The absolute dates mentioned here follow the low chronology of Kenneth A. Kitchen in “Egypt, History of: Chronology,” in Freedman, ABD Vol. 2, 321–331. Earlier dates (1872 and 1541) are given in Shaw, *Oxford Egypt*, 11.
 31. Kitchen, “Egypt, Chronology,” 321–331.
 32. For an alternative date scheme, see Shaw and Nicholson, *Dictionary*, 479–83.
 33. Yves Miserey, “Égypte: la chronologie des dynasties revue au carbone 14,” *Le Figaro* (June 18, 2010).
 34. For example, Kitchen (“Egypt, Chronology”) puts the 3rd dynasty in the Old Kingdom, but Baines and Málek, *Cultural Atlas*, 36, put it in the Archaic or “Early Dynastic” period.

INTRODUCTION

TABLE 1. THE CHRONOLOGY OF ANCIENT EGYPT

Major Eras	Dynasties	Dates	Remarks
Predynastic	n/a	prior to 3000	Egypt not unified
Archaic	“0” and 1st–2nd	3000–2700	Egypt unified and classical Egyptian culture established
Old Kingdom	3rd–8th	2700–2160	Pyramid age; Egypt powerful and united
First Intermediate	9th–10th	2160–2010	Political chaos; Egypt not unified
Middle Kingdom	11th–12th	2106–1786	A second era of power and unity; overlaps with the First Intermediate
Second Intermediate	13th–17th	1786–1550	Weakness and division; this period includes the Hyksos dynasties (15th and 16th)
New Kingdom	18th–20th	1550–1069	Egypt's imperial age; the exodus probably took place in the 18th or 19th dynasty
Third Intermediate	21st–25th	1069–656	Approximately coincides with Israelite monarchies; Egyptian power waxed and waned
Saite-Persian	26th–31st	654–332	Foreign domination of Egypt
Ptolemaic	32nd–33rd	332–30 B.C.	Greek domination after Alexander the Great and subsequent rule by Ptolemaic kings
Roman	n/a	After 30 B.C.	Decline and end of classical Egyptian culture under Roman domination

INTRODUCTION

Predynastic Egypt

This is essentially prehistoric Egypt, as there are no written records with which to construct a history. Knowledge of conditions at this time is dependent on finding the archaeological remains of communities at individual sites. The cultures that emerged were essentially regional; there was, as yet, no pan-Egyptian society. An important transformation of the land took place with the end of the last ice age. Exceptionally heavy rains and flooding south of Egypt, in East Africa, broke open channels that allowed the White Nile to begin to flow. The Nile River thus took on the characteristics that it has to this day. At the same time, there was very little rainfall in Egypt itself, contributing to the desertification of the land (prior to this, Egypt and even the Sahara were composed of grassy plains and even some large lakes). These two factors—a desert land, and a great and seasonally flooding river flowing through the middle of it—would allow for the creation of classical Egypt. On the one hand, the river both made agriculture possible and unified Egypt. On the other hand, the desert isolated Egypt in the manner described above and contributed to the creation of a homogenous culture.

Predynastic cultures are identified by the sites at which their remains have been found. For example, the Badarian cultural phase (which flourished about 4000 B.C.) is named for the place at which remains from this culture were found, at el-Badari in the northern half of Upper Egypt. Amratian culture (which flourished about 3600 B.C.) is named for a site called el-'Amra further to the south. Human civilization began to flourish during the late predynastic period. Agriculture is known to have been practiced in the Badarian culture, and the delicate Badarian pottery was of very high quality (some even regard it as the finest pottery ancient Egypt ever produced). Amratian pottery was decorated with various human and animal motifs, and the making of stone monuments was well-established by the end of this period. It may be that loose confederations existed in Egypt and that gradually power became more centralized.

Archaic Egypt

The historical process in which Egypt was unified between 4000 and 3000 B.C. is not fully understood.³⁵ Two factors appear to have been decisive: the military success of the kings who unified Egypt, and the

35. For a recent analysis of this problem, see Kathryn A. Bard, *From Farmers to Pharaohs: Mortuary Evidence for the Rise of Complex Society in Egypt* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994).

INTRODUCTION

organized irrigation of the soil (which allowed for large scale agriculture, brought about population increase, and functioned best when there was a strong central government to insure cooperation in irrigation maintenance). King Narmer, a semi-legendary predynastic (or “dynasty 0”) king, appears on a famous stone palette with images of himself on both sides. On one side he is wearing the red crown, and on the other the white crown (the ruler of Lower Egypt wore a red crown, and the ruler of Upper Egypt wore a white crown). The red and white double crown became the abiding symbol of pharaonic rule over the “Two Lands,” Upper and Lower Egypt. On the other hand, a king named Meni (or Menes) is said to have established the 1st dynasty, and it may be that Meni and Narmer were one and the same. Be that as it may, the country was unified under a single pharaoh by about 3000 B.C. Memphis, on the southern tip of the Delta and thus at the junction of Lower and Upper Egypt, became the capital city. The distinctive Egyptian style in art and writing (the hieroglyphic script) was well-established by the end of the Archaic period. This is, of itself, an astonishing achievement: the political, artistic, literary and religious culture established by the end of the Archaic period would endure virtually unchanged for 3,000 years.

Old Kingdom

The unification of Egypt naturally led to its becoming a great power and arguably the first nation (as opposed to city-state) in history. The names and chronology of the pharaohs of the first five dynasties are known from the Palermo Stone, a black basalt stone inscribed with parallel lines that list the kings from this time. Pharaohs maintained the security of Egypt by leading military campaigns to the Levant and to Libya, and they maintained control of the nation by, among other things, seeing to it that the lands held by any individual baron were dispersed across Egypt. Thus, no member of the aristocracy had his land concentrated in a single location, from which he could set up a rival dynasty. This policy would fail in the 6th dynasty, however, as provincial governors became local warlords. The 7th and 8th dynasties were a series of ephemeral kings.

The monuments that the world identifies with Egypt, the pyramids and the Great Sphinx, were built during the Old Kingdom period. The first major pyramid was the Step Pyramid built by Djoser, the first pharaoh of the 3rd dynasty, and his architect Imhotep (this scholar-architect was so renowned that he was eventually deified). The zenith of pyramid building was the Great Pyramid of Kheops (Khufu), which was constructed in the fourth dynasty. Some of the finest statuary of

INTRODUCTION

Egypt comes from the Old Kingdom. Some classic works of Egyptian literature, such as the proverbs of Ptahhotep, also date from this period. We should note that all of these achievements were already hundreds of years old when Abraham was born.

First Intermediate Period

The 9th dynasty consisted of rulers who claimed power from the city of Herakleopolis Magna (this city, located on the west side of the Nile and just south of the Faiyum, was the cult center of Herishef, a ram-headed creator god; the Greeks identified Herishef with Hercules, and thus the name Herakleopolis). But during the Herakleopolitan 10th dynasty, a rival dynasty, the 11th, was established at Thebes. Central authority thus had collapsed. Few monuments survive from this time. Even so, this era produced some significant works of literature (all of it in a pessimistic tone), such as the “Song of the Harper” and the “Admonitions of Ipuwer.”

Middle Kingdom

The 11th dynasty can be considered the end of the First Intermediate and beginning of the Middle Kingdom, and central authority was gradually reestablished during this time. The founder of the 12th dynasty, Amenemhet I (reigned 1963–1934) moved the capital city to Itjawy, close to the traditional capital city of Memphis. In the 12th dynasty, Egypt had a series of strong and for the most part long-lived pharaohs (Amenemhet I, Sesostris I, Amenemhet II, Sesostris II, Sesostris III, Amenemhet III, Amenemhet IV, and Sobeknofru). As such, the 12th dynasty is the glory period of the Middle Kingdom. Quarries were reopened and monumental works were again produced. The beautiful White Chapel was built at the temple complex at Karnak by Sesostris I (reigned 1943–1898). The army was rebuilt, and Sesostris III (reigned 1862–1843) won significant victories against Nubia in the south. Amenemhet III (reigned 1843–1798) greatly expanded the development of the Faiyum by extending irrigation works and building a great mortuary complex at Hawara (called the “Labyrinth” by classical authors). He exploited the Sinai Peninsula for minerals, especially turquoise, and in the center of the peninsula at Serabit el-Khadim he enlarged a great shrine to Hathor. Canaanite workers in these mines gave us the first true Semitic alphabet, the Proto-Sinaitic script, which is the precursor to the standard Hebrew alphabet. Amenemhet III also established a city for “Asiatics” (Canaanites and other Semites) in Lower Egypt.³⁶

36. Orly Goldwasser, “How the Alphabet was Born from Hieroglyphs,” *BAR* 36, no. 2 (2010): 36–50.

INTRODUCTION

Some important literature comes from this time. The most important of these is the autobiographical “Tale of Sinuhe,” in which the protagonist, Sinuhe, tells us that he was an attendant of Nefru, wife of Sesostris I. When Sesostris died, however, Sinuhe feared that he would be killed in the subsequent political turmoil, and he fled Egypt. On his way out of the country, heading toward Canaan, he passed by fortifications built along Egypt’s northeastern frontier; these, he tells us, had been put in place to keep the “Asiatics” out of Egypt. This is a valuable piece of information, as it illustrates how the Egyptians felt themselves to be under constant pressure from invaders or immigrants from Canaan. Sinuhe, now in self-imposed exile, took up residence in Canaan, which he describes as a good land, abundant in figs, wine, oil, honey, grains, and cattle. In this, and in his dealings with local kings and warlords, he provides us with a firsthand account of life in Middle Bronze Age Canaan. In an episode reminiscent of David and Goliath, he tells how he entered into single combat with a mighty champion and defeated him.³⁷

Second Intermediate Period

The stability of the Middle Kingdom collapsed rather abruptly with the advent the 13th dynasty (1786–1633 B.C.), in which 70 kings ruled within about 150 years. Especially catastrophic for the country, however, was immigration (or invasion) of Semitic peoples from the Levant. These outsiders naturally congregated in the eastern Delta, at their point of entry, and they were soon numerous and powerful enough to seize control of Lower Egypt. The kings of the 15th and 16th dynasties (1648–1540 B.C.) were Semitic rather than Egyptian, and they are known as the Hyksos (from the Egyptian *heka khaswt*, “foreign rulers”). They established their capital at Avaris, in the eastern Delta. Not surprisingly, the Egyptians came to hate the outsiders who had taken control of at least part of their country. The Egyptian 17th dynasty (1633–1550 B.C.), ruling from Thebes in the south, set about driving out these foreign overlords.³⁸ On the other hand, the Hyksos

37. Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings* (Berkeley: University of California, 1973), 1: 222–35.

38. A list of the kings of the 17th dynasty is found in Jürgen von Beckerath. “Theban Seventeenth Dynasty,” in *Gold of Praise: Studies on Ancient Egypt in Honor of Edward F. Wente*, ed. Emily Teeter and John A. Larson (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1999), 21–26. This essay, focused entirely on constructing a sequence of 17th dynasty pharaohs, is a good example of

INTRODUCTION

did bring new technologies into Egypt, such as improved metallurgy, new livestock breeds, and apparently also the military chariot.

New Kingdom

Ahmose I (reigned 1550–1525 B.C.), founder of the 18th dynasty, succeeded in driving out the Hyksos and establishing the New Kingdom. Egypt thereafter became an empire that reached through Canaan and into Syria. This was not an empire, however, in the sense that the Roman Empire was, with occupation, colonization and often direct governance of the conquered territories. The Egyptians preferred to remain in their own territory except for short campaigns and the establishment of a few fortified barracks in the region. In Canaan and Syria, local governments remained intact and demonstrated their submission to the pharaoh by the payment of tribute and by the submission to him of local disputes for adjudication.

As the New Kingdom is not only the greatest chapter of Egyptian history, but also the time in which the exodus probably took place, its pharaohs deserve special attention. From the 18th dynasty the following pharaohs are noteworthy.

- *Amenhotep I* (reigned 1525–1504): He is best known for a successful military campaign into Nubia in the south, from which he brought a great deal of wealth into Egypt. He also opened or expanded mining operations (for example, reviving turquoise mining in the Sinai), and he engaged in monumental building projects, especially at the temple site of Karnak, near Thebes. Devotion to the sun-god Amun and expansion of the temple facilities at Karnak, which became the center of pharaoh veneration, were marks of the 18th dynasty.
- *Thutmose I* (reigned 1504–1492): He continued the subjugation of Nubia, partly because of the threat the Nubians posed and partly to get his hands on the gold of that land. He also continued the expansion of the temple precinct at Karnak. To the northeast, Egyptian power extended as far as the Euphrates River in Syria, where Egypt came into conflict with the kingdom of Mitanni in northern Mesopotamia. While Nubia was directly administered by Egypt as a colony, however, Egyptian power in

the kind of puzzle Egyptologists must unravel and of the limitations of the data at their disposal.

INTRODUCTION

the Levant was probably limited to making certain city-states into tributary vassals.

- *Thutmose II* (reigned 1492–1479): The length of his reign is actually much in doubt. Although the son of Thutmose I, his mother was a secondary wife. To strengthen his claim to the throne, therefore, he may have married his half-sister Hatshepsut, who was fully royal.³⁹ Be that as it may, Thutmose II was Thutmose I's designated heir, but a powerful faction coalesced around Hatshepsut at Thebes. And Thutmose II had a short time on the throne. Apart from his putting down a rebellion in Nubia, there is little that scholars can confidently ascribe to his reign. When Thutmose II died, his son and heir (by a harem girl named Isis) was only twelve years old.
- *Hatshepsut* (reigned 1479–1457): She was the most famous woman pharaoh of Egypt. At the death of Thutmose II, the crown passed to his son, Thutmose III. Hatshepsut (his aunt) was powerful enough to direct the government as regent. After a few years, however, she openly claimed the throne and governed as king, even taking a throne name for herself (Egyptian pharaohs had royal wives, but there were no governing queens, and thus she was in effect not “queen” but “king”). She did not set aside or do away with Thutmose III, however; he was regarded as her coregent. She expanded the commercial contacts of Egypt and is famous for having built a magnificent funerary temple for herself and her father (Thutmose I) at Deir el-Bahri. In popular Christian preaching, one may sometimes hear the claim that she was the “daughter of Pharaoh” who drew Moses from the Nile; there is absolutely no evidence to support this. A powerful pharaoh would have scores of daughters by his minor wives and concubines; even if Moses’s birth was contemporary with Hatshepsut (and this cannot be established), there would have been many princesses of various rank at this time. Hatshepsut is an intriguing if somewhat enigmatic figure. After her death, her name was chiseled out of many inscriptions, while others were hidden or destroyed. Traditionally, this has

39. But some say that Thutmose II was not Thutmose I's son at all, but only his son-in-law. Also, evidence that he married Hatshepsut is thin (Hans Goedicke, *The Speos Artemidos Inscription of Hatshepsut and Related Discussions* [Oakville: Halgo, 2004], 107–12).

INTRODUCTION

been attributed to the malice of Thutmose III, who supposedly hated her for exercising power while he was the rightful pharaoh. More recently, this theory has been questioned. It may be that the idea of a female pharaoh was regarded as unnatural.⁴⁰ Hatshepsut's mummy was recently discovered. She died in her early 50s perhaps of cancer or of diabetes complications. She was severely overweight at the time of her death.⁴¹

- *Thutmose III* (reigned 1479–1425, partly as coregent with Hatshepsut): He began to reign in his own right when Hatshepsut died around 1457. He became sole ruler at a moment of crisis—the king of Kadesh in Syria (probably with the prodding of Mitanni), had put together a powerful, anti-Egyptian coalition of Syrian states. Thutmose took the army north and won a great victory at Megiddo, a city in the Jezreel Valley in Canaan. He subsequently subdued the coastal cities of Canaan and also took Kadesh. In the 33rd year of his reign (about 1446) he crossed the Euphrates River and decisively defeated the king of the Mitanni in a pitched battle. Indeed, he was away on military campaigns throughout his reign—usually in Syria and Canaan but also in Nubia—and he seems to have chalked up one victory after another. He established Egyptian garrisons across the Levant and took tribute from subject kings. He also did great building works, especially at the temple of Amun at Karnak. If the “Early Date” for the exodus (1447) is correct, and if the Egyptian dates here are also followed, then the exodus took place in the middle of his reign, just around the time he was defeating the king of Mitanni in Syria. This seems implausible, suggesting that either the Early Date of the exodus or the chronology of the 18th dynasty is wrong.
- *Amenhotep II* (reigned 1427–1400): His reign was occupied with maintaining Egyptian hegemony over the Levant. To this end, he waged several campaigns to keep the empire from slipping away. Even so, the Egyptian Empire in Syria lost ground to Mitanni. Curiously, he is famous for having been very

40. Joyce A. Tyldesley, *Hatchepsut: The Female Pharaoh* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 225.

41. Ayman Wahby Taher, “The Mummy of Hatshepsut Identified,” *Ancient Egypt* 8, no. 2 (2007): 10–13.

INTRODUCTION

athletic; he boasted, for example, of having been a terrific archer. Some believe that Amenhotep II was the pharaoh of the exodus, based partly on the lack of military campaigning late in his reign and partly on an anecdote concerning Thutmose IV, described below. To sustain the claim that Amenhotep II is the pharaoh of the exodus, however, one must adjust the date for the exodus (normally dated to about 1447 if the Early Date is followed), or for Amenhotep II's reign, or for both.

- *Thutmose IV* (reigned 1400–1390): Like his predecessors, Thutmose IV tried to maintain Egypt's empire in the Levant. Near the end of his reign he negotiated a peace treaty with Mitanni, and his successor, Amenhotep III, took a Mitanni princess as his wife. A peculiar fact about this pharaoh is used to make the argument that Amenhotep II was pharaoh of the exodus. As a young prince, he had military duty at Memphis, near the pyramids. He had a dream, he claimed, in which the god Horus told him that he would become pharaoh if he freed the sphinx from the sand in which it was trapped (in ancient Egypt even great monuments could be swallowed by the shifting sands of the desert). It is thought that Thutmose IV told this story to legitimatize his claim to the throne, and that he needed to do this because an elder brother, who should have become the pharaoh, suddenly died. This brother could have been, it is suggested, the firstborn of Pharaoh, who died in the last plague. If so, this sets the date for the exodus. This is a possible scenario, but it is impossible to prove, and it is a very slender basis for dating the exodus. Many pharaohs were not succeeded by their firstborn sons; Ramesses II's successor, Merenptah, was his thirteenth son!
- *Amenhotep III* (reigned 1390–1352): Peace having been established with Mitanni, he devoted himself largely to building up the great city of Thebes. His reign was long, peaceful, and prosperous. Two famous individuals from his reign are his chief wife, Tiy, and his master builder, Amenhotep son of Hapu. The former was the daughter of a commoner but came to be a favored and competent political adviser to the pharaoh. The latter directed the great construction work of this time.
- *Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten* (reigned 1352–1336): He was the famous “heretic” pharaoh. Although he at first continued to

INTRODUCTION

build up the temple complex at Karnak, he soon underwent a religious transformation and became in practice, and possibly in theology, a monotheist. He disregarded all the cults of the other gods, began to build a grand new city and worship complex at el-Amarna, and devoted himself to the worship of the sun-disk Aten (he also changed his name to from Amenhotep to Akhenaten; he called his new city Akhetaten—both of the new names honored Aten). During his reign the empire in the Levant deteriorated, and local kings throughout Canaan sent him correspondence begging for assistance. Perhaps he was too preoccupied with his new city and religion to be bothered with these matters. Also, in the north, the power of Egypt's ally, Mitanni, began to fail under the onslaught of the emerging Hittite Empire, coming out of central Anatolia (modern Turkey). Shortly after Akhenaten's death his new city and religion were both abandoned. The correspondence he received from Canaan had been inscribed on clay tablets and mostly written in Akkadian, the diplomatic language of the day. Some letters date from the reign of his father, Amenhotep III, and the latest letters date from the first years of his successor, Tutankhamun, but most are from his reign. Also, some letters are from Mesopotamia or Mitanni, but most are from the Levant. They were found by a peasant woman in 1887 (382 tablets were eventually recovered). These letters are of enormous importance for the study of Canaan in the Late Bronze Age, and they are known as the Amarna Letters.

- *Tutankhamun* (reigned 1336–1327): He was a boy when Akhenaten died, and the country was governed by a regent. The Restoration Stele, a monument from his reign, describes how terrible conditions were under the heretic Akhenaten and how the new pharaoh restored order. Tutankhamun died at about 18 years of age and his reign was otherwise unremarkable except for the fact in 1922 the English Egyptologist Howard Carter discovered his tomb basically intact—that is, although grave robbers had found it, they had left a great deal behind (all other pharaonic tombs had been thoroughly plundered). Thus, from the treasures that were placed in his tomb, modern people were able to get a glance at the wealth and treasure of Egypt. At Tutankhamun's death, a period of confusion followed, in which a courtier named Ay, Tutankhamun's widow Ankhesenamun, and a general named Haremhab struggled for

INTRODUCTION

power. Eventually Haremhab won out, even though he was by his own admission without royal blood. He was the last pharaoh of the 18th dynasty.

- *Ramesses I* (reigned 1295–1294): He had been Haremhab's vizier, and as the former died childless, he was made Haremhab's heir. He begins a new dynasty, the 19th.
- *Seti I* (reigned 1294–1279): He restored Egypt, repairing the damage done in the latter years of the 18th dynasty. He finished the work of restoring the traditional religion. He resumed the work of building up the temple precinct at Karnak. At Abydos, a little to the north of Thebes, he built a grand mortuary temple for himself. He also set about rebuilding Egypt's empire in the Levant. When he came to the throne, Egypt's holdings in Palestine had been reduced to three fortified cities at Beth Shean, Rehob, and Megiddo. Egypt's chief rival for control in this area was now the Hittite Empire, against which he fought at least one war. Also, although he maintained Thebes as his capital city, he recognized the need for a royal presence in the north and built a royal palace near Avaris, the former Hyksos capital, in the eastern Delta.
- *Ramesses II* (reigned 1279–1213): The most famous of the pharaohs, he reigned for 67 years and fully restored the glory of the Egyptian Empire. He led a series of campaigns into the north to regain full control of the Levant. He encountered the Hittite army in a great battle at Kadesh, on the Orontes River in Syria. In this battle, Ramesses was cut off with a small number of men by a much larger Hittite army, but by personal valor (so he claims in his monuments) he held off the enemy onslaught until Egyptian reinforcements arrived. The Egyptians failed to take Kadesh and the battle was for them at best a narrowly escaped catastrophe, but the pharaoh's courage was celebrated in numerous inscriptions. Egypt and the Hittites made peace in 1258, and Egyptian suzerainty over Palestine was restored (Ramesses II campaigned, for example, against Moab and Edom). He went on to be one of the greatest builders of all the pharaohs, constructing or enlarging temples and monuments all across Egypt, especially in Thebes and Abydos. He had colossal statues built to himself at Abu Simbel, far to the south (these statues had to be moved away from the Nile in the 1960s, during construction of

INTRODUCTION

the Aswan Dam, to save them from the waters of Lake Nasser). He also built a new capital city for himself at Pi-Ri'amsese (the biblical store-city of Raamses) at the site where Seti I had built a palace, near Avaris. In the Late Date model for the exodus, Ramesses II was the pharaoh of the exodus.

- *Merenptah* (reigned 1213–1203): The thirteenth son of Ramesses II, he took over the kingdom after his father's 67-year reign (many of Ramesses's 150 children having predeceased him). Egypt's military prowess had declined with the increasing age of Ramesses, moreover, and thus Merenptah faced a number of challenges when he took the throne. He had to put down rebellion in Canaan, and he faced an invasion from the west of Libyans and Sea Peoples. The latter group refers to Indo-European peoples, some of whom were Greek, who pushed south across the Mediterranean during the 13th century. Making good tactical use of his archers, Merenptah slaughtered the invaders in the western Delta area and so saved Egypt. Already about 60 when he became pharaoh, however, Merenptah died as an old man and Egypt fell into confusion. The 19th dynasty thus came to an end. For biblical studies, the most important record of Merenptah's reign is a monumental stele he erected to commemorate his victories in Canaan. It includes the line, "Israel lies waste, its seed no longer exists," and this constitutes the first extrabiblical reference to Israel. We thus know that Israel was settled in Canaan by 1209, when the stele was written. The exodus, therefore, can be dated no later than the reign of Ramesses II.

After a period of civil war and usurpers, the 20th dynasty was established by Setnakht (reigned 1186–1184). Order was reestablished by the end of his reign, and his son, Ramesses III (reigned 1184–1153), inherited a fairly unified Egypt. He soon faced the challenge of renewed invasion from Libya in the northwest and from Sea Peoples in the northeast. He successfully beat off both attacks, and his defeat of the Sea Peoples was commemorated in a great inscription at his mortuary temple at Medinet Habu (in the area of Thebes). The repulsed Sea Peoples almost certainly included a group known as the Pilist, who settled in the southwest part of Canaan and became the biblical Philistines. After the death of Ramesses III, the 20th dynasty went into a long decline, and by the time it ended (in about 1069 B.C.) the New Kingdom era was over.

INTRODUCTION

Third Intermediate Period

Egypt was no longer politically unified. Pharaohs of the 21st dynasty ruled from Tanis in the Delta (the capital at Pi-Ri'amsese having been abandoned due to silting up of waterways). But parts of Egypt were effectively independent; much of southern Egypt, for example, was controlled by Theban high priests. Not all the dynasties were made up of native Egyptians. For example, the Libyan pharaoh Shoshenq I (reigned 945–924) established the 22nd dynasty. He sought to bring all of Egypt under his control, and he was in part successful. He also conducted an expedition into Israel and Canaan that stripped the land of its wealth (he is the Shishak of 1 Kings 14:25⁴²). The record of his achievement is inscribed on the “Bubastite Portal” at Karnak, in Thebes. The 25th dynasty (780–656 B.C.) was Nubian and included the pharaoh Taharqa (690–664 B.C.), famous from 2 Kings 19:9. At times there were rival dynasties in Egypt.

The Remainder of Ancient Egyptian History

Egyptian power briefly rose again under Psammetichus I (reigned 664–610 B.C.), who expelled the Assyrians and Nubians and also reunified Egypt. He established the 26th or “Saite” dynasty (so-called because they ruled from Sais, in the western Delta). He was followed by Necho II (reigned 610–595). Hoping to curb the rising power of the Babylonians and Medes, he moved his army through Israel, defeating and killing Josiah of Judah along the way (2 Kings 23:29). Necho II was defeated at Carchemish (605 B.C.) and driven back into Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon. Egypt was annexed into the Persian Empire by Cambyses in 525 B.C. The fall of the Persian Empire to Alexander the Great led to the Greek takeover of Egypt in 332. After Alexander’s death in 323, Ptolemy I (one of Alexander’s Macedonian generals) seized Egypt, and his dynasty ruled Egypt until the death of the last Ptolemaic ruler, the famous Cleopatra VII (reigned 52–30 B.C.). After Antony and Cleopatra were defeated by Octavius (the emperor Augustus) in 31 B.C., Egypt was placed under imperial rule as a Roman province.

A Word about the Egyptian Language

Readers of this commentary will in a few places encounter transliterated Egyptian, and thus it is advisable that they be acquainted

42. The dates for the reign of Shoshenq I, as well as his identification with the biblical Shishak, are fairly well-established. See A. J. Shortland, “Shishak, King of Egypt,” in *The Bible and Radiocarbon Dating*, ed. Thomas E. Levy and Thomas Higham (London: Equinox, 2005), 43–54.

INTRODUCTION

with basic issues concerning the language. Egyptian is classified as an Afro-Asiatic language, having some traits in common with Semitic languages, but other traits in common with African languages such as Cushitic and Berber. It is a dead language today, except as it survives in the liturgy of the Coptic Church.

As is well known, classical Egyptian was written in hieroglyphs. These were pictures that served either as phonograms (signs indicating sounds, just as Roman letters indicate sounds), logograms (signs indicating specific words), or determinatives (signs that classify the meaning of a sign to disambiguate it). For example, if English used such a writing system, a picture of an eye could mean the noun “eye” (this would be a logogram), or it could be used to be the sound of the English long “i” (i; it would here be a phonogram). Similarly, a picture of waves could mean “sea” when used as a logogram, but as the sound “sea” when used as a phonogram. Therefore, a picture of waves with a picture of an eye below it could be used for the verb “see” (the waves representing “sea” would be the phonogram, indicating how the word is pronounced, but the eye would be a determinative, telling the reader that this word is related to vision).

Egyptian hieroglyphs number in the hundreds, and these are organized into standard categories. Used as phonograms, some hieroglyphs represent a single consonant, while others represent two or three consonants. Unfortunately, hieroglyphs do not represent vowels, although some letters represent semi-vowels, similar to the English “y.” And since ancient Egyptian had no tradition to preserve the pronunciation of the words, scholars are not entirely certain how the words were pronounced (although there are certain scholarly conventions for pronunciation, such as inserting the vowel “e” after certain letters). For this reason, the English spelling of Egyptian proper names and words can vary from one scholar to the next. For example, many Egyptian tombs contain little figurines of men and women. In the afterlife, these were supposed to become servants who would do work for the deceased. These figures are variously called by the name “shabti,” or “ushabti,” or “shawabti.” Because the script has no vowels, no one can be sure of the pronunciation of the word. Similarly, the spelling variants for the names of pharaohs and gods can be quite confusing.⁴³

Ancient Egyptian could also be written in a shorthand kind of

43. For the sake of consistency in this text, place names follow the spelling in Baines and Málek, *Cultural Atlas*; pharaohs follow the spelling in Kitchen, “Egypt, Chronology”; and deities follow the spelling in Barbara Watterson, *The Gods of Ancient Egypt* (London: Sutton, 1984).

INTRODUCTION

hieroglyphs called hieratic, or, beginning about the 7th century B.C., in a cursive hieratic called demotic. Hieratic and demotic are difficult to work with, and scholars typically transcribe these into standard hieroglyphs and use that as a basis for translation work. In addition, scholars use a standard set of transliterations when discussing Egyptian words. It turns out that in spite of the large number of hieroglyphic signs, Egyptian writing can be reduced to a transliteration system of consonants. These are given in Table 2.

**TABLE 2. TRANSLITERATION
OF EGYPTIAN CONSONANTS**

Sign	Value	Sign	Value	Sign	Value
ȝ	Weak glottal stop	n	N	k	Q
j	Weak glottal stop	r	R	k	K
y	Y	h	H	g	G
‘	Strong glottal stop	ḥ	“throaty” H	t	T
w	W	ḥ	German ch	t	Tj
b	B	ḥ	German ch + y	d	D
p	P	z	Z, S	d	Dj
f	F	s	S		
m	M	š	Sh		

The values for the letters given above are simplified, and the transliteration follows the European transliteration system used by James Allen.⁴⁴ In an older transliteration system, *j* is transliterated as *ȝ*, *z* is transliterated as *s*, and *s* is transliterated as *š*. The Egyptians no doubt had slightly different pronunciation for each of the four “h” letters, as

44. James P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 14–7.

INTRODUCTION

suggested above. A “glottal stop” is like the Hebrew נ or ו. The first glottal stop (ז) is something like the נ; it is not the number 3! When you come across a word of transliterated Egyptian, it is not necessary to try to pronounce it. In fact, nobody today really knows how to pronounce it.

THE REALITY AND DATE OF THE EXODUS

The exodus of Israel from Egypt is historical and occurred as described in the book of Exodus. Today, however, many scholars believe that the exodus tradition at best has only a small kernel of truth and at worst is entirely fictional.⁴⁵ To be sure, they are aware that the exodus event dominates the Israelite consciousness of their history (Amos 9:7, for example, makes no sense unless one understands that the prophet is speaking to people who believed that the exodus made them different from every other people). Scholars who believe that the exodus is a myth need to account for this.

Ronald Hendel, for example, embarks on a new kind of tradition criticism to explain elements of the exodus story. The notion of enslavement in Egypt, he says, arose from the many experiences of western Semites with enslavement to Egyptians. But there were many small examples of such slavery through the centuries, and not one great example of the enslavement of one people, Israel. Similarly, the tradition of the plagues of Egypt is a gathering together and retelling of many examples of plagues, famines, and disasters in Egyptian history. The story of Moses is greatly expanded and folded into the traditions of enslavement, plagues, exodus, and wilderness wanderings. Of the man himself, Hendel claims, we can be sure of little more than that he had an Egyptian name and that he is associated with Midian.⁴⁶ Against

-
45. E.g., John J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 108–10.
 46. Ronald Hendel, “The Exodus in Biblical Memory,” *JBL* 120, no. 4 (2001): 601–22. Hendel builds upon the research of Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), who describes his approach as “mnemohistory,” which focuses not on what actually happened but on how ancient peoples remembered their past. On the other hand, Hendel’s analysis is reminiscent of the now discarded tradition history of Martin Noth, except that Noth’s work was based more in the analysis of the biblical text, and Hendel (following Assmann) makes a case that is more rooted in archaeology.

INTRODUCTION

such a radical recasting of the exodus, what may one say in defense of the historicity of the narrative?⁴⁷

Ideally, we ought to consider whether the exodus is a historical fact before we consider when it occurred. It turns out, however, that a number of the arguments for establishing the date of the exodus are also critical for establishing the reality of the exodus. For the sake of presentation, moreover, it is easier to comprehend some of the data first in relation to the date. Therefore, we begin our study with an examination of the date of the exodus.

As is widely known, the exodus is often dated either to about 1447 B.C. (the “Early Date”) or to the mid-thirteenth century, about 1250 B.C. (the “Late Date”).⁴⁸ This is not to say that these are the only two possibilities, and we will also consider two other alternatives (see below, “A Very Early Date or a Very Late Date?”). Nevertheless, we will begin with the standard Early Date and Late Date to give focus to our discussion.

The Late Date

Although the Late Date for the exodus once dominated the field,⁴⁹ it lost a great deal of support with the collapse of the Albright model.⁵⁰

-
- 47. I will not concern myself with alternative theories for accounting for the origin of Israel, such as the partial exodus theory, the native revolt theory, or the gradual migration theory, as that would take me too far afield of my main purposes.
 - 48. One can find a variety of opinions among the commentaries. Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, NAC 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 24, supports an Early Date, while R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity, 1973), 43, prefers a Late Date, as does Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation, Commentary*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), xiv. Others are hesitant to ascribe a date to the exodus or set its events against events known from Egyptian history. See Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, IBC (Louisville: John Knox, 1991), 9–10; Peter Enns, *Exodus: From Biblical Text to Contemporary Life*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 23–5; Durham, *Exodus*, xxiv–xxvi; Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus*, trans. Johan Rebel and Sierd Woudstra, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament (Kampen: Kok, 1993), 175–9.
 - 49. For a succinct presentation of the classic arguments for placing the exodus in the late 13th century, see Nahum M. Sarna, “Exploring Exodus: the Oppression,” *BA* 49, no. 2 (1986): 68–80.
 - 50. This was an attempt, at the middle of the 20th century, to bring about a grand unification of biblical history and archaeological data. It is named for the great polymath William F. Albright. As part of the synthesis, it

INTRODUCTION

Critical scholars began to move away from the historicity of the exodus entirely, and conservative scholars tended toward the Early Date model. Thus, in recent years it has had few vocal advocates. K. A. Kitchen, however, continues to support the Late Date model; he has made a strong case for this position in *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*,⁵¹ and he is by no means the only contemporary evangelical defender of the Late Date.⁵² As such, we must reopen the question of the date of the exodus.

Biblical Data

Exodus 1:11 states that the Israelites worked on the construction of a city called Raamses. We know that this city was built by and named for Ramesses II (reigned 1279–1213). Taken at face value, this indicates that the Israelites were present and working in Egypt during the reign of Ramesses II in the 13th century. Therefore, the Israelites could not have already left Egypt in the 15th century, as the Early Date for the exodus demands. Although the significance of Exod. 1:11 is debatable (see the discussion below of “The Store Cities”), as a piece of evidence it must be reckoned to be supportive of the Late Date.

Two other biblical passages are often cited as evidence for the date of the exodus, however, and these are problems for the Late Date. 1 Kings 6:1 tells us that the construction of Solomon’s temple began in the 480th year after the exodus; dating the former to about 967, the latter figures to have taken place in 1447. In addition, in Judg. 11:26 the Israelite “judge” Jephthah asserts to the Ammonites that in his

postulated an exodus during the reign of Ramesses II. The historical synthesis is capably presented in John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959). This historical reconstruction, which at one time was dominant in American scholarship, had a number of weaknesses. By about 1980 it had largely been abandoned in mainstream scholarship.

51. See Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). Kitchen’s main point is not to defend the Late Date but to defend the historicity of the Old Testament. But for the exodus, he does this entirely within the framework of a late-date model, and his arguments support that reconstruction of events.
52. See Iain W. Provan, V. Philips Long and Tremper Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 131–2; Ralph K. Hawkins, “Propositions for Evangelical Acceptance of a Late-Date Exodus–Conquest: Biblical Data and the Royal Scarabs from Mt. Ebal,” *JETS* 50, no. 1 (2007): 31–46; and James K. Hoffmeier, “What is the Biblical Date for the Exodus?” A Response to Bryant Wood,” *JETS* 50, no. 2 (2007): 225–47.

INTRODUCTION

lifetime Israel had already been settled in the land for 300 years. If Israel did not enter Canaan until the latter part of the 13th century, they obviously could not have already been there for 300 years at the time when Jephthah spoke. Kitchen must deal with these two passages if he is to sustain his claim that the exodus did not take place until around 1250.

Regarding the 480 years of 1 Kings 6:1, an old explanation is that the number 480 refers to twelve generations, and that each generation is by convention set at 40 years (thus, $12 \times 40 = 480$). But in the ancient world the actual time from the birth of one generation to the next was in reality probably about 23 years. Thus, twelve generations is really about 276 years, which works well as the chronological gap between the exodus and the temple for the Late Date. The difficulty here, of course, is that the text never speaks of a “twelve-generation” gap, only a gap of 480 years. We should observe, however, that 1 Chron. 6:3–8 indicates that the high priest Zadok (living in the reign of David) was a tenth-generation descendant of Aaron. Although this is conceivable with a 15th century Aaron, it is more reasonable with the 13th century Aaron of the Late Date.

Kitchen, however, prefers to believe that the author of kings has given us a figure of 480 by selectively using the chronological data of Exodus–Judges. Specifically, he thinks that the figure refers to the aggregate of all years during which Israel was not under oppression plus years for the wilderness wandering and for the reigns of the early kings. He suggests that the source for the figure 480 may have come from the data outlined in Table 3.⁵³

This is, to say the least, a creative way of looking at the data; the assignment of 5 years to the period of Joshua’s leadership is arbitrary, as Kitchen acknowledges. We should not automatically assume, on the other hand, that biblical writers reckoned time as we do (see “A Caveat on Early Biblical Chronology” below). As Kitchen notes, if we add up all of the years mentioned in the Bible from the exodus to Solomon, we actually get 554 years plus an unknown number of years for the governments of Joshua, of Samuel, and of Saul. Advocates of both the Early Date and the Late Date try to find some way to compress this span of time. A period of over 554 years is certainly not compatible with an exodus at 1447, and those who protest that they read the Bible literally at 1 Kings 6:1 find themselves reading the Bible in a nonliteral manner in Judges. Kitchen also tabulates the data for the years of the judges in a manner that plausibly sets it within a framework of about

53. Kitchen, *Reliability*, 308–9.

INTRODUCTION

1200 to 1000 B.C.⁵⁴ His proposal cannot be proven, but it should not be dismissed as mere cleverness. It is reasonable and is respectful to the Bible, reading it as an ancient book which presents data in a way meaningful to ancient—not modern—readers. One must say that, as a piece of evidence, 1 Kings 6:1 favors the Early Date, but also that Kitchen's argument is plausible when seen against the backdrop of ancient historiography and of the fact that the literal reading of the years given in Joshua–Judges–Samuel chronology is incompatible with the *prima facie* interpretation of 1 Kings 6:1. Kitchen's interpretation may be the only one that actually finds a way to reconcile the chronology of Joshua–Judges–Samuel with 1 Kings 6:1.

**TABLE 3. THE 480 YEARS OF 1 KINGS 6:1
ACCORDING TO K. A. KITCHEN**

Years	Source
40	Egypt to Jordan (Num. 11:33)
40	Othniel (Judg. 3:11)
80	Peace after Ehud (Judg. 3:30)
40	Peace after Deborah (Judg. 5:31)
40	Gideon (Judg. 8:28)
48 (3+23+22)	Abimelech, Tola, Jair (Judg. 9:22; 10:2–3)
31 (6+7+10+8)	Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon (Judg. 12:7; 9, 11, 14)
40	Eli (1 Sam. 4:18)
40	Samson and Samuel (Judg. 15:20; 1 Sam. 7:2)
32	Probable years for Saul (see 1 Sam. 13:1)
40	David (1 Kings 2:11)
4	Solomon's years prior to beginning temple
5	Proposed years for Joshua and elders
480	Total years

54. Ibid., 202–9.