Egyptian Chronology and the Bible: The Patriarchal Age

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1. Old Kingdom Dynasties

In a previous essay, we have noted that Courville regarded the third dynasty of Egypt as parallel to the first dynasty, and that the second dynasty was contemporaneous with the fourth and fifth dynasties. In the second part of his discussion of the pre-famine period in Egypt, Courville said he could provide evidence for the correctness of these concepts.¹

This evidence consisted of (1) The kings in the Book of Sothis are listed as following the first dynasty but are really the kings of the fourth and fifth dynasties; (2) The time of the fourth and fifth dynasties must be abbreviated to a great extent; (3) The power of the fourth dynasty was usurped by the 1st king of the fifth dynasty, and this event also usurped the power of the second dynasty; (4) A “unique” incident happened at the ends of both the second and fourth dynasties that provides a synchronism between these two dynasties; (5) Uncertainties in regard to the Palermo Stone show that the early Egyptian dynasties did not rule in sequence.

Before discussing Courville’s understanding of the fourth and fifth dynasties, we should provide a chart of the kings of the latter part of the Old Kingdom so that the discussion will be easier to follow:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4th Dynasty</th>
<th>5th Dynasty</th>
<th>6th Dynasty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soris, 29 – Snefru</td>
<td>Suphis, 63 – Khufu, Cheops</td>
<td>Mencheres, 63 – Menkaure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suphis, 66 – Djedefre</td>
<td>-----Khafre, 25</td>
<td>Ratoises, 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----Hardjedef, Kheper, 19</td>
<td>-----Baufre (or Rabaef), 5</td>
<td>Bicheris, 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sebercheres, 7 – Shepseskaf</td>
<td>Thampthis, 9 – Djedefptah</td>
<td>Usercheres, 28 – Userkaf</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Courville, Exodus Problem, 1:186.
As his first line of evidence Courville proffered the inscription of Ra-skhem-kha (or Sekhemkere) which lists the number of kings that Sekhemkere served under—three from the end of the fourth dynasty and two from the beginning of the fifth dynasty. It was pointed out that if Manetho’s reign lengths are taken literally for this period, the elapsed years for Sekhemkere would have been about 180 years. Courville then referenced Mertitefs (or Mertityotes), the queen of Sneferu, who says she lived during the days of Snefru, Khufu, and Khafre. Manetho’s figures would give 92 years for the time between Snefru and Khafre, and Mertitefs would have been 110 years old at the beginning of Khafre’s reign, and thus could not have been described as a “favorite of the young king Khafra.” Courville’s solution was that the reigns of Khufu and Khafra must have overlapped significantly.

Courville also referenced the Westcar Papyrus and its “Tales of the Magician.” This was written during the fifth dynasty in an attempt to prove the legitimacy of the kings of the fifth dynasty as true successors of Khufu. The story claims that Kakai, the 3rd king of the fifth dynasty, was born during the days of Khufu, the 2nd king of the fourth dynasty. Even leaving Khufu and the fifth dynasty kings aside, calculation of reign lengths results in an elapsed time of at least 200 years, giving too great an age for Kakai. Courville believed that this tale, combined with the Ra-skhem-kha material, shows that it should be taken seriously as a factual account, and that a great abbreviation of the time between the fourth and fifth dynasties is required.

Courville argued further that Khufu is to be identified with Osirios of the Sothis list, and the remaining kings of the fourth dynasty are to be correlated to the Sothis kings who

\[\text{Ra-skhem-kha (or Sekhemkere)}\]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reign</th>
<th>King Name</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Sneferu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Khufu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Khafre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Menkawhor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Djedkare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Shukare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Onnos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Unas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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2 Courville, 1:188.
follow Osiraphis. The question of whether Shepseskaf is to be identified with Bicheris or Sebercheres is resolved in favor of the latter, and it is said that Bicheris has a different identity. Courville summed up his chronology to this point:

“[T]he total period of Dynasty IV was encompassed by the sole reigns of Khufu and Khafra, and the total reign of Menkaure; the remaining kings had reigns that fell entirely within the reign of Menkaure. The total for the dynastic period was thus 135 years, excluding Sors or Shaaru who may have been a progenitor of the dynasty but who belongs to the era of the decadent phase [sic] of Dynasty III.”

This summation was regarded by Courville as insufficient given the time constraints of the Sekhemkere inscriptions and the Westcar Papyrus. Userkaf (brother of Kakai) would have been an improbable 113 years at his death even under a shortened chronology. Courville, therefore, believed that a better solution was required if the Westcar Papyrus was to be regarded as containing factual material.

This solution consisted in regarding the “usurpation” of the fourth dynasty by fifth dynasty king Userkaf as occurring earlier in the reign of Menkaure, and at the accession of Rhatoises. The “usurper” triplets of the Westcar Papyrus began contemporaneous reigns, each ruling a different section of Egypt. Userkaf set up an independent fifth dynasty at Elephantine and “permitted Menkaure to continue to rule as a figurehead” for his remaining years.

Sahure is to be identified with fourth dynasty king Bicheris, and ruled for a time at Memphis before moving to Elephantine to rule as coregent with Userkaf. After Sahure left Memphis, Shepseskaf (or Sebercheres) took his place and restored the line of Menkaure on an ephemeral level. With respect to the third triplet, Kakai (Nephercheres), Courville said that he “usurped the power of Dynasty II at about this same time” and is to be identified with Nephercheres of the second dynasty. Courville says,

“According to the developing chronology, the position of this king [Nephercheres] in the list falls in line with the incident of the usurpation of Dynasty IV by Userkaf.”

This putative usurpation during Menkaure’s 30th year was the event that “prompted him to abandon his uncompleted burial pyramid and to construct a second pyramid.”

Of course, Courville made these adjustments because he accepted the Westcar Papyrus story as factual, and wanted to abbreviate the elapsed time as much as could be done. “This placement [of the usurpation],” says Courville, “reduces by another 33-34 years the length of the period from Khufu to the beginning of the reign of Userkaf, thus providing a chronology well within the area of possibility in terms of the specifications of the Westcar Papyrus inscription.”

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3 Courville, 1:189, 190.  
4 Courville, 1:191.  
5 Courville, 1:192.  
6 Courville, 1:194.
Courville went on to argue that Rhatoises was to be identified with Userkaf: “While there is not the faintest resemblance between the names, this is no evidence per se against the proposed identification, since Egyptian kings commonly had a variety of names.”7 His basis for making the correlation is from the Theban king list, and he attempted a further identification of the 12th king in the list, Chnubos or Gneuros, with second dynasty king Cheneses. Additionally, the 13th king of the Theban list is named Rayosis, who is identified with Userkaf, while the 14th king, Biyes, is identified with Sahure. Courville says,

“But these names are quite obviously but different renderings of the names Rhatoises and Bikheris, the two names following Menkaure in Manetho’s Dynasty IV and occupying the positions demanded by the developing chronology for the usurper kings, Userkaf and Sahure.”8

If this is regarded as insufficient proof for the revised chronology, Courville refered to the Sothis list where the two names, Chamois and Miamus, are to be equated with the names Userkaf and Sahure. He says, “But Manetho’s name for Sahura in Dynasty V is rendered Sefres [Sephes], while the Sothis name coinciding in position with Bikheris, the alternate name of Sahura, is given as Akeseptheres, the resemblance being too close to explain by mere coincidence.”9

In the next section of his discussion, Courville provided a detailed timeline of Userkaf’s rule, which we do not need to pursue. His next point was in reference to the Ptahshepses inscription, another source that provides the names of the kings of the fourth and fifth dynasties, though Courville does not devote much time to discussing it. Following this Courville called on the Sothis list to fill in the fifth dynasty, correlating the remaining Sothis kings after Chamois and Miamus with the subsequent fifth dynasty kings given by Manetho.10

Amesesis of the Sothis list is equated with Manetho’s Rathures, while Mencheres of the fourth dynasty is equated with Mencheres of the fifth dynasty. In this case, Menkaure (Mencheres) is regarded as having outlived the “usurper” triplets, Userkaf, Sahure, and Kakai.11 Manetho’s Siseres is equated with Sebercheres (Shepseskaf), and Tancheres is regarded as having ruled within the reigns of Amesesis and Unas. Courville paused again to sum up his discussion:

“The total dynastic period to the end of Dynasty V may then be calculated as having been 479± X years where X represents any minor discrepancy from the difference in time between the end of Dynasty I and the beginning of Dynasty IV.”12

The chronology of the second dynasty is then discussed. Courville said that the Sothis list could not help in correlating second dynasty kings since they are considered as

7 Courville, 1:195.
8 Courville, 1:195.
9 Courville, 1:196; note: Courville is comparing Sephes with Akeseptheres.
10 Courville, 1:196, 197.
11 Courville, 1:198.
12 Courville, 1:199.
vassals to the fourth and fifth dynasty kings. On his premises, the Sothis list only records the main line of kings, not vassals of contemporary dynasties. Courville appealed instead to the Theban king list, and thought the kings from Stoichos to Chnubos should be equated with the kings of Manetho’s second dynasty.  

“Tentatively,” says Courville, “we identify Gesormies with Binothris of Manetho, Mares with Tlas and Anoyphis with Sethenes. Sirius is then the same king as Sesochris and, as noted previously, Chnubos is the same as Cheneres. As also noted previously, the next two names are Rayosis and Biyres whom we have identified as the coregents of Usercheres in Dynasty IV following the usurpation, Rathothis and Bikheris by name.”

The reign lengths of these various kings was then discussed, which we can also pass over, and the equation was made between the time of Beby of the ending part of the second dynasty with the time of Unas, the last king of the fifth dynasty. This was based upon famine inscriptions in their respective reigns:

“That the reign of Unas was marred by a severe famine is portrayed by the now famous famine inscription of this king. The inscription is a pictorial one and contains little by way of explanatory information. However, the protruding ribs of the victims cannot be, and has not been, misinterpreted. Egypt experienced a severe famine in the reign of Unas. But there was also a severe famine in the era of Zazay, or Beby....”

Emile Brugsch found a famine inscription of one “Baba” whom he dated to the seventeenth dynasty of Egypt. More specifically, his brother Heinrich Brugsch dated “Baba” to the time of Seqenenre Ta’o 3, predecessor of Kamose, last ruler of the seventeenth dynasty. Courville noted that one Vandier disagreed with Brugsch and dated the inscription of “Bebi” to the thirteenth dynasty. Arthur Weigall was less certain and dated the tomb of “Beba” to the period between the thirteenth and seventeenth dynasties.

Nevertheless, Courville agreed with Vandier that the famine inscription of Bebi is to be dated to the early thirteenth dynasty but also equated it with the famine of Ameny, who lived during the time of twelfth dynasty king Sesostris 1. From this it follows that the twelfth and thirteenth dynasties overlapped. In addition to the correlation with the twelfth dynasty, Courville equated this proposed Bebi-Ameny famine to the time of fifth dynasty king Unas, noted above, who recorded a famine during his reign (depicted on the causeway of his tomb). In addition to this, the proposed Bebi-Ameny-Unas famine was equated to the time of “Bebi” of the second dynasty. It follows from this proposed Bebi-Ameny-Unas-Bebi famine that the second dynasty did not end until the time of Sesostris 1 of the twelfth dynasty. It further follows that the twelfth dynasty was to some extent contemporary with the end of the fifth dynasty and beginning of the sixth dynasty. Courville summarized:

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13 Courville, 1:200.
14 Courville, 1:203.
15 Heinrich Brugsch, Egypt Under the Pharaohs, 1902, Bracken edition, pp. 121, 122.
17 Courville, 1:136, 204, 205.
“In a preceding chapter [EP, 1:136], the famine inscription of Bebi was shown to meet the specifications for the famine of Joseph and hence should be identified with the famine in the reign of Sesostris I of Dynasty XII. If this inscription of Bebi belongs to the decadent phase [sic] of Dynasty II and is still to be identified with that in the reign of Sesostris I, then we are forced to the conclusion that dynasties II and V extended past the beginning of Dynasty XII and into the era of Sesostris I.”

Thus, the second, fifth, twelfth, and thirteenth dynasties are regarded as roughly contemporaneous dynasties. Courville was confident that his interpretations were completely consistent and resulted in an exactness that ruled out coincidence:

“This attempt to alter the early chronology of Egypt thus stands or falls with the feasibility of tying the structure thus far developed to that of the XIIth Dynasty in a manner that is totally consistent. The resulting structure will be so far removed from anything previously suggested that the chances are exceedingly remote that these two structures shall fit together in a manner to yield a consistent panorama of the history of Egypt, except as the developed structure is correct, at least in its larger aspects. The next chapter [EP, 1:211] is devoted to a demonstration that this can be done with an exactness that does not allow for any significant deviation. Yet the demands are so specific that it cannot be rationally concluded that the agreement is one of mere coincidence.”

2. Criticisms of Courville’s Model

In our opinion, Courville’s reconstruction of the chronology of the fourth through the sixth dynasties is unnecessarily complicated. This is due primarily to his desire to treat the story of the magician in the Westcar Papyrus as a significant chronological datum. This tale is a piece of propaganda from the fifth dynasty attempting to justify its usurpation by connecting itself to the revered fourth dynasty king Khufu. For that reason alone its value as a chronological datum is questionable.

There is an even greater reason to reject it. What is remarkable about Courville’s Westcar chronology (and all its complications) is his apparent lack of knowledge of the fact that as early as 1906, J. H. Breasted had already provided a satisfactory chronology of the fourth through the sixth dynasties. In fact, Breasted based his chronology on the inscriptions of the individuals already cited by Courville, who left us records from the Old Kingdom recording the names of the kings they served under during the fourth, fifth, and sixth dynasties. In the following chart, the names of three individuals, Mertyotes, Sekhemkere, and Ptahshepses, are given with the names of the kings they served under:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>King</th>
<th>Dynasty</th>
<th>Servant</th>
<th>Prince</th>
<th>Son-in-Law</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Snefru</td>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>Mertyotes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Khufu</td>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>Mertyotes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Djedefre</td>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>Mertyotes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Khafre</td>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>Mertyotes</td>
<td>Sekhemkere</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Menkaure</td>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>Mertyotes</td>
<td>Sekhemkere</td>
<td>Ptahshepses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Shepseska</td>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>Sekhemkere</td>
<td>Ptahshepses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Short reigns</td>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>Sekhemkere</td>
<td>Ptahshepses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Userkaf</td>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>Sekhemkere</td>
<td>Ptahshepses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18 Courville, 1:205.
19 Courville, 1:205.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Sixth</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Unas</td>
<td>30 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Teti</td>
<td>32 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Userra</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is granted that these individuals may have lived short lives, but if we allow that they lived normal lives, say 70 or 80 years apiece, it does require a certain amount of temporal spread for the two dynasties in question. Taking these overlapping lifetimes, Breasted estimated the period from Snefru to Nuserre as 200 years, and calculated the elapsed years for the fourth and fifth dynasties to be not more than 300 years. The remaining kings of the fifth dynasty are: Menkauhor (8 years), Djedkare (32 years), and Unas (30 years).

According to Breasted, the average reign length of the fourth and fifth dynasties was 16.6 years; the average reign length of the first and second dynasties was 23 years; and the average reign length from the first to the eighth dynasties was about 19 years. This is very close to the 20 year average reign length suggested by Newton and which we have used for estimating dynastic periods among the Greeks. Since there are 15 kings in the fourth and fifth dynasties (using the overlaps above), an average reign length of twenty years multiplied by the number of kings gives us approximately 300 years for the total length of both dynasties. This is the same estimate as calculated by Breasted on the basis of overlapping inscriptive material.

“Three lifetimes somewhat overlapping, a matter of 200 years at most, run parallel, as stated above, with the end of the Third Dynasty, the whole Fourth, and the first half of the Fifth. The Fourth and Fifth Dynasties thus lasted not more than 300 years.”

This is quite a bit less than Manetho’s 500 years for the fourth and fifth dynasties. Given the inscriptions as interpreted by Breasted, or the use of average reign length calculations, there is really no need to adopt either Manetho’s longish chronology, nor the complicated short chronology of Courville to arrive at a satisfactory chronology of the fourth and fifth dynasties (and much of the sixth dynasty as well).²²

In addition to the three individuals with overlapping lives, we also have two other inscriptions, one for the fifth to sixth dynasty transition and the other for the beginning of the sixth dynasty. The first inscription is from Sabu, who lived under Unas, last king of the fifth dynasty, and also under Teti, first king of the sixth dynasty. The second

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²¹ Breasted, 1:38.
²² Note: Using average reign length calculations works for the fourth, fifth, and sixth dynasties because we have inscriptive evidence indicating these dynasties were consecutive. It should be borne in mind, however, that average reign length calculations can be skewed if a king ruled for an excessive period of time. Also, the average reign length method would not work with parallel dynasties, for we would first have to establish the extent of any parallelism. It so happens that from the end of the second dynasty (Khasekhemwy & Djoser) to the end of the sixth dynasty, we have inscriptive evidence indicating these dynasties were consecutive. This is a rather remarkable feat of historical preservation in that we seem to know more about the chronology of the Old Kingdom than we do about the rest of Egypt’s history, which was closer to us in time.
inscription is from Uni, who indicates that he lived under the first three kings of the sixth dynasty. The correlations are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>King</th>
<th>Dynasty</th>
<th>Servant</th>
<th>Servant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Unas</td>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>Sabu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Teti</td>
<td>Sixth</td>
<td>Sabu</td>
<td>Uni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Pepi 1</td>
<td>Sixth</td>
<td></td>
<td>Uni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Merenre</td>
<td>Sixth</td>
<td></td>
<td>Uni</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of Sabu’s inscriptions reads: “Attached to (King) Unis, high priest of Ptah, more honored by the king than any servant. He descended into every barge; a member of the court, [when he entered] the ways of [the southern palace] at feasts, Sabu (S’bw), whose beautiful name was Ibebi (Ybby).”\(^{23}\) Another reads in part, “Today in the presence of the Son of Re: Teti, living forever...Sabu.” These inscriptions make it clear that the transition between the fifth and sixth dynasties was consecutive.

With regard to the order of reigns of the sixth dynasty kings, the following is from one of Uni’s inscriptions: “[Count, governor of the South], chamber-attendant, attached to Nekhen, lord of Nekheb, sole companion, revered before Osiris, First of the Westerners, Uni (Wny)...[I was a child] who fastened on the girdle under the majesty of Teti (Tty); my office was that of supervisor of [...] and I filled the office of inferior custodian of the domain of Pharaoh.”\(^{24}\)

Uni subsequently served as a judge under Pepi 1, as well as an army leader: “[I was] eldest of the [privy?] chamber under the majesty of Pepi (Ppy).”\(^{25}\) Additionally, “While I was judge, attached to Nekhen, his majesty appointment me as sole companion....” Also, “His majesty sent me at the head of this army....”\(^{26}\)

Under Merenre, Uni became governor of the south, and presumably died in Merenre’s reign: “When I was master of the footstool of the palace and sandal-bearer, the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, Mernere (Mr-n-R’).”\(^{27}\)

These inscriptions demonstrate the order of the first kings of the sixth dynasty, Teti, Pepi 1, and Merenre. Teti reigned for 12 years, Pepi 1 for 49 years, and Merenre for 5 years, which is 66 years. These three kings multiplied by an average reign length of 20 years would have ruled an elapsed time of about 60 years. The rest of the sixth dynasty was nearly filled by one long-lasting king named Pepi 2, who reigned 94 years. He was followed by Merenre (1 year) and Nitocris (2 or more years). The 7 rulers of the sixth dynasty multiplied by average reign length of 20 years gives us 140 years for the elapsed time, but modern scholars give it 165 years. The difference is probably due to the excessive reign length of Pepi 2 which almost amounts to an “outlier” for purposes of calculating averages (i.e., something that skews the results of averaging).

\(^{23}\) Breasted, 1:131.
\(^{24}\) Breasted, 1:135.
\(^{25}\) Breasted, 1:141.
\(^{26}\) Breasted, 1:143.
\(^{27}\) Breasted, 1:147.
Moving on we notice that some of Courville’s other arguments for a shortening of the fourth and fifth dynasties do not seem to carry much weight. For instance, the idea that the very old woman Mertitef would not have been described as a “favorite” of Khafre is not conclusive. It is likely that the description “favorite” was simply a title for the old woman, not a romantic designation. Moreover, the appeal to the Sothis list, where Khufu becomes Osirophis, etc., is without value for chronological reconstruction, since the Sothis list is dismissed by modern scholars as a piece of ancient fakery (as was discussed previously.) Courville’s reliance on this list is therefore misplaced.

Furthermore, we must criticize Courville’s long and involved reconstruction of the supposed events of the fifth and sixth dynasties as being mainly based on the “name game.” This is an attempt to prove a synchronism between two kings or events based on similar sounding names. Most of the names do not really match, and even the ones that might look similar are based on Courville’s comparisons of the English names, not on what they might look like in the Egyptian language. Finally, the famine inscriptions of the second, fifth, twelfth, and thirteenth dynasties cannot in themselves say whether they were referring to the same event. Certainly, it is simply fallacious to correlate all these famines and then claim that they constitute a proof of a proposed chronology. Since they are correlated in the first place by the chronology in question, any further use of them as evidence would constitute a circular argument.

We adopt the chronology of the fourth through the fifth dynasties as set forth by Breasted, though we might argue that life expectancy in Egypt was probably closer to 50 or 60 years rather than 70 or 80 years. Nevertheless, we do not see a need for shortening the chronology on the basis of the Westcar story, nor do we see any evidence that the twelfth dynasty is connected to all the famines brought together by Courville into one time.

Courville regarded his chronology as standing or falling with the placement of the twelfth dynasty in relation to earlier dynasties. We in fact think this was unnecessary brinkmanship on Courville’s part, as a more satisfactory chronology can be developed without the need of the Westcar story or the Sothis list. We will need to return to the twelfth dynasty in a future essay, as Courville sets so much store by it, and thought he could demonstrate his chronology “with an exactness” that cannot be ascribed to coincidence.

There is one thing we do agree with Courville about, and that is the total elapsed time of the first 6 dynasties of Egypt. This is “a period not in excess of 750 years and more probably within a period of seven centuries.”\textsuperscript{28} Using average reign length, with each dynasty regarded as consecutive, we calculate the time as amounting to 780 years. However, if we regard Pepi 2 as a statistical outlier and if the second dynasty overlapped the first dynasty, this would be even less time. We are thus very close to Courville’s figures, and we did not need to use complicated means to shorten the chronology. Manetho’s figures for the elapsed time from the first to the end of the sixth dynasty add

\textsuperscript{28} Courville, 1:163.
up to nearly 1500 years, which is about twice as much as a more reasonable approach would arrive at.  

3. Abraham’s Journey of Faith

New Courville accepts Classic Courville’s idea that Abraham migrated from Mesopotamia to Canaan during Egypt’s fourth dynasty. We think the best choice for the pharaoh of Abraham’s time is Khephren—he of the Sphinx fame—though this choice is only a tentative correlation. Abraham would have been living in Ur during what has become known as the First Dynasty of Ur, whose kings were Mesannepadda, 80 yrs.; Eannepada, unknown yrs.; Meskiagnanna, 36 yrs.; Elulu, 25 yrs.; and Balulu, 36 yrs. Nevertheless, it is not easy to tell (or even guess) which of these kings Abraham may have lived under.

According to the Bible, Abraham's travels were as follows: from Ur to Haran, then to Shechem, on to Moreh-tree; set up camp between Bethel & Ai; sojourned in Egypt (because of famine); from there to the Negev; resettled at Bethel & Ai (Bethel formerly Luz); then moved to Alon Mamre in Hebron. In addition, the Bible also gives us some information about a Mesopotamian war, in which the following peoples were attacked:

1. Rephaim in Ashteroth Karnaim  
2. Zuzim in Ham  
3. Emim in Shaveh Kiriathaim  
4. Horites in Seir mountains to El Paran  
5. Amalekites in En Mishpat (Kadesh)  
6. Amorites in Hazezon Tamar  

Abraham was an ally of the Amorites who are named as Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner. The Mesopotamian coalition was made up of the following kings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Shinar</th>
<th>Ellasar</th>
<th>Elam</th>
<th>Goyim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>King</td>
<td>Amraphel</td>
<td>Arioch</td>
<td>Chedorlaomer</td>
<td>Tidal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These fought against Canaanite kings:

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29 Modern Egyptologists are all over the map regarding the elapsed time from the first dynasty to the end of the sixth, but their numbers are quite a bit less than Manetho’s. J. Beckerath has the elapsed time as about 816 years, in R. Schulz & M. Seidel, ed., Egypt: the World of the Pharaohs, Konemann, p. 528; while Peter Clayton has about 966 years or so, Chronicles of the Pharaoh, pp. 16, 64; and Aidan Dodson has it at about 1033 years, The Complete Royal Families of Ancient Egypt, pp. 44, 70. Currently (as of April, 2013) Wikipedia has it at 902 years.

30 Genesis 28:19.


32 Genesis 14.
In the above, we can see that Shinar (now the Sumerians) are allied with Elam, though the names cannot be matched with any known kings. However, the following are some hypothetical name variants: a) **Amraphel**: This name could be an early version of the name Hammurabi (Amarabi-el). Or perhaps it is a name similar to that of Amar-Sin of the third dynasty of Ur, hence Amar-piel, Amar-p-ilu, or similar. Our preference is that it is an early form of Hammurabi; b) **Arioch**: Uriaku,Erra-aku, or similar; c) **Chedorlaomer**: Kudur-laomer, or similar; d) **Tidal**: Tuttal, or similar.

Abraham, in alliance with the Amorites, defeated the Elamite king Chedorlaomer, then after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, dwelt between Kadesh and Shur and sojourned in Gerar. The latter city was ruled by Abimelech, a Philistine. On our theory, this places the origins of the Philistines in the Early Bronze Age (fourth dynasty of Egypt), not during the beginning of the Iron Age as per conventional views.

From Gerar, Abraham went to a place where he swore an oath with Abimelech, and it became known as Beersheba. It is unlikely that the current archaeological site identified with the biblical city is the Beersheba of the patriarchal era, since this modern tell only starts with Iron Age material, and even on a conventional basis, Abraham is placed in the Middle Bronze Age, much too early for the Iron Age city. It is more likely, as some have suggested, that the remains of biblical Beersheba lie under the modern city of Beersheba.

After a time, Abraham went to Hebron to bury Sarah, and purchased a cave in the field of Machpelah before Mamre. The philosopher John Locke makes an interesting point about Abraham’s travels:

“For we see, that in that part of the world which was first inhabited, and therefore like to be best peopled, even as low down as Abraham’s time, they wandered with their flocks, and their herds, which was their substance, freely up and down; and this Abraham did, in a country where he was a stranger. Whence it is plain, that at least, a great part of the land lay in common....”

Nevertheless, since Abraham had to purchase a cave from the Hittites, it is also clear that private property had already been in existence by Abraham’s time. Title to property probably was required in urban environments due to population pressure, but outside of the jurisdiction of the city and its immediate surroundings, population pressures diminished, and lands became common.

The original town in this area did not go by the name “Hebron” or even “Kirjath Arba” since those were later names for the city. More than likely the town was simply called

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33 Gen. 20: 1ff.; 21:32.
34 Gen. 21:31.
35 Gen. 23.
Mamre, or else the biblical writer did not know the name and merely ascribed the town to the sons of Heth (i.e., the Hittites).

If Abraham lived during the Mesopotamian Early Dynastic 3 phase (which was part of the first dynasty of Ur), then we can look to this period in Ur to get a sense of what life was like for Abraham. This period is famous for the Royal Standard of Ur, the death pit of Ur, the Stela of the Vultures, and during a time when Mesopotamia was once again dominated by one king, the Sumerian ruler Eannatum. The famous example of artwork in this era is the ram caught in a thicket. It is a fertility idol, so cannot really be related to Abraham.

The city of Ai was in existence at this time, with Early Bronze Age 3 occupation, and Bethel shows signs of at least some EB3 occupation. The following are a list of cities from the EB2 and EB3 periods as given by Mazar:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cities</th>
<th>Strata</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ai</td>
<td>5 to 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Hazor</td>
<td>21, begins at EB3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Beth-Yerah</td>
<td>12 to 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Beth-Shean</td>
<td>13 to 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Megiddo</td>
<td>18 to 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Far'ah (North)</td>
<td>ends at F; no EB3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Jericho</td>
<td>G to F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Gezer</td>
<td>23 to end of EB2; no EB3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Yarmuth</td>
<td>Area B, strata 4 to 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Yarmuth</td>
<td>Area A, strata 3 to 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Tell el-Hesi</td>
<td>10-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Tel Erani</td>
<td>13, no EB2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Arad</td>
<td>1 to EB2; no EB3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cities that were destroyed or abandoned at the end of EB2 were:

a) Tell el-Far'ah (N)
b) Gezer
c) Arad

Despite destruction levels between EB2 and EB3 there was culture continuity between these archaeological levels. The Early Bronze 3 period begins somewhere around 2500 BC (on conventional dating), and the conventional dates for the Early Dynastic period of Mesopotamia are:

ED1 = 2900-2750 BC  
ED2 = 2750-2650 BC  
ED3a = 2650-2500 BC  
ED3b = 2500-2370 BC

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38 Mazar, p. 109.
Thus EB3 matches Mesopotamian Early Dynastic 3 (first dynasty of Ur), which is where we would tentatively place Abraham. In our opinion, the current placement of Abraham in the Middle Bronze age will not work because the city of Ai was not in existence during this period. Thus, Abraham would have to be at least a pre-Middle Bronze Age individual. We have presented evidence that the MB1 strata constitute the best fit with the biblical account of the Exodus & Conquest (citing especially the MB1 material in the Negev & Kadesh-barnea).

The patriarch Abraham has been the subject of wide discussion, especially since the time of Kierkegaard, who wrote extensively on the akedah or binding of Isaac for sacrifice. Many in Kierkegaard’s day thought the episode to be obscene, sanctioning child sacrifice, and earlier Kant had said that the sacrifice of Isaac should have told Abraham that the command had not come from God. Kierkegaard’s response to all this was to claim that the story of Abraham was about “paradox” and the “teleological suspension of the ethical.” Abraham, in this view, was about moving beyond thinking; it was about grasping the “strength of the paradox,” of standing in an “absolute relation to the absolute.”

In our opinion, these philosophical interpretations of Abraham do not represent good exegesis of the biblical text. In Abraham’s case, he had no need for faith in order to believe in the existence of God, or to believe that God had communicated with him. Abraham knew this, for God had not only communicated with him about the covenant but also appeared to him to reconfirm his promise. In addition, God showed his great wrath and power in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and also gave a son to Abraham while he and his wife were too old for normal childbirth. Abraham, therefore, had no good reason to doubt that the command came from God. The test was not whether Abraham merely believed in God, but rather whether he believed in the goodness of God. Abraham had to believe in the covenantal promise of God regarding Isaac despite the dark path before him.

In his intercession for the city of Sodom, Abraham asked the important question: “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” St. Paul says of Abraham: “He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God....” Thus, Abraham retained his hope in the future of his posterity, a hope based upon the faithfulness of God. By this test, God demonstrated to Abraham that he was not a cruel tyrant, like the pagan gods—who required endless magic, ritual, and sacrifice—but was faithful to his promises. He only required of Abraham that he walk in the steps of faith.

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40 Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*.
41 Gen. 12; 15; 17.
42 Gen. 18; 19; 21.
43 Gen. 18:25.
44 Rom. 4:20.
45 Rom. 4:12.
4. The Sojourn of a Family: Isaac to Joseph

The patriarchal narratives are not national histories, but are the narratives of one family’s journey through time and space, hoping for a promised land, a homeland where they would no longer be strangers. As such, the narratives contain very little information that could be of significance for a chronologist, but are certainly of great significance to the family whose history was being recorded. We hear, for instance, of a bride for Isaac46, something a family would be interested in. After this is the report of the burial of Abraham, the genealogies of Ishmael and Isaac, the LORD’s promise to Rebekah that the older twin (the firstborn) would serve the younger twin, and from there, the mistake made by Esau in selling his birthright to Jacob, thus fulfilling the promise.47

We hear that Esau married two Hittites, Judith the daughter of Beeri, and Basemath the daughter of Elon, and that Jacob, helped by his mother, obtained the blessing from Isaac.48 Esau’s lament that Jacob had stolen away his birthright and his blessing is important to the family; so also is Jacob’s departure from Isaac to take a wife from the daughters of Laban, in Padan Aram.49 Along the way, we are told of Jacob’s dream, his meeting with Rachel, his marriage to Leah and Rachel and all the troubles of serving under Laban.50 Nevertheless, Jacob prospered and eventually escaped from Laban, and was also reconciled with his brother Esau.51 Jacob journeyed to the city of Shechem, where his daughter Dinah was raped by Shechem ben Hamor, who was later killed by the sons of Jacob in revenge.

In keeping with the familial nature of the patriarchal narratives, the Bible lists the names of Jacob’s twelve sons and the genealogy of Esau, as well as the chiefs of Edom, the sons of Seir the Horite, the kings of Edom, and the chiefs of Esau.52 Unfortunately, our knowledge of secular history for this period is so fragmentary that we have very little to go on with respect to the Horites (or Hurrians) of this period in history. Nor does the Bible enlighten us any further since as we’ve said these narratives were a history of only one family, not of the nations of the world.

After this comes the familiar story of Joseph, who was hated by his brothers because of his father’s favoritism toward him, and for his prophetic dreams, in which Joseph implies that he will rule over his brothers.53 After being sold by his brothers, Joseph eventually found himself in Egypt, and was placed in prison on the basis of a false accusation. He became the de facto administrator of the prison, and through the correct interpretation of dreams, first of the Pharaoh’s servants, and then of the Pharaoh himself, was exalted to be the ruler of the Egyptian nation, second only to Pharaoh. When the famine came upon the land of Egypt, and upon all lands for seven years, the family of Jacob along with

46 Gen. 24ff.
48 Gen. 26:34; Gen. 27ff.
49 Gen. 27:30ff; Gen: 28ff.
50 Gen. 29:15ff.
51 Gen. 32ff.
52 Gen. 35:23; 36:1, 15, 20, 31, 40.
53 Gen. 37:3ff.
many other people traveled to Egypt to buy grain. Joseph recognized his brothers but they did not recognize him, so he treated them roughly at first and tested them.

The rest of the story is heartbreaking and wonderful, for the brothers eventually returned to Egypt with Benjamin, and Joseph once again tested their loyalties by threatening to keep Benjamin, but Judah offered his own life as surety in place of Benjamin. Finally, Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers, and they return to Canaan and tell their father about Joseph’s rule in Egypt. Jacob’s journey to Egypt is described and then just as one would expect from a family history, a genealogy is placed in the middle of the narrative of descent into Egypt. Once this is done, the narrative resumes with the dramatic reunion between Jacob and Joseph, then Joseph’s continuing administration during the famine.

This process saw the Egyptians giving up most of their money, their personal property, their real property, and their service, to the king of Egypt. This would eventually allow the Pharaoh to institute a tax of one-fifth of the produce from all Egypt. But the Egyptians had few choices, either that or starvation, a good example of the importance of subjective-marginal utility in establishing market prices. The remaining chapters show us Jacob blessing the sons of Joseph, and then giving blessings to his sons. The death of Jacob is described, then the death of Joseph, with his final request that his bones be taken back to the land of promise. Again, all of great interest to the patriarchal family.

Some references to the outside world—outside of the family, that is—can be found scattered throughout the narratives. These references are clues that may help with chronological matters, but too often we know little about these foreign references. For instance, we are told of Ephron and Sohar, described as Hittites, but nothing much about the Hittite people in general during this period. We have already mentioned Seir the Horite, and a similar lack of interest in the history of the Hurrians. The narratives make reference to various locations, but it is sometimes not clear whether these are contemporary references or later references. Of the Ishmaelites we are told that “they dwelt from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt as you go toward Assyria.”

We hear of Isaac’s father-in-law, Bethuel the Syrian of Padan Aram, and his brother-in-law, Laban the Syrian. Yet we know very little about these individuals or their culture and history, outside of what the Bible mentions.

The Philistines come into focus briefly when a famine settles upon the land during Isaac’s day. The king of the Philistines was Abimelech in the city of Gerar. This king was very concerned about preventing sexual immorality, primarily the kidnapping of foreign women. This sets the Philistines apart from the later Trojans and Greeks, who apparently had no qualms about stealing wives (e.g., Paris’s kidnapping of Helen). Nevertheless, the Philistines were not quite as circumspect when it came to property, for they envied Isaac’s wealth and stopped up the family wells. Despite Isaac’s move to

54 Gen. 25:18.
56 Gen. 26ff.
57 Gen. 26:9.
58 Gen. 26:14ff.
the Valley of Gerar, the Philistines quarreled with Isaac’s herdsmen over water rights and wells, and this stopped only when Isaac moved far enough away from the Philistines. However, the Philistine king recognized the signs of God’s blessings upon Isaac and made a covenant with him to do no harm.\textsuperscript{59} Unfortunately, however, the Philistines are almost as much a mystery as the Hittites and Horites, and the scholarly confusion of equating the origin of the Philistines with the invasion of the Sea Peoples clouds the issue even further.

The narratives of Joseph in Egypt tell us some things about the customs of the Egyptians, but do not mention the name of the Pharaoh of the famine period. Still, the famine of Joseph’s day is an important datum for determining the correct chronology of this period. Our own view is that \textit{Unas}, the last king of the Fifth Dynasty, was the king who exalted Joseph to the status of ruler over Egypt, where he became the savior of the Egyptians, as well as of his own family.

5. \textit{Famines in Egypt}

One of the most exciting aspects of Courville’s reconstruction of the chronology of the ancient world was his identification of Joseph and the famine of Egypt as told in the book of Genesis. Courville argued that there was a parallel of dynasty 6 with dynasties 12 and 13. The consequence of this is that Courville was able, on his theory, to identify some of the major players in the history of Israel. Among these were Joseph, Moses, the Pharaoh of the Oppression, and the Pharaoh of the Exodus. In this section we will concentrate on Joseph and his placement within Courville’s system of chronology in relation to the history of Egypt.

Courville started out by discussing the rarity of extended famines in Egypt\textsuperscript{60}. By “extended” he meant famines that occur over a period of years rather than for a few months or perhaps a year or so. The famine of Joseph’s time would be an example of an extended famine, and the following are examples drawn from archaeology:

a) The Djoser famine: This was a famine that is said to have occurred during the time of third dynasty king Djoser and his vizier Imhotep. Unfortunately, this famine record is from a late source, written around 205 B.C. under Ptolemy 5. It is always possible that the priests who inscribed the famine stela may have known about the story of Joseph from the Hebrews, but of this no one can really be sure. There is actually nothing inherently unlikely about a famine in Egypt due to low Nile inundations, though they might be few and far between. Despite uncertainties, this famine record may be describing a historical reality during the days of Djoser of the third dynasty.

Aside from the reference to seven years, however, there are not many similarities of Djoser’s famine with the story of Joseph. For instance, Imhotep did not predict the famine, and it was only after the seven years had run their course that Imhotep travelled

\textsuperscript{59} Gen. 26:29.
\textsuperscript{60} Courville, 1:133.
to the putative source of the Nile and prayed to the Egyptian gods for alleviation of the misery.

b) The Unas famine took place at the end of the fifth dynasty. We will discuss this famine in the next section.

c) The Ankhtifi famine occurred during the First Intermediate Period after the collapse of central rule of the Old Kingdom. It was a time in which the ninth and tenth dynasties were in conflict with the eleventh dynasty for control of Egypt. During this time there was a great deal of hardship and famine, the latter probably caused by warfare between the dynasties rather than by lack of Nile inundations. Nomarchs such as Ankhtifi were proud of their ability to provide for their own townships:

“I gave bread to the hungry and clothing to the naked; I anointed those who had no cosmetic oil; I gave sandals to the barefooted; I gave a wife to him who had no wife. I took care of the towns of Hefat and Hor-mer in every [situation of crisis, when] the sky was clouded and the earth [was parched (?) and when everybody died] of hunger on this sandbank of Apophis. The south came with its people and the north with its children; they brought finest oil in exchange for the barley which was given to them.

“The whole of Upper Egypt died of hunger and each individual had reached such a state of hunger that he ate his own children. But I refused to see anyone die of hunger and gave to the north grain of Upper Egypt. And I do not think that anything like this has been done by the provincial governors who came before me....I brought life to the provinces of Hierakonpolis and Edfu, Elephantine and Ombos!“

As we can see here, the Ankhtifi famine did not involve pre-planning, and the exchange rate for barley (finest oil) was very inexpensive compared to all the things that Egyptians gave up to the Pharaoh under whom Joseph administered famine relief.

d) Ameni’s famine occurred under the rule of Sesostris 1, and Ameni’s comments are mainly a litany of boasts about what a good manager he had been:

“Year 43 under the majesty of Sesostris I. . . .chief of prophets, Ameni, triumphant. . . . There was no citizen's daughter whom I misused, there was no widow whom I oppressed, there was no [peasant] whom I repulsed, there was no shepherd whom I repelled, there was no overseer of serf-laborers whose people I took for (unpaid) imposts, there was none wretched in my community, there was none hungry in my time. When years of famine came I plowed all the fields of the Oryx nome, as far as its southern and northern boundary, preserving its people alive and furnishing its food so that there was none hungry therein. I gave to the widow as (to) her who had a husband; I did not exalt the great above the small in all that I gave. Then came great Niles, possessors of grain and all things, (but) I did not collect the arrears of the field.”

Breasted explained that “great Niles” refers to Nile inundations, when the land became fertile and prosperous vis-à-vis low Niles which could result in famine. The last line means that Ameni gave debt relief to those who had borrowed from him during bad times. This famine also differed from Joseph’s in that there was no prior planning. Additionally, the nomarchs appear to have turned inward during this time, caring only for the happiness of their own people rather than for the survival of Egypt in general.

62 Breasted, 1:518, 532; emphasis added.
e) The famine of Baba took place during the time of Seqenenre Tao (or Seqenen-Ra Taa), a king of the seventeenth dynasty. Baba’s tomb also accords with the time of a seventeenth dynasty governor Sobeknakhte 2 on paleographic grounds. Like those before him, Baba took credit for alleviating the effects of an extended famine:

“I collected corn, as a friend of the harvest god. I was watchful at the time of sowing. And when a famine arose, lasting many years, I distributed corn to the city each year of famine.”

Courville agreed with Jacques Vandier who argued that Baba and his famine—inscribed at El Kab—should have been dated to the thirteenth dynasty rather than to the seventeenth dynasty. However, I have not been able to find any modern Egyptologist who places Baba in anything other than the late seventeenth dynasty. It must be pointed out that Baba’s collection of corn and watchfulness at the time of sowing is not necessarily related to the many years of the famine. It appears more likely that Baba merely took normal precautions against the day of any famine, and had enough provisions to supply his own city when times were tough. There is nothing here about supplying food for the rest of Egypt much less the rest of the world, as was true of Joseph.

In the discussion above, we have argued against Courville’s attempts to relate various famines in Egypt to the same time. The idea of connecting a second dynasty famine to the time of a fifth dynasty famine and a twelfth dynasty famine is simply not possible. The second dynasty is keyed to very early in the Early Bronze Age and the fifth dynasty is keyed to later Early Bronze Age strata, whereas the twelfth dynasty is keyed to even later Middle Bronze Age strata. There is simply no way to equate all of these strata to the same time period, and for that reason there is no independent grounds for equating several different famine inscriptions to the time of Joseph. Courville general respected the need to take into consideration the archaeology of the ancient world, and that set him apart early on from many other chronological revisionists. That does not mean, however, that Courville always followed through on this in a consistant manner. All that Courville really has left to support his multiple-famine identification is essentially a circular argument.

6. Pharaoh & Famine

If the Exodus took place at the point of the end of the Old Kingdom, and if the Israelites were the makers of MB1 pottery, we should expect to see evidence of a famine a couple hundred years or so before MB1, a famine that took place in the late Old Kingdom of Egypt. Just such a famine was recorded in the reign of the last fifth dynasty king, Unas:

“[O]ne of the most curious, and at the same time, absolutely unique representations, is that of some wretched, famine-stricken men and women. The curious scene, which was found in a trial sondage over the lower...part of the causeway [of Unas], is puzzling. The persons represented seem to be foreigners, but nothing remains to afford us a clue as to their identity or the cause of their wretched plight. Most of the figures are nude, but a few wear narrow girdles, and they are most arranged in groups; they are emaciated in the extreme.”

It has been suggested by one historian that these “famine-stricken” men and women were not really suffering from starvation, but were mine workers. The Egyptians needed thin workers to fit into narrow mine shafts. We regard this as a ludicrous explanation. All researchers point to the emaciated conditions of these men, obvious victims of starvation. If the Egyptians had wanted mine workers, they could have hired small men, or thin men, not men and women who were “emaciated in the extreme” and likely unable to do any work in such a state.

Joseph was 30 when he obtained ruler-ship in Egypt, and he was 110 at the time of his death, and thus ruled in Egypt 80 years. Moses was born 64 years later, and led the Israelites out of Egypt 80 years after that, and died after about 40 years in the wilderness, at the beginning of the Conquest of Canaan. If we start with the end of the Old Kingdom and work backward using the above span of years, the time of Joseph falls within the period of the end of the fifth dynasty. If we match up Joseph as one of Pharaoh Unas’s viziers, or vizier-like official, it is likely that Joseph came to his position after Unas had been on the throne for about three or four years. Unas would have died shortly after the death of Jacob.

a) The inscription of the Unas famine is described as “curious” and “absolutely unique.”

b) The men and women shown are “wretched” and “famine-stricken.”

c) The scene is described as “puzzling.”

d) The famine-stricken individuals are apparently foreigners, i.e., non-Egyptians.

e) The people can barely afford clothing, most being “nude” and some wearing “narrow girdles.”

f) They are arranged in groups.

g) They are not just “emaciated” but rather “emaciated in the extreme.”

There is nothing in this inscription that proves beyond doubt that we are seeing the results of the famine of Joseph’s time, but we can make some inferences based on the above descriptions. The first inference is that this really was a famine and these really were famine-stricken individuals. Given the descriptions of these individuals as being emaciated, it is hard to believe they were just mine workers having a bad day.

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The second thing is that they were arranged in groups, meaning famine relief was not chaotic but an orderly process. Compare this to the days of al-Mahdi (Mohammed Ahmed) and his hoard of dervishes (Moslem fanatics influence by Wahabism). The Mahdists had set up Omdurman to be the new capital and holy city of their murderous empire, but by the late 1880s (AD) a devastating famine was raging in the Sudan. This was probably caused by the breakdown in trade and more probably because the Mahdists had instituted a communistic form of economic life. The result was that the city of Omdurman offered no hope for the famine-stricken sufferers:

“From the countryside that was turning to desert, the peasants flocked into the city where they were hoping for relief from their hunger. Instead, they found streets full of bodies rotting in the open air, and all that remained for them to do was to lie down beside the dead to wait for the end. The boldest among them would gather in groups of twenty or thirty and assault the food stores, the owners of which would defend themselves by bludgeoning those living skeletons. Others rumbled through the foulest garbage or fought over the blood of animals slaughtered by the butchers; there were those who killed for a morsel of bread. [An observer] recounts cases of cannibalism. Then came the epidemics: dysentery, typhoid, and smallpox.”

This was undoubtedly a judgment on the Mahdists, though it was not the final judgment that the Mahdists had wanted to inaugurate to hasten the end of the world.

In the Egyptian inscription of Unas, the grouping of the sufferers appears to be orderly, and it is not likely Unas would have decorated his tomb with groups of famine-stricken marauders. The order depicted in the inscription presupposes a certain amount of pre-planning, as it is likely that if Egypt did not have enough food to spare, foreigners would have been turned away from entering the land.

Third, given the poor condition of these foreigners—“emaciated in the extreme”—they must have been near death’s door, but apparently heard that Egypt had enough to save their lives. So they came to Egypt for help rather than die in their own lands. This means either the famine did not affect Egypt or that Egypt had a plentiful supply of foodstuffs on hand during the famine. The desperation of foreigners may also indicate that the famine lasted for several years, long enough to completely dessicate the lands of those who came to Egypt for rescue.

The last thing to note is that the depiction is described as “puzzling” and “absolutely unique.” Apparently, this sort of representation had never been inscribed before, especially on a Pharaoh’s tomb. The most likely explanation is that the inscription represented something that happened during the reign of Unas for which he was proud. In this case feeding the starving and those who were near death and doing so in an orderly way would have been something to boast about. We have seen how other leaders in Egypt boasted of similar accomplishments for their own nomes or cities. So it is not unreasonable to think that Unas would put his boast in both written and pictorial form, though the latter is the only one to have survived the ravages of time.

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Due to these factors we think the prospects are good that this was the famine of Joseph’s time. Because of Joseph’s prophetic planning for the famine, Egypt not only had enough to feed itself but also the countries of the world, all of whom flocked to the Nile as their only salvation.

Finis