

Book Reviews: John Ashton & David Down, *Unwrapping the Pharaohs: How Egyptian Archaeology Confirms the Biblical Timeline*, AR: Master Books, 2006. David Down, *Unveiling the Kings of Israel: Revealing the Bible's Archaeological History*, AR: Master Books, 2011.

By Vern Crisler, 2013, updated 2015

David Down is a tour guide, editor, and “field archaeologist” who claims to have excavated in Israel for a number of years but who does not appear to have an advanced degree in archaeology. John Ashton is a chemist who specializes in food nutrition and research. Since they lack academic degrees in Egyptology or Archaeology, it is not really clear to me why either of these authors felt themselves qualified to write a history of Egypt or of Israel.

Nevertheless, the authors have managed to produce a couple of glossy books about the history of Egypt and Israel, and the pictures alone will be enough for some to justify buying these books. The authors provide fairly

standard accounts of the history of Egypt and Israel, but as far as chronology goes, they are content merely to proffer suggestions by chronological revisionist Donovan Courville and Immanuel Velikovsky.

Thankfully, in their book on Egypt the authors provide a table of correlations between Egypt and biblical events based on their revised chronology. One does not have to wade through a lot of information in order to find out where they place the Exodus or the time of Solomon, for instance. Taken together I think both of these books would provide a fairly good introduction to the history of Egypt and Israel for high school students, and may be of some interest to the general reader who is unfamiliar with the subject.

While I am partial to Courville's views on chronology, I am disappointed that the authors accepted his views uncritically. For instance, they make a very serious error when they adopt Courville's equation of the First and Second Intermediate Periods of Egypt. “There was no First Intermediate

Period,” they say. “The dark ages of the First Intermediate Period have been confused with the dark ages of the Second Intermediate Period.” This topsy-turvy reorganization of the Egyptian dynasties will not work for the simple reason that these periods are assigned to separate archaeological strata. To equate them would be to equate the archaeological strata, which is not possible.

Let us look more closely at this. The thirteenth dynasty of Egypt cannot be separated from the twelfth dynasty because the “filiative nomen” of the first and second kings of the thirteenth dynasty indicates they were the sons of the last twelfth dynasty king.¹ In other words, wherever the twelfth dynasty goes, so goes the thirteenth and following dynasties (dynasties 14-17). Now the equation of the First and Second Intermediate periods entails that the period covered by dynasties 7-11 is to be equated with the period of

¹ Aidan Dodson & Dyan Hilton, *The Complete Royal Families of Ancient Egypt*, 2010, pp. 92, 102.

dynasties 14-17. This means the twelfth and thirteenth dynasties would have to be equated with the last of the Old Kingdom dynasties since those occur just before the First Intermediate period. Hence the Egyptian dynasties would go as follows, using the double arrow to mean equal in time and the single arrow to mean consecutive:

(Dyn 5-6 ↔ Dyn 12-13) →

(Dyn 7-11 ↔ Dyn 14-17).

The only way the authors (and Courville) could make the resulting scheme work with the archaeological record is to delink the twelfth and thirteenth dynasties from any archaeological context and associate them with the relevant Early Bronze Age stratigraphy correlated to Old Kingdom dynasties 5 and 6.

While it is difficult to associate the twelfth dynasty with archaeological strata, the same is not true of the thirteenth dynasty, which is linked stratigraphically with MB2b. This would require the twelfth dynasty to be

linked to MB2a.² In addition, MB1 is linked to *late* Meydum (or Maidum) ware.

The earlier forms of Meydum ware are types of Egyptian pottery found throughout the Old Kingdom until the end of the sixth dynasty, while late versions of the Meydum pottery are found in the Egyptian First Intermediate period context and also with MB1 pottery in the Holy Land. This indicates that MB1 followed *earlier* Meydum ware.

While it is speculative, we think Meydum ware might possibly represent the pottery of the Egyptian multitude that accompanied the MB1 Israelites from Egypt during the Exodus. We cannot, of course, be sure about this but given the association with MB1 pottery, which we regard as the pottery of the Israelites at the time of the Exodus, the equation is not far-fetched. In fact, it is the sort of thing we might expect if what the Bible says about the

mixed multitude who left with the Israelites is true.

Here is a chart to illustrate the archaeological correlations under discussion:³

² See, Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 1992, p. 196.

³ Mazar, p. 196.

Dynasty	Pottery	Strata
Second Intermediate (14-17)		MB2c
Middle Kingdom (12 & 13)		MB2a-b
First Intermediate (7-11)	Late Meydum ware	MB1
Old Kingdom (6)	Earlier Meydum ware	EB3
Old Kingdom (5)		EB3

Can you see the problem with the Courville, Ashton & Down chronology? To equate the two Intermediate Periods means the time of the Old Kingdom dynasties has to be equated with the time of the Middle Kingdom dynasties. But this cannot be done without also equating their archaeological strata. It would mean that EB3 pottery would have to be equated with the time of MB2a-b pottery. It would also require that the MB1 late Meydum ware would have to be equated with the time of MB2c pottery.

I see no way in which these equations can be accomplished without throwing out the science of archaeological stratigraphy altogether. Courville respected archaeology and would not have accepted such an unscientific conclusion, even if it went against his own theories. In my opinion, Courville just did not see the problems involved.

Because of these archaeological problems, neither the twelfth nor thirteenth dynasties can be associated with the time of the Old Kingdom

dynasties, nor can the First and Second Intermediate periods really be equated with one another if scientific archaeology means anything.

The bottom line for chronological revisionists is that the Exodus may be associated with either the end of the sixth dynasty or sometime in the thirteenth dynasty, but it cannot be associated with both.

Another problem is that the authors provide no evidence or arguments to back up their correlations of the kings of Israel with any of the kings of Egypt. For instance, their dating of Ramses 2 to the mid-eighth century time of king Azariah (or Uzziah, 768 B.C.) is problematic. We know that Omri of Israel built the city of Samaria around 885 B.C. (early ninth century B.C.) We also know that the earliest pottery associated with buildings on the hill of Samaria is from the early Iron Age.

The obvious problem here is that an eighth century placement of Ramses 2 causes the Late Bronze Age to be placed too late. Since Ramses 2 is not

even the last king of the nineteenth dynasty, which is associated with LB2b, this would cause the Late Bronze Age to be placed even later on the B.C. time scale. Ashton & Down give 693 B.C. as the time of Merneptah, so the end of the nineteenth dynasty would be another 24 years or so after that.

This is a huge problem for some chronological revisions (including Courville's). The problem is that the Iron Age had already begun by the time Samaria was built in 885 B.C. so this date is a *terminus ante quem* (can't-be-later-than) for the Late Bronze Age. If Ramses 2 is placed during the days of Azariah, then the Late Bronze Age would have to be placed there, too. But how could the Late Bronze Age be placed in this time slot if the Iron Age had already started a century earlier? The two metal ages (with corresponding pottery) would have occurred out of their proper time sequence.

In this regard, the motto for all chronological revisionists with respect

to the Late Bronze Age should be *no-later-than-Samaria*. This means no later than the early ninth century B.C. when Samaria was first built. I should note that this problem has been known for a long time and it is astonishing that any chronological revisionists should not have known about it by now.

At certain points, the authors go beyond Courville and invoke the theories of Immanuel Velikovsky. I refer to the idea that Ramses 3 should be correlated with the Persian period and that the Peleset (of the Sea Peoples) were really Persians rather than Philistines. Oddly enough, while the authors rely on Courville throughout their books, this Peleset-Persian concept was criticized by Courville as unworkable.⁴ Moreover, there are tremendous archaeological problems with accepting this Velikovskian theory, and they are as follows:

⁴ Donovan Courville, "Are the Peleset Philistines or Persians?" *Catastrophism and Ancient History*, Vol. 3, Part 2, July 1981, pp. 85ff.

First, Down claims to be a "field archaeologist" but it is strange that he correlates the Hebrew kings Saul (1021 B.C.) to Manasseh (686 B.C.) with the Late Bronze Age pharaohs all the way down to the end of the nineteenth dynasty (Ahmose I to Twosret). As we saw in the case of Ramses 2, a serious archaeological problem is created by this move.

In order to move the eighteenth and nineteenth dynasties to the time of Saul through Manasseh, the authors would also have to move Late Bronze Age stratigraphy down with them. Why? Because Late Bronze Age strata are tied unalterably to various archaeological indicia of eighteenth and nineteenth dynasty Egyptian kings.⁵ The end result is to bring all the Late Bronze age strata right into the midst of Iron Age stratigraphy.

How do the authors avoid this result? Incredibly, they do so by separating Ramses 2 (Late Bronze) from Ramses 3 (Iron Age) by 379 years. In their

⁵ Mazar, pp. 232ff.

scheme Ramses 2 is dated to 759 B.C., while Ramses 3 is dated to 380 B.C. Somehow Ramses 3 is correlated with Nactenebo I, a king of the thirtieth dynasty contemporary with the Persian period. In my opinion, this nearly 400 year separation between the two pharaohs undermines the credibility of the authors' chronology.

Second, according to the Great Harris Papyrus Ramses 3 was the son of Setnakhte. It is generally believed by Egyptologists that Setnakhte fought with Twosret, the last ruler of the nineteenth dynasty, for control of Egypt (as documented by the Elephantine stela). In addition, it is also believed that Setnakhte was a grandson of Ramses 2 which is why Ramses 3 associated himself with the former king.⁶ For this reason, there cannot be a long temporal distance between Ramses 3 and Ramses 2. This means there must also be a close relation between the end of the Late Bronze Age and the beginning of the early Iron Age. Therefore, a movement of the

⁶ Dodson & Hilton, p. 186.

Late Bronze Age forward in time would also entail the same movement of the Iron Age forward in time.

Third, even if Setnakhte was not a grandson of Ramses 2, or there were no other relationships between the twentieth dynasty and the nineteenth dynasty, there is still a huge archaeological problem in separating Ramses 3 from Ramses 2 by several hundred years. With respect to archaeological stratigraphy Ramses 3 is connected to the *beginning* of the Iron Age, or at least in the transitional period in which the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age overlap. On the Ashton-Down chronology, however, since Ramses 3 began his reign in the Persian period (380 B.C.), this means the beginning of the Iron Age would have to be placed in the Persian period as well. This means the *beginning* of the Iron Age would have to be dated to a time *after* the whole of the Iron Age had already run its course. Moreover, if the Iron Age and the Persian period occurred at the same time, then their respective pottery indicia must also

occur at the same time, and this is impossible to reconcile with archaeological science.

I don't see how the authors can avoid this problem unless they somehow de-link Ramses 3 from the early Iron Age, and in my opinion this would not be feasible in light of the archaeological connections of Ramses 3 with the invasion of the Sea Peoples, the harbingers of the era of the Iron Age.⁷

These are the most serious problems with the authors' books, but some minor ones also crop up. For instance, Down agrees with Josephus (and Courville) that the Egyptians learned arithmetic and astronomy from Abraham. While Abraham knew something about getting a good bargain (Gen. 18:24ff), there isn't the slightest bit of evidence in the Bible that Abraham knew anything at all about arithmetic or astronomy, and even if he did, that doesn't mean he taught it to Egyptians or to anyone else.

Additionally, Down accuses Abraham of cowardice in misleading the Pharaoh regarding the marital status of Sarah. I see nothing cowardly about it at all; it was a simple act of prudence. Likely as not, if word had gotten to the king that Sarah was Abraham's wife, the king's operatives would have discreetly murdered Abraham. The sequel is that a plague came upon the king's house, and Abraham left Egypt with much cattle and servants. In miniature the narrative is prophetic. It is what happened to the Israelites at the time of the Exodus: the 10 plagues came down upon their Egyptian oppressors, and the Israelites left Egypt with much plunder.

Down also accuses Rebekah of being a "scheming wife" who advised Jacob to practice "shameful deceit" in fooling Isaac regarding the blessing on the firstborn. In fact, Rebekah was acting in faith, being obedient to the LORD's prophetic word that the older would serve the younger (Gen. 25:23). Jacob was entitled to the blessing, not only because of the prophetic word but also because Esau sold his birthright for a

⁷ Mazar, pp. 295ff.

mess of pottage. Isaac, no doubt, had placed more weight on his belly than on the word of the God, and only Rebekah's cleverness could overcome her husband's sinful stubbornness.

Down also claims that Jacob was "feeling guilty for so shamelessly deceiving his father" (42). In fact, Jacob obeyed his mother, which in this case, was obedience to God rather than to men. Moreover, in the sequel Jacob was given a magnificent dream of angels, and also of the LORD, who said, "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go. . ." (Gen. 28:15). That does not sound like the dream of a guilty man. Contrary to Down, Jacob obeyed his mother in faith so that the "purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls" (Rom. 9:11).

Down follows Velikovsky in equating the Queen of Sheba with Egyptian Queen Hatshepsut, but Bimson has provided decisive arguments against

such an identification.⁸ Down also gives credibility to the modern story that a whaler named James Bartley was swallowed by a whale and lived to tell the tale. He could have googled or binged this story and found out very quickly that it is pure fiction. I also don't think Jonah refused to go to Nineveh out of fear but rather, he wanted to avoid helping a people whom he saw as enemies of Israel.

On the positive side, Down follows Cohen in recognizing the MB1 pottery in the Holy Land as the pottery of the Israelites at the time of the Exodus and Conquest. Courville saw this too but sometimes confused Albright's MB1 pottery with Kenyon's MB1 pottery, and this led him astray to a certain extent on the later history of Israel. Under Albright's terminology, Kenyon's MB1 would really be Albright's MB2a, so Cohen has helped to clarify these issues since Courville first wrote his revision.

In addition, the narrative style of both books is reader-friendly, the text is free of typos, and indexes are included. Unfortunately, the authors neglected to include a bibliography, so readers will have to search footnotes in order to follow up on the subject of chronological revisionism.

For some reason Down, in his book on Israel, only provides a table of biblical events and persons starting with Saul. One would hope that in a future edition, he could provide a complete listing starting with Abraham or even further back and not restrict it only to the kings of Israel. Some appendices are included in the book on Israel but are mostly reproductions of pictures or chart information from the writings of Flavius Josephus and Isaac Newton.

If you want nice, glossy, easy to read books about the histories of Egypt and Israel, these books will do the trick. If you purchased these books expecting an in-depth analysis of chronological issues, you will be disappointed.

⁸ John Bimson, "Hatshepsut and the Queen of Sheba," *SIS, Review* 8, 1986.

There seems to be no awareness of scholarly evaluations of Courville or Velikovsky's theories, nor is there the slightest attempt to interact with published criticisms. For these reasons, the value of the books is greatly diminished for serious researchers of chronology and archaeology. However, for those who are not as concerned with chronology, these books will be beneficial.

Appendix: The following table represents many of the correlations accepted by the authors:

Israel	Egypt	Dynasty	Revised BC
Terah	Zozer	3	2080
Abraham	Sneferu and Khufu	4	1950
Isaac	Djedefre	4	1850
	Khafre, Menkaure, Shepseskaf	4	
Jacob	Shepseskaf	4	1790
	Unas, Teti, Pepi 1, Merenre, Pepi 2	5-6	
Joseph	Amenemhet 1, Sesostris 1, Amenemhet 2, Sesostris 2	12	1703
Oppression, Moses	Sesostris 3, Amenemhet 3, Neferhotep 1	12, 13	1572
Exodus	Neferhotep 1	13	1456
Saul	Ahmosis, Hyksos	18	
Joshua, Conquest	Hyksos	15	1405
David	Amenhotep 1, Thutmosis 1	18	1011
Solomon	Thutmosis 1 & 2	18	971
Queen of Sheba	Hatshepsut	18	941
Jeroboam	Thutmosis 2 & 3	18	931
Zerah the Ethiopian	Amenhotep 2	18	
Ahab	Amenhotep 2, Thutmosis 4	18	874
Jehoash	Akhenaten	18	824
Jehoahaz	Smenkaure 2, Tutankhamen	18	804
Jeroboam 2 to Hezekiah	Rameses 2	19	759
Persian period	Rameses 3	20	380

As noted, the authors accept Courville's equations of the first and second Intermediate periods of Egypt.

Again, it is not easy to see how MB1 pottery could co-occur with MB2c pottery. There is evidence of an MB1 – MB2a transitional period, but MB1 stops at some point, and MB2a (correlated to the twelfth dynasty) takes

over followed by MB2b (correlated to the thirteenth dynasty). It is only then that the next pottery phase, MB2c occurs (correlated with the fifteenth dynasty and the Hyksos).

By equating the dynastic periods as Ashton & Down have done, the pottery periods are also equated. There is no real explanation from the authors as to

how this is to be done. For this reason and others I cannot accept the correlation of Joseph with the twelfth dynasty pharaohs or that Sesostri 3 was the pharaoh of the Oppression, or any of the rest of the Ashton-Down correlations.

Finis