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## ***I. Introduction***

The date of the Exodus is one of the most debated topics in OT studies because of the ambiguous nature of the evidence. Although the biblical texts seem to require a date in the middle of the 15th cent. B.C., archeological evidence seems to point to a date in the 13th cent. B.C. (see CHRONOLOGY OF THE OT III.B; ISRAEL, HISTORY OF THE PEOPLE OF III). Merneptah's "Israel" stele (ca. 1220 B.C.) fixes a date before which the Exodus occurred, since it mentions Israel, as a people, among names that otherwise refer to places (cf. K. Kitchen, pp. 59f; see picture in ISRAEL). Thus Israel was established in Canaan by at least 1220 B.C.

## ***II. Egyptian Evidence for Thirteenth-Century Date***

A. *City of Raamses* Exodus 1:11 indicates that the Israelites built Raamses (usually spelled "Rameses") for the pharaoh of the oppression. The stele of Merneptah indicates that Israel already was settled in Palestine early in his reign. Only two pharaohs preceding Merneptah bore the name of Ramses, and Ramses I was not very significant since he reigned less than two years. Ramses II, however, ruled Egypt from 1290 to 1224; he was a great builder whose monuments are known throughout Egypt. Papyrus



Anastasi III describes his royal residence city of Pi-ramses, located in the delta. If the reference to this city in [Ex. 1:11](#) is related to this information from [Egypt](#) in a straight-forward manner, Ramses II should be connected in one way or another with the events of the oppression and the Exodus. Thus the archeology of this site might offer some assistance in deriving the date of the Exodus if the site has been located correctly and excavated.

1. *Tanis* A sizable number of monuments from the Hyksos kings and Ramses II has been recovered at Tanis (P. Montet, *Les Nouvelles fouilles des Tanis* [1934]; *Le Drame d'Avaris* [1940]). It is generally agreed on the basis of Egyptian evidence that Pi-ramses occupied the site of the earlier Hyksos capital of [Avaris](#), so Hyksos monuments are to be expected there (P. Montet, [RB](#), 39 [1930], 1–28). The presence of such objects at Tanis does not confirm its identification with Pi-ramses, however, because not one of them was found in its original location; rather, they were taken from their original locations and brought to this site to be used as building materials. There is no archeological evidence *in situ* for the occupation of Tanis in the second half of the 2nd millennium B.C. before the time of the 21st Dynasty, [ca.](#) 1100 B.C. Inscriptions date the foundation of the inner wall of Tanis to the 21st Dynasty and its outer wall to the 22nd Dynasty. No palace has been found there yet and its excavator Montet admits that no evidence is available with which to date the temples of Tanis as early as Ramesside times.

Egyptian textual evidence concerning Pi-ramses indicates that it was situated on the waters of Ra, which have been identified with the Pelusiac or easternmost branch of the [Nile](#). Tanis, however, was located on the Tanitic branch, the next branch [W](#) of the Pelusiac. Pi-ramses was also located “at the forefront of every foreign land.” Tanis was an important

port but it was poorly situated to serve as a place from which to leave for Asia by land. Papyrus Anastasi III praises the fertility of the fields around Pi-ramses, but the land around Tanis is low and often flooded from the sea, so that it consists primarily of infertile salt flats.

Thus the literary evidence relating to Pi-ramses does not accord well with Tanis, and there is no architectural and stratigraphic evidence for its existence prior to the 21st Dynasty. If the biblical Rameses was located at Tanis, then according to this archeological evidence the Exodus could not have taken place before the 21st Dynasty, more than a century after Merneptah's reference to Israel in Palestine.



Granite statue of Ramses II (1301–1234 B.C.) wearing the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt and holding the flail and scepter (Trustees of the British Museum)

There is also some biblical evidence that the Raamses of [Ex. 1:11](#) was not located at Tanis. When the Israelites left Egypt they started out from “Rameses” ([Ex. 12:37](#)). No bridges crossed the branches of the Nile in the delta in ancient times. Therefore, if the Israelites traveled E from a Rame-

ses located on the Tanitic branch, they still would have had to cross the Pelusiac branch. This would have posed a considerable problem for a sizable group of people accompanied by herds and flocks. Thus Tanis must be rejected as the site of the Egyptian Pi-ramses. The last reason for this rejection requires a site located on the east bank of the easternmost branch of the Nile. That leads to a consideration of *Qanṭîr*.

2. *Qanṭîr* Since 1930 various studies have suggested that *Qanṭîr* was Pi-ramses (e.g., M. Hamza, *Annales du service des antiquités de l'Égypte*, 30 [1930], 31–68). Recent examinations of the literary evidence relating to Pi-ramses have concluded that it should be located in the vicinity of *Qanṭîr* (cf. J. Van Seters, E. Uphill [*JNES*, 27], and M. Bietak). The fertility of the fields around *Qanṭîr*, its location on both the land and sea routes to Asia, the existence of a palace of Ramses II there, and the geographical divisions of the city and its surrounding regions all correspond to the literary references to Pi-ramses.

Just S of *Qanṭîr* is *Tell el-Dab'a*. The occupation of this site under the 12th and 13th Dynasties was brought to an end with a violent destruction. Three Hyksos strata or building phases follow this destruction and the city enlarged progressively through these three periods. The third and last Hyksos stratum was brought to an end with a violent destruction which has been connected with the conquest of Lower Egypt by the early 18th Dynasty. The 18th Dynasty appears to have left this site unoccupied (Bietak, p. 25), but it was rebuilt under the 19th Dynasty.

These archeological findings lend support to the reasons advanced above for identifying *Qanṭîr* and its immediate vicinity with the Hyksos capital of Avaris and with Pi-ramses, the delta residence of Ramses II. Since the 19th Dynasty is represented here and the 18th Dynasty is not,

these findings seem to support a 19th-Dynasty (thirteenth-century) date for the Exodus.

### *B. Political History of the 19th Dynasty*

1. *Ramses II's Wine-Jar Sealings* To support his date of *ca.* 1290 for the Exodus, W. F. Albright called attention to the sharp reduction in wine-jar sealings from this time found in the Ramesseum at Thebes (Yahweh, p. 156). Since earlier Egyptian tomb reliefs depict Apiru (Egyp 'pr.) or HABIRU working in the vineyards of the northeastern delta, and since these Habiru have been connected in part with the biblical Hebrews, the departure of the large number of Hebrews could have left these vineyards largely untended and caused a sharp drop in the production of wine. Albright connected this departure with a revolt by Egypt's Asiatic dependencies which called for Ramses' campaign of Year 8.

2. *Ramses II's Transjordanian Campaign* The only text of historical significance from the second decade of Ramses' reign is the stele from Bethshean in Palestine that is dated to his 18th year (Schmidt, p. 36; see picture in INSCRIPTIONS). An inscription from the Karnak temple (cf. K. Kitchen, JEA, 50 [1964], 47–70) indicates that Ramses II campaigned in Moab. His previously known inscriptions indicate that he also campaigned in Edom, which he referred to as Seir in the land of the Shasu bedouin (cf. R. Givon, *Les Bédouins Shosou des documents égyptiens* [1971]). Geographically his campaigns in Moab and Edom probably should be linked together as parts of the same campaign. This Transjordanian campaign is best dated to Year 18 because his targets on the preceding four campaigns from Year 4 through Year 10 were located in Lebanon and Syria. Ramses probably crossed the Sinai peninsula on the

central route through Kadesh-barnea. If the Exodus occurred shortly before this time, that would have put Ramses II in the very territory where the Israelites were wandering before they went around Transjordan. Given this course for this campaign, one could regard part of this mission as a search for the escaped Israelite slaves.

3. *Ramses II's Hittite Treaty* Support for dating the Exodus ca. 1290 might be drawn from an unusual feature of the covenant between Ramses II and the Hittite king *Hattusilis III*. This treaty was inscribed on the walls of both the Karnak temple and the Ramesseum. A Hittite copy of it is known, also (*ANET*, pp. 199–203). Of the four main stipulations in this treaty, the first, second, and fourth apply similarly to the Egyptian and Hittite kings.

The third stipulation incumbent upon Ramses II was that, in the event of an irregularity in the succession to the Hittite throne, he was to support—evidently by force of arms if necessary—the successor designated by *Hattusilis*. *Hattusilis* became king by deposing his nephew *Mursilis III* (*Urki-Teshub*) and installing himself upon the throne. He obviously wanted to insure that his designated successor would not have similar problems and enlisted the aid of Ramses toward that end. The third stipulation incumbent upon the Hittite king was that, in the event that Ramses' "own subjects" committed "another crime against him," the Hittite king would come to his aid in suppressing such a disorder.

This third stipulation is extraordinary and can be attributed to the exceptional conditions of that time. In the case of the Hittite king that condition was his own irregular accession to the throne. In the case of the Egyptian king that condition appears to have involved a recent "crime" committed by his subjects against him. The evident distinction between

the foreign territories of the pharaoh in the second stipulation and “his own subjects” in Egypt in the third stipulation appears to be quite intentional. The use of the word “another” modifying the word for crime in the third stipulation also appears to be intentional (cf. J. Schmidt, p. 133).

This treaty dates to the twenty-first year of Ramses II. Ramses was preoccupied with Asia during the first decade of his reign, campaigning there in his fourth, fifth, eighth, and tenth years according to his dated inscriptions. Given the tendentious nature of royal inscriptions of ancient Egypt, no direct reference to the Exodus is to be expected from them. If the Exodus took place at this time, its setting can be sought only through veiled Egyptian references to events that correspond satisfactorily with those events described in the Bible. Unfortunately for such a search, the second decade of Ramses’ reign is largely unknown (cf. Schmidt, p. 170).

In spite of this paucity of sources, the situation presupposed by the third stipulation of Ramses’ treaty with the Hittites could be viewed as providing just such a veiled reference to these biblical events. The departure of the Israelite slaves could have been viewed by the pharaoh as a crime. The severity of the “crime” perpetrated by Ramses’ subjects shortly before the treaty of Year 21 was of such a magnitude that he was willing to appeal to a foreign potentate for assistance to prevent a recurrence. The biblical description of the events surrounding the Exodus appears to reach this level of importance from the Egyptian point of view. At least it comes at the right time to accord with Albright’s date for the Exodus.

4. *Form of the Mosaic Covenant* A sociological point in the context of the Exodus can be made from the present knowledge of the Hittite treaty



form used in Egypt at that time. This particular treaty refers to two previous Egyptian-Hittite treaties, the earlier of the two dating to the middle of the preceding century. These are parity treaties, in which the two great kings treated each other essentially as equals. The other type of covenant known from the Hittites is the suzerainty type, used by Hittite kings to make vassal treaties with the kings of smaller states. G. E. Mendenhall noted that there are a number of significant resemblances between the Mosaic covenant of the Bible and the suzerainty covenants of the Hittites (BA, 17 [1954], 24–46; 50–76; see COVENANT [OT]). These resemblances could be most easily explained if Moses was in Egypt during the 13th century.

### *C. Objections*

1. *City of Raamses* The Bible does not employ the name of Ramses with the same chronological specificity with which it is employed in Egyptian texts. This is evident from Gen. 47:11, which refers to the “land of Rameses” as that part of Egypt in which Jacob and his descendants settled. Since no one dates the arrival of the biblical patriarchs in Egypt in the time of Ramses II of the 19th Dynasty, the use of the name Ramses here must represent the modernization or updating of an older name for that region. If the name of Rameses was used in this way in Gen. 47:11, it could have been used similarly in Ex. 1:11. Thus the mere presence of the name of Ramses in Ex. 1:11 cannot be the final arbiter of the date of the Exodus.

2. *Political History of the 19th Dynasty* The political conditions cited above as a possible historical context for the Exodus early in the 13th cent. are not sufficiently specific to confirm that date for it. They only provide a



potential historical situation for it.

*a. Ramses II's Wine-Jar Sealings* The reduction in wine-jar sealings at Thebes may have occurred because the wine was shipped elsewhere. These sealings continued at a low rate there for the next four decades, and it seems improbable that the wine industry of Egypt did not recover for more than four decades after the Israelite workers in the vineyards were supposed to have departed.

*b. Ramses II's Transjordanian Campaign* Ramses may have conducted his campaign through Transjordan and Sinai in order to pacify his eastern flank prior to concluding his treaty with the Hittites, not to pursue any escaped Israelite slaves.

*c. Ramses II's Hittite Treaty* Ramses' allusion in the Hittite treaty to a crime by his subjects could just as well have referred to a conspiracy or revolt by native Egyptians as to an Exodus of Israelites.

*d. Form of the Mosaic Covenant* Moses' knowledge of Hittite treaties is a general feature that could be applied to earlier times as well.

3. *Historical Evidence* Beyond the nonspecific nature of the preceding suggestions, some problems with dating the Exodus in the 13th cent. arise when the history of this period is examined from the biblical point of view. These problems have to do with the pharaohs involved: the pharaoh of the oppression, who died while Moses was in exile (Ex. 2:23), and the pharaoh who died during the Exodus (Ex. 14:23–28; cf. Ex. 15:19; Ps. 136:15; and F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry* [1975], p. 50, on Ex. 15:4).

The question here is how well the pharaohs of the 19th Dynasty fulfil

these qualifications. Two sets of rulers are involved. Either Ramses II was the pharaoh of the oppression and Merneptah was the pharaoh of the Exodus (the older view), or Seti I was the pharaoh of the oppression and Ramses II was the pharaoh of the Exodus (the more recent view).

*a. Ramses II and Merneptah* Ramses II corresponds to the pharaoh of the oppression well, employing state slaves on his many building projects, but Merneptah does not correspond to the pharaoh of the Exodus very well. If Merneptah was the pharaoh of the Exodus, the Exodus must have occurred early in his reign, because the Israelites already were in Palestine by the time his stele mentioning Israel was inscribed. But that does not allow sufficient time for Israel to wander in the wilderness, and in any case Merneptah did not die at the time of the Exodus.

*b. Seti I and Ramses II* These difficulties with Merneptah lead to consideration of Seti I and Ramses II as the pharaohs of the oppression and the Exodus. Seti I reigned only eleven years, so he would not fit very well as pharaoh of the oppression if one takes seriously the biblical indications that Moses stayed in the wilderness a long time (Ex. 4:19; 7:7). Ramses II would not fit very well as pharaoh of the Exodus either, according to this scheme, for he did not die until *ca.* 1224, long after the latest possible date for the Exodus.

Thus there is no satisfactory way to harmonize the rulers of the 19th Dynasty with all that is stated or implied in the Bible about the pharaohs of the oppression and the Exodus. If the Exodus is to be dated at this time, then a pharaoh did not die while Moses was in the wilderness (Ex. 2:23), or a pharaoh did not die with his army at the time of the Exodus (Ex. 14–15; Ps. 136:15), or Moses did not spend a long time in exile (Ex.

4:19; 7:7), or the [Israelites](#) did not wander very long in the [wilderness](#) (Numbers-Deuteronomy), etc. The lack of satisfactory historical correlations with these elements in the biblical record casts some doubt upon dating the Exodus during the 19th Dynasty.

### ***III. Fifteenth-Century Date***

*A. Biblical Evidence* The main text is in [1 K. 6:1](#), which states that [Solomon](#) began to build the temple in the fourth year of his reign, 480 years after the Exodus. (Note that the month is also given; such specificity may give some weight to the literal understanding of these 480 years.) Since the dates for [Solomon's](#) reign are generally agreed to be ca. 971–931 (perhaps beginning earlier if a coregency with [David](#) is allowed), the Exodus would be dated ca. 1450 (see [CHRONOLOGY OF THE OT IV.B](#)).

One other text may be correlated roughly with this date. In [Jgs. 11:26](#) Jephthah (ca. 1100) states that the [Israelites](#) had lived in Transjordan for three hundred years. Thus the Conquest would be dated ca. 1400, and the Exodus ca. 1440. Other texts (e.g., [Gen. 15:13, 16](#); [Ex. 12:40](#)) that might appear relevant have other problems that lessen their value (see [CHRONOLOGY OF THE OT III](#)).

*B. Egyptian Evidence* The pharaohs of this period must be dated as accurately as possible before the attempt is made to associate biblical events with them, because if they have been misdated then the correlations suggested by the biblical date for the Exodus will be incorrect. The chronology of the 18th Dynasty has been established by using three types of data: Sothic cycle dates, new moon dates, and the highest-numbered regnal years attested for each of the kings who ruled during this period (see [EGYPT](#)). Using these data the following correlations may be suggested.

1. *Thutmose I* When [Moses](#) was born a decree was in effect which ordered that all male babies born to the Hebrews were to be killed ([Ex. 1:22](#)). Aaron does not appear to have been threatened by this decree, and he was only three years older than [Moses](#) ([Ex. 7:7](#)); hence this decree may have been proclaimed only a short time before [Moses](#) was born. [Moses](#) was eighty years old when he went to negotiate with pharaoh ([Ex. 7:7](#)). Adding these eighty years to the date of 1450 for the Exodus dates the birth of [Moses](#) in 1530. The Sothic cycle datum and the total number of regnal years known for Amenhotep I date his reign from 1553 to 1532. This would put [Moses](#)' birth, when the death decree was in effect, early in the reign of Thutmose I, and the birth of Aaron three years earlier, when the death decree was not in effect at the end of the reign of Amenhotep I. These considerations suggest identifying Thutmose I as the pharaoh who proclaimed the death decree.

In some respects the character of Thutmose I would fit that part very well. Prior to his time the 18th Dynasty had been mainly on a defensive footing after defeating the Hyksos. It was Thutmose I who set this dynasty on the road to an empire; he staked out the territory of that empire by campaigning all the way to the [Euphrates](#) and to the Fifth Cataract of the [Nile](#). Some of his barbarity can be seen in his act of hanging the head of his executed Nubian enemy, as Amenhotep II did later, from the prow of his royal barge. He moved his court to Memphis, where the palace he built was still used by royalty 150 years later (Redford, *History*, p. 79), and it was here in the north that the daughter of the pharaoh who issued the death decree came in contact with the baby [Moses](#) ([Ex. 2:1–10](#)). All factors considered, therefore, Thutmose I fits reasonably well as the pharaoh of the death decree.

2. *Hatshepsut* It is possible that she was the pharaoh's daughter who rescued the baby [Moses](#) ([Ex. 2:1–10](#)). If [Moses](#) was born *ca.* 1530, the pharaoh who decreed the death of all Hebrew male babies would have been Thutmose I, Hatshepsut's father. [Moses](#) would have grown up during the reigns of Thutmose I and Thutmose II (Hatshepsut's husband), and with Hatshepsut's sponsorship he could have attained the prominence that later tradition attributed to him (cf. [Acts 7:22](#); [Josephus Ant. ii.10](#)). If [Moses](#) fled [Egypt](#) when he was forty ([Acts 7:23](#)), then it was late in the reign of Hatshepsut (1504–1482) and her coregent Thutmose III (1504–1450) may have begun to assert himself (note that *ca.* 1488 is the last reference to Senmut, Hatshepsut's prime minister; Thutmose may have disposed of him in order to gain full control of the throne).



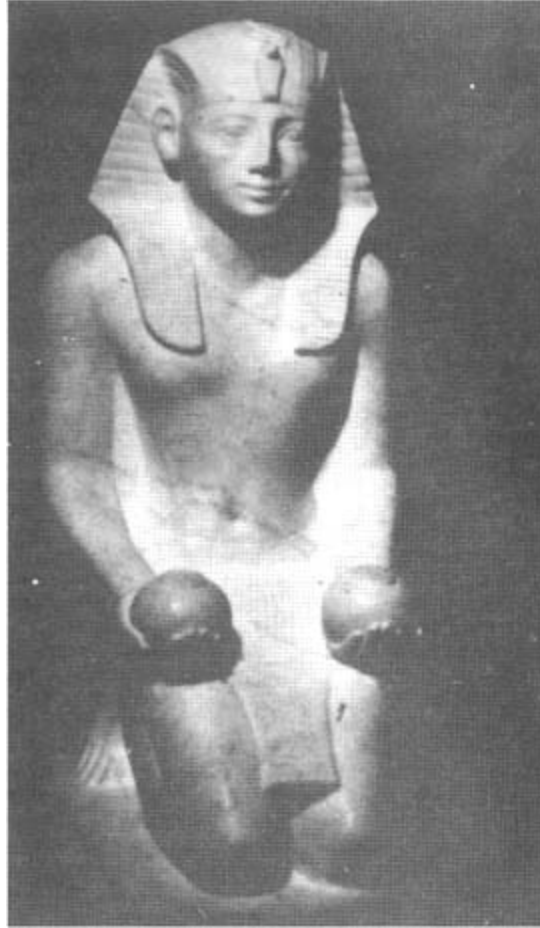
Statue of Hatshepsut (ca. 1504–1482 B.C.) with the *nemes* (striped wig cover) and *shendyt* (kilt) of the king (Metropolitan Museum of Art; picture W. S. LaSor)

According to this scheme, Hatshepsut also would have been the pharaoh who died while Moses was in exile (Ex. 2:23; the masculine reference here may be explained by Hatshepsut’s adoption of all royal titles and prerogatives, including the masculine ones). During the reign she undertook building projects that would have required the kind of labor the Israelites could supply.

3. *Thutmose III* Several characteristics of the pharaoh of the Exodus could

be pointed out from the biblical references to him, but the most significant information about him is that he died in the Reed Sea at the time of the Exodus. No reference in Egyptian sources to his death need be expected; not only would such a reference be contrary to the propagandistic nature of the royal inscriptions of Egypt but it would also be contrary to the Egyptian theology of kingship. Pharaoh was a god, Horus incarnate. Gods, of course, do not die in the human sense of the term. In spite of this qualification, a few random dates of pharaohs' deaths have survived.

The date of Thutmose III's death has come down to us through the biography of Amenemhab, who served in the Egyptian navy under several pharaohs. That date is given as "the last day of the 3rd month of the 2nd season" (Breasted, III; 234).



Statue of Thutmose III (1504–1450 B.C.) (*Service des musées, Cairo*; picture W.S. LaSor)

The Egyptian calendar was divided into three seasons of four months each, so the third month of the second season was the seventh month of the year. These months had thirty days, so the date referred to here is VII/30. The [Elephantine](#) temple inscription from 1468 B.C. dated the mid-July rising of Sothis at the end of the eleventh Egyptian month. The rising of Sothis had moved only four days by 1450 when Thutmose III died at the end of the seventh month, four months before Sothis rose in mid-July. Thus the death of Thutmose was in mid-March, March 17 to be exact when more detailed calculations are carried out (Breasted, III, 234).



The pharaoh of the Exodus died shortly after [Passover](#), according to [Ex. 12–14](#). [Passover](#)—the celebration of which began with the Exodus—was celebrated in the middle of the first month of the [Israelite](#) lunar calendar, later called Nisan, which corresponds to March–April in the Julian calendar. Although one would thus expect the pharaoh’s death to be in early April, the slightly later spring harvest in Palestine, coupled with the later omission of an intercalary month (which would have been added *ad hoc* at this early period), could account for this difference. Thus not only did Thutmose III die in the year of the Exodus according to the chronologies worked out above, but he also died at the right time of that year.

A mummy labeled with his name in the Cairo Museum warrants closer inspection. Occasionally it has been objected that neither Ramses II, Merneptah, Thutmose III, nor Amenhotep II could have been the pharaoh of the Exodus because their mummies have all been found, whereas the pharaoh of the Exodus drowned and his body should have been lost in the Reed Sea. His body could have washed ashore ([Ex. 14:30](#)), however, and been recovered by a search party that set out when it became evident that he and his troops were overdue. But further evidence needs to be considered. These mummies have been x-rayed recently to determine their ages at death, and the one labeled Thutmose III has been estimated to have been between forty and forty-five when he died (cf. R. Harris and K. Weeks, *X-raying the Pharaohs* [1978], p. 138). Since Thutmose III reigned fifty-four years, he presumably should have been at least sixty when he died. Thus it may be that another body was substituted for Thutmose III when his was not recovered from the Reed Sea.

It is important to note that the Israelites' oppression became worse at this time ([Ex. 2:23](#)). A fitting circumstance to explain this development is present in the history of the 18th Dynasty. Thutmose III was one of the great military pharaohs. He established Egypt's Asiatic empire by a series of some sixteen campaigns into Syro-Palestine, conducted almost annually from his twenty-third year, the year after Hatshepsut died, to his forty-second year.

From these conquests the booty and tribute, described in long lists of Thutmose III, flowed into Egypt's treasuries. It was also necessary to establish a base **N** of Memphis as a point of departure for these campaigns. The location of the later Rameses would have been a logical site for such a base. The cities of Pithom and Rameses that the Israelites built are described as “store-cities” (Heb. *‘ārê mišk<sup>e</sup>nôṭ*). Elsewhere in the OT ([1 K. 9:19](#); [2 Ch. 8:4, 6; 16:4; 17:12](#)) this phrase refers to military bases with armories and supply depots, which were usually on the periphery or borders of the Hebrew kingdoms. This phrase should have a similar meaning in [Ex. 1:11](#), and the Asiatic campaigns of Thutmose III provide an excellent explanation why construction on these delta projects would have become more pressing, since they served both as bases from which his troops and their supplies were sent into Asia, and as temporary sites for the storage of the booty and tribute brought back from those campaigns.

4. *Amenhotep II* The coregency of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II should be taken into account here. Three main lines of evidence point to the existence of this coregency (Redford, [JEA](#), pp. 108–122). General evidence for it comes from monuments on which their names appear together. Specific evidence for it comes first from Amenhotep II's accession date of

IV/1, which should have been VIII/1, after the death of his father on VII/30, if a coregency was not involved here. The second specific line of evidence in support of this coregency comes from Amenhotep II's Syrian campaign of his third year (Amada and [Elephantine stelae](#)) and his seventh year (Memphis stele), both of which are called his "first victorious campaign." This was a specific and technical identification in Egyptian political terminology, not a general one, and thus two "first" campaigns present a problem. The best solution to this problem is to suppose that when Amenhotep II campaigned in his third year he still was coregent with his father, but when he campaigned in his seventh year he was sole ruler after his father's death, and that fact was indicated by the reuse of this term (Redford, [JEA](#), p. 121).

The new-moon date of Amenhotep II, published recently, and the new-moon dates of Thutmose III together indicate that their reigns overlapped by three years regardless of which set of absolute Julian dates is selected for them (R. Parker, "Once"). This means the campaign of Amenhotep II was conducted during his third year, the last year of his coregency with his father Thutmose III, who died that same year. During his last dozen years Thutmose III did not campaign in Syro-Palestine. This absence led to a revolt among his vassals there and he dispatched Amenhotep II with the army to quell this revolt in the last year of his reign. When Amenhotep II returned to [Egypt](#) from that campaign, in the eleventh month according to the relevant [stelae](#), he found that his father had died some three months earlier.

The existence of this coregency does not mean that [Moses](#) dealt with two pharaohs, because only one of them (Thutmose III) remained in [Egypt](#), while the other (Amenhotep II) was away in Asia. This historical

context provides a good reason why Thutmose III would have been resident in the delta where Moses consulted with the pharaoh, since it probably was from that area that he had sent his son on his first military expedition not long before this, and he may have remained there to await news of his son's success. The revolt in Syria could have strengthened Thutmose III's resolve not to let his Semitic slaves go to sacrifice in the wilderness (Ex. 5:2). From the Israelite point of view, however, this would have been an auspicious time to leave Egypt, since some of the troops were away. Of possibly greater importance could have been the effect this information had upon the route chosen for the Exodus. The coastal route had the risk not only of military engagements with the residents of southern Canaan (Ex. 13:17), but also of a possible encounter with the troops of Amenhotep II returning to Egypt.

Of importance in this connection was the reaction of Amenhotep II upon his return to Egypt. After giving the date of Thutmose III's death, the tomb biography of Amenemhab describes the coronation of Amenhotep II, and this description is remarkable in that it contains a reference to the execution by beheading of the foreign chiefs he brought back to Egypt with him as captives. As Breasted noted (III, 319), "Amenemhab doubtless refers to the sacrifice of the seven kings of Tikhsi." This region (*Semitic Tahši*) was the target for the campaign of Amenhotep II's third year, and the execution of these captive princes in Egypt upon his return is also mentioned by the stelae which refer to that campaign.

Several reasons for this extraordinary course of action can be suggested when it is viewed from the standpoint of the events of the biblical Exodus. First, the rebellion raised by these princes took Amenhotep away from Egypt when he should have been there with his troops to

defend his father, and this reflected upon his kingship. Second, the escaped Hebrew slaves who caused his father's death were Semites and the royal captives he executed were Semites, so he could have expressed his anger at the Semites as a group in this way. Third, the Hebrews had rebelled against pharaoh by escaping from [Egypt](#). It was in the interests of Amenhotep to provide the strongest possible deterrent to prevent any other subjects, native or foreign, from attempting to follow their example. Executing these foreign princes and parading their heads up the [Nile](#) warned everyone else against such a course of action. From a biblical point of view, therefore, these actions of Amenhotep II fit very well with the actions of the enraged son of the pharaoh of the Exodus who returned to [Egypt](#) to find his father dead from circumstances caused by the Hebrews.

Two elements in the Egyptian texts mentioned above appear to be false, and this emphasizes the extraordinary nature of these events. Amenemhab introduced the description of Amenhotep II's coronation with the phrase, "when the morning brightened." This phrase has been understood by Egyptologists as indicating that Amenhotep II was crowned the day after his father died. But Amenhotep was away in [Syria](#) at the time; his coronation had taken place three years earlier when he was installed as coregent. At that time he "was established upon the throne of his father," and at that time he "assumed the royal titulary." Egyptian records do not describe any ceremony for a coregent coming to sole reign, because he already had been installed as king and assumed the royal titulary when he was enthroned as coregent. By identifying this occasion as Amenhotep's coronation, Amenemhab attempted to deny the coregency. The Amada and [Elephantine stela](#)e of Amenhotep indicate

that the princes of Takhsi were executed at a public function, but it is unlikely that this function was Amenhotep's coronation as Amenemhab would have us believe.

The other example of falsification comes from the Memphis stele of Amenhotep II, in which he identified the campaign of his seventh year as his "first victorious campaign"; that designation, however, had already been applied to the campaign of his third year. This looks like a deliberate attempt to expunge the memory of the campaign of Year 3. Was some disgrace connected with it? For Amenhotep to have been out of the country when his father died under unusual circumstances could have brought some disgrace upon him. Thus Amenemhab's incorrect date for Amenhotep's pseudo-coronation and the contradictory system of numbering employed by Amenhotep for his own campaigns look like deliberate distortions in an attempt to cover up the truth of what really happened.

If Amenhotep held the Hebrews responsible for the death of his father, it would have been natural for him to seek revenge. It is interesting to note in this connection, therefore, that the first contemporary Egyptian reference to 'Apiru *outside* of Egypt comes from the Memphis stele's combined record of the campaigns of Amenhotep's seventh and ninth years, in which he claimed that he brought 3600 'Apiru back to Egypt among the captives he took in Syro-Palestine (ANET, p. 247). This could have been a compensation for the escape of the Hebrews four years earlier. The loss of a sizable number of Hebrew slaves also depleted the ranks of the Egyptian work force. Amenhotep's claim to have brought a total of 90,000 captives back from these two campaigns could have been an attempt to replenish that depleted work force.

Finally, from the end of Amenhotep's reign comes a text that is so unusual that Egyptologists think he may have been drunk while dictating it. Basically, it expresses his hatred of Semites (cf. A. Gardiner, *Egypt*, p. 199). This inscription is dated fourteen years after the last of his Asiatic campaigns, that of Year 9, which shows that he still had the Semites on his mind, even when he was as far away from them as Nubia. The Hebrews are not mentioned by name in this inscription, but Takhsi, where Amenhotep campaigned in the proposed year of the Exodus, is. If Amenhotep held the Hebrews responsible for the death of his father at the Exodus, then he had good reason for the hatred of the Semites he expressed here. The reference to magicians is interesting, and although the Nubians may have been noted for their practice of the magic arts, the reference to that practice in this context might convey echoes of the contest in magic between Moses and the Egyptians which preceded the death of Thutmose III—if he is identified as the pharaoh of the Exodus. Taking all the factors discussed above into consideration, Amenhotep II fits very well as the pharaoh after the Exodus.

5. *Thutmose Son of Amenhotep?* Few texts are known from the end of the reign of Thutmose III; thus it is not surprising that no reference to the biblical plagues have been found in Egyptian sources. Even if more sources were available, it is unlikely they would mention such adverse events. Indirect evidence of the tenth plague, however, might be found among the members of the royal household. Amenhotep II was not the eldest son of Thutmose III, for he had an elder half brother named Amenemhet who died earlier in the reign of Thutmose (Redford, *JEA*, p. 108). Thus Thutmose III's firstborn son was not alive in 1450 when the tenth plague fell on Egypt. If the household of the pharaoh suffered the loss of



a son in this plague, therefore, that son must be sought in the family of Amenhotep II.

In earlier presentations of the fifteenth-century Exodus, attention was called to the Dream Stele of Thutmose IV, which relates how he was told that he would become king even though he was not in line for the throne. This was taken as indirect evidence for Amenhotep II's firstborn son who was thought to have been lost in the tenth plague. This view must be revised now that the sons of Amenhotep II have been studied more carefully. The son of Amenhotep II who was in line for the throne before Thutmose IV was named Amenhotep. It has been estimated that he was born early in the reign of Amenhotep II, and he is known to have been the heir apparent until his father's twentieth year (Redford, *JEA*, p. 115). He apparently died around that time, which is the reason Thutmose IV came to the throne. But Amenhotep the son of Amenhotep II did not die until near the end of his father's reign; so he could not have been the son who was lost in the tenth plague at the beginning of his reign.

It has been noted, however, that it is somewhat unusual to have a king and eldest son by the same name. While this arrangement is not impossible, it seems more likely that the firstborn son of Amenhotep II would have been given a different name. Thutmose was the other royal nomen particularly favored by this dynasty. It has been proposed therefore, wholly apart from any consideration of the Exodus, that Amenhotep II had a son named Thutmose who was older than Amenhotep. Even though no inscriptional evidence for this son named Thutmose has been recovered, he has been suggested as the one who was originally first in line for the throne (cf. Redford, *JEA*, p. 114). If Amenhotep II did have such a son, he would have been born late in the reign of Thutmose III and



would have died early in the reign of Amenhotep II, which would make him the best current candidate for the royal son who died in the tenth plague. This relationship could have given Thutmose III added cause to pursue the Hebrews.

6. *piru* The first reference to ‘Apiru in Egypt comes from a tomb painting which depicts them working in the vineyards of the eastern delta in Hatshepsut’s time. On the basis of a 1450 Exodus date, this was around the time when the enslavement of the biblical Hebrews became especially oppressive. The dictum appears to apply here that the Hebrews were ‘Apiru, but not all ‘Apiru were Hebrews (see HABIRU). Thus these ‘Apiru working in the Delta could have been Hebrews, but they could also have come from some other Semitic group.

The next contemporary Egyptian reference to ‘Apiru comes from the Memphis Stele of Amenhotep II, which lists 3600 ‘Apiru as captives he brought back to Egypt from the Asiatic campaigns of his seventh and ninth years. These probably were not biblical Hebrews, because they still were wandering in the wilderness when Amenhotep conducted these campaigns. These ‘Apiru could have been taken captive, however, to compensate for the damage to Egypt and to Amenhotep’s pride that occurred as a result of the Hebrew Exodus.

In some instances in the Amarna Letters, “*Habiru*” is used to refer in a derogatory way to rival Canaanite rulers (see AMARNA TABLETS). In other instances these letters refer to *Habiru* who are more like those known in texts from elsewhere in the ancient Near East. In still other instances the activities attributed to some *Habiru* are consistent with activities of the biblical Hebrews early in the period of the judges—which is when these texts should be dated in terms of biblical history, according to a fifteenth-

century date for the [Exodus](#).

The stele of Seti I from Beth-shean (*see* picture in [INSCRIPTIONS](#)) refers to military contacts with ‘Apiru. Since these operations took place in a region where the northern Israelite tribes settled, it is possible that some of these ‘Apiru were Hebrews. Some of the ‘Apiru depicted as state slaves in [Egypt](#) during the 19th Dynasty could have come from this campaign, but they may have come from other Semitic groups captured at other times.

### *C. Objections*

1. *Chronology* The main objection to a fifteenth-century date for the Exodus is that the figure of 480 years presented by [1 K. 6:1](#) may have been derived from an inaccurate estimate, such as calculating twelve generations of forty years each. Since the length of time from the birth of one generation to the next was closer to twenty years, it is argued that this period should be shortened considerably. (The presence of the stock numbers twelve and forty may be indicative of an approximation, but there is no other indication in the text that the 480 is not literal.) The reference in [Jgs. 11:26](#) may be a gloss based on the preceding chapters in Judges, which include a total of approximately three hundred years for the reigns of the judges up to that point.

From the lines of evidence discussed above, however, it is evident that the [Israelites](#) who lived at the end of the 2nd millennium and at the beginning of the 1st millennium B.C. held chronological views dating the Exodus in the 15th [cent.](#), and that corresponds to the only date given for it in the [Bible](#). While it is possible that these data could have been corrupted in transmission, the most reasonable approach to them is to

examine in more detail the historical context in which they date the Exodus. This biblical date for the Exodus has a reciprocal relationship with the events described in Exodus as related to Egyptian history. A pragmatic approach to this date suggests a period in Egyptian history that should be examined for a possible relationship to the biblical Exodus, and considerable agreement of the evidence from Egyptian and biblical sources pointing to that period supports the accuracy of the chronological datum (480 years) from which that search started.

2. *City of Rameses* The problem that Rameses poses for the 18th-Dynasty (fifteenth-century) Exodus is not so much that it was named for a 19th-Dynasty (thirteenth-century) pharaoh as that archeological evidence for an 18th-Dynasty (fifteenth-century) occupation of the area with which Rameses is best identified has not been found yet. This is especially the case now with the excavations at *Tell el-Dab'a*, which have revealed a gap in occupation from the end of the Hyksos settlement there down to the time when it was rebuilt by the 19th Dynasty (thirteenth century).

The first point that should be taken into account here is the extent and nature of the area involved. Including its suburbs or sectors, the city of Pi-ramses took in an extensive area that now includes a number of tells. J. Van Seters estimated its size as 3 km (2 mi) from north to south and 1.5 km (1 mi) from east to west, and he located six sites of antiquities within that area. E. Uphill has estimated this area as more than 3 km (2 mi) on a side, and he has located six sites of antiquities within that area. M. Bietak, the excavator of *Tell el-Dab'a*, estimates it covered 3 square km (1.2 square mi), and he has mapped almost a dozen sites of antiquities within that area.

The Egyptian texts that describe the city of Rameses refer to the

palace area in its center and four sectors of the city surrounding it. They also refer to its port and granaries, and some area within this complex must have been occupied by the troops of pharaoh, including his chariots. If Ramses' palace has been correctly located at Qantir, the excavators of *Tell el-Dab'a* have been digging in the southern sector of the city. Hyksos remains have been found at both *Tell el-Dab'a* and Ezbet Rushdi N of it. Remains from the 12th Dynasty have been found at *Tell el-Dab'a*, Ezbet Rushdi, and *Khata'na* S of *Tell el-Dab'a*.

Thus, the city of Rameses took in a large area, and the more thorough study of that area by means of excavation has only begun. It is possible, therefore, that evidence for an 18th-Dynasty (fifteenth-century) occupation in this area will be found during subsequent explorations. A fragmentary inscription with the name of Haremhab, the last pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty, has already been found at *Tell el-Dab'a*. Since the 18th-Dynasty pharaohs who ruled through the 15th cent. (Thutmose III, Amenhotep II, and Thutmose IV) conducted well over twenty campaigns into Asia, one would expect that they had a base of operations somewhere in this vicinity.

An alternate proposal to solve this problem has been to interpret [Ex. 1:11](#) as referring to [Israelite](#) work on the sites involved under the Hyksos or the Egyptian rulers of the Middle Kingdom (J. Bimson, p. 244). Since evidence for the occupation of this area during both of these periods exists, this proposal satisfies the requirements of the archeological findings in the area. The context of [Ex. 1:11](#) appears to connect the construction work of the [Israelites](#) more closely with the [Exodus](#) than it does with their entrance into [Egypt](#), however, so this suggestion seems less likely at the present time. Further archeological developments from the region of

Rameses can be expected, and they may well include the discovery of evidence for an 18th-Dynasty (fifteenth-century) occupation there.

3. *Archeology* The major objection to the fifteenth-century date for the Exodus has come from the results of excavations in Palestine. Ai, Arad, [Bethel](#), Debir, Gibeon, Hazor, Hebron, [Heshbon](#), Hormah, Jarmuth, [Jericho](#), Lachish, and [Megiddo](#) are among the more important sites that have relevance for the date of the Conquest, and hence the Exodus. The prevailing opinion among archeologists has been that a number of these sites show evidence of destruction and resettlement in the 13th [cent.](#), presumably caused by the Israelite conquest, since the [Bible](#) mentions most of these towns in its account of the Conquest. As the excavations continue, however, new evidence comes to light that renders the earlier interpretations inconclusive. A brief summary of this evidence is given below; for a more detailed discussion, see the articles on the individual sites.

Several factors must be considered in evaluating the archeological evidence. First, according to the [Bible](#) only three towns were burned ([Jericho](#), [Josh. 6:24](#); Ai, [8:19](#); Hazor, [11:13](#)); thus destruction levels should not be expected at other sites, although evidence of occupation should be found. Second, other peoples, e.g., the Egyptians and sea-peoples, could be responsible for the destruction of some of these towns. Third, the tentative nature of archeological evidence must be remembered. Bimson's theory that the relative chronology should be revised downward, moving the end of MB II.C from 1550 to 1400, would help to harmonize the biblical account with archeological evidence, but his theory is not without problems.

Arad, Hebron, and Jarmuth yield no evidence of thirteenth-century

occupation, and thus these towns do not support a late date for the Exodus. Similarly Ai, if it is identified with et-Tell, has no evidence of occupation from 2400 to ca. 1220. This fact can be harmonized with Josh. 7–8 in two ways: either the excavations need to be expanded to another part of the tell, or another site identification must be made. Albright followed the latter option and located Ai at Bethel, which had a thirteenth-century destruction level. This level, however, may be earlier in the 13th cent. than Albright supposed; but in any case, if that level is assigned to the Conquest, then the later destruction of Bethel (Jgs. 1:22–25) is not in evidence. It seems more plausible to locate Ai at et-Tell and assign Bethel's thirteenth-century destruction to the judges period.

Debir, which Albright incorrectly identified with Tell Beit Mirsim, has now been identified with Khirbet Rabûd, but it was apparently destroyed in the early 12th cent., too late to be relevant to the Exodus and Conquest. Gibeon has yielded no evidence of occupation in the 13th cent., although one would expect such evidence in view of Josh. 9–10. Hazor has destruction levels at the end of the 15th, 14th, and 13th cents, but the Early Iron Age occupation was only a small village, which hardly corresponds with Jgs. 4:2; hence it would seem that one of the earlier destructions was a result of the Conquest. The earliest occupation of Heshbon (modern Hesbân) was in the 12th cent. (L. Geraty and R. Boraas, *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 16 [1978], 1–17), and thus it is of no help; however, it is possible that Heshbon was earlier located elsewhere, perhaps at Jālûl, where there is evidence of Late Bronze Age occupation. Jericho has no evidence of thirteenth-century occupation or destruction, but some scarabs point to a fifteenth-century occupation (despite disclaimers) and there is Late Bronze Age pottery there; also, the Middle

Bronze Age wall could have continued into the Late Bronze Age, and thus could have been the wall of Josh. 6. Lachish and Megiddo were destroyed early in the 12th cent., too late for a thirteenth-century Exodus and Conquest. Finally, N. Glueck's surface survey (AASOR, 14–15 [1934/35]; 18–19 [1939]; 25–28 [1951]) of Moab was inadequate, and thus his results showing no occupation until 1300 must be discarded (so J. M. Miller in “An Archaeological Survey of Central Moab,” a report presented to the annual session of the American Schools of Oriental Research on Nov. 19, 1978).

In conclusion, the archeological evidence does not seem to support a thirteenth-century Exodus and Conquest; rather, much of it points to a fifteenth-century date.

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