

ISRAEL, EGYPT, AND THE EXODUS

By Ashby Camp

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Using certain securely dated historical events, one can derive from Scripture absolute dates for events involving the patriarchs and the Exodus.¹ With less certainty, one also can establish an absolute chronology for the reigns of various Egyptian Pharaohs. Archaeologist Douglas Petrovich, who has studied the subject for many years, argues in detail for an Egyptian chronology that fits neatly with the biblical storyline.²

DATE	EVENT	REIGN	PHARAOH
2166	Abraham born in Ur		
2091	Abraham enters Canaan		
2066	Isaac born		
2006	Jacob and Esau born		
1991	Abraham dies		
		12th Dynasty	
		1979-1950	Amenemhat I
		1960-1916	Sesostris I
1915	Joseph born	1919-1884	Amenemhat II
1898	Joseph sold into Egypt		
1886	Isaac dies	1887-1878	Sesostris II
1885	Joseph made ruler in Egypt		
1876	Jacob and family move to Egypt	1878-1840	Sesostris III
1859	Jacob dies in Egypt	1859-1813	Amenemhat III
		1814-1805	Amenemhat IV
1805	Joseph dies in Egypt	1805-1801	Queen Sobekneferu
		15th Dynasty	
		1670-1560	The Hyksos
		18th Dynasty	
		1575-1550	Ahmosé
1529	Aaron born	1550-1529	Amenhotep I
1526	Moses born	1529-1516	Thutmose I
		1516-1506	Thutmose II
		1506/4-1488	Queen Hatshepsut
1486	Moses flees to Midian	1506-1452	Thutmose III
1446	Moses returns and Exodus	1455-1418	Amenhotep II
		1418-1408	Thutmose IV
1406	Moses dies	1408-1369	Amenhotep III
		1369-1352	Amenhotep IV
		1352-1349	Smenkhkare
		1349-1339	Tutankhamun
		1339-1335	Ay
		1335-1307	Horemheb

¹ See, e.g., Andrew E. Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011), 67-86.

² Douglas Petrovich, "Amenhotep II and the Historicity of the Exodus-Pharaoh" (Feb. 4, 2010), <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2010/02/04/Amenhotep-II-and-the-Historicity-of-the-Exodus-Pharaoh.aspx>; see also, Douglas Petrovich, "A Chronology of the 12th, 18th, 19th, & 20th Dynasties of Egypt," https://www.academia.edu/4452742/Chronology_of_Egyptian_Dynasties_12_18_19_and_20 and note that the end of Hatshepsut's reign has been adjusted from 1484 to 1488.

Petrovich's proposed Egyptian chronology is within the bounds of mainstream archaeology and Egyptology. In other words, he is not arguing, like David Rohl and John Bimson, that the conventional Egyptian timeline is radically skewed, off by hundreds of years. Rather, he presents historical evidence for dating the reigns of the Pharaohs within the generally accepted framework of Egyptian history. All of his dates are, at the very least, plausible and would find support among mainstream archaeologists and Egyptologists. For example, his reigns for the 18th Dynasty vary by only a few years from those given in the *Cambridge Ancient History*, "a publication produced by impartial scholars and recognized as impeccable authority."³ Richard Lobban, Professor of Anthropology and African Studies at Rhode Island College, dates the reign of the key figure Amenhotep II from 1453/1450 to 1425/1419.⁴ Many similar examples could be provided.

You see that Abraham entered Canaan (2091) over two centuries (215 years) before Jacob's family moved into Egypt (1876). They dwelled largely in tents in the region and were predominantly keepers of livestock. But since Lot, who like Abraham had flocks and herds, resided in the city of Sodom, perhaps others likewise dwelled in cities. In any event, they lived among the various people groups in Canaan for a long time and no doubt added aspects of Canaanite culture to the Mesopotamian culture that Abraham and his family had brought with them.

This is before the giving of the Mosaic Law, which Paul described in Eph. 2:14 as a "dividing wall" between the Jews and Gentiles. In other words, the Mosaic Law isolated the Israelites from the surrounding cultures which made them more distinctive and thus potentially more readily identifiable in the archaeological record. Those distinctives of later Israelite culture were not part of patriarchal life and thus are not available as markers of Israelite presence.

Moreover, given the kindness and goodwill shown to Jacob's family by Pharaoh when they entered Egypt in 1876, one can imagine the Israelites being favorably disposed to Egyptian culture. When one adds the fact the Israelites in Egypt engaged in idol worship (Josh. 24:14; Ezek. 20:5-10, 23:3; see also, Ex. 32:1; Lev. 17:7; Ps. 106:7; Acts 7:39-43), it becomes virtually impossible to distinguish them by archaeological remains from other Canaanite groups that may have been in Egypt.

This puts a different light on the frequent charge that there is no evidence of Israelites in Egypt. As archaeologist James Hoffmeier states:

Archaeology's ability to determine the ethnicity of a people in the archaeological record, especially of the Israelites at such an early period, is quite limited. Assuming the Israelites were in Egypt during Egypt's New Kingdom (c. 1540–1200 B.C.), what kind of pottery would they have used? What house plans would they have lived in? What sort of burial traditions did they practice? And would archaeologists be able to identify the burial of these early Israelites who ended up

³ Eugene H. Merrill, *A Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 58-59.

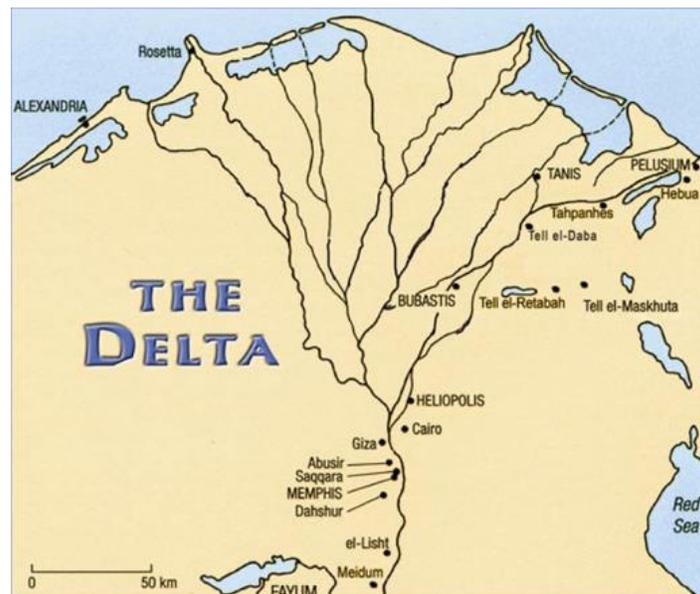
⁴ Richard A. Lobban, Jr., *Historical Dictionary of Ancient and Medieval Nubia* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 28.

as slaves anyway? And how are all these things different from those of Canaanites or other Semitic-speaking peoples in Egypt at this time?⁵

The fact the Israelites were concentrated in the damp eastern Delta of Egypt, called the Land of Rameses (Gen. 47:11) and Goshen (Gen. 45:10, 47:4, 6; Ex. 8:22; 9:26), makes it very unlikely that any papyrus writings documenting their presence would have survived. After more than 35 years, Manfred Bietak's team excavating at the Delta site of Tell el-Dab'a has not discovered *any* papyri. The same goes for Edgar Pusch's 25 years of excavating at the sister site of Qantir.⁶

As for carved monuments, it would be surprising to find a reference to foreign inhabitants, especially those that eventually became slaves and were associated with the humiliating defeat of the Exodus. Even if such references had existed, one can imagine they would be systematically removed or destroyed, as was done with references to Queen Hatshepsut. Renowned Egyptologist Kenneth Kitchen makes the point with regard to a later Pharaoh. Referring to 2 Chron. 14:9-15, he states: "No pharaoh ever celebrates a defeat! So, if Osorkon [I] had ever sent out a Zerah [the Cushite], with resulting defeat, no Egyptian source would ever report on such an incident, particularly publicly. The lack (to date) of external corroboration in such a case is itself worth nothing, in terms of judging history."⁷

With those limitations in mind, the excavations at Tell el-Dab'a are far more significant than is often recognized. This site was occupied for centuries, during which time it expanded and became known by different names (Rowaty, Avaris, Peru-nefer, and Rameses). The excavations show that in the mid-19th century B.C., right around the time Scripture says Jacob and his family moved to Egypt, there was an influx of people from Canaan to this location.



⁵ James K. Hoffmeier, "Out of Egypt" in Dorothy Resig, editor, *Ancient Israel in Egypt and the Exodus* (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2012), 3.

⁶ Hoffmeier, "Out of Egypt," 4-5.

⁷ K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 11.

The people from Canaan who inhabited this site sometimes are referred to in the literature as "Asiatics." That is a kind of catch-all category that Egyptians used for inhabitants of the Levant (the region of Syria and Palestine) and Mesopotamia. The "Asiatics" at Tell el-Dab'a are for various reasons understood to have come from the Levant, an area encompassing the land of Canaan. Bietak describes the site as "a settlement constructed at the beginning of the 12th Dynasty and completely re-settled by Canaanites from the late 12th Dynasty onwards."⁸

Archaeologist Bryant Wood says of the 19th-century settlement at Tell el-Dab'a:

About 82 acres in size, it was unfortified, although there were many enclosure walls, most likely for keeping animals. The living quarters consisted of small rectangular buildings built of sand bricks. Neutron activation analysis indicates that Palestinian-type pottery from the village originated in southern Palestine, and Bietak notes that the presence of handmade cooking pots is evidence of a nomadic pastoral population. He further observes that these "foreigners" could not have settled there without Egyptian consent.⁹

About 20% of the pottery found at the settlement was of Palestinian type, and 50% of the male burials included weapons of Syrian-Palestinian type. The largest building in the community was a house consisting of six rooms laid out in horseshoe fashion around an open courtyard. That floor plan is identical to the later Israelite "four-room house" in Palestine. The villa evidently belonged to an official of some kind. It is conceivable that after discharging his administrative duties related to the famine Joseph moved to Rowaty to be near his family. If that happened, this prominent house may well have been his.

One of the tombs in the village cemetery included a large statue, almost two times life size, of a seated Asiatic dignitary. The statue had been deliberately destroyed and fragments of it were found in two separate tombs (actually more but only two were large enough to accommodate it), so it is unclear which one originally housed it.¹⁰ Wood says of the statue:

The likeness was of a seated official 1 1/2 times life size. It was made of limestone and exhibited excellent workmanship. The skin was yellow, the traditional color of Asiatics in Egyptian art. It had a mushroom-shaped hairstyle, painted red, typical of that shown in Egyptian artwork for Asiatics. A throwstick, the Egyptian hieroglyph for a foreigner, was held against the right shoulder. The statue had been intentionally smashed and defaced (Bietak 1996: 20–21).¹¹

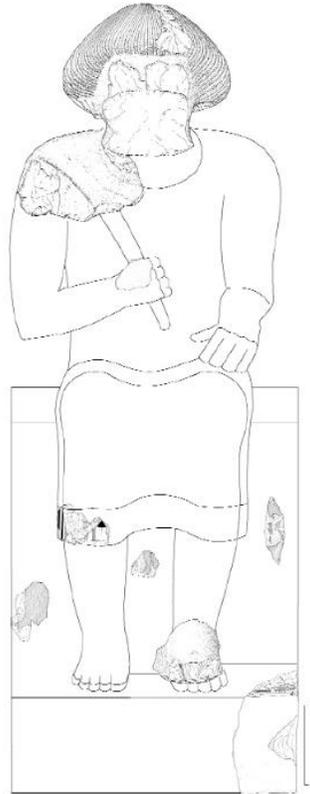
⁸ Manfred Bietak, "Egypt and the Levant" in Toby Wilkinson, editor, *The Egyptian World* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 422.

⁹ Bryant G. Wood, "From Ramesses to Shiloh: Archaeological Discoveries Bearing on the Exodus-Judges Period" (Apr. 2, 2008), <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2008/04/02/From-Ramesses-to-Shiloh-Archaeological-Discoveries-Bearing-on-the-Exodus-Judges-Period.aspx>.

¹⁰ Robert Schiestl, "The Statue of an Asiatic Man from Tell el-Dab'a, Egypt," *Egypt and the Levant* 16 (2006), 173-185.

¹¹ Bryant G. Wood, "The Sons of Jacob: New Evidence for the Presence of the Israelites in Egypt" (Jan. 28, 2016), <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2016/01/28/The-Sons-of-Jacob-New-Evidence-for-the-Presence-of-the-Israelites-in-Egypt.aspx>.

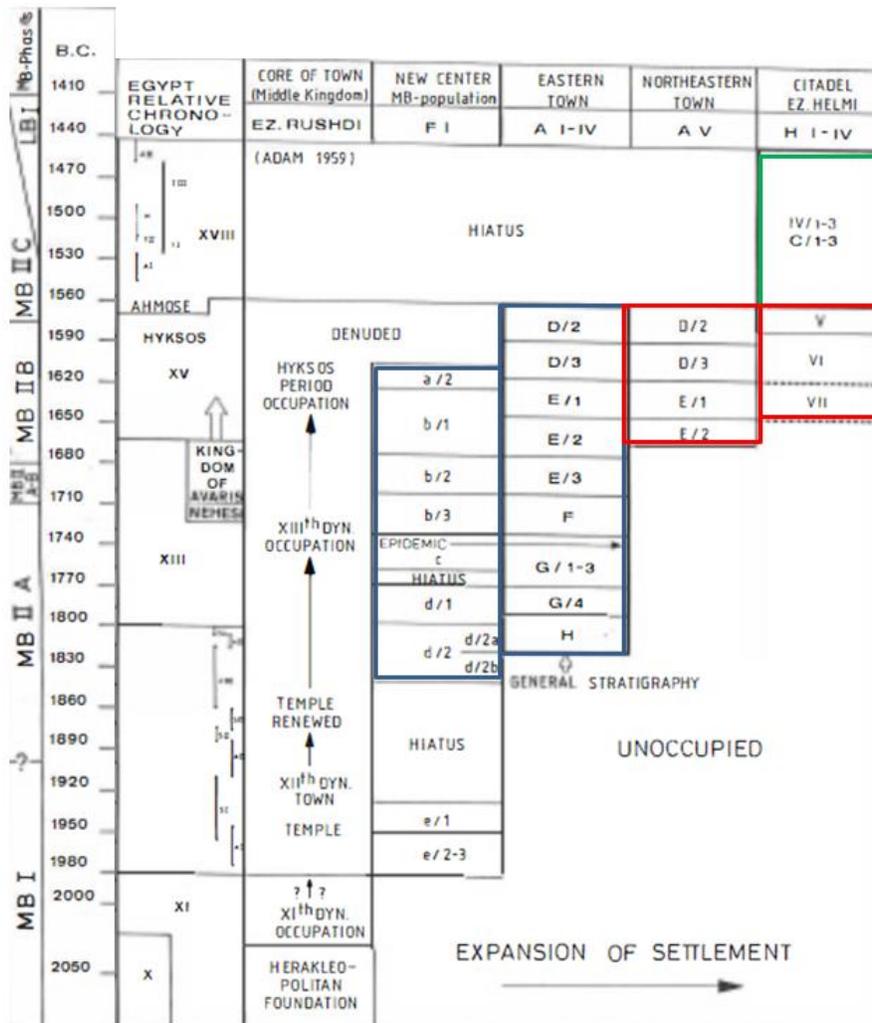
Given that the tombs date from around the time of Joseph's death in 1805, it is possible this statue was in Joseph's tomb and was erected in his honor. Whether that is the case or not, the reason it was later destroyed is unknown, especially if Schiestl is correct in tentatively assigning that destruction to the end of the 18th century (rather than the later time of the Hyksos takeover or after the Exodus). Here is the proposed reconstruction from the available fragments.



The Asiatic community at Tell el-Dab'a grew quickly from its initial settlement in the mid-19th century and spread eastward. Around 1670 another group of Asiatics, known as the Hyksos, occupied the adjoining area to the northeast and seized control of the government of northern Egypt. The site was by then called Avaris, and it served as the center of the Hyksos' dynasty, complete with a substantial palace complex that they built. The Hyksos and the earlier group of Asiatics coexisted and prospered at Avaris throughout the Hyksos' approximately 110-year rule in Egypt, which came to be known as the 15th Dynasty of Egypt.

Around 1560 Ahmose, a ruler in southern Egypt, succeeded in removing the hated Hyksos from power and expelled them from Egypt. This marks the establishment of the 18th Egyptian Dynasty. At that point, the archaeological record at Avaris in the areas occupied by the Hyksos and the other group of Asiatic people goes quiet, with the exception of one of the areas of prior Hyksos occupation which became the site of a new Egyptian palace complex.

Here is a chart of the site created by the excavators that I have modified by adjusting the dates to correspond better to Petrovich's chronology and color coding the occupied areas in accordance with Bryant Wood's video lecture titled "The Pharaohs of the Bondage."



Blue = Canaanite occupation **Red** = Hyksos occupation **Green** = Egyptian occupation

Wood says the non-Hyksos Asiatic group was still present in the area, but it is unclear where they were living. They obviously were no longer flourishing there and were not creating structures and architectural remains in the formerly occupied areas.

It seems likely that Ahmose was the Pharaoh who did not know Joseph referred to in Ex. 1:8. It is possible he literally did not know of Joseph, since Joseph had been dead for about 245 years (1805-1560) and Ahmose was from Thebes which is a long way from the Delta (about 380 miles from Tell el-Dab'a). But the verse may mean he did not "know" Joseph in the figurative sense of he did not recognize any obligation toward him.

Having just overthrown the Hyksos, foreign rulers who were Asiatics, one can see how Ahmose would be concerned that the non-Hyksos Asiatics in the Delta might be persuaded to side with the Hyksos in the event of further conflict. That fits well with Pharaoh's rationale expressed in Ex. 1:10: *Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war*

*breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and [take possession of] the land.*¹² That is especially true if they already were a large population as Ex. 1:9 states in reference to the Israelites.

In that regard, Avaris is only one of many Delta cities where these Asiatics may have resided. In fact, in the narrow fertile band known as the Wadi Tumilat that extends eastward from the easternmost Nile tributary, 21 of the 71 sites excavated yielded materials identified with the Levant during the time from about 1800 to 1550. Canaanite remains were found at Tell el-Maskhuta from roughly 1830 down to 1750, and it is clear that an Asiatic element resided at Tell el-Yehudiyeh during the time from roughly 1800 down to the Hyksos expulsion. Interestingly, Tell el-Yehudiyeh is Arabic for "mound of the Jew," perhaps reflecting a faint memory of an ancient Jewish presence in the area. A nearby cemetery dated to 1700-1600 contained ceramic remains of a Palestinian type and is thought by archaeologist Olga Tufnell to be a burial site for "a poor community of shepherds."¹³

So while there are no documents or inscriptions that establish definitively an Israelite presence in Egypt during the time the Bible puts them there, there is significant circumstantial evidence supporting that claim. As Wood points out, archaeology has provided evidence of "the right culture in the right place at the right time." We have Canaanites in the eastern Delta during the time of the Israelite sojourn described in Scripture. That is quite a coincidence. Speaking specifically of Tell el-Dab'a, Wood says, "Without identifying inscriptions, we will never know for sure if the Str. d/2 people were Israelites. This much we can say, however. The finds represent exactly what we would expect to find from Israelite occupation in Egypt."¹⁴

If the Asiatics at Avaris were enslaved after Ahmose defeated the Hyksos, perhaps they were relocated to more temporary work-site quarters that have not survived or were in an area that has not been excavated. That would explain the "hiatus" in the archaeological record in the areas where they formerly resided. They certainly would be needed as laborers given the construction of the Egyptian palaces at the site and the conversion of the city into a "store city" (see below).

Note that Gen. 15:13 need not mean that the length of the Israelites' *slavery* was 400 years. Rather, the 400 years is a round number for the time of the overall Egyptian sojourn, the time more specifically identified in Ex. 12:40-41 as 430 years. This is expressed in the NIV rendering: Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there."

The store city of Pithom (Ex. 1:11) that the Israelite slaves were forced to build is thought by many scholars to be located at Tell el-Retabah. The oldest remains so far discovered date to

¹² The idiomatic translation of the final clause is based on Douglas Stuart's discussion of the issue in *Exodus*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 65-66. See also, NJPS which renders the clause "gain ascendancy over the land."

¹³ James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 65-67.

¹⁴ Wood, "The Sons of Jacob," <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2016/01/28/The-Sons-of-Jacob-New-Evidence-for-the-Presence-of-the-Israelites-in-Egypt.aspx>.

the early 18th Dynasty, which began with Ahmose, and consist of a relatively large silo (just over 8 feet in diameter) constructed of mud bricks. Only a small section of this layer has been excavated, so it cannot be determined at present whether the silo belonged to a "private estate" or was a government-built facility.¹⁵

The store city of Rameses (Ex. 1:11) is thought to be located at Tell el-Dab'a (or, more precisely, just north at Qantir). At the time, the city was called Peru-nefer, the name the Egyptians gave to Avaris, the Hyksos capital, after they defeated them. It would not be known as Rameses until the 13th century when Rameses II would build his great city there. The Israelite slaves are said to have built the store city *of Rameses* because at the time of the inspired editorial shaping of the text into its final canonical form the name of the city was updated to the name by which it was then known. This is obviously the case in Gen. 47:11 where it is said that Joseph settled his family in the "land of Rameses," referring to the eastern Delta, an event that occurred around 1876. The same phenomenon is evident in Gen. 14:14 where Abraham is said to have pursued the four kings as far as Dan. The city at that time was named Laish; it was not named Dan until around 1100 when it was taken over by the tribe of Dan (Judg. 18:7, 27).

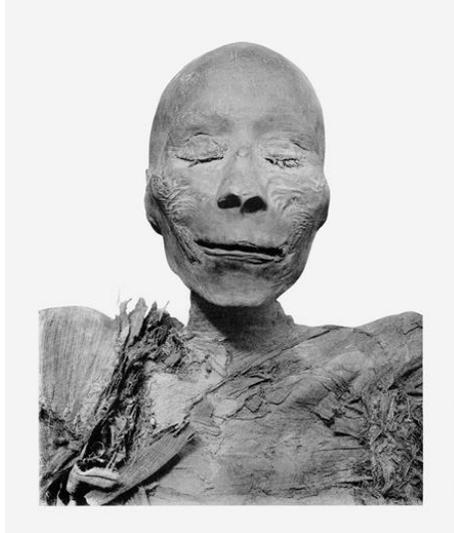
Massive storage facilities have been discovered at the site dating to the early 18th Dynasty. Excavators have found at least 30 round silos that are each 17 feet in diameter. Bietak writes:

At the northern sections of our excavations, the platform C of the late Hyksos period had been taken down during the early 18th Dynasty and a storage compound set up on top of it. It consisted of at least 30 round grain silos and other silos were found beside the Palace in the south and at other places. Each silo was about 5.25 meters (10 cubits) in diameter. The silos were renewed up to four times which would speak in favor of a long time span. This amenity was used to store enormous quantities of grain and probably other foodstuff for a considerable number of people. It could have been a makeshift military facility for supplying troops.¹⁶

As we follow the biblical chronology down to the time of the Exodus and compare that to Petrovich's chronology of the Pharaohs, the two mesh together very neatly. We see that Aaron was born in 1529, the same year that Thutmose I succeeded Amenhotep I as Pharaoh. Since there is no mention of Aaron's life being in danger at birth, the decree to kill the male Israelite babies, which was in effect by the time Moses was born in 1526, must have been issued in that three-year window, presumably by the new Pharaoh Thutmose I. Here is a picture of his mummy.

¹⁵ Sławomir Rzepka et al., "New Kingdom and the Third Intermediate Period in Tell el-Retaba," *Egypt and the Levant* 21 (2011), 156-157.

¹⁶ Manfred Bietak, "The Palatial Precinct at the Nile Branch (Area H)," http://www.auaris.at/html/ez_helmi_en.html.



And here is a statue of his head from the British Museum.



Hatshepsut was the daughter of Thutmose I and Queen Ahmose. She very likely was the daughter of Pharaoh who rescued Moses from the river and raised him in the palace as her stepson. Here is her mummy, which was positively identified in 2007.



And here is a statue of her during better days, no doubt idealized to some degree.



Thutmose I was succeeded in 1516 by Thutmose II, who was Hatshepsut's half-brother, the son of Thutmose I by another woman (Mutnefert). To continue the royal bloodline, Hatshepsut and Thutmose II married. They produced a daughter, Neferure, but no son. Thutmose II had a son, Thutmose III, by another woman (Isis), but Thutmose III was only an infant or small child when his father died in 1506. Thutmose III formally assumed the throne, but his stepmother, Hatshepsut, who also was the stepmother of Moses, assumed the role of coregent until her death in 1488. Interestingly, examination of her mummy suggests she died in her 50s, which would put her at 12 to 21 years of age when Moses was rescued. Here is a chart of the lineage that I created based on Wood's lecture "The Pharaohs of the Bondage."



Pharaoh, of course, stubbornly refused to free the Israelites and increased their hardship by requiring them to gather their own straw but not reducing their quota of bricks. Interestingly, the only scene discovered in Egypt that shows the making of bricks is from the Tomb of Rekmire, an official in Thebes, which dates to the reign of Amenhotep II.



Two questions arise immediately regarding the claim that Amenhotep II was the Pharaoh of the Exodus. The first is how he could be the Pharaoh of the Exodus when he obviously did not drown in the Red Sea in 1446 but continued to reign until 1418. Indeed, his mummified body is still preserved. The answer is that Scripture does not indicate definitively that Pharaoh died in the Red Sea at the time of the Exodus. It nowhere states that expressly, and the texts on which that conclusion is based leave ample room for doubt.

In Ex. 14:4 and 14:17-18 a distinction is drawn between Pharaoh and all his host, chariots, and horsemen. God says in those texts that he will get glory over not only Pharaoh but also over his military men who serve as the source of his strength. In that light, Ex. 14:23 probably should be (certainly can be) read to mean that those who went into the parted sea were the horses, chariots, and horsemen of Pharaoh rather than Pharaoh himself. According to Ex. 14:28, it was those chariots and horsemen who were killed, the host of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea (see also Ex. 15:4, 19).

All of these chariots, and presumably the horsemen as well, were under the command of officers (Ex. 14:7), so one need not speculate that Pharaoh actually led the pursuit into the sea

rather than directing that pursuit from the rear. Ancients knew well the need to protect kings in battle (e.g., 2 Sam. 18:2-3; 1 Ki. 22:31-33), and though the Israelites were largely unarmed civilians, they were perceived as enough of a threat, given the power of the God they served, to warrant such a significant military force. Note that Ex. 15:4 speaks of the chariots of Pharaoh and his host being cast into the sea and then tellingly specifies that "his chosen officers" were sunk in the Red Sea without identifying Pharaoh himself as being among the dead.

Psalms 106:11 says simply that the waters of the Red Sea covered the adversaries who were pursuing the Israelites. It does not refer to Pharaoh. Psalm 136:15 says that God "shook off" (*nā'ar*) Pharaoh and his host *at* (*bē* can mean at or in) the Red Sea, meaning he there broke off their pursuit of Israel by drowning the host of Pharaoh that had followed Israel into the sea. It need not mean Pharaoh was among those who drown.

Certainly God did not have to kill Pharaoh to gain glory over him as mentioned in Ex. 14:4, 17-18. Administering a humiliating defeat of Pharaoh's great army at the hands of a rabble of largely unarmed and recently-freed civilian slaves makes the point of God's supremacy quite well and leaves no doubt that God could take Pharaoh's life whenever he chose to do so.

The second question that arises regarding the claim that Amenhotep II was the Pharaoh of the Exodus is why he did not die in the tenth plague that killed all the firstborn of the Egyptians. The answer, as you might imagine, is that he was not the eldest son of Thutmose III. Thutmose III's firstborn son was Amenemhet, the older half-brother of Amenhotep II. He was in line for the throne but died before he could assume it.¹⁷

Of course, if Amenhotep II was the Pharaoh of the Exodus, then his firstborn son would have died in the tenth plague. So if Amenhotep II's successor, Thutmose IV, was Amenhotep's firstborn son, Amenhotep could not be the Pharaoh of the Exodus. It turns out that is not a problem because Thutmose IV was not Amenhotep II's eldest son. This is clear from inscriptions and other written documentation.¹⁸

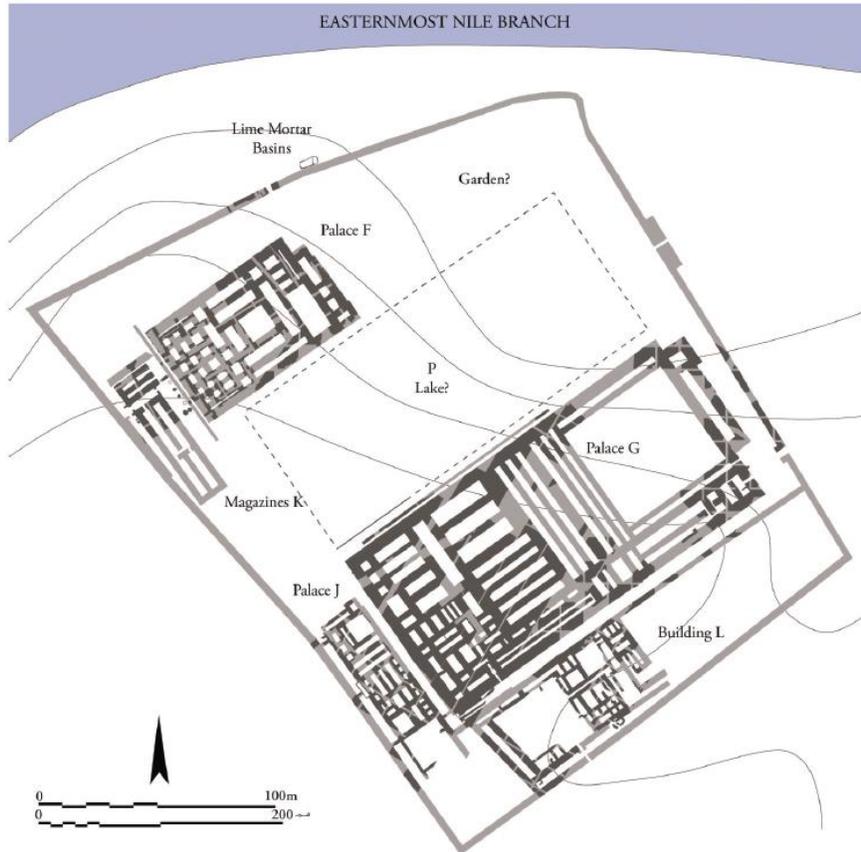
As I mentioned, after Ahmose expelled the Hyksos rulers around 1560, the Egyptians constructed a royal citadel at the Hyksos' capital of Avaris, which is the archaeological site Tell el-Dab'a. Gary Byers remarks, "While the national capital for the 18th Dynasty Pharaohs was in Memphis 13 miles south of Cairo, after the Hyksos experience a royal presence would always have been seen as necessary for national security in the Nile's eastern delta."¹⁹ At the time of Moses and Amenhotep II, this complex occupied about 13.6 acres and consisted of three palaces (F, G, and J), associated buildings, and a perimeter wall. Palaces F and G were parallel to each other with an artificial lake or large central square between them.²⁰ One of these palaces may well be where Moses and Aaron confronted Amenhotep. It was constructed on the easternmost branch of the Nile, and the city served as a major naval stronghold in the time of Thutmose III

¹⁷ See Petrovich, "Amenhotep II," <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2010/02/04/Amenhotep-II-and-the-Historicity-of-the-Exodus-Pharaoh.aspx>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Gary Byers, "Israel in Egypt" (Sept. 24, 2008), <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2008/09/24/israel-in-egypt.aspx#Article>.

²⁰ Bryant G. Wood, "New Discoveries at Rameses" (Oct. 26, 2008), <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2008/10/26/New-Discoveries-at-Rameses.aspx>.



Very interestingly, this strategic center in the eastern Delta was mysteriously abandoned. There is nothing recorded in Egyptian history that explains it. The excavators state (emphasis supplied):

The palace district was probably abandoned after the reign of Amenophis II [=Amenhotep II, 1453–1419 BC]...*The reason for the abandonment of this district, and, presumably, the entire city adjoining the district on the south is an unsolved puzzle at this time. Its solution would be of the greatest importance to historians.* The suggestion that the peaceful foreign policy of the late reign of Amenophis II and Tuthmose IV made this militarily important settlement unnecessary is not convincing. A plague, such as the one documented for Avaris in the late Middle Kingdom, and associated with Avaris in later tradition, appears to be the most likely solution of this problem, although it cannot be proven at this time.²²

This abandonment is all the more intriguing in light of Petrovich's 2013 article in the *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* in which he makes a lengthy and detailed argument that the abandonment took place *during* the reign of Amenhotep II rather than after. Petrovich writes:

²² Quoted in Wood, "New Discoveries at Rameses," <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2008/10/26/New-Discoveries-at-Rameses.aspx>.

Once the native Egyptians eradicated the foreign invaders who had dominated their landscape for over a century, they quickly moved to rebuild the destroyed city and establish it as a storehouse, eventually to be utilized as a military garrison with weapon-making facilities. Peru-nefer/Avaris became the most vital cog in the unprecedented military campaigning under the reigns of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II. Yet during the height of Egypt's enterprise and glory, her naval base was abandoned mysteriously, and her imperialistic machinery ground to a halt. Egypt suddenly sought to make treaties rather than seize whatever she desired.

Neither the site nor Egyptian annals provides an explicit answer as to why Avaris/Peru-nefer was abandoned. Even years of excavation at the site have not answered this vital question, as Bietak himself states that "[t]he reasons for this are very unclear." . . .

[T]he available evidence indicates that the vacating of the site is understood best to have occurred *during* the reign of Amenhotep II, rather than at the end of his reign or during the reign of Thutmose IV. Moreover, the historical evidence from Amenhotep II's reign points to the events of Year 9 as providing the key to unraveling the mysteries surrounding both the odd change in Egypt's political and military direction and the desertion of Egypt's vital naval base at the height of her imperialism.²³

Year 9 of Amenhotep II's reign, at least by Petrovich's calculations, would be 1446, the year of the Exodus. The odd change in Egypt's political and military direction to which Petrovich refers was the sudden curtailment of its aggression and imperialism at the seeming height of its power. Amenhotep II's predecessor, Thutmose III, was a renowned conqueror who led 17 military campaigns into the Levant. According to Petrovich, Amenhotep led only 2, the last being a rare November incursion into southern Palestine some 6 months after the Exodus, the timing of which suggests it was in response to some kind of emergency.²⁴

The strangeness of that campaign is further reflected in the fact the forces stayed closer to Egypt than in the prior campaign, the opposite of how successive campaigns normally were conducted, and focused far more on capturing slaves and chariots than did prior campaigns. Indeed, the "booty list" from that campaign includes 101,128 prisoners, 1,082 chariots, and 13,500 weapons. That is 46 times the number of prisoners reported in Amenhotep's first campaign, which is certainly consistent with the need to replenish a recently lost slave force.²⁵

Regarding the reversal of foreign policy, Petrovich writes:

²³ Douglas Petrovich, "Toward Pinpointing the Timing of the Egyptian Abandonment of Avaris During the Middle of the 18th Dynasty," *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 5 (2013), 21-22. The article is available online at https://www.academia.edu/3219636/2013_Toward_Pinpointing_the_Timing_of_the_Egyptian_Abandonment_of_Avaris_during_the_Middle_of_the_18th_Dynasty.

²⁴ Petrovich, "Amenhotep II," <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2010/02/04/Amenhotep-II-and-the-Historicity-of-the-Exodus-Pharaoh.aspx>.

²⁵ Ibid.

Another oddity of A2 [Amenhotep's second campaign] is that after its conclusion, the Egyptian army – established by Thutmose III as the 15th century BC's most elite fighting force – went into virtual hibernation. Their previous policy of unwavering aggressiveness toward Mitanni became one of passivity and the signing of peace treaties. The reason for this new policy is missing from the historical record, but Amenhotep II evidently was the pharaoh who first signed a treaty with Mitanni, subsequent to A2. Redford connects this event to "the arrival (after year 10, we may be sure) of a Mitannian embassy sent by [Mitanni's King] Saussatar with proposals of 'brotherhood' (i.e., a fraternal alliance and renunciation of hostilities)." Redford adds that "Amenophis II seemed susceptible to negotiations," and that he "was apparently charmed and disarmed by the embassy from 'Naharin,' and perhaps even signed a treaty." Yet such a treaty is completely out of character for imperial Egypt and this prideful monarch, especially since "the pharaonic state of the Eighteenth Dynasty could, more easily than Mitanni, sustain the expense of periodic military incursions 800 km into Asia." Support for Amenhotep II being the first to sign a pact with Mitanni is found in the actions of Thutmose IV: "Only by postulating a change of reign can we explain a situation in which the new pharaoh, Thutmose IV, can feel free to attack Mitannian holdings with impunity." Why would Amenhotep II do the unthinkable, and opt to make a treaty with Mitanni?

This mysterious reversal in foreign policy would remain unexplainable and unthinkable if not for the possibility of a single, cataclysmic event. If the Egyptians lost virtually their entire army in the springtime disaster at the Red Sea in Year 9, a desperate reconnaissance campaign designed to "save face" with the rest of the ancient world and to replenish their Israelite slave-base would be paramount. Certainly the Egyptians would have needed time to rally their remaining forces together, however small and/or in shambles their army may have been, and it would explain a November campaign that was nothing more than a slave-raid into Palestine as a show of force. The Egyptians could not afford to live through the winter without the production that was provided by the Hebrew workforce, and they could not allow Mitanni or any other ancient power to consider using the winter to plan an attack on Egyptian territories, which would seem vulnerable.²⁶

In addition, the "booty list" from Amenhotep II's second campaign refers to other foreign rulers having heard of his great victories. Petrovich comments, "This reference to the effect of a military campaign upon kings of distant nations, all of whom ruled empires in their own right, is unique among contemporary Egyptian booty lists and annals." This concern over how other kings viewed his Year-9 conquests may be the result of his needing a victorious campaign after the Exodus defeat to ward off suspicions that Egypt was no longer able to wage war.²⁷

Another intriguing bit of evidence supportive of the claim Amenhotep II was the Pharaoh of the Exodus is his subsequent desecration of Hatshepsut's image. At some point after her death, a concerted effort was made to remove her from Egyptian history. Petrovich writes:

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

Many inscribed cartouches of her were erased, while her busts were smashed or broken into pieces, perhaps by gangs of workmen dispatched to various sites throughout Egypt. In some cases, the culprits carefully and completely hacked out the silhouette of her image from carvings, often leaving a distinct, Hatshepsut-shaped lacuna in the middle of a scene, often as a preliminary step to replacing it with a different image or royal cartouche, usually that of Thutmose I or II. At Karnak, her obelisks were walled-up and incorporated into the vestibule in front of Pylon V, while at Djoser-Djeseru her statues and sphinxes were removed, smashed, and cast into trash dumps.²⁸

Though most Egyptologists believe this campaign was waged by Thutmose III out of an alleged sense of sexist shame for having shared the throne with a female ruler, there are serious objections to that theory. It is inconsistent with how he otherwise treated Hatshepsut's memory, it was done too long after she left office for that motive to make sense, and it does not explain why attacks also were made against Senenmut, the foreign chief-advisor of Hatshepsut. A much better candidate for this attack is Amenhotep II. If Hatshepsut had raised Moses as her own son, the humiliating and devastating defeat at the Red Sea would have left Amenhotep seething with rage against her, the kind of rage that would explain wanting to extinguish her existence in the afterlife, which was the effect that expunging one from the society's memory was believed to have.²⁹

Around 1400 Pharaoh Amenhotep III built a temple in Soleb (in the current nation of Sudan) that was dedicated to the god Amon-re. The inscribed topographical list at the temple refers to "the Land of the Shasu of Yahweh." "The term Shasu is almost exclusively used in New Kingdom texts for semi-nomadic peoples living in parts of Lebanon, Syria, Sinai, Canaan, and Transjordan."³⁰ So here is an Egyptian reference some 50 years after the Exodus to a semi-nomadic people associated with the Levant who were devoted to Yahweh, the God of the Israelites.³¹ That certainly suggests an Egyptian familiarity with Israel and its God at a very early date, a familiarity that is consistent with the events of the Exodus. Aling and Billington conclude:

Although we do not have all the information that we wish we did, it is significant that there are no mentions of the Shasu of Yahweh in Egyptian texts earlier than the reign of Amenhotep III. If the group in question were Yahweh followers who never went to Egypt, why are they absent in topographical lists from the early period of the 18th Dynasty, for example, from the extensive topographical lists of Thutmosis III? The reason may very well be because the

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Charles Aling and Clyde Billington, "The Name Yahweh in Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts" (Mar. 8, 2010), <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2010/03/08/The-Name-Yahweh-in-Egyptian-Hieroglyphic-Texts.aspx>.

³¹ It is possible the phrase should be understood as "the land of the nomads who live in the area of Yahweh" instead of "the land of the nomads who worship the God Yahweh," but in that case certainly "the area of Yahweh" was named after the God of the Israelites. And note that no town or geographical area bearing the name Yahweh has been discovered.

Shasu of Yahweh were indeed the Israelites and that they were still living in Egypt in the early 18th Dynasty. . . .

It thus appears very likely that the Shasu of Yahweh, who are mentioned in the topographical texts at Soleb and Amarah-West, were the Israelites who by about 1400 BC had settled into their own land (*t3*) in the mountains of Canaan. It also appears that for the ancient Egyptians the one feature that distinguished the Israelites from all the other Shasu (Semitic herders) in this area was their worship of the God of Yahweh.

It also seems likely that the name "Israel" was used in an Egyptian inscription known as the Berlin Statue Pedestal Relief 21687. In 2001, Manfred Görg published a new reading of an incomplete name on the inscription suggesting it was an archaic form of "Israel." Gorg's proposed reading was disputed by James Hoffmeier, but in 2010 Gorg, joined by Peter van der Veen of the University of Mainz and Christoffer Theis of the University of Heidelberg, published a scholarly defense of the reading with additional supporting evidence. The inscription itself dates to the reign of Ramesses II in the Nineteenth Dynasty (13th century), but based on the spellings of the names it is believed to have been copied from an earlier inscription from around 1400.³² That would make it the oldest express reference to Israel by a couple of centuries, a date that fits with an Exodus under Amenhotep II.

The sum of the matter is that those who reject the historicity of Scripture's account of Israel, Egypt, and the Exodus are being unreasonably skeptical. They are demanding a kind or quantum of evidence that is unrealistic given the limitations of archaeological investigation of ancient Egypt. When those defenses are lowered, one's eyes are opened to Scripture's consistency with the historical data. One can appreciate the fact there was a significant population from the land of Jacob's family in the precise area described in Scripture at the precise time they are said to have been there. One can see that Pithom and Rameses were indeed storage cities as stated in Scripture, one can see the meshing of many biblical details with the chronology of Egyptian rulers, and one can see the significant circumstantial evidence pointing to some kind of transformative event in Egypt during the reign of Amenhotep II. It seems that until that Day there will always be room to defend one's unbelief; absolute certainty is beyond historical inquiry. But there likewise will be room for an intellectually satisfying faith, as the evidence from ancient Egypt demonstrates.

³² Peter van der Veen, Christoffer Theis, and Manfred Görg, "Israel in Canaan (Long) Before Pharaoh Merenptah? A Fresh Look at Berlin Statue Pedestal Relief 21687," *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 2 (2010), 15-25; see also, Bryant G. Wood, "New Evidence Supporting the Early (Biblical) Date of the Exodus and Conquest" (Nov. 11, 2011), [http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2011/11/11/New-Evidence-Supporting-the-Early-\(Biblical\)-Date-of-the-Exodus-and-Conquest.aspx](http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2011/11/11/New-Evidence-Supporting-the-Early-(Biblical)-Date-of-the-Exodus-and-Conquest.aspx).