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### THE DATE AND THE ROUTE OF EXODUS

For the last century and the half, biblical scholars tried to determine the date and the route of the Exodus based on historical and archaeological evidence. From exceedingly early on, Egyptian and Hebrew writers tried to determine the date of the Exodus. Egyptian writer Manetho (early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, preserved in Josephus) assigns Moses to the reigns of Amenophis and his son Ramesses of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasties. Artapanus (2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, preserved in Eusebius) assigns him to Chenephres of the 5<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Lysimachus (2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC, also in Josephus) assigns him to Bocchoris of the 17<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. The expulsion of alien leprous Jews occurs in Hecareus of Abdera (about 300 BC), Lysimachus, and Apion (1<sup>st</sup> century AD). Equally propagandistic are the pro-Jewish accounts in Philo (1<sup>st</sup> century AD), where Moses is presented as an idealized Hellenistic philosopher-king. In Josephus, the antiquity and nobility of the Jews are portrayed for the benefit of his Roman audience<sup>1</sup>.

The Bible states that Moses was the leader of the Exodus, which took place during the reign of the unnamed pharaoh of Egypt. Tradition names this pharaoh as Rameses, probably the second from the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, because Exodus (1.11) mentions the building of the store-city called Pi-Pareses. We must remember, through, that for the Hebrews the Exodus was not recorded as *an historical event*, but as *a religious experience*. The emphasis in these religious experiences “is on the theological interpretation, not on historical detail. The biblical narratives are essentially documenting of faith, not records of the past.”<sup>2</sup> Having said that, there are many chronological difficulties surrounding the Exodus event. These difficulties arise from the fact that the compilers of the Hebrew records did not have the same outlook on exact dating that we of the twentieth century have<sup>3</sup>. Since the whole issue is so fascinating, I will try to go through the thesis regarding the date and the route of the Exodus.

#### **Historical background:**

The historical background of the Exodus is Egyptian. Therefore, it is important to have a brief historical background. From historical and social point of view, some scholars argued that “the total migration of people from northern Mesopotamia at the time of the patriarch Abraham was far more numerous than the tiny family of Abraham. Just as it may be argued that the total movement of Semitic peoples into Egypt was far more numerous than the family of Jacob<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Johnston W., Exodus, (JSOT Press, 1990), pp. 17-18 (Anti-Jewish feeling is evident in Manetho’s account of Moses as a deposed prince of the god Seth, leader of a band of leprous mine-workers in Sinai and ally of the Hyksos invaders from Jerusalem).

<sup>2</sup> Sarna Nahum, Exploring Exodus, (Schoken Books, New York: 1996), p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Thompson J.A., The Bible and Archaeology, (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids: 1982), p. 57.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

The history of Israel begins with the patriarchs. One of those patriarchs, Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers. After a difficult period, he was appointed as second to the Pharaoh and governor<sup>5</sup>. In Egypt, this appointment might have never taken place if the rulers of the land were native Egyptians. Since biblical scholars establish Joseph's time in Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period in the history of Egypt, during the Hyksos occupation, then his appointment as chief overseer seems very natural, because both the pharaoh and Joseph were foreigners<sup>6</sup>. During a great famine, Joseph's brothers came and lived with him in the land of Goshen (Gen. 46.57)<sup>7</sup>. Goshen was known also by the name of 'land of Rameses (Gen. 47.11) or "the field of Zoan" (Psa. 78.12)<sup>8</sup>. The land was mentioned by this name in the Egyptian records during the time of Joseph. But later, in the early thirteenth century, it was known as "the land of Rameses", when the city of Zoan or Tanis was rebuilt by Rameses II<sup>9</sup>. This land was the riches of all in Egypt, as it is described in Gen. 47.11.

Two Egyptian inscriptions indicate that it was customary to allow Bedouins from Palestine and Sinai to enter Egypt<sup>10</sup> during the hard times and live in the Goshen<sup>11</sup> area or to trade there<sup>12</sup>. The Pharaohs of the Nineteenth Dynasty employed these semi-nomadic shepherds and cattle-breeders in the building projects as well as to keep the stability of their North-Eastern border<sup>13</sup>. One of these inscriptions dates from 1350 BC and the other from 1230 BC. The latter mentions the district of Succoth<sup>14</sup> and the city of Pithom. These two names are mentioned in the Bible (Ex. 1.11, 13.20). When Joseph entered Egypt, the country was in a so-called "dark ages." Egyptian inscriptions mention a group of people called *Apiru*<sup>15</sup>, which some scholars tried to tie it with the

<sup>5</sup> Joseph's title is often assumed to be that of vizier, but some scholars think it more likely that he was put in charge of a certain task, perhaps as minister of agriculture (Heorth Alfred J., *Archaeology and the Old Testament*, (Baker Books, Grand Rapids: ), p. 151).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149-150.

<sup>7</sup> "The land of Goshen extended from Zoan-Tanis to the store-city of Pithom and to the depression of the Wadi Tumilat east of the Delta (Cornfeld, Gaalyah, *Archaeology of the Bible*, (Harper & Row Publishers, New York: 1976), p. 35).

<sup>8</sup> Wright G. Ernest, *Biblical Archaeology*, (The Westminster Press, London: 1957), p. 56.

<sup>9</sup> "While we cannot be certain that Goshen covered exactly the same territory as these two geographical terms, we are sure that it was in this area, and comprised at least the region now known as the Wadi (Arabic for river bed) Tumilat. This Wadi is a narrow valley between thirty and forty miles long, connecting the Nile with Lake Timsah" p. 56): Cornfeld, p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, George Buttrick, ed., (Abington, Nashville: 1980), p. 191.

<sup>11</sup> "The land of Goshen where the Hebrews lived was close to Avaris, now known to have been sited at Tell el-Dab'a and not at Tanis as have been thought for many years" (Thompson, p. 58; *New Century Bible Commentary*, Clements, Ronald E. and Black Matthew, editors, (Eerdmans Publication Co., Grand Rapids: 1980), p. 38.

<sup>12</sup> Thompson, p. 58.

<sup>13</sup> *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 191.

<sup>14</sup> "Other inscriptions found there recently suggest the identification of the tell with Teku, probably biblical Succoth, the Israelites' first station after their flight from Per-Rameses. Some scholars believe that the city was known by both names, Per-Amun and Teku" (Cornfeld, p. 35); Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, p. 61.

<sup>15</sup> "It is improbable, however, that the name [apiru] indicated a nationality during the second millennium BC. Instead, it was probably used for landless aliens who were not citizens of the particular legal community in which they resided. The biblical tradition speaks of a "mixed multitude" or "rabble" (Num. 11.4) who left Egypt" *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 191; "In the time of Thutmose III, they are engaged in making of wine; Amenothep II lists 36,000 apiru among captives taken in Syria-Palestine": *New Century Bible Commentary*, pp.39, 41-42. There seems to be close relation between the apirus and the hapiru in the cuneiform text. Whatever the relationship, they cannot be related to the Hebrews.

Hebrews. This argument, however, never found acceptance by most biblical scholars.

Shortly before 1700 an Asiatic people, known in Egyptian inscriptions as Hyksos (“*Rulers of Foreign Countries*”) invaded and conquered Egypt. They ruled from around 1700 to 1550 BC. The Hyksos created a great empire, which included Palestine and southern Syria. They built a new capital, Avaris<sup>16</sup>, in the Delta region. Avaris was well suited to be a focus for communication between Canaan and Egypt on both economic and strategic grounds<sup>17</sup>. The book of Numbers gives an interesting information: “Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan (Tanis) in Egypt” (13.22). The question that poses now is that why the Hebrews be concerned about Tanis? The natural answer is that there must have been Hebrews who were connected with Hyksos activity and who were in Egypt when Tanis was founded<sup>18</sup>. Further information from Exodus and Genesis tell us that the children of Israel “dwelt in Egypt” for 430 years (Ex. 12.40). Genesis reduces that to 400 years (15.13). These and other reasons have caused the majority of scholars to place the entry of Joseph, his father and brothers into Egypt in the time of Hyksos. Before and after the Hyksos era, the Egyptian capital was in Upper Egypt, in Thebes. Tanis was used by the Hyksos, from 1720 - 1580 BC, and by the Nineteenth Dynasty pharaohs, after 1300 BC<sup>19</sup>.

Gen. 47.13ff. contains another hint of Joseph’s story, when he bought the land of Egypt for Pharaoh: “*And Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh; for every Egyptian sold his field, because the famine prevailed over them. So the land became Pharaoh’s. And as for the people he made them bondmen from one end of the border of Egypt to the other. Only the land of the priests bought he not, for there was a subvention for the priests from Pharaoh and they lived off their portion which Pharaoh had given them....*” (Gen. 47.20-22). After the Hyksos era, instead of noblemen, we find a strong bureaucracy came into existence<sup>20</sup>. These information hints that Joseph might have lived during the time of the Hyksos. And if the Hyksos ruled Egypt between 1720 and 1580 BC and the children of Israel lived there for 430/400 years, then they must have left Egypt between 1320 and 1290 BC, during the Nineteenth Dynasty and the reign of Rameses II (1290 – 1224 BC)<sup>21</sup>.

The middle of the sixteenth century was the time of emerging new states. Around 1550, the Hurrian state of Mitanni was on the rise. In Asia Minor, the Hittite Empire was recovering and in Northern Mesopotamia Assyria was emerging as a nation. The most important of these states was Egypt, who just threw the rule of the Hyksos, the Asian invaders, who swept Egypt and ruled

<sup>16</sup> “For many years the exact location of Avaris was the subject of much discussion. It was probably located at San el-Hagar in the Delta, a site which is now thought to have possessed the successive names of Avaris before 1500 BC, “House of Rameses” from about 1300-1100 BC, and finally Tanis (which is the same as Zoan) after 1100 BC. One of the most important objects found at the city of Avaris-Rameses-Tanis was the stele or monumental stone of the year 400. It was erected by an official of Rameses II by the order of the Pharaoh to commemorate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the city by a Hyksos ruler. Thus Avaris was founded 400 years before the date on which the anniversary fell. This date has been fixed somewhere between 1320 and 1300 BC, the establishment of Avaris as the Hyksos capital having occurred, therefore, about 1720-1700 BC.

<sup>17</sup> Thompson, p. 58.

<sup>18</sup> Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, p. 57.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57-58.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>21</sup> “For purposes of dating the best are the possible connection between Israelite tradition and the Tanite era (especially Num. 13.22) and the implication of the Bible story that the Egyptian capital was in or near the Nile Delta in Joseph’s day” *Ibid.*, p. 58.

her from around 1700 – 1550 BC. Under Ahmoses (1550 – 1525 BC), Egypt threw off the Hyksos yoke with a determination to secure its north-eastern borders by defeating the enemy in its own territory of Asia. “The main focus of the early eighteenth Dynasty was on the subjugation of Nubia and the Sudan in the south.” Later, however, Thutmosis III (1490 – 1436 BC), directed his attention to Asia. In a famous battle at Megiddo, ca. 1468, he defeated the Hyksos, whose center was at Kadesh on the Orontes in southern Syria<sup>22</sup>. In later decades, Amenophis III’s opulence and Akhnaten’s religious innovations had bad influence on the Egyptian Empire. The Hittite Empire, by this time, was at the prime of its power. The Hittites defeated the Hurrian Kingdom and subjected the Mitanni Kingdom. By 1350 BC, the Mitanni were no more. Assyria, under Assur-uballit I (ca. 1356 – 1321 BC) and the Hittites divided the country between them.

The once powerful Eighteenth Dynasty was weak against these threats. The emergence of Assyria, however, saved Egypt. While the Hittites were engaged with Assyria, the Nineteenth Dynasty came into power with Rameses I, a descendent of the old Hyksos kings<sup>23</sup>. For quick access to Asia, he relocated his capital at Avaris, the old Hyksos capital, in the northeastern Delta. His son Seti I, recaptured the lost territories. He defeated the Hittite king Muwattalis. Under Rameses II (1290 – 1224 BC), Egypt and the Hittites fought for years. After Hattusilis III (1275 – 1250 BC) ascended the Hittite throne, a peace treaty was signed between the two countries. Both countries now faced other enemies; the Hittites were being menaced by Assyria and the Indo-Europeans, while Egypt by the Sea Peoples. Ramses’ reign was best remembered for its colossal building projects<sup>24</sup>. The most famous of his buildings was Pi-Rameses, “The House of Rameses,” (or “Domain of Rameses”) north of Avaris, where his father built a summer palace, as the books of Exodus (1.11; 12.37) and Numbers (33.3,5) mention<sup>25</sup>. Under Rameses’ son, Merneptah, Egypt campaigned in Canaan, around 1220, against the Sea People. He recorded his victory on a stele, where he mentions “Israel is laid waste, her seed is not”<sup>26</sup>. After his death, Egypt control over Palestine was over.

### **Biblical Evidence of the Exodus:**

Although, the Exodus is THE EVENT in the history and religion of Israel, it poses historical, geographical, and cultic questions<sup>27</sup>. For decades, biblical scholars tried to determine the date of the Exodus. Since the time of the Egyptian historian Manetho (250 BC) until recently, the date of the Exodus was placed in the sixteenth century<sup>28</sup>. Some scholars think that neither Exodus 1.11 nor the artificial framework of chronology of Exodus 12.40, especially 1 Kings 6.1 can help set the date of Exodus<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> La Sor W. S., Hubbard D. A., Bush F. W, Old Testament Survey, (second edition, Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1996), p. 53.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>24</sup> Thompson, p. 59.

<sup>25</sup> Thompson, p. 59, 62: see also Bietak M, Tell el-Dab’a II (1975); Kitchen K. A., The Egyptian Nineteenth Dynasty (1980).

<sup>26</sup> La Sor, W. S., p. 56.

<sup>27</sup> The Interpreter’s Bible, The Book of Exodus, Rylaarsdam J. C., (Abington, Nashville: 1952), p. 836.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 836.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 836; (Heorth, p.178-181; Sarna Nahum M., Exodus, The JPS Torah Commentary, (The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia: 1991), p. xiv.

The Bible itself presents some clues about the possible date of the Exodus, which led the scholars to determine two possible dates of the Exodus. According to 1 Kings 6.1, “*In the four hundred and eightieth year after the people of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign over Israel, he began to build the house of the Lord,*” suggests an event that took place in the fifteenth century and the only other biblical reference, which gives weight to 1 Kings 6.1, is found in Judges 11.26: “*While Israel lived in Heshbon and its villages, and in Aroer and its villages, and in all the towns that are along the Arnon, **three hundred years**, why did not recover them within that time?*”. This means that, if the Exodus took place in the fifteenth century, around 1441, by the time of the Judges, Israel was having problems conquering the land. If they left Egypt in 1441 and wandered in the wilderness for forty years, they must have entered Canaan in the beginning of the fourteenth century. After Joshua’s military campaign, probably for forty years, the period of the Judges must have begun in 1360. If we agree that the period of the Judges was a little more than 200 years, than this statement of Judges 11.26, suggests that Israel was governed by the Judges for more than 300 years, which brings that time of Solomon building the Temple into acceptable date. However, we cannot establish the date of the Exodus on biblical evidence at this point. On the other hand, the history of Egypt does not support any Exodus date in the fifteenth century. We will return to this later.

On the other hand, the Bible and archaeology produce enough statements, which suggest another date for the Exodus. According to Exodus 1.8, “*Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph,*” a new king or a new dynasty came to power in Egypt, after Joseph and Israel settled there. The time of Joseph is sometime in the sixteenth century, when the Hyksos ruled Egypt. The other information that the book of Exodus gives is that the Hebrews were made slaves and built cities for the new king: “*Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens; and they built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Ra-amses*” (Ex. 1.11). The reading of this verse suggest that the slavery of the Hebrews and the building of the store cities happened in noticeably short time. However, we must examine this “new king” and then the store cities. When the Egyptians drove the Hyksos out of power, they moved their capital back to Upper Egypt, to Thebes, abandoning Avaris. During the Eighteenth Dynasty (around 1570 – 1310 BC), the building program hardly reached the Delta region. Only a limited number of royal buildings were erected in the east Delta region<sup>30</sup>. But when the Nineteenth Dynasty came to power in 1310 BC, Seti I moved the capital back to the Nile Delta, to be close to the eastern frontier<sup>31</sup>. He began massive building projects all over Egypt, for example, the great hall of sixty-six columns at the Karnak temple of Amun at Thebes<sup>32</sup>. In this new capital was the seat of the government, the great building operations were carried on and a splendid temple was erected to the old Hyksos god, Seth.

Who was the Pharaoh who oppressed the Israelites? The book of Exodus seems to imply

<sup>30</sup> Thompson, p. 58; The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, p. 190.

<sup>31</sup> “About 1290 BC Rameses the Great came to the throne and moved his capital to the Delta site. We are not sure of the reason, but presumably it was either to be in a better position to control his Asiatic empire, or to live in a city with which his family had had connections for some generations, or both” p. 58; The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, p. 190-191.

<sup>32</sup> Thompson, p. 58-59.



that the “new king over Egypt who knew not Joseph” (1.8) died before the Exodus, which took place under one of his successors (Ex. 2.23; 4.19). Some suggested that Thutmose III (1479 – 1425 BC) was the pharaoh of oppression and the Exodus took place during the reign of his son and successor Amenhotep II (1425 – 1400 BC)<sup>33</sup>. Some think that Rameses II was the oppressor, and that the Exodus took place under his son and successor Merneptah (1224 – 1212 BC)<sup>34</sup>. Others think that the Pharaoh who began the oppression might have been Seti I (1308 – 1290 BC), father of Rameses II and that the Exodus took place under Rameses II<sup>35</sup>. It was Seti I, who brought the capital back to Tanis and began to reorganize it, as well as began the reorganization of the empire. This task was continued by his son, who renamed the capital after himself, restored the empire and fought with the Hittites, until a peace treaty was signed in 1270 BC<sup>36</sup>. As much as Seti seems to be the Pharaoh of oppression, I believe that the oppression began long before the Nineteenth Dynasty came into power. The most probable Pharaoh of the oppression could be Ahmoses (1550 – 1525 BC). When the Egyptians expelled the hated Hyksos, their rage turned also against those to whom the Hyksos gave favors and raised them to power. The Israelites could easily be placed in this category since their leader, Joseph was a prisoner and was raised to become second only to the Pharaoh. The Eighteenth Dynasty (1570 – 1310 BC) did little, if any, building in the Nile Delta<sup>37</sup>. However, the biggest building projects were undertaken by Seti I and Rameses II. The narrative of Exodus 5 is matched in the Anastasi papyri from Memphis dating to the thirteenth century where reference is made to men “making their quota of bricks daily” (cf. Exodus 5.8, 13-14, 18-19)<sup>38</sup>.

In 1224, when Merneptah succeeded his father, on the fifth year of his reign, he campaigned in Palestine and recorded his “victory” on a stone *stele*, where he mentions his enemies, among them Israel: “Israel is desolated, her seed is not”<sup>39</sup>. This extra biblical evidence indicates without the shadow of doubt that Israel was in possession of central southern portions of Palestine<sup>40</sup> in the last quarter of the thirteenth century. “Archaeological evidence from the sites of Bethel, Lachish, Debir and probably Hazor suggests a thirteenth century date for the Israelite conquest of Canaan and may be taken to be in accord with the information of Merneptah’s *stele*<sup>41</sup>. A quick mathematical calculation indicates that if Israel was in Palestine in 20 BC, after being in the wilderness for forty years (1260-1220 BC), and they stayed around Mount Sinai for a year, then the Exodus must have taken place around 1262 BC.

Of those store cities, much debate went into their identity and place in the Nile Delta. As we saw earlier, Pithom is identified with Tell er-Retabeh<sup>42</sup> in Wadi Tumilat and Raamses

<sup>33</sup> Heorth, pp. 160-161; Peake’s Commentary on the Bible, Black, Matthew, ed., (London: 1962), vol. 1, p. 208

<sup>34</sup> The Interpreter’s Bible, p. 836.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 836; New Century Bible Commentary, p.42-43.

<sup>36</sup> Wright, Biblical Archaeology, p. 60.

<sup>37</sup> The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, p. 190.

<sup>38</sup> Wright, Biblical Archaeology, p. 60.

<sup>39</sup> The Interpreter’s Bible, 836; The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, p. 190.

<sup>40</sup> The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, p. 190.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>42</sup> “In the beginning of this century, Pithom was identified with Ramese, but latest research showed that it was a mistake. Pithom was found to have been an old town, but the finest structure on the site was the temple built by the great builder, Rameses II. No other royal building of an earlier Pharaoh was found there, so we must conclude on

with San el-Hagar<sup>43</sup>. Excavations at Tell er-Ratabeh revealed massive structures including a fine temple from the days of Rameses II, but no traces of Eighteenth Dynasty constructions. Pithom may have been originally Per-Amun (“House of Amun”)<sup>44</sup>.

Returning to the fifteenth century exodus theory, biblical scholars argued that the Exodus took place in 1440 BC. The basis of this theory is the statement in 1 Kings 6.1: *“In the four hundred and eightieth year after the people of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign over Israel, he began to build the house of the Lord.”* There are several gaps with this theory:

If we take the biblical narrative of the Exodus seriously, and we should, then the capital of Egypt must in the north, in the Delta region. Only twice, in Egypt’s history it was there. First during the Hyksos period and second, during the Nineteenth Dynasty. The Hyksos period is too early for the Exodus. It fits Joseph’s story. It is evident, then, the Exodus must have taken in thirteenth century, during the period of the Nineteenth Dynasty.

As we saw earlier, the rulers of the Eighteenth Dynasty hardly build anything in the Delta region, while the rulers of the Nineteenth Dynasty were known for their massive building projects. Modern excavations demonstrate that clearly<sup>45</sup>.

During their forty-year wondering in the deserts, the Israelites encountered several kingdoms, mentioned in the Pentateuch. Those kingdoms were Edom (Num. 20.14-21), Moab (Num. 22.1-25.9; Deut. 2.8-18), Ammon (Deut. 2.18-23), the Amorites and their rulers Sihon and Og (Deut. 2.26-36). Historical and archaeological evidence suggest that the Trans-Jordanian area was settled toward the end of the late Bronze Age (thirteenth century) and certainly in the Iron I Age (1200-1000 BC)<sup>46</sup>. N. Glueck’s archaeological surveys have shown that there was little settled occupation of the area in previous centuries. Therefore, Edom, Moab, and Ammon could not have been in existence at an earlier time<sup>47</sup>.

The 1 Kings 6.1 is “supported” by another biblical reference, namely 1 Chronicles 6.3-8, which includes eleven priests between Aaron and Zadok, the priest in Solomon’s time. A comparison with the Greek Septuagint shows that there was a difference of opinion in the minds of the translators about the time when this text was prepared. The Septuagint gives a period of four hundred and forty years as the time lapse between the Exodus and Solomon. If this is only a round number for a generation and if in fact the generations were something less than forty years, we may arrive at a date for the Exodus closer to the thirteenth century<sup>48</sup>.

These arguments suggest that the fifteenth century theory of the Exodus is not supported by historical, social or archaeological evidence. On the other hand, as we have seen earlier, a

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the basis of our present evidence that if the Israelites worked on royal projects at the site, it must have been in the time of Rameses II” p. 58. “At the end of the last century E. Neville had already identified the great mound of Tell el-Mashkuteh as Pithom” (Cornfeld, p. 35; Wright, Biblical Archaeology, p. 61).

<sup>43</sup> The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, p. 190; Thompson, p. 61.

<sup>44</sup> Thompson, p. 61-62; Cornfeld, p. 35.

<sup>45</sup> Thompson, p. 61.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 62-63.

<sup>47</sup> Cornfeld, p. 35; New Century Bible Commentary, p.39; Peake’s Commentary on the Bible, Black, vol. 1, p. 208; The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, p. 190.

<sup>48</sup> Thompson J.A., p. 63; Cornfeld, p. 36.

thirteen-century theory is more than likely, due to historical and archaeological evidence.

One thing is clear and certain that the Israelites WERE IN CANAAN, no later than 1220 BC. Pharaoh Merneptah's (1224-1216 BC) stele mentions that on the fifth year of his reign he campaigned in Canaan and Israel was one of the tribes he submitted to his rule:

“The princess are prostrate, saying, “Mercy,”  
Not one raises his head among the Nine Bows.  
Desolation is for Tehenu; Hatti is pacified;  
Plundered is Canaan with every evil;  
Carried off is Askelon; seized upon is Gezer;  
Yanaom is maid as that which does not exist;  
Israel is laid waste, her seed is not;  
Hurru is become a widow for Egypt;  
All lands together, they are pacified.<sup>49</sup>”

Merneptah's stele is also the first document outside the Bible, which mentions Israel for the first time in history. Therefore, the Exodus must have taken place prior to 1220 BC. As I suggested, if we make a simple mathematical calculation, the most probable date for the Exodus is between 1265-1260 BC, during the reign of Rameses II.

The naming of the “Rameses” as one of the cities built by the Israelites in Goshen (Ex. 1.11).

Joshua 12 mentions the cities, which the Israelites captured or destroyed. Among them are Jerico, Ai, Lachish, Gezer, Debir, Taanach, Megiddo and Hazor<sup>50</sup>.

Some scholars suggested 1280 BC as the probable date of the Exodus<sup>51</sup>. Rameses was in war with the Hitties during the first two decades of his reign. If he ascended the throne of Egypt in 1290, then the war lasted until 1270 BC. After the battle of Kadesh, Egyptian power in Canaan declined. The struggle between the Egyptians and the Hitties for Canaan sapped the energy of both great powers, leaving both too weak to completely dominate the land. Rameses left no stone unturned to regain control and ensure communications along this major trade route<sup>52</sup>.

Exodus 1.8-10 presents the time when the Egyptians threw the invading Hyksos out of Egypt and they had no sympathy to those associated with them. Therefore, the pharaoh said, “Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and if war befall us, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land” (1.9-10). “Too mighty for us” indicates that the Egyptians were not yet strong enough as they were during the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Also, “Lest they multiply” indicates that they were not as numerous, and this must have been shortly after Joseph's death.

<sup>49</sup> Thompson J.A., p. 63; Sarna, p. xiv; New Century Bible Commentary, p. 39; Peake's Commentary on the Bible, vol. 1, p. 208

<sup>50</sup> Thompson, p. 63.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>52</sup> Cornfeld, p. 36; Sarna, p. xiv.



Exodus 1.11 shows their oppression might have began much later and not immediately. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty moved the Egyptian capital back to the south. It was the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty that began massive building projects (Pithom and Rameses)<sup>53</sup> and they enslaved the Israelites. Most probably the oppressor was Seti I and the pharaoh of the Exodus was Rameses II.

Politically speaking, between the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, Egypt had a tight grip over Canaan. There was no way for Israelite to leave Egypt and enter the country less than almost fifty years of their departure<sup>54</sup>. The thirteenth century theory seems the most acceptable for the moment. Even this theory is not completely free of difficulties. Perhaps one day more evidence will enlighten us about this subject.

### **The Route of Exodus:**

The route of the Exodus remains a difficult and tantalizing problem. However, I will try to summarize the data about the route rather than suggesting another alternative. According to the Book of Exodus, “*The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth*” (12.37: 32 miles south-east) and then continues, “*When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was nearer; so, God led the people by the roundabout way of the wilderness toward the Reed Sea. They set out from Succoth and camped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness*” (Ex. 14.17-18, 20). Before crossing the sea, “*the Lord said to Moses, ‘tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pihahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baalzephon*” (Ex. 14.2). After crossing the sea, “*they went into the wilderness of Shur. Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees*” (Ex. 15.22, 27). Afterwards, “*The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim; and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure*” (Ex. 16.1) and then “*from the wilderness of Sin*<sup>55</sup> *the whole congregation of Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim*” (17.1) and “*on the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai. They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain*” (19.1-2).

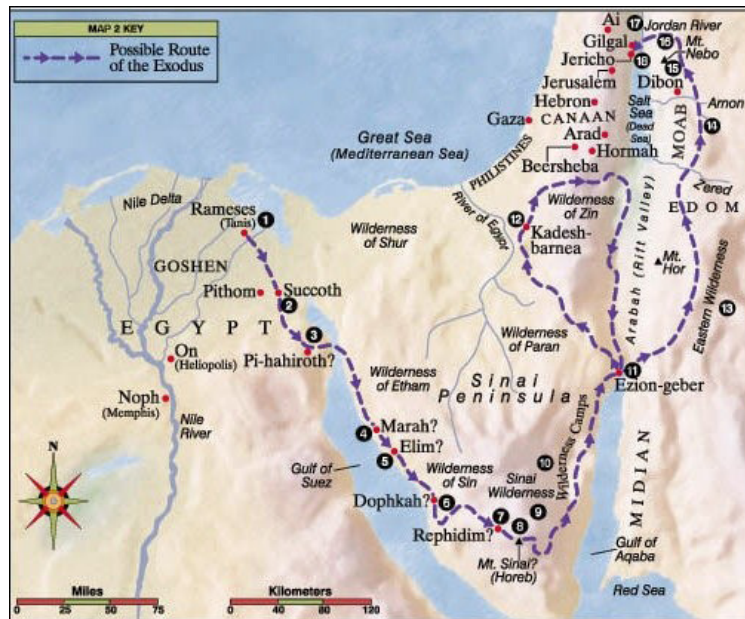
Thus, the Exodus happened. The chronicle tells us about the route of the Exodus, but his narrative presents many difficulties. We will see these difficulties in order.

The normal route from Egypt into Canaan is known as the way of the Philistines (Ex. 13.17). The main trade route between Egypt and the Middle East was the way Moses avoided by the command of God. Moses took the people through the “Way of the Wilderness” (v.18). We will center our attention to some points only.

<sup>53</sup> Sarna, p. xiv.

<sup>54</sup> Sarna, Nahum M., Exodus, The JPS Torah Commentary, (The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia: 1991), p. xiv.

<sup>55</sup> The name Sin is spelled Tsin in Hebrew and carries no connotation of wrongdoing (Heorth, p.168).



Mount Sinai: The Bible gives two names for the mountain: Sinai (J and P use this name) and Horeb (E. and Deuteronomy use Horeb extensively). Deuteronomy 1.2 states that Mount Sinai was eleven days from Kadesh-barnea to the south (Num. 33). The name Sinai is associated to several mountains (at least 11!)<sup>56</sup>. Elijah made the same journey from Beersheba (1 Kgs. 19.1-8) to Sinai in “forty days and forty nights”<sup>57</sup>. Three, though, must be considered. First, in the south, where traditionally Mount Sinai lies. The Mount is still known in Arabic as Jebel Mousa. The second location is in the region of Kadesh-barnea, where the Israelites spent much of their forty years wilderness period. This area is also known as the wilderness of Paran<sup>58</sup>. The third location, suggested by M. Noth, is in the Arabian Peninsula, according to Exodus 19, which indicates that the mountain must have had volcanic activity<sup>59</sup>. According to other theories, through the “northern” route, Sinai should be close to Kadesh-barnea (Ex. 15.22), the well watered oasis. The incident of the quails in Numbers 11.31-32 (also Exodus 16.13) suggests the same location also<sup>60</sup>. According to the “southern” route, Sinai is located almost at the tip of the peninsula, which was an ideal place for Moses to bring the people, away from the Egyptians and other contacts. However, we know from the Bible, that the quail’s incident took place when the Israelites left Sinai.

The identification of Etham, Mogdol and Pi-hahiroth is still debated<sup>61</sup>. Baal-zephon, on the other hand, has been located. A Phoenician letter mentions the god “Baal-zaphoon and all the gods of Tahpanhes.” The letter was located at modern Tell Defneh; it was the Egyptian town to which Jeremiah was taken after the fall of Jerusalem and the murder of Gedaliah (Jer. 43.7-9). Baal-zephon was a Canaanite God, and the letter proves that a temple of his existed in this

<sup>56</sup> Gunther Plaut W., *The Torah*, (Union of American Hebrew Congregation, New York: 1981), p. 378.

<sup>57</sup> La Sor W.S., p.61; *The Interpreter’s Bible*, p.837; Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, p. 63-64.

<sup>58</sup> *The Interpreter’s Bible*, p. 837.

<sup>59</sup> Johnston, pp. 29-30; *The Interpreter’s Bible*, p.837; Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, p. 63.

<sup>60</sup> Cornfeld, p. 40; *New Century Bible Commentary*, p.346; Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, p. 65.

<sup>61</sup> Thompson, p. 68.

place<sup>62</sup>.

Identifying all the locations of the journey is still open for debate. We will stop here from further speculation and conclude that the Israelite went to Egypt sometime in the beginning of the eighteenth century, where they lived comfortably for centuries. With the overthrow of the rulers, they were reduced to second class citizens and put to harsh work until the end of the fourteenth century and the beginning of the thirteenth, when they were heavily burdened and were enslaved. Under the leadership of Moses, they left Egypt in the first quarter of the thirteenth century and went to Sinai. Wandering for forty years in the wilderness strengthened their national and religious identity. Later, sometime in the last quarter of the thirteenth century, they entered the promised land where they established their kingdom.

NAVASART MARDOYAN

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<sup>62</sup> Wright, Biblical Archaeology, p., 62.