

An Absolute dating for the Israeli Exodus out of Egypt Part 1

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The historicity of the Exodus, as well as its dating in absolute universal historic time, have always been pivotal for the three sister religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, despite the great divides that have separated them over many other pertinent issues.

The event, in itself, is not a matter of dispute between the three faiths, since acknowledged by their three relevant scriptures, which for Moslem in particular, represent one and the same source, corrected and sealed by the Koran; the infalsifiable autograph for them all.

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Thus, knowing the exact date of the historical event will serves, not only to locate the Patriarchal époques exactly, but will serve also as an absolute dead reckoning for Abraham's monotheism.

Interestingly enough, this issue concerning 'Historicity', has always raised within the Judeo-Christian-secular's scholarship, uninformed of the Islamic paradigm, the pertinent question of whether or not a text prepared long after the event (that is a secondary text and not an autographic one) is likely to be historically accurate, since the text of Exodus, as admitted by mainstream biblical criticism, was prepared centuries after the events it describes!

So, it would come as a big surprise to discover, that Islamic scholarship, possessing an autographic text; the Koran, does not suffer from such wavering and has developed accordingly a monolithic solid stance (consensus) on the issue, amenable easily to external falsification through the many impartial and objective tools of scientific enquiry.

This Judeo-Christian-secular dithering has much to do, as we will discover below, with the Biblical 'textus receptus', which is structurally of a secondary nature (that is; not true autographs but only copies of copies).

This state of affairs, as expected, is not conducive to produce a consensus on the issue and has given rise to three main antagonizing splinter group namely; conservatives, liberals, and secularists¹.

Now, before embarking on detailing the Islamic stance on the subject, which is the main drive behind this essay, it would seem didactically appropriate, to have at least a bird's view of the Judeo-Christian-secular's scholarship results, which we will take as a yardstick against which the Islamic approach is to be compared.

{mospagebreak title= I. When did the Exodus take place?}I. When did the Exodus take place?

Judeo-Christian-secular's scholarship has developed in the main three paradigms concerning this question with various shades and innuendo within each: 1. The liberals' viewpoint

These scholars reads Exodus (1:11) literally when it says that the Israelites built for the Pharaoh two cities. 'Ramses' and 'Pithom'.

They view 'Ramses' as the 'Pi-Ramses' or 'Avaris-Tanis'² which was deserted after 1500 and was resettled by Seti I (photo 1) who reigned from 1291 through 1278 BC³. Ramses II (1303 – 1213 B.C) (photo 2) began to reign right after Seti I and is known to have embarked on extensive building projects, which could explain the use of Hebrews for slave labor as depicted in Exodus (1:11)

More to the point, liberals argue compellingly that toward the end of the reign of Ramses II, Egyptian power declined markedly, which would make it easier for the Israelites to engage in conquering Canaan, than during the time of Thutmose III (1490-1362 BC) (photo 3) who is known historically to have conducted extensive campaigns in Canaan. 2. The conservatives' viewpoint

These scholars and apologists consider another text of the Bible, chiefly; 1 Kings (6:1) which states that Solomon began to build the temple in the 480th year after the Exodus, in the fourth year of his reign.

So fixing the date for the beginning of Solomon reign around 961 – 962 B.C, would place the Exodus around 1437-1438 BC⁴.

The conservative paradigm, according to the secularists, their "bête noire"! Is generally represented by pious Jewish and Christians "scholars" who do their utmost in denying anything discovered that contradicted what the bible upheld! And would not hesitate at massaging data in order to nudge them into fitting!

For these reasons and others, most of these scholars are dubbed Biblicists by the secularists and are represented by the likes of (from left to right); William Foxwell Albright (1891 – 1971)⁵, Kenneth Kitchen⁶, Gary A. Rendsburg⁷, Adam Zertal⁸, Rabbi David Lichtman⁹ (no photo), Anson Rainey¹⁰ among others.

One Characteristic of the Biblicist archaeologists, according to the secularists, is that they spare no effort or occasion to fit the historical facts into the biblical jar! Irrespective of the evidence at hand! 3. The secularists's viewpoint

Scholars of this shade are dubbed by the Biblicists; "minimalists"! "Copenhagen - Sheffield school", "revisionists" and even nihilists. Slanders which fall short of doing them justice, just being different from mainstream conservatism!

Secularists, on the other hand, view the Hebrew Bible as worthless when it comes to writing the history of ancient Israel!

A stand they share without knowing, with one of the leading Muslim Andalusian's scholar; Ali Ibn Ahmad Ibn Sa'id Ibn Hazm (994 – 1064) of Cordoba (shown in this Spanish commemorating stamp photo 4), who is considered the father of biblical criticism.

He was the first to have coined the non flattering expression; "Petty historians" to the biblical scribes, after coming across so many inconsistencies in the Bible, concerning, events, dates, numbers, names, genealogies,..., etc, in his famous seminal work; "Al-fasl fil al-Milal wal-Nihal" (The Separators Concerning Religions, Heresies, and Sects).

Themes rediscovered seven centuries later in the "Tractatus Theologico-Politicus" (1670) of; (ÑÈÕÚ éäÙàÕÖÖ) (– 1677) (photo 5), and in the two renown treaties; "The Reasonableness of Christianity, as Delivered in the Scriptures" (1695) and "A Vindication of the Reasonableness of Christianity" (1695) of (1632 – 1704) (photo 6), and which will be reverberated also in the writings of European renaissance biblical critics, who understandingly frowned at risking their lives at the burning stacks under the mischievous Church inquisition!, by citing a Moslem scholar of the caliber of Ibn Hazm for their findings.

Contemporary secularists are represented by; the Scandinavian Marit Skjeggstad¹², Dever William¹³, Thomas Thompson¹⁴, Philip Davies¹⁵, Keith Whitelam¹⁶, Niels Peter Lemche¹⁷, Ze'ev Herzog¹⁸ and Israel Finkelstein²⁰ among others.

The group is not as monolithic as the rhetoric of their conservative antagonists, who repeatedly disparage them, would suggest.

Here Ideology is at play and renders hollow the conservatives's reasoning, when they lump all the secularists cited above and throw all of them into one and the same bin, while one can discern at a glance by reading their respective works, that there is as much differences and shades among them, as exist between them all and other scholars!

It is just not fair for a scientist, worth his salt in the field, to engage in such groundless invectives.

It goes without saying that this excessive criticism has nothing to do with open minded inquiry, and bears the stamp of polemics and demagogy not objective science.

Suffice to mention that Dever, who is a staunch foe of the revisionist, and has developed his own version of the history of ancient Israel, is also a secularist!

But most important of all, secularists, irrespective of their beliefs and credo, which has no bearing whatsoever on scientific enquiry, where facts, and facts alone should count, represent today, the main renovating force in the field.

This is mainly due to their questioning of the age old conservative's paradigms and inherited wisdom, which had served science badly for eons past.

Secularists for sure should have their say in the field at least for three objective reasons;

1) They are the ones who are proposing new lines of research by not upholding the conservatives' paradigm which is accepted by the latter without proofs!

2) Their motto is to question any age old premise, and never satisfy themselves with a-priories, clichés, stereotypes and ready made answers.

3) it is their God given right, to doubt any assertion biblical or other, which does not satisfy their intellect or fall short of providing tangible data to support it. The onus of proof is on the conservatives' shoulders, should they have one.

It is crystal clear from the above, that short of this, the whole conservatives' impetuous behind their scholarly drive, will be no more than a mere reaction, opposite for sure, but never equal to the driving action of the secularists. A fact which shows where the future lies.

Unfortunately, whenever passions are high and ideologies strive hard to hijack the field at the expense of true enquiry, producing their own artificial factoid instead of letting true facts speak for themselves, aberration sets in and one can't avoid coming across some ultra demagogues, of the variety of the avowed Zionist Gary Rendsburg, who disparage vehemently and passionately these free secular's scholars, just because they don't share his conservative's paradigm²¹ saying;

..To give you the names of the four best known among them, they are Thomas Thompson, Philip Davies, Niels Lemche, and Keith Whitelam. Some of them are driven ... by Marxism and leftist politics. Some of them are former evangelical Christians who now see the evils of their former ways. Some of them are counterculture people, left over from the 60s and 70s, whose personality includes the questioning of authority in all aspects of their lives. But the two most important elements in the profile of these scholars are the following. First, almost without exception, these scholars have no expertise in the larger world of ancient Near Eastern studies!²² Second, almost without exception, the scholars of this group are not Jewish.²³...Furthermore, and I do not hesitate to use the terms, these scholars are driven by anti-Zionism approaching anti-Semitism²⁴.

It goes without saying, that the last sentence is usually used as a sword of Damocles in order to frighten the opponents or the recalcitrants!

{mospagebreak title= II Dealing with the textual issues of the Bible}II Dealing with the textual issues of the Bible

Now, if one compares the proposed dates for the Exodus with the time the Israelites spent in Egypt, he will come up with a lot of confusion and disparaging dismay and despair!

For one; the Hebrew text of Exodus (12:40) says plainly;

that the Israelites spent 430 years there (Egypt).

But a perusal of the 'Septuagint', the Greek translation of the Bible performed by the Jewish Hellenized Alexandria community of Egypt says that;

"the dwelling of the sons of Israel which they spent in Egypt and in Canaan was 430 years"!

This confusion is further compounded by four other internal inconsistencies namely;

a) 1 Chronicles (5:27-29) says that Moses and Aaron, were fourth generation descendants of Jacob's son Levi!, which would mean that only three generations with an average of 143 years each, preceded them!

This count would clash immediately with 1 Chronicles (7:20-27) which says that 'Joshua', the younger servant of Moses, was a 12th generation descendant of Levi's brother Joseph! Giving 11 generations from Joseph to Joshua averaging 39 years each!

b) The Egyptian's historical record, to the dismay of the neophyte as well as to the disarray of the specialist Egyptologists, remains adamantly silent and provides almost no direct clue or support for such happening!

c) the mitigated evidence dug in different place of the Sinai peninsula in Egypt, where the event is supposed to have taken place, has led contemporary archaeologists either;

1) to doubt the event, or

2) to place its happening from the thirteenth century B.C.E. onward, in complete disaccord with either the biblical exegetes of old or the classical historians who placed the event, contrary to what is stipulate verbatim in (Exodus 12:41),

two or three centuries earlier, making it one and the same with the expulsion of the Hyksos by Ahmosis 1 {Ahmosis Nebpetyrê around (1550-1525)} (photo 7) of the 18th Egyptian dynasty!

d) The Torah (תּוֹרָה), on the other hand, of which the original autograph, has been lost since the Israelite's exile to Babylon (586 B.C – 538 B.C) and is extant today only in secondary copies either in Hebrew, as in this circa 1192 Sephardic Sefer Torah from Spain (photo 8), or in translation from Hebrew into other ancient languages, suffers from two internal structural inconsistencies;

- 1) Loss of meaning due to any translation of the original autograph, as is true of any translation.
- 2) Errors in copying and even subtle or direct tampering with the texts.

Now, even after taking these two defects into consideration, the prospective investigator looking for an absolute timing of Exodus, to anchor the whole history of Judaism, has still to jump over a big hurdle presenting itself in the form of an overabundance of numbers, leading back, when one reads them literally and at their face value either; to the thirteenth, fourteenth or fifteenth centuries, all of which, besides not resolving the biblical accounts adequately, lack the necessary scientific support of archaeology!

Archeology nowadays, serves the dual role of;

- 1) Anchoring the event in its true geographical setting and as;
- 2) An acid test for the historicity of capital events of this sort.

From the above considerations, and given that resolving the Exodus date is of scientific relevance, for its own sake, to all the three sisters' faiths concerned, it goes without saying, that one has to put his theology as well as his ideology behind him and stick to the standard of scientific enquiry with no "a-priori" stance.

Now, concerning the connection between the big narration of the Bible and Archeology, the results are best summarized by Dr. Stephen C. Meyers²⁵ (photo 9) in an article entitled; "The Date of the Exodus According to Ancient Writers"²⁶ as follows;

- 1- Most of the ancient writers equated the Exodus with the expulsion of the Hyksos from Egypt around 1570- 1550 BC, {Results at variance with Moslem scholarship's findings}
- 2- Most ancient writers put the Jews in Egypt for 215 years or less. { Results at variance with Moslem scholarship's findings}
- 3- All took the 400 or 430 years to cover the time in Egypt and Canaan. { Results at variance with Moslem scholarship's findings}
- 4- Most counted the 400 years from the birth of Isaac, or Abraham's entry into the land of Canaan. { Results at variance with Moslem scholarship's findings}
- 5- None of the ancient writers including the apostle Paul said the Jews were in Egypt for 430 years { Results at variance with Moslem scholarship's findings}

And concerning the big divide separating conservatives and liberal on this issue, Dr. Stephen C. Meyers summarized their respective positions as given below²⁷;

- 1) Liberal scholars place Israel in Canaan around the 13th century BC while conservative scholars place Israel in Canaan at 1406 BC. { Results at variance with Moslem scholarship's findings}
- 2) Both conclusions seem to be wrong according to archaeological evidence;.{ Results at variance with Moslem scholarship's findings}

And with this summary of the findings of the Jewish-Christian's scholarship, we are ready to investigate the Moslem's findings.

End

To be followed by the Judeo-Christian-secular's scholarship y Part 2

1 Coined also as; postmodernists, deconstructionist, revisionists and minimalists by the conservatives.

- 2 This identification, while opposed by the conservatives in general and J. Bimson in: John J. Bimson; 1978, "Redating the Exodus and Conquest", Sheffield, , pp. 35-48, in particular, is in the right direction as we will prove latter.
- 3 He ruled Egypt for 13 years and some Egyptologists differ on this matter, giving him a reign of between 15 and 20 years.
- 4 Many critics have noticed the artificiality of this number, since 480 is simply 12 generations of 40 years each!
- 5 American Orientalist, archaeologist, biblical scholar, linguist and expert on ceramics His upbringing bears the stamp of the evangelical American Methodist Church. His seminal works include; "New Light from Egypt on the Chronology and History of Israel and Judah" (1953). For him, the narration in Genesis is historical, and there is no reason to doubt the general accuracy of the biographical details..
- 6 Egyptologist at the University of Liverpool (retired). He published; "Pharaoh Triumphant: the Life and Times of Ramesses II", Warminster, UK: Aris & Phillips, 1982.
- 7 Jewish scholar and Professor of Jewish History at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey. His most popular book is a general survey of the biblical world entitled; "The Bible and the Ancient Near East", co-authored with the late Cyrus H. Gordon (1997).
- 8 He is an avowed Zionist resident of Kibbutz Ein Shemer south of the port city of Haifa. He was introduced to the discipline at age 35 after his legs were severely injured in the 1973 Yom Kippur War. While hospitalized, Zertal was visited by archaeologist Yoram Tsafrir, who himself had sustained serious injuries in his legs in a previous war and who makes a practice of visiting soldiers with severe leg injuries. Tsafrir's enthusiasm for archaeology and his own success as an archaeologist, despite his physical handicaps, helped move Zertal to study archaeology. Eventually, he enrolled at Haifa University. He is now the Chairman of the Dept of Archaeology at the University of Haifa! He published; "Has Joshua's Altar been Found on Mount Ebal?", Biblical Archaeology Review XI (1985), pp. 26-44 among other articles and books.
- 9 He is one of the Jewish apologetic schools. He was a former Rabbi of the Orthodox congregation in Calgary, Alberta (Canada), presently lives in Kiryat Sefer, Israel, and lectures at the Aish Hatorah Discovery Seminar. He does not hide his biases and phobia, which are anathema in science, whenever an occasion presents itself. He criticizes for example the seculars; Herzog and Israel Finkelstein for being convinced of their position from their own studies! For him, studying anything, except the Torah is valueless!
- 10 Professor of Ancient Near Eastern Cultures and Semitic Linguistics, Tel Aviv University
- 11 Andalusian litterateur, historian, jurist and theologian born in Córdoba, present day Spain.[4] He was a leading proponent of the Zahiri School of Islamic thought and produced a reported 400 works of which only 40 still survive. See his biography in Wikipedia.
- 12 She was born in 1963 in Stavanger, Norway. Her doctoral thesis from the Faculty of Theology, Oslo University was entitled; "Facts in the ground-Biblical history in archaeological interpretation of the Iron Age in Palestine".(2001).
- 13 Dever, William G. is a Professor of Near Eastern Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Arizona; He wrote; "What Did the Biblical Writers know and when did they know it? What Archaeology and the Bible Can Tell Us about Ancient Israel", Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- 14 He published; "Early History of the Israelite People" (Brill 1992) and "the Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel" (1999).
- 15 University Of Sheffield, England. Revisionism, as it is now generally termed, began as a deliberate movement within Biblical studies in 1992 with his book by entitled; "In Search of "Ancient Israel." Noteworthy is his essay; "What separates a Minimalist from a Maximalist? Not much," published in Bible archaeology Review, 2000-MAR/APR Vol. 26, #2, Pages 24 to 27; 72 & 73. And also his two books; "Whose Bible Is It Anyway? », Continuum; 2nd edition (Dec 7 2004) and "The Bible, as History, Flunks New Archaeological Tests Is the Bible history? What does the archeological record show?"
- 16 He teaches at the University of Sheffield, UK. He wrote "The Invention of Ancient Israel" in the same vein as Edward Said's classic; "Orientalism". He is more critical of the Zionist agenda behind archeology and protests against the use of history "to validate modern political stances". He published; "The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History" (1996).
- 17 He teaches at the University of Copenhagen, department of Biblical Studies. He wrote "Canaanites and Their

Land: The Tradition of the Canaanites”, Continuum Intl Pub Group, 1991 and “Prelude to Israel's Past: Background and Beginnings of Israelite History and Identity”, Hendrickson Pub., 1998.

18 Associate Professor at Tel Aviv University. He took part in the excavations of Hazor and Megiddo with Yigael Yadin (the smuggler of the Dead-Sea Scrolls) and in dig at Tel Arad and Tel Beer Sheba with Yohanan Aharoni. He published books and Wrote articles on archeology see his article; ”Deconstructing the walls of Jericho: biblical myth and archaeological reality. Prometheus 4:72-93 (2001) among others.

19 Professor of Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Studies, Tel Aviv University

20 An Israeli archeologist affiliated with the University of Tel Aviv. He served as Director of The Sonia and Marco Nadler Institute of Archaeology at Tel Aviv University from 1996-2002. He wrote; “The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts », “The Bible Unearthed : Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts, 2001 »,and “David and Solomon: In Search of the Bible's Sacred Kings and the Roots of the Western Tradition, 2006 » among others.

21 G. Rendsburg, "Down with History, Up with Reading: The Current State of Biblical Studies

22 This is a false pretence.

23 What their” being Jews” or the lack of it has to do with their field of enquiry?

24 This is the classical petty war cry so dear to the Zionists, when they feel flat beaten or cornered.

25 Director and Senior Fellow of the Center for Science and Culture at the Discovery Institute, in Seattle, Washington.

26 In “Biblical Archaeology”, Institute for Biblical & Scientific Studies, based on his doctoral dissertation thesis entitled; “The Date of the Exodus in Ancient Writings”, link {<http://www.bibleandscience.com/archaeology/exodusdate.htm> }

27 Idem.