

THE  
EARLY HISTORY OF EGYPT.

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INTRODUCTION.

**O**F the early history of Egypt the accounts which have come down to us are so bald, and so far from meeting with universal belief, that it seems to be the best course to lay the whole before the enquirer in the separate forms in which the fragments exist, rather than attempt to frame one connected account, which can never be satisfactory unless reliance be placed on most of the original authors. In the case of Egypt there is an additional reason for this course; the original authors are but few, and their accounts are so different that they must, if all true, relate either to different countries, or parts of the country, or to different times.

The principal sources of information are, first, the Old Testament, which of course, from the geographical position of the countries, when it contains information about Egypt, must be understood to mean Lower Egypt, at least whenever the two parts of Egypt were under different kings.

Secondly, Herodotus, who tells us that he obtained his information from the priests at Memphis and the Greek colonists in the Delta; hence his history also is that of Lower Egypt.

Herodotus and the Old Testament agree entirely in their chronology. Herodotus has not given us any regular history or series of kings' names before the reign of Solomon, and after this time

the first king mentioned by name is the same in each, *viz.* Sesostris, or Shishak ; and probably for this reason, that he was the first great king that reigned in Lower Egypt.

Thirdly, Diodorus Siculus, who lived four hundred years later than Herodotus : he does not say where he got his information ; but he agrees sufficiently with the history of Herodotus to prove that he had only heard of those kings who ruled at Memphis.

Fourthly, Manetho, whose list of kings runs back to a very early period : of a considerable part of this we can make no use, having nothing to compare it with ; but, if we begin with the expulsion of the Hycsos and the rise of the great Theban empire, he leads us through a list of kings whose greatness and wealth is proved by the monuments which remain to us. On the decline of Upper Egypt, about the time of Solomon, he furnishes us with the names and length of reigns of the Pharaohs of Lower Egypt, and in no particular does he differ with the Old Testament or with Herodotus ; though, indeed, in the principal points he does not admit of any comparison with them, that is, in his kings of Upper Egypt.

Fifthly, The genealogical tablet of kings, discovered by Mr. W. J. Bankes at Abydos, contains a list of the kings of Upper Egypt, probably, when perfect, sixty-four in number. Of the first portion of these we can make no use, from not being able to read their names ; but the last portion, containing the names of the Theban kings from the rise of that monarchy till nearly the last who bore the name of Rameses, and its fall under the Ethiopian invasion, agrees even more exactly than could be expected with the names of Manetho's kings, and quite confirms his statement, that he got his information from the monuments of the country. The tablet contains no kings of Lower Egypt, and therefore cannot be compared with the Old Testament or Herodotus. Nothing is known

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respecting its age, but we may conclude that it was made in the reign of the last king mentioned in it, probably about 800 B.C.

Sixthly, The remaining buildings of Egypt are generally covered with hieroglyphical inscriptions, which are in all cases sufficiently understood for us to know by what king these wonderful works of art were built ; and, by comparing these names with the tablet of Abydos, and again with Manetho's history, we obtain the wished-for knowledge, for which indeed chronology and the mechanical part of history is principally valuable, namely the order of succession, and the approximate time at which the stupendous monuments of Upper Egypt were erected.

The following is a list of the principal authors who have either written expressly on the subject or have left notices respecting the early history of Egypt, which are made use of in the following pages.

B.C.	1400	} The Books of Genesis and Exodus.
	or 1200	
	820	Homer and Hesiod.
	800	The tablet of kings at Abydos.
	580	Jeremiah, Books of Kings and Chronicles.
	430	Herodotus, visited Egypt.
	260	Manetho, an Egyptian.
	200	Eratosthenes.
	40	Diodorus Siculus, visited Egypt.
	40	Strabo, visited Egypt.
A.C.	40	Quintus Curtius, visited Egypt.
	60	Pliny.
	90	Tacitus.
	100	Plutarch, visited Egypt.
	160	Pausanias.

From these authors I have, I believe, extracted all the passages which relate directly to the chronology of Egypt or contain the names of Egyptian kings before the Persian invasion.

We learn from the Old Testament that, while the Jews, the earliest nation that has handed down to us the history of its rise and civilization, were yet a tribe of wandering shepherds, under Abraham, depending solely upon the unbought gifts of nature, who, when they had exhausted one district, instead of cultivating it, drove off their flocks in search of another, the Egyptians were acquainted with agriculture, and all those arts of civilization and government, and notions of property, which usually belong to nations which have been long settled and civilized. This we find confirmed in a striking manner by the architectural remains that have survived the ravages of above thirty centuries; for, while the Jews, under the immediate successors of Joshua, were still warring with the Canaanites for the possession of the country, or perhaps even while they were yet slaves in Egypt, Egypt itself possessed palaces, temples, porticoes, obelisks, statues, and canals, which are even now the admiration of the world. And though the Jews never allowed that they learned their arts of civilization from their cruel task-masters, but owed them a grudge which lasted till the growing power of Assyria made it prudent for them to forget it, yet the Greeks have abundantly borne testimony to how much the world is indebted to the Egyptians for architecture, geometry, agriculture, irrigation, letters, and paper (*qua constat hominum immortalitas*, says Pliny). Indeed the earliest *express assertion* of the *immortality of the soul* is found in the statement by Herodotus of the opinions held by the Egyptians (lib. ii. 123).

That most remarkable custom of embalming the dead, to which the numerous mummies yet bear witness, they practised even in

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the earliest ages; it is mentioned in Genesis, chap. 1., by Herodotus, and by all succeeding writers.

But the buildings are the principal evidence of the extent to which they had cultivated the arts of civilization and production. From their vast size and number we are immediately led to consider the populousness of the country, the number of hands, and the mechanical knowledge employed in raising these monuments, and the complete cultivation of the soil required to feed such a population; and this again is corroborated by the extent of the canals, lakes, and other works used for irrigation.

The quantity of mathematical knowledge required to make the waters of the Nile useful for this purpose over such an extent of country, from the highest nilometer at Elephantine to that great reservoir the lake of Moëris, and again over the alluvial plain of the Delta, can best be judged of by considering the number of published works on hydrostatics, and on the force of running water, that have been brought into existence by the rise in the bed of the Po, and by the dykes of Holland; and by recollecting that the draining of the Pontine marshes has baffled the attempts of the Roman engineers from the time of the emperors to the present day.

Indeed, Egypt teems with evidence of the great civilization of its early inhabitants, and with materials to awaken our curiosity and spur our enquiries into its letters and history; and our disappointment is of course fully equal to our curiosity when we find, from every fresh advance which is made in the reading of hieroglyphics, how little the priests thought worth the recording, in that laborious and durable manner which has already survived thirty centuries, beyond the titles of their gods and the particulars of the sacred offerings to their shrines.

In the following pages the events are all made more modern than in the system of chronology usually adopted, and yet we go back to the year B.C. 1600, before we come to one of those heroes whose exaggerated actions prove that we are beyond the bounds of exact history,—Osirtesen I., the Sesostris or Sesonkosis of Manetho (not of Herodotus), the Sesosis of Diodorus Siculus, who conquered India beyond the Ganges.

Women were allowed to succeed to the throne at a very early time, a circumstance that proves a quiet succession in the sovereignty and polished manners in the people. Indeed, in giving to the female name the precedence on all occasions, as in the case even of Isis and Osiris, they exceeded the politeness of moderns.

Of the form of Government we know but little, and that little relates to Lower Egypt; though it is probable that the two regions did not differ in this respect: it was monarchical, but very far from despotic in the bad meaning of the word; for a king surrounded by an hereditary order of soldiers and an hereditary order of priests, and these possessed of civil power, must have felt himself a good deal checked by his aristocracy. And, without supposing the assembly of elected judges to have possessed the important privileges of legislation and control of the monarch which we now annex to the idea of a representative chamber, it can hardly have been of less importance in those respects than the old French parliaments, which were not elected. But the few facts which we possess, respecting the limitation of the royal power, are strengthened by their adoption of the English constitutional axiom, and exactly in the sense in which we now use it, that the king could do no wrong: his advisers bore the blame. He was himself, in some cases, of the priestly order, as we learn from Herodotus and the hieroglyphical inscriptions. The two privileged orders held their estates free of rent or

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taxes, while the rest of the people paid a fifth of the produce to the crown. Each city had a tutelary divinity, after whom it was often named; and in some cases, most probably in all, the chief priest, in the temple of this god, was the chief magistrate of the city. As the priests were the hereditary and sole depositaries of all learning, we must also suppose that they filled the judicial and magisterial offices, as well as the learned professions.

The enquiry into the political condition of any people who have left behind them works worthy of admiration, is of the highest moral importance. The pyramids of Lower Egypt, requiring for their erection the least quantity of architectural knowledge, no elegance of design, no taste in the detail, might possibly have been the work of men driven by task-masters to their daily labour; but that the palaces, tombs, and temples of Upper Egypt, which present to us the earliest known instances of architecture, sculpture, and painting; the colossal statues of Amenothph and Rameses, requiring considerable anatomical knowledge for the original design, and a mechanical skill in transferring that design from the model to the block of stone exceeding perhaps even that of the Greeks themselves; the vast works for irrigation; and the correct division of the calendar, requiring great knowledge of mathematics, and this at a time when no other nation, certainly none with whom they were connected, was in an equally cultivated state;—that these should have been the works of a people suffering under political disadvantages would contradict all our observations on the human mind and its powers.

A tree is known by its fruit; and every circumstance, of which Herodotus and Diodorus have related many, that leads us to believe that the kingdom of Thebes, at the time that it was one of those favored spots in which the human mind has been most ex-

panded, enjoyed also the blessings of good government, must be gratifying to the historical enquirer.

### THE OLD TESTAMENT.

IN the Book of Genesis, ch. x. v. 6, &c. we have the following account of the descent of the Egyptians, and of all the nations with whom they were most closely connected in war and peace.

“ And the sons of HAM,

Cush, [Arabia and Assyria.

and Mizraim, [Egypt.

and Phut,

and Canaan; [The aborigines of the land of Canaan.

“ And the sons of Cush,

Seba, [Petra. See Isaiah, xlv. 14.

and Havilah, [Armenia?

and Sabtah,

and Raamah,

and Sabtechah,

and Nimrod (the Hunter, and the beginning of his kingdom was Babel), [the Assyrian empire.

“ The sons of Raamah,

Sheba, [The incense country of Arabia, whose queen visited Solomon.

and Dedan.

“ And Mizraim begat

Ludim, [Ethiopians, before the Cushite invasion?

and Ananim,

and Lehabim, [Africa to the west of the Nile, Lybia.



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and Naphtuhim, [Arabia Nabatæa, of which Petra was the capital.

and Pathrusim, [Upper Egypt. See Is. xi. 11; Jer. xlv. 1.

and Casluhim, [On the coast between Egypt and the Philistines.

“ (Out of whom came Philistim), [The Philistines, the inhabitants of the southern part of Canaan.

and Caphtorim, [The Copts, Coptos.

“ These are the sons of Ham, after their families, after their tongues, in their countries, in their nations.” &c.

The explanation of this history of the descent of the nations that were descendants of Ham is attended with very great difficulty; and this difficulty is further increased by our finding that, at the earliest period to which our knowledge reaches, in most of the countries here described as peopled by descendants of Cush, an Arabic dialect was spoken, which, from its close analogy to Hebrew, would have led us to call them sons of Shem. It might be conjectured that the aborigines were Cushites, and that after the time of Abraham the countries were peopled by Arabs; but this would not alter the case, because there is reason to believe that the people called Cushites in the later books of the Old Testament spoke Arabic; hence we must conclude that Arabic was the language of the sons of Cush, and that Coptic was confined to the sons of Mizraim.

Of the four great divisions, three may be considered as known; and, as Phut is not subdivided into tribes, we may suppose it some nation more distant and less connected with the Jews. With the subdivisions of the Land of Canaan we are not here concerned; they were the tribes which the Jews found in possession of the

promised land. Cush and Mizraim are the object of the present enquiry, and only a part of their subdivisions are understood.

In the want of knowledge where to place some of the nations of the Cushites, we are not justified in placing any of them to the west of the Red Sea, but must rather suppose that the migration of Cushites across its southern end into Ethiopia took place at a later period.

Ludim is, throughout the Old Testament, translated by the Septuagint Lydians; and in Jeremiah, xlvi. we have the additional phrase, Lydians “that bend the bow.” Bochart considers that they inhabited Ethiopia. In Isaiah, lxvi. 19, they are mentioned in connection with Egypt and Pul (the kingdom of Phylæ or Elephantine). According to Strabo, as hereafter quoted, the Ethiopians fought with a bow of four cubits length. The Philistines, we see, were not aborigines in the country to which they afterwards gave their name, but entered Palestine from Arabia, probably later than the Jews did, being of Egyptian origin.

Genesis, xii.—Abraham journeyed into Egypt, when the famine made it difficult for him to feed his flocks in his own country: thus the first mention of Egypt is on account of its fertility. The Pharaoh on the throne at that early time was surrounded with princes and servants.

Genesis, xxi. 9, &c.—God said unto Abraham, “and also of the son of the bond-woman [Ishmael, the son of Hagar the Egyptian] will I make a great nation, because he is thy seed.” “And he dwelt in the wilderness and became an archer: and he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt.”

Here is distinct notice of the existence of a great nation, of a mixt race between the Egyptians and the Chaldeans, that dwelt