

# **Manetho's Eighteenth Dynasty: Putting the Pieces Back Together**

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*Paper presented at ARCE '99, Chicago, April 23-25, 1999*

In the third century BC, an Egyptian priest named Manetho, writing in Greek, produced a history of his native country. Beginning with the reigns of gods prior to the First Dynasty and continuing down to the conquest of Egypt by Alexander, his work contained an enormous amount of information about Egyptian chronology. It was apparently quite popular and widely circulated. But the copies were poorly transcribed and contained many inconsistencies. Josephus, the Jewish historian of the first century AD, for example, indicates that he had two different versions that differed on some details.

Some time after publication of his history, one or more redactors took Manetho's chronological data and organized the material into a king-list, separating the kings into thirty dynasties. This arrangement is known as the Manetho Model and forms the basis for our modern outline of Egyptian dynastic history. Whether Manetho, himself, ever subscribed to this scheme is unknown because no version of Manetho's original manuscript has yet been found. Instead, we have three primary sources that claim to be based on his writings.

The oldest comes from Josephus and it retains Manetho's original narrative form, but covering only the period from the middle of Hyksos era to the reign of Ramesses II in the Nineteenth Dynasty. Although noting the conflict between Theban and Hyksos rulers, Josephus has no numbered dynasties and records no dynastic divisions. Yet, his excerpts

encompass all or part of at least three different Theban dynasties, a good indication that the Manetho Model was not part of Manetho's history.

The other two sources come from the Christian writers Africanus and Eusebius, who date respectively to the third and fourth centuries AD. Both sources are based on the king-list summaries extracted from Manetho's text, with the kings and/or dynasties listed in tabular format along with lengths of reign for many of the kings and dynasties, with the dynasties appearing in numbered order. It is from these two sources that we derive the Manetho Model of thirty dynasties.

Unfortunately, not only are all three sources often wildly inconsistent with each other, especially as regards the Second Intermediate Period, they are often very much out of synch with the archaeological record. Nevertheless, it is quite apparent that the original Manetho frequently relied on legitimate and accurate source material about Egypt's chronological history. In fact, he was a priest at the temple at Heliopolis and tradition held that in this temple there was a depiction of a Tree of Life that contained the names of all the Egyptian kings on its leaves. It has been my argument, both here and in other papers and articles, that Manetho originally had a very accurate chronological history of Egypt and that the copies of his works that have survived represent badly garbled mutilations of his original text.

Despite the enormous number of difficulties presented by Manetho's work, his history still plays an important role in Egyptological studies. Much of the writing about Egyptian chronology often attempts to either reconcile or disprove Manetho's claims.

The three versions of Manetho's Eighteenth Dynasty, in Josephus, Africanus, and Eusebius, provide a good illustration of the many problems associated with his work.

[Table 1](#) lists all three chronologies side by side. They show more kings than actually served in the Eighteenth Dynasty; the Greek transliterations of the various names are often unrecognizable as particular Eighteenth Dynasty kings; to the extent some of the kings can be associated with Egyptian counterparts, the names are sometimes out of chronological order; some lengths of reign are widely inaccurate, such as that for Sethos; and, the three lists have many inconsistencies amongst them, including different spellings for the names of the kings and the omission of names on one list that appear on the other lists.

On the other hand, close examination of the list shows that it is indeed based on authentic records of the Eighteenth Dynasty. Consider, for example, the fourth name on the Josephus and Africanus lists, whom Josephus calls Amessis and Africanus calls Amensis. Both describe this ruler as a female and give her a reign of 21 years and 9 months on one list or 22 years on the other. Note that, for the most part, Africanus's lengths of reign simply show Josephus's lengths of reign rounded off to whole years but with no consistent pattern as to when the last year is rounded up or down. In any event, there is a female queen in the Eighteenth Dynasty, Hatshepsut, and archaeological records give her a high-year mark of 22 years. However, she was the fifth ruler in sequence, not the fourth, and her reign was concurrent with that of Thutmose III. Still, such a match seems unlikely to be the product of mere coincidence unrelated to historical data.

Consider also that Josephus lists three different kings named Amenophis, which is the Greek transliteration for Amenhotep, and this dynasty actually had four kings with

that name. (We will see later that the fourth Amenhotep also appears in the list but under a different name.)

Josephus's first Amenophis appears in the third position and is assigned a length of reign of 20 years and 7 months. The actual first Amenophis in this dynasty has a high-year mark of 21 years, but he was the second king in sequence, not the third. I should note here that high-year marks indicate only that the king reached that particular year in his reign, but does not necessarily mean that he couldn't have ruled longer.

The last Amenophis in the Josephus list erroneously appears between Ramesses I and Sethos I and has a reign of 19 years and 6 months. The last Amenophis in the true Eighteenth Dynasty was Akhenaten, also known as Amenhotep IV, who ruled approximately 17 years. He was succeeded by Smenkhkare, who ruled for about three years, possibly a portion of that time as coregent, and who continued the Amarna heresy during his reign. Putting aside the problem of accurate order of appearance, it is obvious that the Josephus list combines the two Amarna heretics as if they were a single king.

These coincidences between three rulers in the Josephus king-list and three monarchs in the Eighteenth Dynasty—Amenhotep I, Amenhotep IV, and Hatshepsut—clearly show that accurate data lay behind Manetho's original chronological record. Whether the placing of the kings in the wrong chronological order was due to Manetho's mistake or that of his redactors can not be resolved without a copy of his original manuscript.

Keeping in mind what we know about Eighteenth Dynasty chronology and high-year marks for various kings, I attempted to reorder the Josephus king-list on the basis of that information. As I went through this process it became apparent that the excess

number of kings in the Manetho list was due to the erroneous division of the reigns of Thutmose III and Horemheb into smaller subdivisions, each assigned to separate king names. Let me show you how I worked through the process. [Table 2](#) contains my solution.

There are four other kings in the Josephus list that have lengths of reign consistent with that of Eighteenth Dynasty kings: Orus, Rathotis, Harmais, and Ramesses. In addition, although Josephus names his first king Tethmosis, the other two lists have names that closely correspond to Ahmose, the dynasty's first ruler. Tethmosis, then, can be considered the first king of the dynasty. Archaeology gives him a high-year mark of 22, but many Egyptologist accept Manetho's 25 years as a more accurate length of reign.

Josephus gives Orus a reign of 36 years and 5 months and Amenhotep III had a high year mark of 37 years, making an excellent match. For this and other reasons, several Egyptologists have endorsed the correlation between the two. Josephus's Rathotis has a reign of 9 years, which coincides precisely with that of Tutankhamen, who ruled only 9 years. Josephus's Harmais has a reign of 4 years and 1 month, which makes an excellent fit with Aye, who has a high-year mark of 4 years. Finally, Josephus's Ramesses has a reign of 1 year and 4 months, which coincides with Ramesses I, who ruled about two years, partly as coregent with Horemheb. This takes care of the more obvious correspondences.

Turn now to the [Josephus list](#) and look at kings number 11 through 17. So far we have associated four of them with the Amarna and post-Amarna period. The only Eighteenth Dynasty king missing from the post-Amarna sequence is Horemheb. That leaves the three other kings in that part of the list as potential Horemheb counterparts,

Acencheres I, Acencheres II, and Harmesses Miamen. This last king has a reign of 66 years and 2 months, far too high for Horemheb, who has a high-year mark of 27 years, although that indication comes from a graffito rather than an official record. Africanus omits this king from his list but Eusebius gives him a slightly longer reign and identifies him as Ramesses also called Aegyptus. Since Ramesses II also had a reign of about 66 years, there seems to be some connection between him and Harmesses Miamen.

However, we should also note that the last king on [all three lists](#) has a reign of about the same length and a name that also seems based on Ramesses. The issues involved in resolving this duplication are too complicated to be resolved in this paper and I will pass over them at this time. In any event, we can safely eliminate Harmesses Miamen as the Horemheb substitute. This leaves two other candidates, each with the same name and each ruling just over 12 years. Both fall short of Horemheb's 27 years, but if we add them together the total is 24 years and 8 months. And if we add to that the 1 year and 4 months for Ramesses I, who served as coregent with Horemheb for approximately that period of time, we have a total period of 26 years, which accords quite well with Horemheb's high-year mark of 27 years.

This completes the Amarna and post-Amarna portion of the Eighteenth Dynasty, and if we add up the lengths of all the associated Josephus reigns we have a grand total of 58 years and 7 months. This is consistent with an inscription from the reign of Ramesses II, which gave Horemheb a reign of 59 years in order to subsume all the kings associated with the Amarna heresy—Akhenaten, Smenkhkare, Tutankhamen, and Aye—under Horemheb's reign.

With that in mind, look at [Josephus's reign for Sethos I](#), 59 years. Sethos, however, has a high-year mark of only 11 years and couldn't have ruled more than a few years longer than that. This suggests that either Manetho or his source placed a line of summation after Ramesses I indicating that there were a total of 59 years from Akhenaten to the start of the reign of Sethos I, the next king in the sequence after Ramesses I. The text may have said something like "to Sethos, 59 years." Subsequently, one or more of the redactors mistakenly read that line of summation as the length of reign for the pharaoh and placed that figure opposite the name of Sethos.

In support of this argument, look at the [Africanus list](#). The sum of years for his corresponding set of kings is 55 years. Although he gives Sethos I a reign of 51 years, the Eusebius list gives a duration of 55 years, equal to the Africanus total and confirming that a line of summation was mistakenly assigned to Sethos in the various Manetho king-lists.

We have now tackled all the Eighteenth Dynasty kings except for Amenhotep II and the four Thutmoses. We can easily dispose of Amenhotep II by identifying him as the second Amenophis in the Josephus list. Josephus gives him a reign of 30 years and 10 months, but Amenhotep II has a high-year mark of only 23. However, the high-year mark is only a minimum length of reign and there is room in the archaeological record for this king to have served into a thirty-first year. Some Egyptologists have speculated that he served into his thirty-fifth year.

This leaves us with five kings in the Josephus list and four Thutmoses still to be accounted for. [Table 3](#) lists the five Josephus kings in order of appearance along with his Queen Amessis, who corresponds to Queen Hatshepsut and who served as coregent with

Thutmose III. The Table also aligns the Josephus kings with my proposed correspondences to the Thutmose kings. There are still obstacles to surmount, however, before we can confirm the solution.

The primary difficulty is that Thutmose III served a total of 53 years, 10 months, and 26 days, and none of the Josephus kings served more than 26 years. Since we have one extra king in the Josephus list, we can reasonably assume that the reign of Thutmose III encompasses at least two of the Josephus reigns, but which two? Even if we add together the two longest reigns in the Josephus list, we still fall several years short of Thutmose III's full reign, and we have no additional kings to add on.

What I propose, therefore, is that we include the Amessis/Hatshepsut reign as the first portion of the Thutmose III reign, and then correlate each of the five Josephus kings with a corresponding Thutmose King according to the order of appearance in the Josephus list. As [Table 3](#) shows, Chebron corresponds to Thutmose I, Mephres to Thutmose II, Mephramuthosis and Thmosis to Thutmose III, and Acencheres to Thutmose IV. However, this arrangement requires that we resolve some issues concerning lengths of reign.

In our reconstruction, the three Josephus kings corresponding to Thutmose III—Amessis, Mephramuthosis, and Thmosis—have a combined reign of 57 years and 3 months, approximately 3 years and 4 or 5 months too long. Also, the king assigned to Thutmose II, Mephres, has a reign of at least 1 year and 3 months shorter than the high-year mark.

I suggest that the extra 3 years and 4 months assigned to the Thutmose III kings in the Josephus list were mistakenly taken from Mephres, the Thutmose II king, due to a

misreading of the text. When those years are transferred back from Mephramuthosis, Mephres has a reign of 16 years and 1 or 2 months. This fits quite well with the high-year mark of 14 for Thutmose II, and provides a much smoother fit with the chronological evidence.

That some confusion existed between Thutmose II and Thutmose III seems apparent from the Josephus king-list. Not only is there a similarity between the names Mephres and Mephramuthosis, the two names are placed in sequential order, with Mephres appearing after Queen Amessis. This suggests that either Manetho or his redactors thought that Mephres, or Thutmose II, ruled after Hatshepsut, clearly an error in the chronological order. I suspect that in the original Manetho narratives, Manetho described events during a portion of the reign of Mephres that lasted about 3 years and 4 months and that a redactor misread that name and thought it applied to the next king in sequence, Mephramuthosis, and added those years to his reign.

I further suspect that the name Mephramuthosis is a corruption of the original name in the Manetho list and may have been much closer in form to Mephres. Note that in [both the Africanus and Eusebius lists](#) there is some variation from Josephus's rendition of the two names. Most likely, the original version of Mephramuthosis's name consisted of two separate names, the first of which was Mephres, the same as that of his predecessor on the Josephus list. This would have accounted for the confusion.

Finally, let's turn to Thutmose I and Thutmose IV. How does our correspondence with the Josephus names of Chebron and Acencheres compare with the chronological record?

Thutmose I has a high-year mark of either 4 or 9 but many Egyptologists believe that the accomplishments belonging to his reign require a much longer length of rule. Gardiner, for instance, assigns him a reign of 18 years. In the Josephus list, Chebron, the corresponding king, has a reign of 13 years, which fits well with the chronological evidence.

Thutmose IV has a high-year mark of 8, but there is a wide range of opinion as to how long he actually ruled. Wentz and Van Siclen have argued for a 34-year reign and Redford for 10 years. The Josephus figure of 12 years and 1 month seems to be within an acceptable time frame.

In conclusion, we have seen that the major problems with Manetho's chronology for the Eighteenth Dynasty, as reflected in the writings of Josephus, Africanus, and Eusebius, can be resolved once we recognize that the reigns of Thutmose III and Horemheb were each subdivided into three portions with each portion assigned to separate king-names, and in each case one of the portions was assigned to a coregent. In addition, the two Amarna kings, Akhenaten and Smenkhkare, were combined into one reign. Once we adjust for those errors, we can see that Manetho's original chronology drew upon highly accurate records of the Eighteenth Dynasty and provided a reliable guide to the lengths of reign for the dynasty's kings.