

A Test of Time: The Bible — From Myth to History Volume 1

by David M. Rohl
Century Ltd, Random House, London

Reviewed by John Osgood

This volume is a shining light in a dark place!

Over the years many have been perturbed by the popular chronology of the ancient world, particularly before 600 BC, and its implied designation of biblical history to the realm of myth.

Many have been the voices — mostly from outside the archaeological discipline — that have cried objection and offered reconstruction of the popular chronology, but rarely have we heard a voice from the discipline itself acknowledging the problem and offering alternate reconstruction. But such is this volume, and David Rohl, Egyptologist and archaeologist, is to be given full credit for his enlightening reconstruction of the Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (T.I.P.). Whether we agree with his conclusions or not, in part or in whole, David Rohl must be acknowledged with deep appreciation for his honesty and integrity, and whatever agreement or disagreement I have for his conclusions, I personally feel a deep debt to his scholarship.

The problem at hand he calls 'The Gordian Knot', and in chapters 4-6 explains what has happened — the central place the assumed or popular chronology of Egypt has played in interpreting the biblical historical narrative.

The four pillars the archaeologists have used to obtain this assumed chronology have been:-

- (1) The sacking of Thebes by the Assyrians, viz. Ashurbanipal, in

664BC — this is on solid ground.

- (2) The identification of Shoshenk I, founder of Dynasty 22 of Egypt, with the biblical Shishak of I Kings 14 and II Chronicles 12 — a pillar that with David Rohl's chronology will collapse.
- (3) The Ebers Calendar of Egypt Sothic Dating. Rohl argues a revision must be made and its value is disputed by respected Egyptologists.
- (4) The lunar date of Rameses II — this is dependent on pillar 3 and rises or falls with this.

Therefore, only pillar 1 remains safe! Rohl concludes (page 138, paragraph 5):

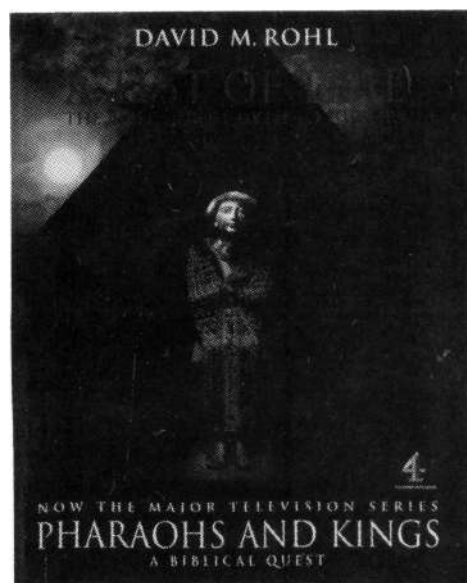
'With so much doubt as to the real length of the TIP, the only option left is for scholars to dismantle the great edifice of Egyptian chronology and begin the process of reconstruction all over again

David Rohl has stated aloud what Sir Alan Gardiner proposed in **Egypt of the Pharaohs**, chapter IV, when he declares:

'... What is proudly advertised as Egyptian history is merely a collection of rags and tatters!

David Rohl has been forced to this conclusion by a frank and honest admission of hard evidence which conflicts with the popular interpretation.

This evidence he has presented in chapters 1-3, and in brief may be summarised by his own succinct



statements :-

- (1) Evidence from the burial vaults of the Serapeum at Sakkara near Cairo:
'The archaeological evidence from the Lesser Vaults of the Serapeum suggests that the length of the Third Intermediate Period may have been artificially over-extended by historians! (page 60)
- (2) Evidence from the Royal Cache south of Deir El Bahri near Luxor:
'The burial of Djedptahefankh in the Royal Cache indicates that the 21st and 22nd Dynasties were not chronologically sequential, as is currently believed, but partly contemporary! (page 80)
- (3) Evidence from the Royal Tombs of San (the biblical Zoan, Tanis to the Greek writers) in the Eastern Delta. He concludes:
'... The order of burial of the two kings indicates that the number of years currently allocated to the TIP should be reduced by at least one hundred and forty one years! (page 107)

Thus David Rohl presents his evidence, aimed at the Third Intermediate Period, to argue powerfully for

- (a) a shortening of the period, and
- (b) at least partial contemporaneity of

the 21st and 22nd Dynasties.

In parts 3 and 4 of his work (chapters 7-15) Rohl attempts a reconstruction of the Egyptian period where it affects the biblical narrative — nine chapters of fascinating reading for anyone familiar with the difficulties of the popular chronology and biblical history.

In part one (chapters 1-3) Rohl is straight and hard-hitting, and I believe his conclusions will stand!

In part two he outlines clearly the present chronological difficulties, showing with hard evidence that the present chronology has difficulties prior to the sacking of Thebes by the Assyrians in 664BC.

Rohl begins a steady attempt at reconstruction, starting in chapter 6 using three known Egyptian chronologies to assess retrogradely the chronology back to Dynasty 19. These chronologies or genealogies (page 139) are:-

- (1) the Graffito Genealogy of Khnemibre in the Wadi Hammamat,
 - (2) the Statue Genealogy of Nespaherenhat in the Cairo Museum, and
 - (3) the Memphite Genealogy of the High Priests of Ptah, now in Berlin.
- He first ratifies that these confirm that the TIP has been overstretched.

However, in taking back the genealogy to the 19th Dynasty certain assumptions must be made — mainly that the average length of a generation is about 20 years. In other words, Rohl can assess the time period in terms of 'reasonableness' back to the 19th Dynasty (and in particular to Rameses II) and not as an **absolute date**. This is critical, because he will now put forward strong rationalisation for Rameses II being Shishak of the Bible, a theory that is closer to acceptance with many revisionists than seeing Shoshenk I of Dynasty 22 as this figure.

In chapter 7 Rohl presents Rameses II as Shishak — he cites evidence that Rameses had captured 'Salem', that he campaigned in the Judean hills, and that the name

'Shishak' can be found in his Egyptian names.

In putting forward such a hypothesis, however, Rohl has not answered all the questions inherent in the biblical chronology. It is clear that the attack on Judah by the biblical Shishak is the most significant attack on the land of Israel (Canaan) since the Exodus and must have been conducted by a very powerful Pharaoh — the only other earlier mentioned attack is the raid in Solomon's day on the city of Gezer so as to present it as a dowry to Solomon for Pharaoh's daughter (I Kings 9:16). Prior to this for about 480 years the Bible is largely silent about Pharaonic intrusions, and in their place we only meet the recurrent intrusions of the Amalekites from the southern direction. Accordingly, another reconstructionist has powerfully argued that Thutmose III (heroic pharaoh of the Empire period and Dynasty 18) is the Shishak of the Bible, and piece by piece identifies the plunder of the Jerusalem Temple on the walls of his temple at Kamak, categorised and displayed by Thutmose III (Velikovsky — **Ages in Chaos**). His argument is strong indeed, and Rohl's argument for the later Rameses II is certainly no stronger!

In chapter 8 Rohl then attempts to date the Solomonic period presently assigned to Iron Age IIA, and rightly concludes, as he must, that *'the cultural wealth of the era of Solomon . . . is not reflected in the archaeology of Iron Age Palestine . . .'* (page 175)

He puts forward the Late Bronze Age as the era of Solomon — the only period consistent with the Solomonic *milieu*. At last a member of the archaeological discipline begins to make archaeological sense of the Palestine archaeological strata!

In choosing Rameses II as Shishak, Rohl has failed however to follow up and identify a candidate for 'Zerah the Ethiopian' (II Chronicles 14:9) who followed soon after Shishak, nor an explanation for the Queen of Sheba. Velikovsky makes positive identification attempts for both of these.

In chapters 9-10 Rohl attempts to place the time of the Amarna letters in the days of Saul and David, and claims to have identified the names of Saul, David, Ishbosheth, Joab, Jesse, Achish, and several other characters of the period, as well as the fortress of Zion, in these letters. His discussion is fascinating and strong, but again Velikovsky has previously identified the same period later in the days of Ahab and Jehoshaphat, in just as much detail, if not more, and just as persuasively, so arguing a more concentrated chronology than Rohl.

From chapter 11 onwards Rohl warns his readers of the thinner nature of his evidence as he attempts to reconstruct the biblical/archaeological chronology and narrative backwards — and so admits here to being more speculative.

He begins a journey to discover archaeologically the Israelites, the beginning of Egyptian Dynasty 18, the Exodus and the story of Joseph. The journey is fascinating and enlightening. However, I believe this section has fallen short of the mark and cannot have the same stamp of conviction as his first section on the Third Intermediate Period.

In chapter 11 he cites astronomical retrodating to determine the times of the Amarna tablets and period, and hence the beginning of the 18th Dynasty of Egypt.

He uses two main astronomical details:-

- (1) a total sundown eclipse (solar) over Ugarit, and
- (2) the Venus cycle in the reign of a king of the first dynasty of Babylon with its implications.

In so doing Rohl has relied upon brilliant work done by astronomers, but has made one important assumption which must be seriously questioned — **that our Solar System has not had any radical alterations that have affected Earth as an observatory**. If there have been such radical alterations, then Rohl's dates based on astronomy become totally meaningless.

At least two authors have made

assertions based on evidence that planetary fly-bys have affected Earth's *status quo*.

- (1) Velikovsky — **Worlds in Collision**, and
- (2) Patten, Hatch and Steinhauer — **The Long Day of Joshua and Six Other Catastrophes**.

I am suspicious of the accuracy of all astronomical calculations before the Hellenistic period!

Furthermore, although Rohl argues for a significant shortening of the popular chronology, his shortening still does not fully satisfy the biblical constraints. His date arrived at for the reign of Thutmose III is 1 138-1085BC, which is before the reign of David, Saul and Samuel, yet the Scripture is silent concerning such a powerful Pharaoh at this time. The Amalekites appear to be the southern power and the case is strong that they were the current rulers of at least Lower Egypt.

Rohl's further chronological calculations now become dependent on his above assumptions and I believe will eventually be shown to have fallen

short of the mark!

So dependent also will be his further discussion of the time of the Exodus, the details of Avaris, Joseph's palace, the times of the conquest, and the identification of Jericho's conquered city and the pharaoh of the famine.

Rohl appears not to have appreciated Donovan Courville's contribution to the period of Joseph and his strong identification of Sesostri I as the pharaoh of the famine (early 12th Dynasty) (Courville — **The Exodus Problem and Its Ramifications**), and I believe he has failed to separate the Hyksos Avaris from the details of Joseph.

In identifying MBIIA Jericho as the city of Joshua's conquest he has missed the significance of this fortress city as the city of Eglon of Moab (Judges 3) where he stationed 10,000 garrison troops, leaving Early Bronze III as the city of Joshua's day.

Nonetheless, although it is my belief that Rohl in his periods prior to the TIP has fallen short of the goal by

a hundred years or more, his arguments are fascinating and very illuminating, and his grasp of the subject matter is strong. He is to be considered a major player in the revised chronology and his TIP revision will, I believe, stand the test of time. However, circumstantial weight is on Velikovsky's side in identifying Shishak with Thutmose III and the Hyksos with the Amalekites, as it is on Courville's 12th Dynasty discussion of the times of Joseph.

The Wandering and Conquest stand by themselves in the MBI/EBIV *milieu*, as I have argued previously in this Journal (Vol. 2, pp. 56-76), and apparently archaeologist Cohen has so identified.

If time proves the above to be so, in no way does it reflect poorly on Rohl's contribution to the chronological revision, which is honest, forthright and settles him as an historian/archaeologist of strong integrity.

This book is certainly worth reading and reading again!

The Facts of Life: Shattering the Myths of Darwinism

by *Richard Milton*
Corgi Books, London

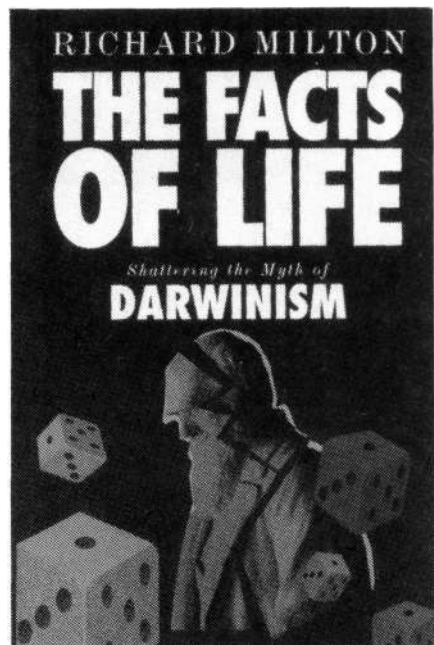
Reviewed by A. W. Mehlert

It is always a pleasure when one discovers a publication by an established science researcher who is not committed to a creationist or Christian viewpoint, but who nevertheless finds a great deal wrong with current evolutionary theory.

Such a work is **The Facts of Life** by Milton, a journalist who has spent more than 20 years commenting on science and technology. Much of his time was spent travelling widely in Europe and America, reporting on scientific developments, and his

articles have appeared in scores of magazines and newspapers. Milton's motive for closely examining evolutionary theory was the fact that his daughter was about to undergo science education at school, and he wanted to be sure that her instruction would be accurate (page 15).

One of the things I like most about this work is the strict honesty and integrity displayed by the author in relation to his private views on evolution and geology. Both in his preface (page 11) and in the postscript



(pages 294-299), Milton makes it quite clear that he is not a creationist and that he holds no religious convictions. Milton believes there is persuasive