

**ON THE VARIOUS YEARS  
AND MONTHS IN USE  
AMONG THE EGYPTIANS**

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THE VARIOUS YEARS AND MONTHS

IN USE AMONG

THE EGYPTIANS.

BY THE  
REV. EDWARD HINCKES, D.D.

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## VARIOUS YEARS AND MONTHS IN USE AMONG THE EGYPTIANS.

1. IT is now twenty-seven years since I wrote a paper on the years and cycles used by the ancient Egyptians, which was published in the eighteenth volume of the "Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy." At that time Egyptology was in its infancy. I accepted as an unquestionable truth a statement of CHAMPOLLION's respecting the tetramenies of the Egyptian year, which is now considered by the great majority of Egyptologists to have been proved to be erroneous; and I drew conclusions which, though legitimately following from that statement, I have been compelled to renounce, as inconsistent with the true statement that has taken its place. I will begin the present paper with explaining the statement of CHAMPOLLION and that which has superseded it.

2. CHAMPOLLION thought that the first of the three tetramenies of the Egyptian year was that of *vegetation*, beginning when the waters of the inundation subsided, the second being that of *ingathering*, and the third that of *inundation*. He gave these three values to the characters which hieroglyphically denoted the tetramenies, supposing them to represent *water plants*, *a house*, and *a basin of water*, and to be used ideographically. In 1838, when I wrote, no one doubted that this was correct, and of course that a year which began about four months after the commencement of the inundation, or the summer solstice, which synchronized with it, was the normal year to which the names of the tetramenies were adapted. It was not till 1856, when BRUGSCH published his "Nouvelles Recherches sur la Division de l' Année des anciens Egyptiens," that the views of CHAMPOLLION on this subject were called in question, and, in the judgment of most Egyptologists, completely disproved. According to BRUGSCH, the names of

the tetramenies were to be read phonetically. The first, *sha*, was the inundation; the second, *per*, was the winter; and the third, *shemou*, was the summer, or, rather, the genial season. I thought it due to M. BRUGSCH to examine his arguments and all that could be said against them with as much care as I could; and the result was, that I was completely satisfied that he was right; most other inquirers also came to a similar conclusion.

3. Now, as my paper of 1838 rested on CHAMPOLLION'S arrangement of the tetramenies as its foundation, it fell to the ground, as a matter of course, when that arrangement was overthrown. It was not in the early part of the eighteenth century before Christ that the months of the wandering year were in their normal position, but towards the end of the fourteenth, or the beginning of the thirteenth; and between that time and the appearance of the Phoenix recorded by TACRUS, no round number of years, such as 1800, could have elapsed. No number about 1800 has a cyclical character, or is a multiple of any that has. Again, I supposed that a year equivalent in its average length to the tropical year continued in use till 1767 B. C., when it was superseded by the wandering year. According to BRUGSCH'S discovery, however, it was not in 1767 B. C. that the wandering year would be in its normal position, but about 500 years later, or about 1000 years earlier. The latter would take us to 2767 B. C., which is not far different from the commencement of the Sothic cycle, 2920 years before that which CENSORINUS states to have begun 100 years before A. D. 238, the year when he wrote. If the cycle began in 139, as is generally supposed, the wandering year would thus have originated in 2782 B. C.; but if it began in 138, as I expect to be able to show that it did, the first wandering year would have begun on the 20th of July of the proleptic Augustan year 2783 B. C., a few days after the solstice and the commencement of the inundation.

4. All this is, however, on the supposition that the Egyptians had a Sothic cycle, such as CENSORINUS describes, and that the wandering year by which the Alexandrine astronomers dated the observations which they made was an Egyptian year. No one, I believe, entertained any doubt as to this being the case, till, in 1864, that same BRUGSCH, who corrected CHAMPOLLION'S mistake respecting the tetramenies, advanced the startling position that the Egyptians knew nothing of a wandering year; and that the civil year, by which they dated the events recorded on their monuments, was a fixed year, commencing at

the end of August, and coinciding with that Alexandrian year which is commonly supposed to have been introduced in memory of the capture of Alexandria by Caesar Octavianus.

5. Such are the strange positions contained in the "*Matériaux pour servir à la Reconstruction du Calendrier des anciens Egyptiens*," published in 1864. I have examined this singular work with the same care as I did his "*Nouvelles Recherches*;" and, if I know myself, with the same openness to conviction; but the results of my two examinations have been totally different. While I felt myself constrained to submit to the arguments used by him in his work of 1856, I feel equally confident that those which he adduces in his last work are of no force whatever. With respect to the use of the wandering year, he has ignored many conclusive arguments that have been long known; and he has really been able to find nothing against it save one document, which he misquotes; the whole force of his argument lying in a number which is different in the original from what he gives in his text. Restore the genuine reading, and his argument fails. Again, he can bring forward no document earlier than the capture of Alexandria by Octavianus, in which the year can be proved to have begun at the end of August, save one which is of an age in which the wandering year would begin at that time. His book is not useless, because it contains some new and valuable *data*; but I have never met a book, the author of which shows such perverse ingenuity in drawing false conclusions from the documents which he brings forward.

6. The *πρώτος ψέδος* of M. BRUGSCH in his recent work is, that the civil year of the Egyptians was not a wandering year of 365 days. My first business must, therefore, be to establish this fact; which I will do by a mass of testimony such as, I believe, can be produced in support of no other chronological fact. In the first place, it is undeniable that the Alexandrian astronomers dated by a year which had always 365 days, and the commencement of which, consequently, wandered through the seasons; the year beginning on the 20th of July in the four years, A. D. 136, 137, 138, and 139. We have dates of such a year not only in the records of the Babylonian inscriptions, but in records of observations made at Alexandria itself. We have, then, to choose between three alternatives:—Was this year of the Alexandrian astronomers introduced from Babylon? Was it invented by the astronomers? Or was it a year



already known to the Egyptians? Independently of direct testimony, the first two of these hypotheses are in a high degree improbable. The Babylonians appear from the cuneiform records to have known no other year than the lunar year, with intercalary months, restraining its commencement within certain narrow limits. It is certain, at least, that the Babylonian astronomers used such a lunar year; and it is not likely that the Alexandrian astronomers had any other Babylonian documents before them than those furnished by the Babylonian astronomers. Again, if the wandering year was the invention of the Alexandrian astronomers, what reason can be given for their making it commence on the 26th February, if they took for an era that of their astronomical tables; or in November or October, if they looked to their own times? And what could have induced them to give the names of the Egyptian months to those of their newly invented year, seeing that these were already appropriated to the months of two fixed years, according to M. BRUGSCH; one beginning in the latter end of August, and one on the 20th of July?

7. But let us hear what the Alexandrian astronomers say themselves of this wandering year that they used. How did they describe it, to distinguish it from the Athenian year, from that of the astronomer DIONYSIUS, and from that of the Alexandrians, dates of all of which are equated in their writings to that of the wandering year? I quote from YOUNG'S *Astronomical and Nautical Collections*, giving Dr. YOUNG'S references to his authorities. "TIMOCHARIS writes that he observed, in Alexandria, the 47th year of the first Calippic period of 76 years, on the 8th of Anthesterion, or the 29th of the *Egyptian* month Athyr" . . . —HALMA'S "Ptolemy," vol. ii, p. 21. "In Dionysius's 13th year, the 25th of his month Egon . . . the 20th, 21st of the *Egyptian* month Athyr."—HALMA, vol. ii, p. 226. The former of these equations places the 1st of Athyr on the 1st of January, B. C., 283, and the latter on the 29th of December, B. C. 273; and of course the 1st of Thoth on the 2nd of November, B. C. 284, and on the 30th of October, B. C. 273. M. BRUGSCH, however, will admit no Egyptian Thoth which does not begin on the 20th of July, or between the 24th and 30th of August.

8. The remaining example seems still more to the point. Dr. YOUNG quotes from THEOPH., "p. 284, 277, 281 B." (I give the reference as I find it), "An eclipse of the moon was observed by THEOPH the commentator  $6\frac{1}{2}$  hours after noon of

the 6th Phamenoth." There can be no doubt that the day intended is the 25th of November, A. D. 364. From this it follows that the 1st of Thoth was in that year on the 24th of May. THEON says, also, that "this was the 81st year of Diocletian, according to the Alexandrians, in the month of Athyr, but according to the Egyptians, the 81st year in the month of Phamenoth." Here we have the wandering year, as used by the astronomers, described as that of the Egyptians, while the fixed year, beginning on the 29th August, which was gradually superseding it, is distinguished as that of the Alexandrians. Now, we find in several documents of the Roman period a date characterized as, "according to the ancients." Surely it is natural to suppose that this phrase is equivalent to "according to the Egyptians," in the passage from THEON just cited; and it was a most natural expression when the Alexandrian year was gradually coming into general use in Egypt. That those two phrases were equivalent M. BRUGSCH himself admits, "*Matériaux*," &c., p. 17; but he maintains that both refer to the Sothic year, which began on the 20th July. This, however, is most certainly not true of the expression as used by THEON.

9. It appears to me rather strange that M. BRUGSCH should labour to prove that the Egyptians had a fixed year, commencing at the rising of Sothis, or about the 20th July, as if this was denied by Egyptologists in general, or as if it were inconsistent with the existence of a wandering year. The received theory is, that the Egyptians had a fixed or Sothic year, and also a wandering year; and that they had a cycle which consisted of 1460 fixed years, and 1461 wandering years; the commencements of the two years coinciding for four consecutive years, about 2783 B. C., 1323 B. C., and 138 A. D. What M. BRUGSCH says in pages 18 and 19 may therefore be dismissed as perfectly irrelevant to the question under discussion. I will now make a few remarks on the Calendar of Esne, which will, I think prove that, in respect to the use of the phrase before us in it, he is completely in error.

10. In the calendar of Rameses III. at Medinet Habou (col. 12), the feast of the apparition of Sothis is fixed to the first of Thoth. From this it appears that this date, and of course all the dates in the calendar, are dates of the fixed or Sothic year. Among these dates there is one (col. 26) in which the setting up of the Tat (or Dudu, as M. BRUGSCH calls it) is fixed to the 30th Choiak. But in the calendar of Esne, of the Roman period, the setting up of the Tat is

assigned to the very same day. Surely it is a fair inference that the Eme calendar was arranged, like that of Medinet Habou, according to the fixed Sothic year, its first of Thoth coinciding with the 20th July of the Romans, or at any rate with the day of the Heliacal rising of Sirius, which occurred *about* the 20th. If this be so, the 9th of Thoth would be on or about the 28th July; but the calendar states that this was the beginning of the year "according to the ancients." This is quite in harmony with the views that I have already expressed. It was the first of Thoth of the ancient wandering year at the time when the calendar was engraved; and it would be so about 106 A. D. Now, as has been correctly remarked by BAUSCH, there is no emperor's name connected with the calendar, or found in its vicinity. LEXARUS assigns it to the reign of Claudius, but has given no reason for doing so. All that seems to be known is, that the hieroglyphics are, as CHAMPOLLION long since pointed out, in the very worst style, indicating a very late age.

11. According to M. BAUSCH, the 9th of Thoth was the first day of the Sothic year, as he thinks that the dating "according to the ancients" was a dating according to that year. His reason for so thinking appears at first sight a very good one; but it breaks down on examination, resting on a false reading of the document on which he relies. He says (p. 17) that a papyrus of an astrological nature, preserved at Paris, is dated in the *tenth* year of Antoninus Cæsar, the lord, on the 8th of the month Hadrian, but according to the ancients the 18th Tybi. The month Hadrian is evidently the Choiak of the Alexandrian year; and the year "according to the ancients" must have begun, according to this document, forty days before the Alexandrian year began, that is, on the 20th July. Now the Sothic year did begin at this time, but the wandering year of the astronomers *did not*; for the tenth of Antoninus was A. D. 147; and in that year the wandering year began on the 18th July. At first sight, as I said, this seems a fair argument; but it rests on the erroneous statement of M. FRANZ, who has, in his "Corpus Inscriptionum," 4736, given *La* "the tenth year" in place of *La* "the first year;" and in the first year of Antoninus the Sothic and the wandering years began on the same day, so that there is nothing in this document to neutralize the arguments already drawn from the Eme calendar, and from the words cited from THEON, in favour of the wandering year being that intended.