

Manetho's Seventh and Eighth Dynasties: A Puzzle Solved

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The only direct evidence for the existence of a Seventh and Eighth Dynasty in Egyptian history appears in two inconsistent, badly garbled, and heavily redacted copies of Manetho's history of Egypt. One copy was prepared by Africanus in the third century and the other by Eusebius in the fourth century. According to Africanus, the Seventh Dynasty consisted of "seventy kings of Memphis, who reigned for 70 days"¹ and the Eighth Dynasty consisted of "twenty-seven kings of Memphis, who reigned for 146 years"² Eusebius has a slightly different account. He has a Seventh Dynasty that consisted of "five kings of Memphis, who reigned for 75 days"³ and an Eighth Dynasty that consisted of "five kings of Memphis, who reigned for 100 years."⁴ ¹ These descriptions present Egyptologists with some problems. Not only does the description of the Seventh Dynasty appear to be either spurious or badly garbled, but no archaeologists would allow much more than a quarter of a century for both dynasties combined. Adding to the difficulty is that there are three additional Egyptian king-lists that encompass this period, and while all have a different number of Memphite kings beginning with the Sixth Dynasty, none of them indicates any sort of dynastic break for a Seventh and/or Eighth Dynasty.

These two dynasties fall into Egypt's First Intermediate Period, and because of the great chaos in this time and the scarcity of records, Egyptologists generally assume that the differences among the two Manetho copies and the various king-lists simply reflect the confusion among the various scribes who attempted to recreate the political records of this earlier era. In this paper, I am going to argue for a different interpretation of the evidence. The original authors of the king-lists, I maintain, had a very clear picture of the First Intermediate Period and that the differences among the king-lists reflect not confusion but political/theological alternatives. More specifically, the political/theological problem involved the determination of when Horus stopped ruling in Memphis and started ruling in Thebes. Different cult centers, as reflected in the king-lists, had different answers. In addition, I am going to argue that the original Manetho king-list never had a Seventh and Eighth Dynasty and that what appears in the Africanus and Eusebius copies are garbled transmissions of lines of summation. Dyn. 7 was originally a line of summation for the entire Memphite line of kings, beginning with the First Dynasty and ending with the Sixth Dynasty; Dyn. 8 was a line of summation for just the Sixth Dynasty.

Before making the case, let me place the First Intermediate Period into political context. There were three major political events that took place during this time frame. One was the termination of the Memphite line of kings sometime after the start of the Sixth Dynasty. Two was the foundation of a line of kings in Herakleopolis, which line belongs to Dyns. 9 and 10. Three was the foundation of the Eleventh Dynasty in Thebes. There was some overlap between the last Memphite kings and the earliest Herakleopolitan kings, but where in the Memphite sequence this overlap began is not known. There was also some overlap between the Herakleopolitans and the Eleventh Dynasty Thebans, which period lasted about 100 years, ending when Menthotpe II defeated his Herakleopolitan rival. Whether or not there was some overlap between the kings of Memphis and the kings of Thebes is unknown.

Each of the various king-lists for this time period provides a different roster of kings and dynasties. The three earliest are the Table of Sakkara, the Table of Abydos, and the Turin Canon of Kings. All three date to the Nineteenth Dynasty. The other relevant king-list is Manetho's, which dates to the third century B.C., about one thousand years later than the others. But his original manuscript is lost, and for the First Intermediate Period we have to rely on the badly garbled copies of Africanus and Eusebius.

The most abbreviated account of the First Intermediate Period comes from the Table of Sakkara. It ends the Sixth Dynasty after the fourth king, Phiops, and then immediately jumps to the reign of Menthotpe II, the Theban pharaoh who defeated Herakleopolis and united Egypt.⁵

This list, therefore, omits part of the Sixth Dynasty, all of the Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth Dynasties, and part of the Eleventh Dynasty. The period omitted comes closest to what we currently describe as the First Intermediate Period. That the Sakkara list ends the Sixth Dynasty with the reign of Phiops, who apparently ruled in excess of ninety years, provides a good clue that whatever went wrong politically began either during or immediately after the reign of this king.

The Table of Abydos presents a different perspective. Beginning with the first king of the Sixth Dynasty, it lists 22 Memphite kings, and there is no indication of any dynastic breaks anywhere in this list.⁶ The Abydos list, like the Sakkara list, omits any mention of the Herakleopolitans, and also skips the first few Theban kings, jumping directly to the reign of Menthotpe II.⁷

The Turin Canon shows a Sixth Dynasty consisting of twelve Memphite kings, and, although the lengths of reign are badly damaged, a summation line indicates that the total duration was either 181⁸ or 187 years.⁹ There is no indication therein of a Seventh or Eighth Dynasty from Memphis.¹⁰ Following the Sixth Dynasty Memphite kings, the Turin Canon allows for eighteen Herakleopolitan kings, but does not divide them into two separate dynasties as Manetho does. Many Egyptologists believe that at least one of the two Herakleopolitan dynasties, Nine or Ten, is spurious. After the Herakleopolitans, the Turin Canon lists several Eleventh Dynasty Theban kings prior to Menthotpe II.¹¹

While most Egyptologists tend to dismiss these differences as reflecting the chaotic nature of the First Intermediate Period, I suggest that a more logical interpretation is that these three king-lists each present a different political viewpoint about the legitimacy of various kings. The Egyptians were a very conservative people and did not approve of abrupt changes in the political order. The king was thought of as a human aspect of the god Horus, and a challenge to the legitimate king was the equivalent of a challenge to the god Horus. During the First Intermediate Period, however, there were three rival kingdoms, Memphis, Thebes, and Herakleopolis. Only one could be the legitimate center of power. Horus could only rule from one throne. The central theological problem of the First Intermediate Period, then, was “When did Horus stop ruling in Memphis and when did he begin to rule from another city?” The three king-lists, I suggest, each show a different political interpretation.

The Sakkara list represents a “plague on all your houses” point of view. Implying that the outbreak of troubles began either during or immediately after the reign of Phiops, the fourth king of the Sixth Dynasty, the Sakkara scribe refuses to recognize any legitimate authority until Menthotpe II reunites Egypt. The list omits the entire period in which there were competing claims.

The Abydos list presents a very different perspective, that of the Memphite loyalist. What we see reflected here is a hard core support for the Memphite throne, complete rejection of the Herakleopolitan claims, and some distaste for the Theban upstarts. It is only after the Memphite throne has ceased to exist and Menthotpe II has reunited Egypt that the Abydos scribe confers legitimacy on the Theban monarchy. If any Theban kings ruled between the time that the Memphite line ended and Menthotpe II reunited Egypt, the Abydos scribe refuses to recognize their legitimacy.

A still different set of values is reflected in the Turin Canon of Kings. The Turin Canon is a Theban document, written by a Theban scribe during a Theban administration. It presents a Theban political viewpoint. Because it is Theban, it begins the Eleventh Dynasty with the founders of the Theban line rather than with the later reign of Menthotpe II. But the Thebans cannot allow a document to show Memphite kings on the throne at the same time as Theban kings.

This would be sacrilege, an affront to Horus in Memphis. This raises the question of whether the Memphite line ended before Thebes came to the throne or after. The Turin Canon, however, only has twelve kings listed where the Abydos list has twenty-two. Since Thebes had an interest in showing a smooth transition from Memphis to Thebes, with no gaps, I suggest that the Turin Canon’s Sixth Dynasty ended at exactly the point where it began the Eleventh Dynasty and that the Thebans deliberately omitted the last ten Memphite kings in order to avoid any appearance of conflict.

On the other hand, the Turin Canon does show a line of Herakleopolitan kings. This is politically significant. Theban authority stems from its defeat of the Herakleopolitan kings. Therefore the Herakleopolitan kings need to be

mentioned. But the inclusion of the Herakleopolitan kings also serves to remind Egyptians that the Memphites couldn't defeat the Herakleopolitans, and that Horus must have abandoned Memphis in favor of those kings who did defeat the Herakleopolitans.

Before turning to Manetho's Seventh and Eighth Dynasties, one more observation about the king-lists is in order. Manetho and the Table of Sakkara both make Phiops the fourth king of the Sixth Dynasty. The Turin Canon and the Table of Abydos make him the fifth king. The latter two lists place an additional king between Manetho's first and second king. This king appears to be named Usarkare and he is documented in the archaeological record, but his reign seems to have been relatively brief. This suggests that Manetho and the Table of Sakkara both omitted Usarkare from the sequence of Memphite kings. Therefore, if Manetho originally had intended to include a complete list of Memphite kings in his chronology, he would have had only 21 kings, instead of the 22 in the Table of Abydos. This figure of "21" is significant in our reconstruction of Manetho.

Dynasty	Africanus Kings Claimed	Africanus Kings Listed	Eusebius Kings Claimed	Eusebius Kings Claimed
1	8	8	8	8
2	9	9	9	9 (3 missing)
3	9	9	8	8 (6 missing)
4	8	8	17	1
5	8	9	31	2 (from Dyn. 6)
6	6	6	?	1
7	70	0	5	0
8	27	0	5	0
Sum 1-5	42	43	73	?

Table 1. Outline of Manetho's First 8 Dynasties

Table 1 presents an outline of the first eight dynasties as recorded in both versions of Manetho. For each dynasty it shows how many kings were claimed and how many kings were listed by name. Look first at the Africanus list. There is only one important anomaly. For the Fifth Dynasty, Africanus has a summation line claiming eight kings, but nine kings are listed.¹² If we count up the number of kings *listed* for the first five dynasties, the total is 43. If we add to that number the 27 kings in Dyn. 8, we have seventy kings, the number claimed for Dyn. 7. This strongly suggests that Dyn. 7 was originally a line of summation, but of what?

The clue is in the 27 kings of Dyn. 8. The number 27 is the sum of 21 + 6. "21" is the number of kings in the entire Memphite line, and "6" is the number of kings in Manetho's Sixth Dynasty. This suggests that Manetho's Eighth

Dynasty was originally a garbled transmission of a Sixth Dynasty line of summation. What seems to have happened is that after the list of Manetho's first six Memphite kings, there must have been a line of summation that indicated that the last 21 Memphite kings belonged to the last Memphite dynasty. One of Manetho's earlier redactors must have misread the text and thought the 21 kings were in addition to the six listed kings, getting a total of 27 kings in all. He may have then written that the last Memphite dynasty had 27 kings. This line of summation was later misread as a separate dynasty apart from the six listed Memphite kings. Because of its description as the last Memphite dynasty, it was placed at the end of the Memphite list and became identified as the Eighth Dynasty.

This confusion about 27 kings being the "last Memphite dynasty" led to an additional error. After the original Sixth Dynasty listing must have been a line of summation for all six dynasties combined, which may have read something like, "number of kings for first five dynasties plus last dynasty, X days" where "X" would originally have been the total number of kings for the first six dynasties and "days" would have been a metaphor for "a complete reign", the metaphor being based on the daily circuit of the sun. In effect, the text would have said there were "X number of complete reigns," but it would not have recorded in that location the total number of years actually ruled. Manetho's intent was to add the 21 kings of Dyn. 6 to the earlier kings in Dyns. 1-5. The "X" entry, however, may have been damaged in transmission, and one of the early redactors must have thought the "last dynasty" referred to the erroneously described "Eighth Dynasty of 27 kings" and added that on to the total for the first five dynasties, getting 70 in all. This line of summation was then subsequently misread as a separate Seventh Dynasty.

If Africanus's Eighth Dynasty was originally a garbled line of summation for the Sixth Dynasty, where then, did he get the figure of 146 years for the Eighth Dynasty's duration? The most likely explanation is that it is connected to the confusion over the existence of the "last Memphite dynasty." Since the problems between Herakleopolis and Memphis appear to have broken out during the reign of Phiops, Manetho probably had a line of summation for the number of years in which Memphis and Herakleopolis were in conflict, said period of time beginning with the reign of Phiops and continuing to the end of the Sixth Dynasty. His text probably indicated something like "the last group of Memphite kings ruled for 146 years," which period began with the reign of Phiops. One of the redactors, however, appears to have confused this reference to a "last group of kings" with the erroneously created "last Memphite dynasty of 27 kings" and attached the 146 year figure to the misnamed Eighth Dynasty.

In support of this idea, let's look at the relevant chronology. According to Africanus, from Phiops to the end of his Sixth Dynasty, there is a total of 108 years.¹³ The Turin Canon has an additional five kings, the last four of whom ruled just under ten years. The reign for the fifth one is damaged but no one believes it was any longer than a year or two. This brings us to a total of about 118 to 119 years. This leaves about 27 to 28 years for the nine additional Memphite kings in the Abydos list that follow after the Turin Canon's last Memphite king, which coincides quite well with the traditional view that these nine kings couldn't have ruled for more than about a quarter of a century.

An examination of the Eusebius list lends some support to our hypothesis about the Africanus list. Unfortunately, the Eusebius list is not only corrupt, but it is quite obvious that dynasties were concatenated together. His Fourth Dynasty of 17 kings, for instance, certainly is out of proportion, and appears to be the sum of 8 + 9, the numeric sequence of kings in Africanus's Fourth and Fifth Dynasty combined. That Eusebius (or more likely his source) mistakenly combined Dyns. 4 and 5, is evident from Eusebius's descriptions of the Fifth Dynasty. He claims that there were 31 kings, but he names the first and fourth kings in the list and they are from the Sixth Dynasty. His list has obviously attached the Fifth Dynasty kings to the Fourth Dynasty roster and thereby shifted the Sixth Dynasty kings into the Fifth Dynasty position. His figure of 31 kings is also suspicious. Not only is it too large, it is the sum of 21 + 5 + 5. This suggests that it is a concatenation of the 21 kings of the Sixth Dynasty Memphite line with the 5 kings in his Seventh Dynasty and the 5 kings in his Eighth Dynasty, an error consistent with his previously described errors.

Look now at the sum of kings in Eusebius's first five dynasties. It is 73. But his Third Dynasty has only 8 kings where Africanus has 9 kings. If we make that upward adjustment, the new total is 74. Additionally, Eusebius's Sixth Dynasty contains only one king. Adding on the single Sixth Dynasty king to the previous total for the first five dynasties gives a sum of 75.

This brings us back to our earlier suggestion that the use of the term "days" in the Seventh Dynasty was a metaphor for "complete reigns." Africanus's Seventh Dynasty has 70 kings ruling for 70 days. Eusebius has 5 kings ruling for

75 days. Note that the Africanus sum for Dynasties 1-5 and 8 equals “70” and the Eusebius reigns for Dyn. 1-6 add up to 75, each corresponding to the number of days ruled in the Seventh Dynasty. Since Africanus’s Eighth Dynasty appears to be a summation line for the Sixth Dynasty, both the Africanus and Eusebius lists appear to have confused a line of summation for the first six dynasties with a description of a Seventh Dynasty. In sum, then, Manetho’s Seventh Dynasty was nothing more than a summation line for the first six dynasties, and Manetho’s Eighth Dynasty was nothing more than a garbled summation line for the Sixth Dynasty, in which the first six kings were accidentally double counted.¹⁴

One last note on Eusebius: He gives the Eighth Dynasty a duration of 100 years where Africanus had 146 years. It was suggested earlier that the Africanus figure represented the sum of Memphite years beginning with Phiops. We note, however, that in the Africanus list, Africanus’s source mistakenly confused Phiops’s 100th birthday with his 100th year on the throne.¹⁵ The Eusebius figure, therefore, may represent the erroneous total for Phiops’s reign, with the balance of the reigns omitted.

In summation, we can say the following: Ancient Egyptian records clearly preserved a list of 22 Memphite kings beginning with the Sixth Dynasty. Some king-lists, however, such as Manetho’s and the Table of Sakkara, omitted the second king on this list, who apparently had a very brief reign. Because of different political views about when moral authority departed from Memphis and alighted in Thebes, different king-lists had different listings of which kings they thought had moral authority. Some, as in Sakkara, thought that from Phiops to Menthotpe II all were illegitimate. Others, as in Abydos, were Memphite loyalists and rejected Theban claims until the reunification. And the Thebans claimed the earliest possible moment for their legitimacy, showing no break between the Memphite Sixth Dynasty and the Theban Eleventh Dynasty. Manetho, attempting a complete history, tried to list everybody. He listed the first six kings in the Sixth Dynasty and indicated that there were 21 kings in the “last Memphite Dynasty.” This ambiguous description of a “last Memphite dynasty” led to a series of errors by Manetho’s redactors. The end result was to create a Seventh Dynasty out of a line of summation for the first six dynasties and to create an Eighth Dynasty out of a line of summation for the Sixth Dynasty.

Since the misinterpretation of Manetho is the sole evidence for the existence of a Seventh and Eighth Dynasty, those two dynasties should disappear from the Egyptian history. Furthermore, the First Intermediate Period should probably now be defined more precisely in accordance with the description in the Table of Sakkara, beginning during the reign of Phiops and ending with Menthotpe II’s conquest over Herakleopolis. More specifically, the First Intermediate Period should be defined simply as the period in time when Herakleopolitan kings ruled independently of Memphis and Thebes.

¹ *Manetho*, §57.

² *Manetho*, §59.

³ *Manetho*, §57.

⁴ *Manetho* §59

⁵ Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, 436–38.

⁶ Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, 102, 436–38.

⁷ Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, 436–38.

⁸ Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, 102, 436.

⁹ Hayes, *Cambridge Ancient History*, I:1:179.

¹⁰ Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, 101-2.

¹¹ Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, 438.

¹² *Manetho*, §51.

¹³ *Manetho*, §55.

¹⁴ Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, 436

¹⁵ *Manetho*, §§53-55.