

## Identifying “Merenptah” as the Exodus-Pharaoh: A special case study in the light of contemporary researchers’ views

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### Abstract

Prophet Moses, his people Bani Israil, and Pharaoh of Egypt are often mentioned in the Divine Scriptures. The Exodus of Bani-Israil from Egypt is the turning point in the history of Bani-Israil. The most important event that happened while Bani-Israil was leaving Egypt is the drowning of the pharaoh of Egypt in water along with his army. In all the Divine Books, especially the Holy Bible and the Holy Qur’an, the drowning of Prophet Moses’ Pharaoh has been mentioned in detail. But no any divine or historical scripture explicitly mentions the name of this pharaoh who drowned. To date, a number of researchers have considered the various pharaohs mentioned in history as the pharaoh who drowned at the time of Bani-Israil’s Exodus from Egypt. The "Merenptah" is the most prominent candidate for this purpose, so, in this research paper, an attempt has been made to identify him as the drowned Exodus-Pharaoh by analyzing and reviewing the views and arguments of contemporary researchers.

**KEYWORDS:** *Prophet Moses, Bani-Israil, Pharaoh, Exodus, Drowned, Merenptah, Ramesses*

### The Drowning of Pharaoh in Divine Books

In the Holy Scriptures, The drowning of the Prophet Moses’ pharaoh along with his army while chasing the Bani-Israil to stop their Exodus from Egypt has been stated in many places. The Holy Bible and the Holy Qur’an both mention it in detail. The Bible points at the incident in detail and concludes it as: "And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. {14:28} And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, [and] all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them." [1] And in Psalms: "And he saved them from the hand of him that hated [them,] and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy. {106:11} And the waters covered their enemies: there was not one of them left." [2] And "To him which divided the Red sea into

parts: for his mercy forever: {136:14} And made Israil to pass through the midst of it: for his mercy forever: {136:15} But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea: for his mercy forever." [3]

While the Holy Qur'an mentions the drowning as: "And remember We divided the sea for you and saved you and drowned Pharaoh's people within your very sight." [4] And said "And We took the Children of Israil across the sea, and Fir'aun (Pharaoh) with his armies followed them in oppression and enmity, till when drowning overtook him, he said: "I believe that none has the right to be worshipped but He, in Whom the Children of Israil believe, and I am one of the Muslims." [5]

All the above-mentioned holy statements elaborate the drowning of Pharaoh and his inmates. However, having a deep look inside the Divine Scriptures, It is hard to clearly point out the actual Pharaoh of Exodus who drowned. So, different researchers tried to mention different pharaohs as victim of the Exodus. In this regard, a brief overview of the pharaohs mentioned by different researchers as the pharaoh of Exodus could be seen inside the following table:

1. <b>Ahmose-I</b>	Dr. Stephen C. Meyers identified Ahmose-I as the pharaoh of the Exodus in a research paper entitled "Biblical Archaeology: The Date of the Exodus According to Ancient Writers," published online in the "Institute for Biblical & Scientific Studies." <sup>1</sup>
2. <b>Thothmes-II</b>	A researcher named "Alfred Edersheim" claimed this pharaoh as the most qualified to be the pharaoh of Exodus in his book "The Bible History Old Testament." <sup>2</sup>
3. <b>Amenhotep II</b>	Amenhotep-II has been proved to be the Exodus-pharaoh by "Douglas N. Petrovich" in his research paper, "Amenhotep II and the Historicity of the Exodus-Pharaoh." <sup>3</sup>
4. <b>Ramesses-I</b>	A well-known Egyptian scholar "Ahmed Osman" mentioned Ramesses-I as the pharaoh of Exodus in his book "Stranger in the Valley of the Kings". <sup>4</sup>
5. <b>Ramesses-II</b>	Ramesses-II is a popular candidate to be the Exodus-pharaoh. Bernhard W. Anderson in his book "The living world of the Old Testament" mentioned the "Ramesses-II" as the Exodus-Pharaoh. <sup>5</sup>
6. <b>Merenptah</b>	Merenptah, the 13 <sup>th</sup> son and successor of the Ramesses-II, has been declared as the Pharaoh of Exodus by many Muslim and Western scholars. The views of different scholars identifying this Pharaoh as corresponding ruler at the time of Exodus of Bani-Israil from Egypt will be discussed later.
7. <b>Setnakhte</b>	The Pharaoh "Sentakhte" was also considered to be the Pharaoh of the Exodus by "Igor P. Lipovsky" in his book "Early Israilites: Two Peoples, One History: Rediscovery of the Origins of Biblical Israil" and by "Prof. Israil Knohl" in his article entitled "Exodus: The History behind the Story". <sup>6</sup>
8. <b>Ramesses III</b>	Ramesses-III is also pointed out as the Exodus-Pharaoh by some scholars such as "Prof. Baruch Halpern" in his book "The Rise of Ancient Israil", "Prof. Gary A. Rendsburg" in his article "The Pharaoh of the Exodus-Rameses III" <sup>7</sup> and by an American researcher "Larry D. Bruce" in his research paper entitled "The Merenptah Stele and the Biblical origins of

	Israil”. <sup>8</sup>
9. Amenophis-II & Thothmes-IV	Both pharaohs have been mentioned as the Exodus-Pharaoh in the article about Exodus in “International Standard Bible Encyclopedia Online.” <sup>9</sup>

### Merenptah as the Pharaoh of Exodus

Merenptah, the 13th son of Ramesses II, was most commonly considered the Pharaoh of Prophet Moses who drowned at the time of Bani-Israil’s exodus from the Egypt. A number of contemporary researchers pointed him out for this position in their research. Among the contemporary scholars, “K.R. Lepsius” was the first to declare the Merenptah as the Exodus-Pharaoh in 1849.<sup>10</sup> Some quotations of different Muslim and western researches, claiming the Merenptah as the Exodus-Pharaoh, are mentioned below:

- **Ibrahim al-Qattan:** "The pharaoh of Moses was "Merenptah" the son of Rameses II, and there was an exodus among Israil in the late thirteenth century BC during the era of the nineteenth dynasty. The body of this "Merenptah" was found in the tomb of "Amenhotep II" and is now in the Egyptian Museum.”<sup>11</sup>
- **Dr. Wahba bin Mustafa Zuheli:** “The body of Pharaoh was saved from drowning, and his name was Merenptah bin Ramesses (1225 BC), which is still in the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities in Cairo and I saw it myself, and I saw in it the effects of the white salinity of sea water on the forehead bone.”<sup>12</sup>
- **Darul-Ifta’ al-Misriyyah:** “As for the Pharaoh of the Exodus, it is “Merenptah the First, the thirteenth son of Ramses the Great.”<sup>13</sup>
- **Abul A’la Maududi:** “If this drowned Pharaoh was Merenptah, who has been declared as the Prophet Moses’ pharaoh according to modern researches, then his body is still in the museum of Cairo.”<sup>14</sup>
- **Muhammad Sayyed Tantavi:** “Some historians believe that the birth of Moses was around the thirteenth century BC, and that his mission was during the reign of Merenptah ibn Ramesses II.”<sup>15</sup>
- **Muhammad Mutawalli Sha’rawi:** “Some researchers of the history said: The concerned pharaoh is Merenptah, and the researchers analyzed some parts of his body and found the effects of salted water on it.”<sup>16</sup>
- **Ahmed bin Mustafa Al-Maraghi:** “The most accurate view of many of those who are concerned with ancient Egyptian history is that Pharaoh of Moses was Merenptah.”<sup>17</sup>
- **Hifzurrehman Seuharvi:** “Merenptah is the pharaoh whom Moses and Aaron invited Islam and demanded the release of the Israilites, and in his era the Israilites left Egypt and this pharaoh drowned in river.”<sup>18</sup>
- **Al-Mosu’a Al-Muyassarrah:** “The Moses went out with Bani-Israil, and that was the year 1213 BC. During the reign of pharaoh Merenptah, who succeeded his father Ramses II, and this pharaoh joined them, but God drowned him in the sea, and saved Moses and his people.”<sup>19</sup>
- **Tahir ibn Aashoor:** “The drowning of Pharaoh was mentioned in other verses that we will talk about in their place, and that was during the time of the king “Merenptah” and it is called “Minftah” or “Minita” from the pharaohs of the nineteenth family in the arrangement of the pharaohs of Egypt according to historians.”<sup>20</sup>

- **Muhammad Rasheed Raza:** “Researchers of the History have reached to the conclusion that Pharaoh of Prophet Moses is Merenptah bin Ramesses-II..... And during his reign was the Exodus of Bani-Israil from the land of Egypt.”<sup>21</sup>
- **Abdul Mun’im Aamir:** “It is known after the pharaonic revelations that Pharaoh of Moses was Merenptah ibn Ramesses II, one of the kings of the nineteenth dynasty.”<sup>22</sup>
- **Isaac Asimov:** The “Isaac Asimov” in “Asimov's Guide to the Bible”, after presenting a brief sketch of the wars and clashes in the reign of Ramses-II and Merenptah, makes a case for Merenptah to be the pharaoh of the Exodus. He says: “It seems to make sense, therefore, to accept Merenptah as the Pharaoh of the Exodus, whether one accepts the actual details described in the Bible or not.”<sup>23</sup>
- **Larry Bruce** (Former adjunct prof. at the Baptist College of Florida): “To make the case for this interpretation of the Stele, a context will be established. It will be argued that the Israilites attempted to escape their enslavement in Egypt coincident with Mernaptah’s famous battle against the Libyan-Sea People coalition that occurred in 1209 BC.”<sup>24</sup>
- **Amelia B. Edwards:** “That Rameses II was the Pharaoh of the captivity, and that Meneptah, his son and successor, was the Pharaoh of the Exodus, are now among the accepted presumptions of Egyptological science. The Bible and the monuments confirm each other upon these points, while both are again corroborated by the results of recent geographical and philological research.”<sup>25</sup>
- **Gaston Maspero:** “We are now certain that we possess the mummy of the son and successor of Rameses II, the Menephtah who has been identified by the common tradition with the Pharaoh of the Exodus who was drowned in the Red Sea”.<sup>26</sup>
- **Dr. Maurice Bucaille:** The research of the famous contemporary scholar Dr. Maurice Bucaille regarding Merenptah, being the drowned pharaoh of the Exodus, is most reasoned, comprehensive and logical. What distinguishes his research from other researches in this regard is that he is a medical doctor, so, he added in his research the medical diagnosis and investigations along with the historical and archaeological points which make it more effective and reasoned. Among the contemporary researchers, Dr. Bucaille is the biggest supporter of Merenptah being the pharaoh of the Exodus, as he has clearly described the Merenptah as the pharaoh of the Exodus in his researches.<sup>27</sup>

### **Reasons to consider Merenptah the Exodus-Pharaoh**

After having the deep look to different researchers’ arguments, Merenptah seems to be the most suitable candidate for the Exodus-Pharaoh because of some reasons mentioned below:

- a) The death year of Merenptah is not confirmed. Dr. Bucaille says: “Regarding the last years of the reign of this pharaoh, on the contrary, no available document exists. The duration of the reign is unknown: surely at least 10 years, maybe 20. The question is debated by Egyptologists; the reign might have lasted until the final decade of the 13th century B.C.”<sup>28</sup>
- b) There is a great succession gap (almost 15 years) after the Merenptah. Dr. Maurice Bucaille states: “During a period of about 20 years of the history of Egypt beginning with the last years of Merenptah's reign, utter confusion prevailed. The succession of the king aroused an internal crisis; a certain Amunmesse seized power in a situation marked by grave disturbances and several assassinations. Such was the situation at the end of the 19th dynasty; the transition to the 20th dynasty is full of obscurity and it remains dim until the accession of Ramesses III to

power, who will put the country on its feet again. Before this redressing, the situation of Egypt, between the last years of Merenptah and the reign of Ramesses III was violently disturbed. Such an awareness of the political events leads one to wonder if the general cataclysms that are related by the Bible before the Exodus and supposed-in all likelihood-to have occurred during Merenptah's reign, would have not been at the origin of the major and prolonged disturbances which followed them.”<sup>29</sup>

- c) After a careful review of the Prophet Moses' age at the time of various events mentioned in the Holy Scriptures, in the context of the reign of different pharaohs, the occurrence of Exodus in other than Merenptah's era could be persisted historically inappropriate.
- d) The medical examination of the Merenptah's body elaborates his tragic and traumatic death. The examination took by two French forensic experts expressed the cracks in body, in bones and ribs etc. which they declared a result of violent and disastrous blows. According to the researchers, this is possible as the Holy Scriptures indicates the situation of the Pharaoh being thrown into the water harshly.<sup>30</sup>
- e) Another microscopic examination of a tiny tissue of the Merenptah's Mummy revealed that the body was remained in water for a short time. This point alludes to the Qur'anic claim (10:92) of the pharaoh's body being thrown out of the water after drowning and its preservation.<sup>31</sup>
- f) A layer of salt other than Natron (the salt used for mummification) was also found by the examiners on the mummy of Merenptah which was identified by some researchers as the “sea salt” and it also indicates to the drowning of the body.<sup>32</sup>

## Conclusion

The drowning of Prophet Moses' pharaoh is mentioned in the Holy Bible and the Holy Qur'an, but both Holy Scriptures don't clarify that which Pharaoh it was. Contemporary researchers have tried to identify this drowned pharaoh in the light of various historical, archaeological and medical clues. Mostly researchers claimed the pharaoh Merenptah, the thirteenth son and successor of Rameses, as the Exodus-Pharaoh. The most significant reasons for declaring Merenptah as drowned pharaoh are: the fact that history does not mention the actual time and cause of his death, no one from his family succeeded him immediately after his death, and that the medical examination of his body revealed the various marks of drowning such as signs of traumas i.e. cracked bones and ribs due to the pressure of water, and the presence of a layer of sea salt on the body. In addition, the comparison between the ages of Moses mentioned in the holy books and the reign of the different Pharaohs also reinforces that the event of the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt is more likely to occur during the reign of Merenptah.

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<sup>1</sup> Article could be seen at: <https://www.bibleandscience.com/archaeology/exodusdate.htm>

<sup>2</sup> This Book could be seen online at: <https://www.hopefaithprayer.com/books/BibleHistoryOldTestament-Edersheim.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Douglas N Petrovich, Amenhotep II and the Historicity of the Exodus-Pharaoh, The Master's Seminary Journal, 2006, P: 30 ([https://www.academia.edu/1049040/2006\\_Amenhotep\\_II\\_and\\_the\\_Historicity\\_of\\_the\\_Exodus\\_Pharaoh](https://www.academia.edu/1049040/2006_Amenhotep_II_and_the_Historicity_of_the_Exodus_Pharaoh) )

<sup>4</sup> This book could be consulted at: <https://archive.org/details/strangerinvalley00osma/page/14/mode/2up>

<sup>5</sup> Bernhard W. Anderson, The living world of the Old Testament, Longman group, London (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition 1978), P: 42

<sup>6</sup> Published online. See: <https://www.thetorah.com/article/exodus-the-history-behind-the-story>

<sup>7</sup> Published online. See: <https://www.thetorah.com/article/the-pharaoh-of-the-exodus-ramesses-iii>

<sup>8</sup> Larry D. Bruce, The Merenptah Stele and the Biblical origins of Israel, Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, 62.3, 2019 (Pages: 463-493), P: 14-15

<sup>9</sup> International Standard Bible Encyclopedia Online, under the “Date of Exodus”. See: <https://www.internationalstandardbible.com/E/exodus-the.html>

- <sup>10</sup> Dr. Maurice Bucaille, *Moses and Pharaoh in the Bible, Quran and History*, Islamic Books Trust Malaysia (2008), P: 207
- <sup>11</sup> Ibrahim al-Qattan (d. 1404 A.H.), *Taysir ul-Tafsir*, Vol: 2, P: 203 / Vol: 2, P: 65 / Vol: 3, P: 23 (<https://quranpedia.net/ar/book/1/2/20>)
- <sup>12</sup> Dr. Wahba bin Mustafa Zuheli, *Tafsir-ul-Munir*, Vol: 11, P: 260
- <sup>13</sup> *Fatawa Darul-Ifta' al-Misriyyah*, Egypt, Vol: 8, P: 121
- <sup>14</sup> Abul-A'la Maududi, *Tafheem-ul-Quran*, Tarjuman-ul-Qur'an, Lahore (2006), Vol: 2, P: 310
- <sup>15</sup> Muhammad Sayyed Tantavi, *Al-Tafsir al-Wasit lil-Qur'an al-Karim*, Dar Nahdha Misr lil-Taba'ah wan-Nashr wat-Tauzi', Cairo (1<sup>st</sup> Edition 1997-98), Vol:5, P: 342 / Vol: 7, P: 267 / Vol: 10, P: 235 / Vol: 12, P: 278 / Vol: 15, P: 270
- <sup>16</sup> Muhammad Mutawalli Sha'rawi, *Tafsir al-Sha'rawi*, Vol:10, P: 6185
- <sup>17</sup> Ahmed bin Mustafa Al-Maraghi (d. 1371 A.H.), *Tafsir al-Maraghi*, Sharika maktaba wa Matba' Mustafa al-Babi al-Halbi wa auladuhu bi-Misr (1<sup>st</sup> Edition, 1946), Vol: 9, P: 21 / Ibrahim al-Qattan (d. 1404 A.H.), *Taysir ul-Tafsir*, Vol: 2, P: 65 (<https://quranpedia.net/ar/book/1/2/20>)
- <sup>18</sup> Hifzurrehman Seuharvi, *Qasas-ul-Quran*, Maktaba Rehmania, Lahore, Pakistan, Vol: 1, P: 258
- <sup>19</sup> Al-Mosu'a Al-Muyassarrah fil Adyan wal-Mazahib wal-Ahzab al-Mu'asarah by Al-Nadwatul Aalmiyyah li-Shabab al-Islami, *Darul Nadwa al-Aalmiyyah li-Nashr wat-Tauzee'* (4<sup>th</sup> Edition, 1420 A.H.), Vol:1, P:495-496
- <sup>20</sup> Tahir ibn Aashoor (d. 1393 A.H.), *Tafsir "Al-Tahrir wat-Tanvir"*, Dar at-Tunasia li-Nashr (1984), Vol: 1, P: 496
- <sup>21</sup> Muhammad Rasheed Raza (Editor in-chief), *Majalla "Al-Mannar"*, Egypt, Vol: 11, P: 281
- <sup>22</sup> This quotation is of "Abdul Mun'im Aamir", the editor of the Book "Al-Akhbar ut-Tiwal by Ahmed bin Dawood al-Denuri (d. 282 A.H.)", *Dar Ihyaul Kutub al-Arbi*, Cairo (1<sup>st</sup> Edition 1960), Vol: 1, P: 11
- <sup>23</sup> Isaac Asimov, *Asimov's Guide to the Bible*, Random House, 1981, p. 130–131 (<https://www.holybooks.com/wp-content/uploads/Asimovs-Guide-to-the-Bible-The-Old-and-New-Testaments.pdf>)
- <sup>24</sup> Larry Bruce, *Israel in the Time of Merneptah*, P: 02 (166), Published online on 16<sup>th</sup> December, 2017 (<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321854058>)
- <sup>25</sup> Amelia B. Edwards, *A Thousand Miles Up The Nile*, George Routledge and sons, Limited, Broadway, Ludgate Hill Glasgow, Manchester, and New York (1891), P: 269-270 (<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/edwards/nile/nile-XV.html#269-2>)
- <sup>26</sup> Gaston Maspero, *Guide to the Cairo Museum*, Printing-office of the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology, Cairo (1903), P: 415, 422 (Electronic version of the book is available at: <https://scholarship.rice.edu/jsp/xml/1911/13080/1540/MusCa1903.tei-timea.html>)
- <sup>27</sup> Dr. Maurice Bucaille, *Moses and Pharaoh in the Bible, Quran and History*, P: 120, 200, 201
- <sup>28</sup> Dr. Maurice Bucaille, *Moses and Pharaoh in the Bible, Quran and History*, P: 88-89
- <sup>29</sup> Dr. Maurice Bucaille, *Moses and Pharaoh in the Bible, Quran and History*, P: 88-89
- <sup>30</sup> Abdulwahab Alahmari, *Radiology Role in Archaeology: Moses' Pharaoh as a Case*, *International Journal of Forensic Research*, Vol: 2, Issue: 4 (2021), P: 84 / Dr. Maurice Bucaille, *Moses and Pharaoh in the Bible, Quran and History*, P: 201, 211
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