

1. Chronology.

The ancient Egyptians did not have any system of numbering years continuously for longer than ^a single reign. Usually a year was indicated according to its position in the reign of a pharaoh, and a new numbering began with the next pharaoh. Taking the highest numbers used in each of them, it was possible to construct a rough chronology, and further study of the great number of writings that we possess has made it possible to enlarge this very considerably. Synchronisms with events in other countries have sometimes been available. An invaluable aid has been the so-called Sothic cycle, or phoenix year. This is based upon the fact that at a very early time the Egyptians adopted a calendar of 365 days. Since this is approximately a fourth of a day shorter than the actual time that it takes the earth to go around the sun, the years became one day off every four years, so that after a few hundred years a date that had previously been in midsummer would come in midwinter. In about 1460 years the calendar would go completely around the cycle and again begin at the same time of year. Eventually it came to be thought that the day on which the star Sirius (also called Sothis), the brightest star in the heavens, rises just before sunrise should be the first day in the year. Sometimes at periods several hundred years apart we find a statement that this day which should be the first of the year actually occurred at another specified date, thus showing how many days off the calendar was at that time. This gives us a means of telling within four years the date within a cycle when a particular document was written, but does not tell in which cycle it was. It used to be thought that there were a number of cycles between certain of the great events in Egyptian history. Now it is pretty well agreed that this is not the case, and the so-called long chronology is hardly held