The Valley of the Kings still holds many mysteries, above all the whereabouts of the earliest royal tombs of the New Kingdom. There are many hypogea dotted around the cliffs of Western Thebes which Egyptologists have proposed for these ‘horizons of eternity’. But it remains a fruitless exercise simply to discuss the characteristics of their design in order to place them in chronological order and so identify their original occupants. In this paper, Bill Manley adopts a different approach by using the ancient Egyptian concept of ‘the sacred land’ to plot the location of the early 18th Dynasty royal cemetery. In doing so, he proposes that the enigmatic Tomb 39 be once more identified as the tomb of Amenhotep I.

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In criticiising the conventional structure of ancient chronology, JACF 1 [1] highlighted how the writing of the history of ancient Egypt invariably still relies on the framework of dynasties established by the native priest Manetho, writing under one of the Ptolemaic kings of the 3rd century BC. Manetho’s own works are now lost, but many of his ideas, including the concept that the kings of Egypt are to be divided up into thirty or thirty one dynasties, have filtered into our own history via the works of his exponents - Josaphus, Africanus, and Eusebius.

In spite of all its defects this division into dynasties has taken so firm a root in the literature of Egyptology that there is little chance of it ever being abandoned. [2]

There is no reason to doubt that the accounts of the exponents are, and wherever possible should, be reconciled with other data [3]. But the crucial concept of the ‘dynasty’ (dynasteia) itself presents a different problem in that there is no suggestion of it predating the work of Manetho; moreover, it is not at all clear what Manetho himself would have understood by the term.

The great obstacle we encounter here is an inadequate understanding of the concepts and considerations which motivated the writing both of Manetho’s history and of earlier Egyptian sources. However, in attempting to reconstruct how the list of kings on the Royal Canon of Turin might originally have been structured, Malck [4] has concluded that it was indeed a carefully thought out and organised document. From there he raises an interesting hypothesis about the relationship between Manetho’s work and the native sources he utilised in its creation. Principally, many of the divisions between dynasties which Egyptologists have found difficult to reconcile with the historical record (such as the breaks between the 3rd and 4th, or 5th and 6th Dynasties, or the grouping of kings into the 13th and 14th Dynasties) may have been the result of Manetho’s own interpretation (or misinterpretation) of his sources. This hypothesis adds a new element to the suggestion that the writing of Egyptian history according to our own perspective should be made to fit a frame of reference created by man of another age.

These divisions are generally used and provide us with a reasonably good chronological framework. Nevertheless, to use them as dividing lines in works on history, art, administration or any other continuous aspect of ancient Egyptian civilization may be arbitrary and historically unwarranted. [5]

This paper amounts to little more than a note about an old problem in the archaeology of the Theban necropolis (dating back at least to a 1911 article by Weigall) developed in line with a First Class Honours Degree in Egyptology (with Coptic Studies), and is now preparing a PhD thesis at University College London on ‘The Phrasology of 18th Dynasty Royal Stelae’. He is an ISIS Research Associate specialising in New Kingdom monumental inscriptions and has recently become joint editor of the JACF.