

Toward a Dendrochronology for Ancient Egypt

Pearce Paul Creasman

For ancient Egypt, a fundamental concept remains unresolved: time. Despite being the focus of nearly 200 years of research, thousands of archaeological excavations, and despite survival of an extensive written record, the chronology of Egypt has been based on a fragmented copy of a 3rd century BC historian's chronicle of the pharaonic period. To refine this framework, Egyptologists have relied on a variety of insufficiently precise methodologies. Many pharaohs ruled for short periods, often less than five years, so precision dating is essential. If annual resolution could be offered for ancient Egypt, the impact would be similar in scope to that of tree-ring dating in the American Southwest and would have broad implications. The need for such precision has been recognized for a century, as has the potential solution: dendrochronology. This paper presents a very brief review of such efforts and a case for further progress toward the construction of a tree-ring chronology for ancient Egypt.