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A History of Ancient Egypt

Second Edition

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A History of Ancient Egypt

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Marc Van De Mieroop

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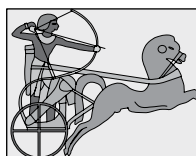
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Contents

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--------|
| <i>List of Illustrations</i> | xii |
| <i>Maps</i> | xxviii |
| <i>Preface to the Second Edition</i> | xxix |

| | | |
|----------|--|----------|
| 1 | Introductory Concerns | 1 |
| 1.1 | What is Ancient Egypt? | 1 |
| | <i>Chronological boundaries</i> | 1 |
| | <i>Geographical boundaries</i> | 2 |
| | <i>What is ancient Egyptian history?</i> | 3 |
| | <i>Who are the ancient Egyptians?</i> | 4 |
| 1.2 | Egypt's Geography | 6 |
| | <i>The Nile River</i> | 8 |
| | <i>The desert</i> | 9 |
| | <i>Climate</i> | 10 |
| | <i>Frontiers and links</i> | 11 |
| 1.3 | The Makeup of Egyptian Historical Sources | 12 |
| | <i>Papyri and ostraca</i> | 12 |
| | <i>Monumental inscriptions</i> | 14 |
| | <i>Historical criticism</i> | 14 |
| 1.4 | The Egyptians and Their Past | 15 |
| | <i>King lists</i> | 15 |
| | <i>Egyptian concepts of kingship</i> | 19 |
| 1.5 | The Chronology of Egyptian History | 20 |
| | <i>Modern subdivisions of Egyptian history</i> | 20 |
| | <i>Absolute chronology</i> | 20 |
| 1.6 | Prehistoric Developments | 21 |
| | <i>The beginning of agriculture</i> | 21 |
| | <i>Naqada I and II periods</i> | 24 |

| | | |
|----------|--|-----------|
| 2 | The Formation of the Egyptian State (ca. 3400–2686) | 27 |
| 2.1 | Sources | 29 |
| 2.2 | Royal Cemeteries and Cities | 31 |
| | <i>The Late Naqada culture</i> | 31 |
| | <i>Dynasty 0</i> | 31 |
| 2.3 | The First Kings | 33 |
| | <i>Images of war</i> | 33 |
| | <i>The unification of Egypt</i> | 34 |
| 2.4 | Ideological Foundations of the New State | 35 |
| | <i>Kings</i> | 35 |
| | <i>Cemeteries</i> | 36 |
| | <i>Festivals</i> | 36 |
| | <i>Royal annals and year names</i> | 37 |
| | <i>Gods and cults</i> | 38 |
| | <i>Bureaucracy</i> | 40 |
| 2.5 | The Invention of Writing | 42 |
| | <i>Precursors at Abydos</i> | 42 |
| | <i>Hieroglyphic script</i> | 42 |
| 2.6 | Foreign Relations | 47 |
| | <i>The Uruk culture of Babylonia</i> | 47 |
| | <i>Late 4th-millennium Nubia</i> | 50 |
| | <i>Late 4th-millennium Palestine</i> | 50 |
| 3 | The Great Pyramid Builders (ca. 2686–2345) | 52 |
| 3.1 | Sources | 53 |
| 3.2 | The Evolution of the Mortuary Complex | 55 |
| | <i>Djoser's step pyramid at Saqqara</i> | 56 |
| | <i>Sneferu's three pyramids</i> | 57 |
| | <i>The great pyramids at Giza</i> | 58 |
| | <i>Solar temples of the 5th dynasty</i> | 61 |
| 3.3 | Administrating the Old Kingdom State | 62 |
| | <i>Neferirkara's archive at Abusir</i> | 62 |
| | <i>Officialdom</i> | 64 |
| 3.4 | Ideological Debates? | 67 |
| | <i>Problems of royal succession</i> | 67 |
| | <i>The gods Horus and Ra</i> | 69 |
| 3.5 | Foreign Relations | 70 |
| | <i>Contacts with Nubia</i> | 71 |
| | <i>Contacts with Asia</i> | 72 |
| | <i>The western desert</i> | 72 |

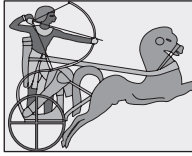
| | | |
|----------|---|-----------|
| 3.6 | Later Traditions about the Old Kingdom | 73 |
| | <i>Djoser and Imhotep</i> | 73 |
| | <i>Sneferu</i> | 74 |
| | <i>The great pyramid builders</i> | 74 |
| 4 | The End of the Old Kingdom and the First Intermediate Period (ca. 2345–2055) | 77 |
| 4.1 | Sources | 78 |
| 4.2 | The Rise of the Regions and Political Fragmentation | 79 |
| | <i>Nomes and nomarchs</i> | 79 |
| | <i>Officials' biographies</i> | 79 |
| | <i>Pepy II</i> | 83 |
| | <i>Why did the Old Kingdom dissolve?</i> | 84 |
| 4.3 | Foreign Relations | 87 |
| | <i>Nubian independence</i> | 87 |
| | <i>The eastern desert and the Levant</i> | 89 |
| | <i>Mercenaries</i> | 90 |
| 4.4 | Competition between Herakleopolis and Thebes | 90 |
| | <i>Herakleopolis</i> | 90 |
| | <i>Thebes</i> | 90 |
| 4.5 | Appraising the First Intermediate Period | 92 |
| | <i>Middle Kingdom literary reflections</i> | 92 |
| | <i>Historical critique</i> | 93 |
| 5 | The Middle Kingdom (ca. 2055–1650) | 95 |
| 5.1 | Sources and Chronology | 96 |
| 5.2 | Kings and Regional Elites | 98 |
| | <i>Reunification and the 11th dynasty</i> | 99 |
| | <i>The start of the 12th dynasty and the foundation of Itj-tawi</i> | 99 |
| | <i>Provincial powers in the early Middle Kingdom</i> | 101 |
| | <i>Royal interference in the provinces</i> | 102 |
| | <i>Administrative reorganization</i> | 104 |
| | <i>Royal power in the 13th dynasty</i> | 104 |
| 5.3 | Kings as Warriors | 107 |
| | <i>The annexation of Nubia</i> | 110 |
| 5.4 | Egypt in the Wider World | 112 |
| | <i>The early Kingdom of Kush</i> | 112 |
| | <i>The eastern desert and Sinai</i> | 112 |
| | <i>Syria and Palestine</i> | 114 |
| | <i>The world beyond</i> | 114 |
| | <i>Rhetoric and practice in foreign relations</i> | 115 |

| | | |
|----------|--|------------|
| 5.5 | The Cult of Osiris | 116 |
| 5.6 | Middle Kingdom Literature and its Impact on Egyptian Culture | 118 |
| 6 | The Second Intermediate Period and the Hyksos (ca. 1700–1550) | 122 |
| 6.1 | Sources and Chronology | 123 |
| 6.2 | Avaris: Multiple Transformations of a Delta Harbor | 124 |
| | <i>A history of Avaris</i> | 124 |
| | <i>Cultural hybridity</i> | 125 |
| | <i>Other immigrants</i> | 127 |
| 6.3 | The Hyksos | 127 |
| | <i>The name Hyksos</i> | 127 |
| | <i>Hyksos origins</i> | 127 |
| | <i>Egyptian cultural influences</i> | 128 |
| | <i>Political history</i> | 130 |
| | <i>The 14th and 16th dynasties</i> | 131 |
| | <i>Hyksos rule in Palestine?</i> | 131 |
| 6.4 | Nubia and the Kingdom of Kush | 131 |
| | <i>The independence of Lower Nubia</i> | 131 |
| | <i>The Kingdom of Kush</i> | 132 |
| | <i>Kerma</i> | 132 |
| | <i>The extent of the Kingdom of Kush</i> | 134 |
| 6.5 | Thebes in the Middle | 136 |
| | <i>Royal tombs</i> | 136 |
| | <i>Sequenrenra Taa</i> | 137 |
| | <i>Kamose's war</i> | 137 |
| 6.6 | The Hyksos in Later Perspective | 138 |
| | <i>Queen Hatshepsut</i> | 139 |
| | <i>The gods Ra and Seth</i> | 139 |
| | <i>Manetho and Josephus</i> | 141 |
| 7 | The Birth of Empire: The Early 18th Dynasty (ca. 1550–1390) | 145 |
| 7.1 | Egypt in a New World Order | 148 |
| 7.2 | Sources and Chronology | 149 |
| 7.3 | Egypt at War | 150 |
| | <i>War and society in the New Kingdom</i> | 150 |
| | <i>The "war of liberation"</i> | 152 |
| | <i>The annexation of Nubia</i> | 153 |
| | <i>Wars in western Asia</i> | 157 |
| 7.4 | Egypt and the Outside World | 159 |
| 7.5 | Domestic Issues | 162 |
| | <i>Royal succession</i> | 162 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| <i>Hatshepsut</i> | 163 |
| <i>Royal funerary customs</i> | 167 |
| <i>New Kingdom bureaucracy</i> | 169 |
| <i>Building activity in the early 18th dynasty</i> | 171 |
| 8 The Amarna Revolution and the Late 18th Dynasty (ca. 1390–1295) | 175 |
| 8.1 An International Age | 177 |
| <i>The Club of the Great Powers</i> | 178 |
| <i>The administration of Syria and Palestine</i> | 179 |
| <i>The rise of the Hittites</i> | 181 |
| <i>A failed marriage alliance</i> | 182 |
| 8.2 Amenhotep III: The Sun King | 182 |
| <i>Amenhotep III's divinity and his building projects</i> | 183 |
| <i>The king's family</i> | 186 |
| <i>The king's court</i> | 187 |
| 8.3 From Amenhotep III to Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten | 188 |
| 8.4 Akhenaten | 189 |
| <i>Theban years (years 1 to 5)</i> | 191 |
| <i>Akhetaten (years 5 to 12)</i> | 192 |
| <i>Turmoil (years 12 to 17)</i> | 196 |
| <i>Akhenaten's successors</i> | 197 |
| 8.5 Akhenaten's Memory | 199 |
| 9 The Ramessid Empire (ca. 1295–1213) | 203 |
| 9.1 Domestic Policy: Restoration and Renewal | 205 |
| <i>Sety I</i> | 205 |
| <i>Rameses II</i> | 206 |
| 9.2 International Relations: Reforming the Empire | 209 |
| <i>Wars in Syria</i> | 209 |
| <i>Egyptian–Hittite peace</i> | 212 |
| <i>A new imperial structure</i> | 212 |
| <i>Foreigners in Egypt</i> | 214 |
| 9.3 Rameses's Court | 217 |
| <i>Officials</i> | 217 |
| <i>The royal family</i> | 219 |
| 9.4 A Community of Tomb Builders | 222 |
| 10 The End of Empire (ca. 1213–1070) | 229 |
| 10.1 Problems at Court | 231 |
| <i>Sety II and Amenmessu</i> | 232 |
| <i>Saptah and Tausret</i> | 233 |
| <i>Sethnakht</i> | 233 |

| | | |
|-----------|--|------------|
| 10.2 | Breakdown of Order | 235 |
| | <i>Tomb robberies</i> | 235 |
| | <i>Workers' strikes</i> | 236 |
| 10.3 | The Decline of Royal Power | 237 |
| 10.4 | Pressures from Abroad | 239 |
| | <i>Libyans and Sea Peoples</i> | 239 |
| | <i>The end of the international system</i> | 244 |
| 10.5 | End of the New Kingdom | 244 |
| 11 | The Third Intermediate Period (ca. 1069–715) | 249 |
| 11.1 | Sources and Chronology | 250 |
| 11.2 | Twin Cities: Tanis and Thebes (the 21st dynasty, 1069–945) | 253 |
| | <i>Tanis</i> | 254 |
| | <i>Thebes</i> | 256 |
| | <i>A peaceful coexistence</i> | 258 |
| 11.3 | Libyan Rule (22nd to 24th dynasties, 945–715) | 260 |
| | <i>Centralization and diffusion of power</i> | 260 |
| | <i>The God's Wife of Amun</i> | 263 |
| 11.4 | The End of the Third Intermediate Period | 265 |
| | <i>Nubian resurgence</i> | 265 |
| | <i>Saite expansion</i> | 267 |
| 12 | Egypt in the Age of Empires (ca. 715–332) | 272 |
| 12.1 | Sources and Chronology | 273 |
| 12.2 | The Eastern Mediterranean in the 1st Millennium | 275 |
| 12.3 | Egypt, Kush, and Assyria (ca. 715–656) | 279 |
| | <i>Military incidents</i> | 279 |
| 12.4 | Egypt, Greeks, and Babylonians (656–525) | 283 |
| | <i>Greek–Egyptian relations</i> | 283 |
| | <i>Military activity</i> | 286 |
| 12.5 | Recollections of the Past Under the Kings of Kush and Sais | 286 |
| 12.6 | Egypt and Persia (525–332) | 290 |
| | <i>Domination and resistance</i> | 291 |
| | <i>Mixing cultures</i> | 296 |
| 13 | Greek and Roman Egypt (332 BC–AD 395) | 301 |
| 13.1 | Sources and Chronology | 302 |
| 13.2 | Alexandria and Philae | 304 |
| | <i>Alexandria</i> | 304 |
| | <i>Philae</i> | 307 |

| | | |
|------|--|-----|
| 13.3 | Kings, Queens, and Emperors | 308 |
| | <i>The Ptolemies</i> | 309 |
| | <i>Queen Cleopatra VII</i> | 311 |
| | <i>Roman Egypt</i> | 312 |
| 13.4 | Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians | 313 |
| | <i>Administration</i> | 313 |
| | <i>Culture and religion</i> | 316 |
| 13.5 | Economic Developments: Agriculture, Finance, and Trade | 319 |
| 13.6 | The African Hinterland | 321 |
| 13.7 | The Christianization of Egypt | 324 |
| | Epilogue | 327 |
| | <i>Guide to Further Reading</i> | 329 |
| | <i>Glossary</i> | 340 |
| | <i>King List</i> | 343 |
| | <i>Bibliography</i> | 349 |
| | <i>Index</i> | 368 |



List of Illustrations

Figure 1.1 Egyptian archetypes. This pair of painted limestone statues, 120 cm high, shows a husband and wife in typical Egyptian fashion. His skin is darker than hers because he works outside, while she, as an upper-class lady, can stay indoors. She wears a tight-fitting long dress, while he has only a short skirt. Both of them are represented without wrinkles or other signs of aging and hold their hands in traditional postures. While they are clearly identified by name in the hieroglyphic inscriptions, the images are not to be understood as naturalistic portraits. Source: Scala/Art Resource

Figure 1.2 Nubian archetype. On this 10-cm-high limestone trial piece for a relief sculpture the 14th-century artist represented a Nubian with the characteristics that were always used for a man from that region. He has specific physical features, braided hair, and an earring. Such images were produced throughout the ancient history of Egypt, although they started to show a greater variety of types when Egypt became an empire in the mid-2nd millennium. Metropolitan Museum of Art 22.2.10. Source: Rogers Fund, 1922

Figure 1.3 Syrian archetype. This 13-cm-high glazed tile, originally used as wall decoration for the palace of Rameses III at Tell el-Yahudiyya, shows a captive from Syria with the typical characteristics always used for the representation of such a foreigner. His facial features, beard, and headdress make him immediately recognizable as someone from that area to an Egyptian viewer. The detail of his clothing shows two gazelles facing a tree, a common Near Eastern artistic motif. Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Ägyptisch-Orientalische Sammlung. Source: Art Resource

Figure 1.4 A matter of presentation. In the 14th century, images of the Nubian prince Hekanef appear in two tombs depicting him very differently. In his own tomb in Lower Nubia at Toshka he is represented fully as an Egyptian and the hieroglyphic text states that he gives praise to the god Osiris. In contrast, in the Theban

tomb of an official of Tutankhamun he is depicted as an archetypal Nubian in a prostrate posture of submission and identified as “Hekanefer, the Prince of Miam” in the accompanying text. Source: Marc Van De Mieroop

Figure 1.5 Before the building of the Aswan dams the height of the Nile River’s flooding was of great importance as it determined how much agricultural land received water. At times the flood was so high, however, that its inundation caused destruction. The photograph here shows the Nile in flood near the Giza pyramids on October 31, 1927. Photograph by Mohammedani Ibrahim, Harvard University – Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition. Photograph © 2010 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Source: Giza Archives

Figure 1.6 As papyrus was expensive, potshards and flakes of limestone provided a cheap alternative for writing down texts, mostly for everyday concerns, or making sketches. An innumerable amount of such objects, called ostraca after the Greek word for potshards, have survived. This example, dated December 6, 127 BC and written in Demotic script, records an oath sworn by a man named Patasetat that he did not steal a piece of cloth. It measures 17 by 19 cm and the scribe used a piece of broken pottery to write on. Metropolitan Museum of Art 21.2.122. Source: Rogers Fund, 1921

Figure 1.7 This image shows a detail of a fragmentary king list carved on a slab of limestone that was found in the temple of Rameses II at Abydos. The preserved part of the list, 135 cm high and 370 cm long, contains 34 royal names in cartouches. The upper row lists rulers of the First Intermediate Period; the lower row kings of the 18th and early 19th dynasties, omitting Queen Hatshepsut and the Amarna kings. British Museum, London EA 117. Source: Werner Forman / Art Resource, NY

Figure 1.8 A 25-cm-high ceremonial mace head carved in limestone depicts a king, identified as Scorpion by the sign in front of his face, apparently digging an irrigation canal with a hoe, surrounded by attendants. On top of the image are standards that symbolize various regions of Egypt, with its inhabitants symbolized by birds dangling from a noose as a sign of subjection. The object dates to ca. 3000 BC and was excavated in Hierakonpolis. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. Drawing by Richard Parkinson. Source: Almendron

Figure 2.1 One of the most widespread emblems of kingship in ancient Egypt represents the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt, symbolized by two plants, the sedge and the papyrus, tied around the image of a windpipe and lung (the Egyptian word for the organ sounds like that for “to unite”). A cartouche containing the king’s name stands on top of the symbol, and indicates that he maintains the union. The example here appears on the side of Rameses II’s throne on the façade of Abu Simbel. Photo: Marc Van De Mieroop

Figure 2.2 In a tomb of the Late Naqada period at Abydos, called U-j by its excavators, were discovered some 160 bone and ivory tags bearing images perhaps precursors to those of the later hieroglyphic script. These most likely indicate the regions

from which goods donated to the tomb owner derived. The sides of the tags measure between 1 and 2 cm, and they have a hole with which to tie them to a container. Source: German Archaeological Institute, Cairo Department

Figure 2.3 The monumental Palette of King Narmer (front and back shown here), measuring 64 by 42 cm and carved from black schist stone, depicts the king with the crown of Upper Egypt subduing a man who represents the Nile Delta. On the reverse the same Narmer, wearing the crown of Lower Egypt and accompanied by men carrying standards, reviews the bodies of decapitated enemies. Both sides show the royal name in a *serekh*. Egyptian Museum, Cairo JE 32169. Source: Erich Lessing / Art Resource

Figure 2.4 One of the earliest statues in the round of a king of Egypt is this small ivory one, 8.8 cm high. It shows an unidentified ruler, probably of the 1st dynasty, wearing the white crown of Upper Egypt and wrapped in a cloak that kings wore during the *sed*-festival. The stoop of his shoulders suggests that he was old when the image was carved. British Museum, London EA37996. Source: Werner Forman / Art Resource

Figure 2.5 Excavations at Coptos revealed three statues dated around 3300 of the god of fertility Min, about 4 meters high and carved in limestone. They represent the god in an entirely different way from what would become the norm after Egyptian art forms became standardized with the creation of the unified state. The symbols on the statue's legs are also unlike those used later on. Oxford, AM 1894.105e. From Barry Kemp, "The Colossi from the Early Shrine at Coptos in Egypt," *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 10:2 (2000), 211–242: p. 212 fig. 1.

Figure 2.6 On this label of ebony wood, 8 by 5.5 cm, the upper right panel shows King Den during the *sed*-festival. Wearing the double crown, he both sits in a booth and runs in an area delineated by six markers. The vertical text on the left side includes the king's name and that of Hemaka, seal bearer of the king of Lower Egypt. The label mentions a kind of oil and a building processing it, and was originally attached to an oil container. British Museum. London. Source: The Trustees of the British Museum / Art Resource

Figure 2.7 Hieratic script was a rapid form of hieroglyphic initially used for documents of daily use. The papyrus fragment here, 35 by 19 cm, contains a letter between two fan-bearers of the king and a fragmentary record of the cultivation of pharaonic lands in year 16 of Rameses III. As papyrus was expensive, the reverse was used later for an account. The papyrus probably comes from the Memphis region. Metropolitan Museum of Art, O.C.3569. Source: Museum Accession

Figure 2.8 In the first few centuries AD Coptic script was developed to write the last stage of the ancient Egyptian language, also called Coptic. The script was based on the Greek alphabet, with a number of letters added to it to render new sounds, and survives until today. Around 600 AD a weaver wrote the pottery ostrakon (15 by 11 cm) shown here to request linen from a monastery. It was excavated in the Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes. Metropolitan Museum of Art 14.1.157. Source: Rogers Fund 1914

Figure 3.1 Sneferu's pyramid at Meidum represents one of the earliest attempts at constructing a real pyramid. It started out as a step pyramid with seven (later eight) stages to which a smooth outer casing was added. The latter started to collapse seemingly early on and is the source of the rubble surrounding the pyramid today. Photo: Marc Van De Mieroop

Figure 3.2 Plan of Giza plateau. While the great pyramids dominate with their enormous masses of stone, the entire Giza plateau is packed with the remains of subsidiary buildings to the burials and of tombs of queens and other members of the court. Today the area may seem abandoned (except for tourists), but in Old Kingdom times there was much activity due to the construction of new elements and the maintaining of royal funerary cults.

Figure 3.3 Abusir papyrus. British Museum, London, EA10735,10 H 20.5 cm. Source: The Trustees of the British Museum / Art Resource

Figure 3.4 This wooden panel, 115 cm high, is one of six found at Saqqara in the mastaba tomb of Hesira, an official of King Djoser. It depicts Hesira with the tools of a scribe hanging from his right shoulder. The hieroglyphs on top provide a list of his titles. Those in front of him list offerings. Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Egypt CG 1427. Source: Werner Forman / Art Resource

Figure 3.5 In the valley temple of King Menkaura's pyramid at Giza were excavated four intact sculptures that represent the king with the goddess Hathor and a nome deity of Egypt (in this example the Hu nome of Upper Egypt). The works are carved from graywacke, a type of sandstone, and are about 1 m tall. Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Egypt JE 46499. Source: Werner Forman / Art Resource

Figure 3.6 This sculpture of Khafra, carved from diorite stone from the south of Egypt, was found in the king's valley temple at Giza. It shows the god Horus in the shape of a falcon embracing the king's head as a symbol of the intimate connection between the living king and that god. The complete statue, showing the king seated on a throne, is 168 cm high. Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Egypt JE 10062. Source: bpk Bildagentur / Art Resource

Figure 3.7 In the mortuary temple of Sahura at Abusir appear reliefs carved in limestone of the king's military campaigns in Asia and Libya with images of the prisoners and other booty he collected there. This is a detail of some of the exotic animals he brought back from Syria, namely three bears. They are tethered to the ground and a jar stands between them. Aegyptisches Museum, Staatliche Museen, Berlin. Source: Erich Lessing / Art Resource

Figure 4.1 With the decentralization of power in the First Intermediate Period, provincial lords were able to construct monumental tombs throughout Egypt, following local customs with different architectural layouts. One such type was the so-called *saff* tomb from the region of Thebes, which consists of a set of chambers carved in the rock with a large courtyard lined with door-like openings in the back

creating the impression of a pillared façade. These tombs were also popular among the early kings of the 11th dynasty.

Figure 4.2 The pyramid at Saqqara of the last ruler of the 5th dynasty, King Unas, is the earliest monument from which the funerary texts we call Pyramid Texts are known. These are spells that were carved into the walls of the burial chamber, intended to help the dead king to reach his proper place in the hereafter. Source: Werner Forman / Art Resource

Figure 4.3 Starting in First Intermediate Period, non-royals had mortuary texts written out on their coffins to guide them to a paradise-like destination with the god Osiris. These could include maps that indicated the dangers they would encounter on the journey there. This image shows part the *Book of the Two Ways*, painted onto the bottom of the 12th-dynasty coffin of Gua, chief physician of Djehutihotep, great overlord of the Hare nome. Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Location: 39. Source: HIP / Art Resource

Figure 4.4 Because Pepy II became king as a young boy, his mother acted initially as his regent, and this 40-cm-high alabaster statue depicts their relationship at that time. Although he is a child sitting on his mother's lap, Pepy is represented as an adult king with a royal headdress in miniature size. Brooklyn Museum 33.119. Source: Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund / Bridgeman Images

Figure 4.5 This very nicely carved hieroglyphic text, on limestone (the segment shown here measures 193 by 50 cm), was set up in honor of a man called Mereri who worked as priest during the 9th dynasty or somewhat later. He claims to have provided the people with food and clothing, and to have judged their court cases fairly. Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art Gift of Egypt Exploration Fund, 1898, 98.4.2a–c

Figure 4.6 This limestone stele, which measures 37 by 45 cm and is said to have been found in a village just south of Thebes, was made for a Nubian soldier called Nenu. Both the hieroglyphic text and some elements of his dress, like the wide leather sash, identify him as Nubian. His wife wears a fully Egyptian outfit, however. The somewhat awkward style of the representation is characteristic for the First Intermediate Period. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Emily Esther Sears Fund. Source: Bridgeman Images

Figure 4.7 With the creation of a new dynasty in Thebes, artists there started to produce very fine sculptures representing the kings in their roles as intermediaries with the gods. This limestone stele, which measures 44.5 by 46 cm, was probably set up on behalf of Wahankh Intef II in the courtyard of his tomb and shows him offering milk to the god Ra and beer to the goddess Hathor. The hieroglyphic text contains hymns to both gods. Metropolitan Museum of Art 13.182.3. Source: Rogers Fund 1913

Figure 5.1 This 46-cm-high statue carved from graywacke stone shows the head of King Amenemhat III wearing the white crown of Upper Egypt. The sculptor

emphasized the contrast between the soft lines of the king's facial features and the smooth surface of the high crown. The head's nose and ears seem to have been ritually destroyed at an unknown later date. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen. Source: Werner Forman / Art Resource

Figure 5.2 In the Middle Kingdom, provincial governors were able to pass their offices on to their sons and to commission tombs decorated with scenes that showed their activities in their official business. This image is a 19th-century AD copy of a fresco painting from the tomb of governor Khnumhotep II at Beni Hasan, and the detail shows desert people bringing him gifts as if he conducted foreign policy on his own. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria. Source: Erich Lessing / Art Resource

Figure 5.3 Senusret I started the development of the Amun temple at Karnak in Thebes and erected the "white chapel," a small limestone pavilion to celebrate his *sed*-festival. The chapel was dismantled in the 18th dynasty and its stones reused for the construction of the 3rd pylon. On its walls was carved a list of the nomes of Egypt in vertical columns, which gave each nome's name, its chief town and patron deity, the distance from north to south, and a number of cattle. The chapel was reconstructed in modern times. Source: Erich Lessing / Art Resource

Figure 5.4 The find of a collection of letters and accounts belonging to a private landowner gives us some insight on the activities on farms throughout Egyptian history. The letter shown here, written on papyrus in hieratic script, contains the landowner Heqanakht's orders to his family members whom he left behind when going on a business trip. He is obsessed with details and seemingly responds to their earlier complaints with a statement that life is hard. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 22.3.517. Source: Rogers Fund and Edward S. Harkness Gift, 1922

Figure 5.5 This 18-cm-high wooden statuette is an execration figurine, that is, an object intended to control enemies through magical means. Their names were written on often very roughly shaped human figures in wood or clay, which had no arms or were tied up to make sure the owner of the object controlled them. Execration Texts, some of them quite long, could also appear on bowls that could be ritually smashed. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Source: RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource

Figure 5.6 Middle Kingdom Egypt constructed multiple fortresses along the 2nd cataract, with moats and massive walls, and barracks, magazines, and other buildings laid out on a gridiron pattern in the interior. The image here is a 3-D reconstruction of the 12th-dynasty fort at Buhen, whose outer ramparts measured some 450 by 200 m. © 2010 Institute for the Visualization of History, Inc.

Figure 5.7 This stele was set up in Abydos by the brother of Rehuerdjersen, who was treasurer under the first two 12th-dynasty kings. It was part of his cenotaph, a monument intended to connect the dead to Osiris and to benefit from the offerings that the god received. The text lists the requisite offerings as "1000 bread; 1000 beer; 1000 meat; 1000 poultry; 1000 linen; 1000 clothing. Incense." Most of the

inscription is taken up by the names of Rehuerdjersen's family members. Metropolitan Museum of Art 12.182.1. Source: Rogers Fund, 1912

Figure 6.1 This 55-cm-high limestone funerary stele was made for an official called Mentuhotep, whose image is painted on it. The offerings he receives include bread, a goose, and the leg, heart, and head of a bull. Alongside the small mummified figure between the man's legs is the text "The Syrian woman Sat-Hathor," identifying his deceased wife as a Syrian woman who had an Egyptian name. Aegyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Staatliche Museen, Berlin. Source: bpk Bildagentur / Art Resource

Figure 6.2 Detail of the Rhind mathematical papyrus. British Museum, London EA10057. Source: Art Resource

Figure 6.3 This 7.8-cm-high double vase onto which the images of lotus flowers was carved is a typical example of what archaeologists call Tell el-Yahudiyya Ware. Pottery of this type was used extensively for trade throughout the eastern Mediterranean and is also found in Nubia. A small vessel of this type could have been used to ship scented oil. Metropolitan Museum of Art 23.3.39. Source: Rogers Fund 1923

Figure 6.4 This 11-cm-high ceramic beaker is typical for the archaeological culture that we call Classical Kerma. Its decoration resulted from placing the vessel upside down in the ashes when firing the clay, which turned the upper part black because no oxygen reached it and the lower part red. Numerous examples of these were found in Nubian tombs as far south as the 4th cataract, but they were also exported to Egypt, perhaps to be placed into tombs of Nubians who had moved there. This example was excavated at Abydos. Metropolitan Museum of Art 20.2.45. Source: Rogers Fund 1920

Figure 6.5 The rulers of Kerma during the Classical Kerma phase had themselves buried in monumental tumuli, that is, earthen mounds over a burial chamber. This is the plan of tomb K X, with a 90-m diameter. It had subsidiary graves dug into it, and a corridor that contained the bodies of 332 human sacrificial victims, many of them women. There were also dogs, donkeys, and horses under the tumulus, while ox skulls lined part of the exterior. Source: Smithsonian Institution

Figure 6.6 Since the Kerma state at the time of the Second Intermediate Period in Egypt did not use writing, we do not have access to the names of the kings of that state. One name is known, however, because the funerary stele of an Egyptian who remained at Buhen after Egypt's control over the fortress ended acknowledges without hesitation that the soldier served the Nubian ruler Nedjeh. Sudan National Museum no 18

Figure 7.1 Chariots were introduced in Egypt at the start of the New Kingdom and long remained an exclusive item of prestige. It was used in warfare and in hunting, and this modern facsimile of a scene from the tomb of Userhat, royal scribe of

Amenhotep II, shows him shooting animals from atop his chariot as a sign of his special status in life. Metropolitan Museum of Art 30.4.42. Source: Rogers Fund 1930

Figure 7.2 The images painted on the walls of the tombs of government officials represent aspects of their activities while alive, and some show to us how foreigners came to Egypt to bring tribute. This image from the tomb of Rekhmira depicts men from the Aegean dressed in their local costume and bearing an elaborate metal vessel and a metal ingot in the shape of an ox hide. Metropolitan Museum of Art 31.6.42. Source: Rogers Fund 1931

Figure 7.3 The reliefs carved on the walls of Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri include an elaborate depiction of a voyage to the land of Punt, the source for products needed for the cult such as incense. Like a graphic novel, the gigantic relief, some 30 m long and 5 m high, shows how ships sailed to Punt and illustrates the exotic aspects of that distant land, including houses, flora, and fauna. This detail (38 by 45 cm) shows the prince of Punt, Perihu, and his wife Eti, who is depicted as being very different from the Egyptian ideal of women's beauty. Their names are given in the inscription on a neighboring panel. Egyptian Museum, Cairo, JE 14276. Source: Erich Lessing / Art Resource

Figure 7.4 This 213-cm-high limestone statue of Hatshepsut, which was originally painted, shows the queen with both male and female features. She wears only a kilt, rather than a dress that would cover her whole body, and the headdress is one of male rulers. But some of her physical features, including small breasts, are of a woman. Also, the inscription gives her female titles "the Perfect Goddess, Lady of the Two Lands," and "Bodily Daughter of Ra." Other statues of her show more masculine features and titles. Metropolitan Museum of Art 29.3.2. Source: Rogers Fund 1929

Figure 7.5 Many years after the start of Thutmose III's sole rule over Egypt, the decision was made to erase the memory of Queen Hatshepsut, who governed in his youth. The removal of her name and images was done systematically and often carefully so as not to damage surrounding figures. Here we see how the image and cartouches of Hatshepsut were cut out from a scene in the temple of Karnak that showed gods pouring the water of life over her. Photo: Marc Van De Mieroop

Figure 7.6 Senenmut, represented here holding Hatshepsut's daughter Nefrura, seems to have been the queen's closest advisor and in return was given access to royal workshops to have statues made. This 53-cm-high diorite statue contains an inscription that praises his relationship to Hatshepsut, referred to in the masculine. The princess has the sidelock typical for a child and the royal *uraeus*. Not visible here is the unusual feature that her right arm embraces Senenmut. Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, gift of Stanley Field and Ernest R. Graham 173800. Source: Erich Lessing / Art Resource

Figure 7.7 The image is a modern facsimile of a detail from the elaborate decoration of Rekhmira's tomb. In this banquet scene two women guests are served by a

girl, whose pose with her back toward the viewer is highly unusual for Egyptian art. The girl pours what may have been an herbal mixture to increase the alcohol level of wine from a tiny jar. The hieroglyphic text reads, "Make a happy day!" Metropolitan Museum of Art 30.4.78. Source: Rogers Fund 1930

Figure 7.8 The Amun temple at Karnak was the most important religious complex in Egypt starting in the New Kingdom and received the attention of kings into the Roman Period. It retained the basic layout of an Egyptian temple, that is, an enclosed inner sanctuary to hold the god's statue, in front of which were a sequence of courtyards filled with statues, obelisks, and other monuments. The courtyards could be covered with a roof or be open to the air and were separated by large gates we call pylons. In the end the Karnak temple had 10 pylons, not only in the usual sequence from east to west but also from north to south, connecting it to the Luxor temple

Figure 8.1 Amenhotep III commissioned numerous monuments of enormous size, including a mortuary temple in western Thebes that was built in the agricultural zone along the river, unlike those of others. Fronting the temple were two gigantic statues of the seated king (20 meters high), called the Colossi of Memnon in later tradition. This is the southern one, today standing in the midst of fields as the agricultural area was later reclaimed. Photo: Marc Van De Mieroop

Figure 8.2 Queen Tiye was represented numerous times, alone and with her husband Amenhotep III, which historians see as a sign that she played an important role at court. The 33-cm-high statue shown here, made of ebony wood and inlaid with gold, silver, lapis lazuli, and less precious materials, depicts an elaborate crown that contains the sun disk connected to the god Ra, cow horns connected to the goddess Hathor, and the double feathers connected to the god Amun. Originally it also had the *uraeus* attached to her forehead. Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung | Ägyptisches Museum, gift James Simon, 1918. Accession number: ÄM 21834. Source: Sandra Steiss/ Art Resource

Figure 8.3 The imagery carved on the walls of the Luxor temple in eastern Thebes indicates that it was a central location for the celebration of the Opet Festival in which the statues of the gods Amun, Mut, and Khonsu travelled from the Karnak temple to Luxor, in a ceremony to renew the king's royal birth. The scenery shows that it involved a procession in which sacrifices were made to the temple, and the detail here shows how people brought a bull whose horns were decorated with the bust of a Nubian on top. Source: Werner Forman / Art Resource

Figure 8.4 Ramose, who was Egypt's vizier under Amenhotep III and Akhenaten, had a lavish tomb in western Thebes, decorated with reliefs and paintings of the highest quality. He is shown here with his wife and guests sitting at the funerary banquet. Unusually, only the eyes are painted. Western Thebes TT 55. Source: Scala / Art Resource

Figure 8.5 Early in his reign Akhenaten set up colossal statues of himself at Karnak, which clearly show the (to us) startling features of Amarna artwork. This 3-m-high

fragment of one, often called the “sexless colossus,” shows the king either naked or wrapped in a tight-fitting cloak that shows the details of his body. The absence of genitalia has inspired much speculation, for example, that it represents the king as Osiris, whose genitalia were cut off, according to myth, or that the statue is of Nefertiti. Other aspects of the colossus, such as the face and the broad hips, are typical for Amarna art. Egyptian Museum Cairo JE 55938s. Source: Werner Forman / Art Resource

Figure 8.6 The extent of the building projects King Akhenaten commissioned made it necessary for the work to be done fast. The walls were made of mud brick lined with stone slabs that we call *talatat* (from the Arabic for three hand spans) onto which elaborate scenes were carved. The example here shows the king sacrificing a duck to the sun disk Aten, with the solar rays ending in hands (height 24.5 cm; width 54.5 cm; thickness 7 cm). One of those is holding the *ankh* sign, indicating life, before the king’s nose. The physical features of the head – long neck, nose, and chin, and thick lips – are characteristic for Amarna art. Metropolitan Museum of Art 1985.328.2. Source: Gift of Norbert Schimmel, 1985

Figure 8.7 King Tutankhamun’s tomb is famous for the incredible wealth of the goods that were excavated in it, many of them of precious materials and high craftsmanship. Shown here is an alabaster vessel finely carved so that its surface is translucent. It is 18.3 cm high and 28.3 cm wide. The hieroglyphic text includes the king’s cartouches. Egyptian Museum, Cairo, JE 67465. Source: Erich Lessing / Art Resource

Figure 9.1 One of the most important king lists preserved is the one carved for King Sety I and crown prince Rameses in the temple of Abydos. They are shown honoring 75 earlier kings of Egypt represented by their cartouches in two registers. The list omits certain rulers who were considered illegitimate at the time, such as Hatshepsut, the Amarna kings, and rulers of the Intermediate Periods. In the lowest register the cartouches of Sety I are repeated multiple times. Source: Erich Lessing / Art Resource

Figure 9.2 One of the most famous monuments of Rameses II is his temple at Abu Simbel, cut into the cliff of the Nile Valley. This shows the façade with four 21-m-high statues of the seated king and smaller ones of some members of the royal family, including several sons and daughters. Photo: Marc Van De Mierop

Figure 9.3 During the New Kingdom, several Syrian cults entered Egypt, and the gods involved became depicted as Egyptian ones, albeit keeping some of their original attributes. This 30-cm-high limestone statue, from the Ramessid period or slightly later, shows the Syrian war god Resheph with the standard traits of a king in Egyptian art (crown, skirt, beard, stance) but brandishing a shield and the sword-like mace that are normal parts of his representations in Syria. Metropolitan Museum of Art 89.2.215. Source: Gift of Joseph W. Drexel, 1889

Figure 9.4 Although Rameses II had multiple wives, queen Nefertari was his favorite and is often represented alongside him. Her tomb (QV 66) is the most

elaborately decorated in the Valley of the Queens, with polychrome frescoes showing her in scenes such as this one where she makes offerings to a god. In the tomb's inscriptions she is called "possessor of charm, sweetness, and love." Source: Bridgeman-Giraudon / Art Resource

Figure 9.5 A large number of objects found throughout Egypt are associated with the numerous children of Rameses II. This thin gold mask, only a tenth of a millimeter thick and 28 by 28 cm in extent, was found in the Serapeum at Saqqara on a mummy-shaped mass of resin which also had jewelry with the name of Khaemwaset on it. It is thus often thought to represent the son of Rameses II who developed that burial ground of the Apis bulls. Louvre Museum, Paris N2291. Source: Erich Lessing / Art Resource

Figure 9.6 The remains of the village of Deir el-Medina show how a community of workers were housed and supported by the state and how they interacted with each other in their professional and daily lives. The majority of the small houses were located within an enclosure wall, but at the height of its existence several additional ones were built around the core settlement. Source: Erich Lessing / Art Resource

Figure 9.7 Among the inhabitants of Deir el-Medina were the artists who decorated the royal tombs with mortuary imagery that was very canonical. They were skilled draftsmen, however, and the ostraca found in the village show how they practiced their art with images that one does not find in the royal tombs. The example here, painted on a flake of limestone, measuring 18.5 by 11.5 cm, shows two bulls fighting each other with a vivacity that illustrates how they could work outside the rules of official art. Metropolitan Museum of Art 24.2.27. Source: Rogers Fund 1924

Figure 10.1 This 44.5-cm-high quartzite head, with traces of blue paint on the crown, belongs to a statue that still stands in the Amun temple at Thebes. The statue's inscription shows that this is Sety II, whose kingship was contested, but who still had the ability to commission artwork of the highest standards. Metropolitan Museum of Art 34.2.2. Source: Rogers Fund 1934

Figure 10.2 Rameses III's major monument was his mortuary temple at Medinet Habu, which tried to emulate his predecessor's nearby Ramesseum. It is famous for its depictions of battles against the Sea Peoples (cf. Figure 10.4). Around the walls of the stone temple were a large number mud-brick magazines, which were used to store supplies for the temple and for the workers at Deir el-Medina. Source: robertharding / Alamy Stock Photo

Figure 10.3 The Papyrus Harris I, or the Great Harris Papyrus, was originally 42 meters long and describes in detail the donations King Rameses III made to gods from several temples of Egypt. Those of Thebes, Amun, Mut, and Khonsu, received the greatest share, and this vignette, which measures 74 by 46 cm, shows the king paying homage to the three gods. Several of these vignettes alternate with the text. British Museum, EA 9999,2. Source: The Trustees of the British Museum / Art Resource

Figure 10.4 The most elaborate depictions of Rameses III's battles against the Sea People are carved on the outer wall of the Medinet Habu temple. They show the king and his troops subduing foreign attackers who are depicted in a chaotic mass. The images provide much detail on the weapons and headdresses of the enemies, which has inspired much speculation about their identities. This is a small part of a massive relief on the temple's north wall that depicts battle in the Nile Delta. Source: Erich Lessing / Art Resource

Figure 10.5 The "Israel" stele of King Merenptah. Found in his funerary temple at Thebes was a granite stele, 10 ft (3 m) high, that he set up to celebrate his military victories over the Libyans. He reused a stele of Amenhotep III, and the inscription and image are carved on a rough surface. The mirror images show Amun giving a sword to Merenptah; on the left his wife Mut stands behind the god, on the right his son Khonsu. Traces of red, yellow, and blue paint are still visible. Egyptian Museum, Cairo JE 31408. © DeA Picture Library / Art Resource

Figure 10.6 The images Rameses III commissioned to celebrate his victories over the Sea People are very detailed in their portrayal of the enemies. The weapons and other items are often very distinctive, and have inspired much research on who is represented. The headdress shown here has led to the identification of the man as a Peleset. Temple of Medinet Habu, 2nd pylon. Source: Erich Lessing / Art Resource

Figure 11.1 While the power of the kings of the 21st dynasty was much less than of those of the New Kingdom, the mortuary goods given them could rival those of earlier centuries. This is the top of the innermost sarcophagus in which King Psusennes I was buried at Tanis, made of solid silver and 185 cm long. The death mask inside it was made of gold. Egyptian Museum, Cairo JE 85912. Source: DeA Picture Library / Art Resource

Figure 11.2 Found in his previously undisturbed tomb at Tanis, the gold mummy mask of King Psusennes I was inside three sarcophagi and shows the same amount of attention given to this king as to his more famous predecessor Tutankhamun. It is 45 cm high, 38 cm wide, and has silver and quartzite inlays. Because he was buried in the humid soil of the Delta, Psusennes's mummy, unlike Tutankhamun's, has disintegrated. Egyptian Museum, Cairo JE 85913. Source: Werner Forman / Art Resource

Figure 11.3 When tomb robberies in the late New Kingdom and later threatened the remains of pharaohs and queens, priests from Thebes removed their mummies, hid them in caches, and identified the bodies with labels. This is the mummy of Rameses II, which was found in a cave in the cliff above Hatshepsut's temple at Deir el-Bahri (DB 320) together with some 45 others, including those of Thutmose III and Sety I. His name and titles were written on the bandages in hieratic script. Egyptian Museum Cairo, JE 26214. Source: Scala / Art Resource

Figure 11.4 Although Egypt in the Third Intermediate Period had lost its impact abroad, some military activity is recorded. On the Bubastite portal of the Karnak

temple King Sheshonq I celebrated his campaigns in Palestine and provided a detailed list of the cities he conquered. He used the standard means of representation for the defeated people, an oval with the name written out in it and on top the upper body of an enemy, arms tied behind the back. Thebes, Karnak Temple, first courtyard. Source: Erich Lessing / Art Resource

Figure 11.5 The God's Wife of Amun at Thebes became a very important religious authority in the Third Intermediate Period and kings and rulers of the various political powers vied to get their sister or daughter the position. The leading status of the women in the Theban hierarchy is clear from the many representations created for them. This is an alabaster statue, 170 cm high, of Amenirdis I, who was incumbent to the position already in the mid-8th century and held the office from about 714 to 700. She was the daughter of the Nubian king Kashta, whose influence in Egypt was so great that he could force her appointment onto the Theban priesthood. Egyptian Museum, Cairo JE 3420. Source: Scala / Art Resource

Figure 11.6 In the 15th century the Egyptian king Thutmose III had founded a temple to Amun in Napata at the foot of a rock outcrop, the Gebel Barkal. Many centuries later the rulers of Napata maintained that cult and expanded the temple, still following the traditional Egyptian temple layout of courts with a row of sphinxes at the entrance. Source: imageBROKER / Alamy Stock Photo

Figure 11.7 King Piye's victory stele in every respect is a work of great artistic and literary skills. The text is carved on all the sides of the granite stele (180 cm high, 138 cm wide, and 43 cm thick), which must have stood in the center of a space at Gebel Barkal where it was discovered. The image at the top is traditional Egyptian in that it shows the Nubian as an Egyptian king with the gods Amun and Mut behind him. All the enemies who submit themselves are identified by name, those on the right with royal cartouches, all but one of those on the left as chiefs of Ma. Egyptian Museum Cairo JE 48862

Figure 12.1 King Esarhaddon of Assyria commemorated his invasion of Egypt with an inscribed diorite stele, 3.46 m high, which he set up in northern Syria. The relief depicts the Assyrian king holding two men with ropes, a Nubian who is generally thought to be Taharqa's son or the king himself, and a Phoenician king (of Tyre or of Sidon). The defeated men are in a posture of supplication. The Assyrian inscription describes how Esarhaddon captured Memphis and took members of the Napatan royal family, including the crown prince, prisoner. Vorderasiatisches Museum, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, VA2708. Source: Erich Lessing / Art Resource

Figure 12.2 In the Late Period, priests, bureaucrats, and others were still able to commission monumental tombs. At Asasif in western Thebes close to Hatshepsut's temple at Deir el-Bahri are the remains of a group of them with massive entryways and intricate underground structures. The grandest tomb is of Mentuemhat, mayor of Thebes, who administered the southern region almost independently while Napata and Assyria fought over Egypt. Source: Magica / Alamy Stock Photo

Figure 12.3 The Nubian kings of Napata, both those who controlled Egypt and later ones, had themselves represented with exquisite artwork that followed Egyptian principles. In many respects these seven statues, excavated in a pit at Dukki Gel, continued the motifs of earlier rulers of Egypt, such as the pose, the crowns, and the hieroglyphic inscriptions. Like many Egyptian royal statues they are carved in granite and can be more than life-sized (they are between 270 and 123 cm high). But there are details that make them recognizable as Nubian, such as the facial features, the double *uraeus*, and the ram's head that appears as a pendant or decorative element of the clothing. Kerma Museum. Source: imageBROKER / Alamy Stock Photo

Figure 12.4 Relief sculpture of the Late Period could be of very high quality and often imitated scenes from earlier periods. Many pieces in museums today were cut out of the tomb walls to be displayed as if they are small tableaux. The fragment shown here, 23.9 by 28.7 cm and carved in limestone, contains the unusual images of a woman pulling a thorn from another woman's foot (much damaged in the top register) and a nursing mother picking up a fig (bottom register). It derives from an unknown tomb in Thebes (possibly Mentuemhat's) and most likely copied paintings found in the 14th-century tomb of a man called Menena in the same area. Its refinement shows how elites from the region could commission very skilled artisans to decorate their tombs. Brooklyn Museum, Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund, 48.74. Source: Brooklyn Museum

Figure 12.5 An example of the interest in the past is this inscription on stone commissioned by the Nubian king Shabaqo. The text purports to be the copy of an Old Kingdom papyrus with a creation story centered on the god Ptah. It was at the earliest composed in the 19th dynasty, however, and shows how the antiquity of a text was thought to give it authority. The damage on the stone is the result of its use as a millstone, which erased 33 of the 62 columns of text. It is made of basalt and measures 66 by 137 cm. British Museum, London EA498. Source: The Trustees of the British Museum / Art Resource

Figure 12.6 The period of independence from Persia in the 4th century was not one of organized national resistance against foreign rulers, but involved multiple families and individuals who claimed kinship, sometimes only over part of the country. One such claimant was Psammuthis, who in 392 for some two years controlled Thebes, where he presented himself as pharaoh. This sandstone relief, 37.3 by 45.2 cm in extent, shows the god Montu holding the symbol of life (*ankh*) before Psammuthis's Horus name and a cartouche with his nomen, followed by the standard phrase "given all life, all joy, forever." Metropolitan Museum of Art 27.2.1. Source: Rogers Fund 1927

Figure 12.7 Although the Apis bull was honored from the very beginning of Egypt's history, the cult flourished especially in the Late Period. Many statues of the animal exist, both large and small, the latter probably used in private contexts. The example shown here is made of copper and is only 10.8 cm high. It depicts the bull with a sun disk between its horns, an *uraeus*, and a rectangular cloth on its back. Metropolitan Museum of Art 04.2.486. Source: Gift of Darius Ogden Mills, 1904

Figure 13.1 Alexandria in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods was a Greek city in its layout. Some earlier Egyptian planned cities used the gridiron street pattern, but Alexandria had unique Greek features, such as a central main street, a roofed colonnade (*stoa*), an open square (*agora*), and a hippodrome. Also, its buildings were Greek rather than traditional Egyptian. Source: Kenzie, Judith (2007) *The Architecture of Alexandria and Egypt*, c. 300 B.C. to A.D. 700, New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 38 fig. 38. © 2007 Yale University

Figure 13.2 The continuation of Egyptian customs while Greeks and Romans ruled the country is clear in funerary practices – mummification remained the norm. The fresco shown here from the interior of the Alexandria Catacombs (1st–2nd century AD) depicts the goddess Isis in an embalming ritual. While the contents of the scene are fully Egyptian, the style is Graeco-Roman. © DeA Picture Library / Art Resource

Figure 13.3 In the Ptolemaic and Roman eras royal depictions on temples maintained the traditional Egyptian imagery of rulers. Shown here is the 2nd pylon of the Isis temple at Philae with King Ptolemy XII Neos Dionysos offering to the gods Isis and Horus. Were it not for his name in the inscriptions, one would not know that the king was not an Egyptian. Photo: Marc Van De Mierop

Figure 13.4 The Ptolemaic kings expressed their rights to rule Egypt by representing themselves in the manner of earlier pharaohs, and the artists employed the age-old traditions of sculpture to do so. This 93-cm-high torso of a black basalt statue commissioned by one of the later Ptolemies shows him with the royal skirt, the shortened staff in his left hand, the left foot forward, and with his name written in a cartouche on his belt. Metropolitan Museum of Art 1981.224.1. Source: Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift and Rogers Fund, 1981

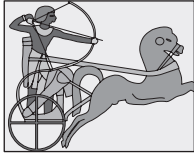
Figure 13.5 The mixture of Greek and Egyptian practices is shown on this 52.4-cm-high limestone stele, which probably stood in a temple in the Fayyum. On the top is a traditional Egyptian depiction of Queen Cleopatra VII making an offering to Isis, who is breastfeeding her son. She is represented as a man, with the double crown of Egypt and the royal skirt. On the bottom the inscription in Greek states that Onnophris, the Greek “president of the association of Isis Snonais” set the stele up on July 2, 51 BC. His name is a Greek rendering of the Egyptian Wen-nefer. Louvre Museum, Paris E27113. © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource

Figure 13.6 The Nubian kingdom continued certain ancient Egyptian practices after they had been discontinued in Egypt. This included burial in pyramids, some 50 of which for kings, queens, and their children are known from Meroe after that city became the center of the kingdom. These were constructed between 300 BC and AD 350. Source: Werner Forman / Art Resource

Figure 13.7 The Nubians in the first few centuries AD merged their religious ideas with Egyptian ones, integrating the two pantheons and mixing characteristics from both cultures. One prominent god was Mandulis (the Greek rendering of the name Merul or Melul), a Nubian deity who was considered the son of Horus and had

several of his father's attributes. On this relief from his main temple at Kalabsha, in Lower Nubia, he is shown as a falcon. He wears a crown with ram's horns, the double *uraeus*, and high feathers. Source: Erich Lessing / Art Resource

Figure 13.8 In the early decades of the common era Amanitore was queen of Meroe. She is depicted here on the pylon of the Lion Temple at Naqa in the traditional pose of an Egyptian ruler defeating enemies. The representation of her body and the fact that she is shown as a warrior are non-Egyptian elements, however. Source: Werner Forman / Art Resource



Maps

Map 1 Egypt and Nubia from prehistory to the Middle Kingdom

Map 2 Pyramid locations

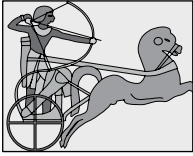
Map 3 Egypt and surrounding territories in the New Kingdom

Map 4 Western Thebes

Map 5 Egypt's Syrian dependencies in the Amarna age

Map 6 Late Period Egypt

Map 7 The eastern Mediterranean in the first millennium



Preface to the Second Edition

When this book appeared in its first edition in the fall of 2011, Egypt was constantly in the news, not for its ancient past but because of the popular uprising against the regime headed by Hosni Mubarak, a president who was regularly called “Egypt’s last pharaoh.” The following years were often very difficult for the country’s inhabitants, with much political conflict, insecurity, and a collapse of the tourism industry, which had been one of the major sources of income. Modern events in a region do impact what students of its history can do, and indeed many archaeological projects were suspended. Yet research on Egypt’s ancient civilization did not slow down. Scholars around the world continued to write on all aspects of history, pursuing established approaches, but also introducing new concerns and sometimes new methodologies. For example, DNA analyses of mummies are more widespread today than they were 10 years ago, while climate change has become more popular as a historical explanation. Also, new archaeological discoveries, often the work of Egyptian researchers, continued to be announced. At the same time, I was encouraged to rethink how to teach the history of ancient Egypt to a succession of undergraduate students at Columbia University, with their varied backgrounds and interests, so when I was given the opportunity to revise this textbook, more than a decade after the first edition was written, I was happy to do so.

The aims of the book remain the same from the first edition. It aspires to provide anyone with an interest in ancient Egypt with a basic survey that pays attention to all periods of its 3000-year-long history and covers the main events. It is intended to be used as an undergraduate textbook – as I do in my classes – but also to be accessible to a wider public. For its structure it follows the chronology of ancient Egypt’s political history, a traditional format that forms the background of all investigations on that culture. Archaeologists, museum curators, and ancient historians with many different approaches and interests, all place their comments in the chronological boxes of Kingdom and Intermediate Periods, dynasties, and individual reigns, which to them as specialists are almost natural and which anyone who wants to contextualize anything ancient Egyptian has to learn. My chapters coincide with these

divisions and use them in their titles in order to provide a structure that enables readers to situate other information within that structure. Within each chapter, I do provide chronological tables that break the period up into dynasties, but I do not survey the periods dynasty by dynasty, or reign by reign, as some other books do. I also hope to give every era sufficient attention and not privilege certain times when Egypt's "glory" was the greatest over others when its remains were not so grand. Obviously, periods when the evidence we have is very rich and we can study the history in more detail get more room in this book than others. Also, the time after Egypt's conquest by Alexander in 332 BC to the end of my story in AD 395, for which we have an abundance of documentation that enables an intricate reconstruction of events, is squeezed into a single chapter. That period is often called "Egypt after the Pharaohs," and I follow most histories of ancient Egypt in giving it less attention.

Because this is an introductory book with limitations to its size, I cannot give every aspect of Egyptian history equal attention and had to make choices about my focus. Political history dominates, and in that history the deeds of leading men are often the focus. I speak a lot about building projects and wars, much less about the daily lives of the people who provided the labor and suffered the consequences of conflict. The textual sources get more attention than the material ones, and in the latter group the impressive remains more than the simple ones. Other histories can be written and have been, but this book follows many others whose focus is dictated by how strongly the evidence we have speaks to us. It serves as an introduction.

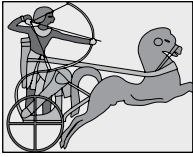
As was the case in the first edition, I have to acknowledge that this book, as every other introductory survey, does not argue – it asserts. Even if sentences are qualified by words like "seemingly" (often omitted to avoid clutter in the text), they give the impression that there is certainty. That is far from true. Every page, if not paragraph, probably contains a statement that will offend someone who has argued differently in writing or lectures. It is impossible to acknowledge every scholarly opinion in an introductory book that covers the entirety of ancient Egyptian history. I chose to follow interpretations that I found the most convincing or appealing, and in the Guide to Further Reading gave preference to works that were the most useful in guiding my decisions. Like most of my colleagues, as a teacher I demand from my students that they acknowledge the sources they use when writing a research paper. It may thus seem that I set the wrong example here by not specifically referencing where I found an idea or what scholar's view I follow. If I had chosen to give full bibliographic references, I would have produced a very different book, longer and probably more daunting to a general reader. But, in order to counteract the impression that what I have written is generally accepted fact, I have included sections called Key Debate in each chapter to survey different views on a specific topic and give more detailed notes with scholarly references. In these sections I often stress how interpretations have evolved because of changing modern preoccupations rather than a clearer understanding. Historians do not live in a vacuum, and their interests and explanations reflect their own conditions. I admit that even in these sections I could not acknowledge all that has been written on a topic; the bibliography is simply too vast.

I have to thank several people for their help and encouragement during the writing of this book. Wiley's Executive Editor Todd Green urged me to prepare a second edition and made it possible for me to do so, and the copy-editor, Giles Flitney,

expertly removed unclear statements and contradictions from the manuscript. The advice of scholars who helped me during the writing of the first edition – John Baines, Ronald Leprohon, Gay Robins, Thomas Schneider, and Willeke Wendrich – was still very important for the version printed here. Richard Parkinson and Robert Simpson were kind enough to let me reuse their translations of several ancient Egyptian texts. The other textual sources quoted were updated and standardized by Katya Barbash and Robert Simpson for the first edition and repeated here. Richard Parkinson and Barry Kemp allowed me to reproduce images they had created. I want to reiterate my thanks to various groups of Columbia undergraduate students who in successive years have shown an interest in the ancient history of Egypt and have forced me to clarify my thoughts on the subject. Their presence in my lectures has strengthened my belief that the study of ancient Egyptian civilization, one of the greatest in world history, is still a worthwhile enterprise today.

I hope this book will inspire others to explore it too.

Damme
August 2020



1

Introductory Concerns

Rather make my country's high pyramides my gibbet and hang me up in chains.
(Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra* Act 5, scene 2)

The tourist to Egypt who sails up the Nile from Cairo to Aswan gazes upon an abundance of grandiose monuments, often remarkably well preserved despite their enormous antiquity. Many of them are icons of ancient Egypt and have been so for centuries. Shakespeare's audience recognized the image Cleopatra conjured up when she called the pyramids her gallows. Modern guided tours always include these same pyramids, as well as the great Amun temple at Luxor with the royal tombs across the river, and the much smaller temple of Isis at Philae between the Low and the High Aswan dams. These monuments, spread over hundreds of miles, are all different from what surrounds the traveler at home, alien in their function, their form, and their use of images and writing. They share so many characteristics that it is easy to forget that their builders lived countless years apart. More time passed between the construction of the pyramids at Giza and the building of the Philae temple we now see, than between the latter temple's inauguration and us.

1.1 What is Ancient Egypt?

Chronological boundaries

It may seem easy to look at something – a monument, coffin, statue, or inscription – and call it ancient Egyptian, but it is not so simple to draw the boundaries of ancient Egypt both in time and space. In the late 4th century AD, the Roman emperor Theodosius issued an edict closing all Egyptian temples and dispersing the priesthood. His act ended the knowledge of Egyptian hieroglyphs, which could no longer

be taught. Can we take the withdrawal of official support for ancient Egyptian cults and writing systems as the end of ancient Egypt? Theodosius's edict only affected a small minority of people that had long been under threat. Ancient Egyptian cultural characteristics had been immersed in a world inspired by Hellenistic, Roman, and Christian ideas for centuries. Certainly in political terms Egypt had lost its separate identity hundreds of years earlier. From the Persian conquest in 525 BC onward, but for brief spells of independence, the land had been subjected to outside control. In native traditions the Persian rulers were still considered part of the long line of Egyptian pharaohs, but their successors were different. Modern historians do not call the Greek and Roman rulers of Egypt pharaohs, although their Egyptian subjects continued to represent them with full pharaonic regalia. Is "Egypt after the pharaohs" no longer part of ancient Egyptian history then? Individual scholars and institutions use different approaches. Some histories of ancient Egypt end with Alexander of Macedon's conquest in 332 BC, others at the death of Cleopatra in 30 BC, yet others run into the Roman Period up to 395 AD and Theodosius's reign.

It is always difficult to draw a line after an era in history, as all aspects of life rarely changed simultaneously. More often the change in the sources that modern scholars use determines where they end historical periods. In Egypt's case the gradual replacement of the traditional Egyptian language and writing systems by the Greek language and script necessitates a different type of scholarship. Most specialists of Egyptian hieroglyphic writing do not easily read Greek sources and vice versa. Although the ancient Egyptian scripts survived after the Greek conquest of the country, there was a constant increase in the use of Greek writing, which turns the modern study of Egypt into a different discipline. Yet, Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt in many respects preserved ancient Egyptian traditions and customs, so I will include a discussion of that period in this survey.

If the disappearance of ancient Egyptian writing in the late 4th century AD heralds the end of the civilization, does its invention around 3000 BC indicate the beginning? No single event announced a new era, but from around 3400 to 3000 BC radical changes that were clearly interrelated took place in Egypt and forged a new society. Those innovations included the invention of writing, a process that lasted many centuries from the earliest experiments around 3250 to the first entire sentence written out around 2750. In the last centuries of the 4th millennium BC the unified Egyptian state arose, and that period can serve as the beginning of Egyptian history despite its vague boundaries. Naturally, what preceded unification – Egyptian prehistory – was not unimportant and contained the germs of many elements of the country's historical culture. Hence, I will sketch some of the prehistoric developments in this chapter to make the influences clear, but the creation of the state with the coincident invention of writing and other aspects of culture will indicate the start of Egypt's history here.

Geographical boundaries

Where are the borders of ancient Egypt? Arabic speakers today use the same name for the modern country of Egypt as did the people of the Near East in the millennia BC, *Misr*. Other people employ a form of the Greek term *Aegyptos*, which may derive from *Hikuptah*, the name of a temple and neighborhood in the city Memphis.

It is easy to equate the ancient and modern countries, but today's remarkably straight borders, which imperial powers drew in modern times, do not mark the limits of ancient Egypt. We can better envision those by using as a starting point what is and always was the lifeline of the country, the Nile. Running through a narrow valley south of modern Cairo and fanning out into a wide alluvial plain north of the city, the river enables people to farm, live in villages and cities, and build and create the monuments and other remains we use to reconstruct the country's history. From the 1st cataract at Aswan to the Mediterranean Sea it forms the core of Egypt, today as in the past. The people who lived in this core reached beyond it into the western and eastern deserts and upriver south of the 1st cataract. At times their reach was extensive, affecting distant places in the west, areas along the Mediterranean coast in the east and north, and parts of the Nile Valley deep into modern Sudan.

It is not always obvious how far ancient Egypt extended, and our ability to determine that often depends on research priorities and modern events. As tourists still do today, the earliest explorers of ancient Egypt focused their attention almost exclusively on the Nile Valley, where monuments and ancient sites are visible and in easy reach. It requires a different effort to venture into the deserts beyond the valley, very inhospitable and so vast that ancient remains are not always easy to find. Yet the ancient Egyptians traveled through this hinterland and settled in oases. In recent years, archaeologists have spent much more time investigating these zones than they did before, a deliberate shift of research strategies. Sometimes the move is less voluntary. When the modern Egyptian state decided to construct the Aswan High Dam in the 1960s, it was clear that the artificial lake behind it would submerge a vast zone with ancient Egyptian remains. Thus archaeologists rushed to the region, producing in a short time span many more data than had been collected in a hundred years of earlier research.

Despite the greater attention that archaeologists now devote to the areas of Egypt outside the Nile Valley, they still spend most of their time in the core area, and conditions in the valley dictate to a great extent how we view the ancient country. It is easy to think that Egypt was a place of tombs and temples only, as those so dominate the remains visible today. Built of stone or carved in the rocks, they are well preserved, a preservation aided by the fact that they are often located at the desert's edge, out of the reach of Nile floods and of farmers who need land for fields. Compared to tombs and temples, the remnants of ancient cities and villages, built in mud brick in a valley that was annually flooded before the construction of the Aswan dams, are paltry. Mostly buried underneath thick layers of later deposit, only small areas of them have been excavated, and we rely often on a number of settlements connected to funerary complexes in the desert to reconstruct urban and village life. Ancient Egypt was an urban society, albeit with smaller cities than elsewhere in the Near East, yet information about the conditions of the people when alive often is obscured by the mass of evidence we have on the dead.

What is ancient Egyptian history?

The question "what is history" is much too wide-ranging and thorny to address here, but before embarking on reading a book-long history of ancient Egypt it may be useful to see how it applies to that ancient culture. Less than 200 years ago many

would have said that ancient Egypt does not have history. In the early 19th century, the influential philosopher of history Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) proclaimed that cultures without accounts of the past resembling historical writings in the western tradition had no history. But the discipline has moved on enormously, and most historians today consider all literate cultures – including ancient Egypt – worthy of study. The field of “world history” goes further and includes the world’s non-literate societies in its purview. This attitude erases the distinction between history and prehistory, a step whose consequences are not yet fully appreciated. It has the benefit for students of ancient Egypt that it removes the awkward problem of what sources they use in their research. Historians mostly consider textual sources to be the basis of their work, but in the case of Egypt we have to wait until the 2nd millennium BC for a written record that is rich and informative about multiple aspects of life. Archaeological and visual remains are often the sole sources for earlier periods, and they stay very important throughout the study of ancient Egyptian history. Writing Egypt’s history thus requires a somewhat different approach than for other periods and places where narrative and documentary sources provide a firm outline.

This book is called “A History of Ancient Egypt,” because it is clear that many other “histories” can be written, each with their own emphasis and intent. Historians can concentrate on political, social, economic, or cultural issues, each of which will provide a different picture of the society they discuss. Most basic surveys build their structure around political history and focus on the deeds of kings and their entou-
rages. This will also be the case here, although it does not monopolize the account, and I will also address other concerns. The choices I made are personal but inspired by other treatments of the subject. Ideally, more attention would have been given to the ancient Egyptians who were not part of the elites, but this book is intended as an introduction only and hopes to inspire further reading and study.

Who are the ancient Egyptians?

When we think about peoples of the past, we intuitively try to imagine what they would have looked like in real life, to visualize their physical features, dress, and general appearance. Preconceptions very much inspire the resulting image, as is best demonstrated by how popular culture portrays ancient Egyptians and how this has changed over time. Take Queen Cleopatra, for example, the last ruler of the country at least partly of Egyptian descent. The numerous performances of Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, on stage or as a movie illustrate how the picture of this woman has evolved. The 1963 Hollywood blockbuster featured the British-born Caucasian Elizabeth Taylor as the queen; in 2017, the Royal Shakespeare Company cast the English actress Josette Simon, of Antiguan descent, to play the part. The calendar an American beverage company issued in the late 20th century and entitled “Great Kings and Queens of Africa,” included a depiction of Cleopatra as a black African woman. These changes in the queen’s representation did not result from scholarly reconsiderations of ancient data, but from shifting perceptions in the popular mind about the context of ancient Egypt.

It was only recently that traditional scholarship started to acknowledge the African background of Egyptian culture, partly in response to world history's aim to replace dominant western-centered narratives with others that focused more on the contributions of other regions, including Africa. At the same time, primarily African diaspora communities wanted the continent's ancient history to be approached outside a Eurocentric context, and insisted, for example, on the use of the ancient Egyptian term *kemet* instead of the European one, Egypt. Initially, most Egyptologists bluntly dismissed these proposals, but in recent years a greater willingness to engage with them has developed. Museums now regularly present their Egyptian collections within an African setting, and the study on the interconnections between Egypt and the rest of Africa has intensified. This new attitude has not made it easier to visualize the ancient Egyptians, however, as their relationship with other African peoples is not obvious. While ancient Egypt was clearly "in Africa," it was not so clearly "of Africa." Archaeological and textual evidence for Egyptian contacts in the continent beyond its immediate neighbors is so far minimal and limited to the import of luxury items. The contributions of Egypt to other African cultures were at best ambiguous, and in general Egypt's interactions with Asiatic regions were closer and more evident. Was the same true for the population of the country, and did the ancient Egyptians leave any reliable data that could guide our imagination?

There exist countless pictures of humans from ancient Egypt, but it is clear that these were not intended as accurate portraits, except for some late examples from Ptolemaic and Roman times. Men and women appear in standardized depictions where physical features, hairdos, clothing, and even posture characterize them as Egyptians (Figure 1.1). The representations of foreigners are equally uniform: Nubians have dark skins and braided hair and wear earrings (Figure 1.2), while Syrians have lighter skins and pointed beards (Figure 1.3). The artists were intent upon showing the opposition between Egyptians and foreigners, not on making clear their individual appearances. The perception of who was Egyptian could change according to the intended audience. For example, a prince from Upper Nubia in the 14th century, Hekanefer, appears in two different guises. In the tomb of the Egyptian viceroy at Thebes, Hekanefer has typical Nubian features and dress, while in his own burial in Nubia he looks fully Egyptian (Figure 1.4). He wanted his own people to see him as a member of the Egyptian ruling class, whereas to the Egyptian viceroy of his country he was a Nubian subject, clearly distinct from Egyptians.

The homogeneity of Egyptians in ancient depictions is deceptive. Over the millennia, Egyptian society constantly integrated newcomers with various origins, physical features, and customs. But unless there was a reason to make the difference explicit, they all appeared alike in stereotypical depictions. They were all Egyptians, not people with Nubian, Libyan, Syrian, Greek, or other backgrounds. Some scholars have tried to determine what Egyptians could have looked like by comparing their skeletal remains with those of recent populations, but the samples are so limited and the interpretations so fraught with uncertainties that this is an unreliable approach.

Can we articulate any idea of what type of people we would encounter were we able to visit ancient Egypt? I think we should stress the diversity of the people. The country's location at the edge of northeast Africa and its geography as a corridor between that continent and Asia opened it up to influences from all directions, in terms both of culture and of demography. The processes of acculturation, intermarriage, and so



Figure 1.1 Egyptian archetypes. This pair of painted limestone statues, 120 cm high, shows a husband and wife in typical Egyptian fashion. His skin is darker than hers because he works outside, while she, as an upper-class lady, can stay indoors. She wears a tight-fitting long dress, while he has only a short skirt. Both of them are represented without wrinkles or other signs of aging and hold their hands in traditional postures. While they are clearly identified by name in the hieroglyphic inscriptions, the images are not to be understood as naturalistic portraits. Source: Scala/Art Resource

on probably differed according to community and over time. People must have preserved some of their ancestors' physique and lifestyles, and the degree to which they merged with neighbors with different backgrounds must have been variable. We cannot imagine an Egyptian population that was of uniform appearance, and the inhabitants of the north probably looked different from those of the south of the country. But somehow all these people at times saw themselves as Egyptians, distinct from people from the neighboring countries, and it is their common history we will explore.

1.2 Egypt's Geography

There is no substitute to visiting the country of Egypt to get a sense of the natural environment in ancient times, but it is important to keep in mind that what we see today is a much manipulated landscape altered over many centuries. In recent times, the building of the Aswan dams has turned the Nile into a human-controlled river,



Figure 1.2 Nubian archetype. On this 10-cm-high limestone trial piece for a relief sculpture the 14th-century artist represented a Nubian with the characteristics that were always used for a man from that region. He has specific physical features, braided hair, and an earring. Such images were produced throughout the ancient history of Egypt, although they started to show a greater variety of types when Egypt became an empire in the mid-2nd millennium. Metropolitan Museum of Art 22.2.10. Source: Rogers Fund, 1922



Figure 1.3 Syrian archetype. This 13-cm-high glazed tile, originally used as wall decoration for the palace of Rameses III at Tell el-Yahudiyya, shows a captive from Syria with the typical characteristics always used for the representation of such a foreigner. His facial features, beard, and headdress make him immediately recognizable as someone from that area to an Egyptian viewer. The detail of his clothing shows two gazelles facing a tree, a common Near Eastern artistic motif. Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Ägyptisch-Orientalische Sammlung. Source: Art Resource

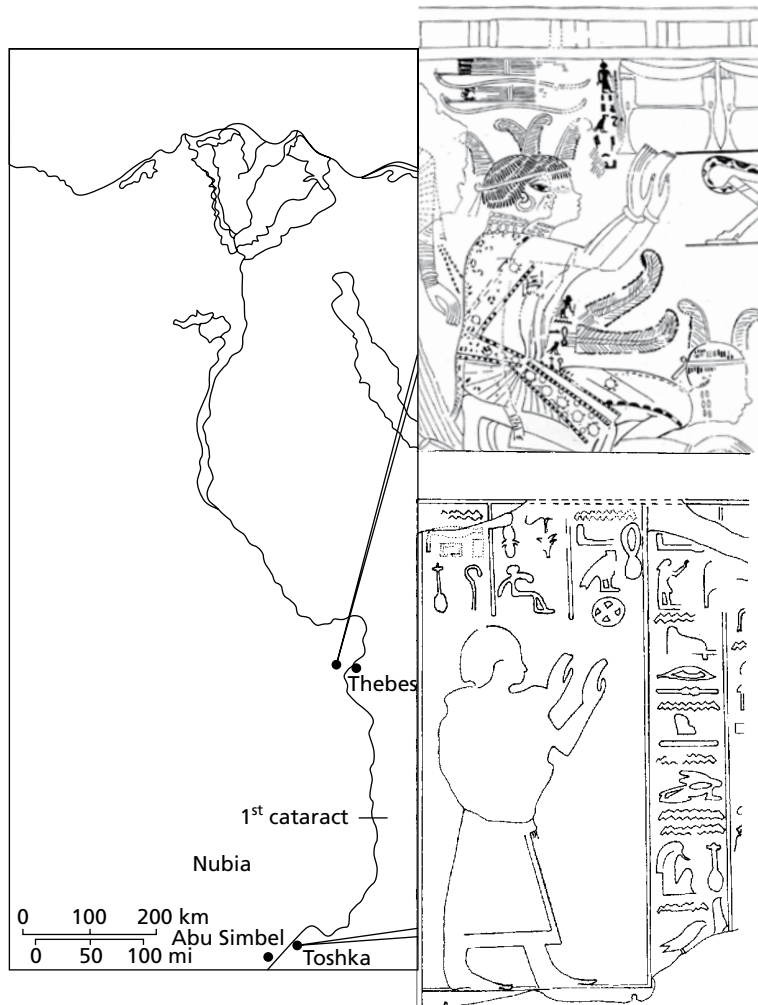


Figure 1.4 A matter of presentation. In the 14th century, images of the Nubian prince Hekanefer appear in two tombs depicting him very differently. In his own tomb in Lower Nubia at Toshka he is represented fully as an Egyptian and the hieroglyphic text states that he gives praise to the god Osiris. In contrast, in the Theban tomb of an official of Tutankhamun he is depicted as an archetypal Nubian in a prostrate posture of submission and identified as “Hekanefer, the Prince of Miam” in the accompanying text. Source: Marc Van De Mieroop

and also many other features seen today are artificial. Still, the basic features of the environment – the contrast between the fertile areas, where the vast majority of the population lives, and the deserts, which restrict access to Egypt – remain the same.

The Nile River

The Nile dictates how we can study the ancient Egyptians, and in many other respects the river shapes Egypt. Running through the eastern end of the Sahara desert, it essentially forms a long oasis. Wherever its water reaches the soil can be