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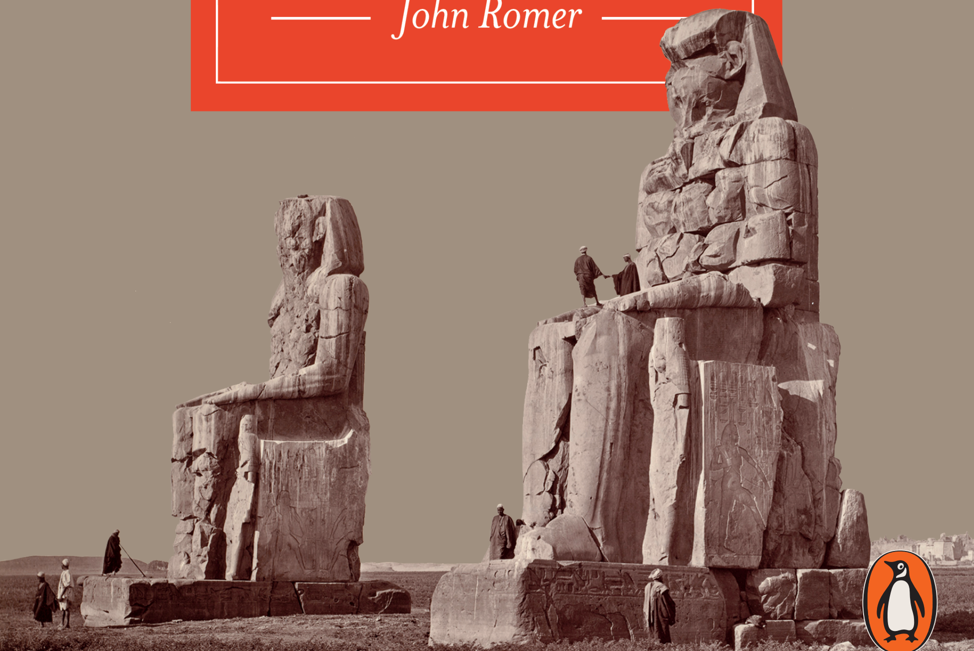
A HISTORY OF ANCIENT EGYPT

VOLUME 3

FROM THE SHEPHERD KINGS TO THE END OF THE THEBAN MONARCHY

John Romer



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A HISTORY OF ANCIENT EGYPT, VOLUME 3

John Romer has been working in Egypt since 1966 in key archaeological sites, including Karnak and Medinet Habu. He initiated conservation studies in the Valley of the Kings and led the Brooklyn Museum expedition to excavate the tomb of Ramesses XI. He has written and presented a number of television series, including *Romer's Egypt*, *Ancient Lives*, *Testament* and *Byzantium*. His major books include *The Great Pyramid: Ancient Egypt Revisited* and *Valley of the Kings*. He lives in Italy.

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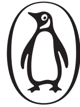

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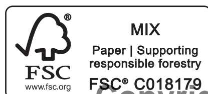

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To Beth, with love

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Preface

This is the third volume of my *History of Ancient Egypt*.

Volume One tells how in the course of two millennia the first communities of farmers on the lower Nile had amalgamated and built four colossal pyramids and the pharaonic state. Volume Two describes the operations of the courts of the Old and Middle Kingdoms – both of which have been cast in bright new lights following several recent discoveries. Volume Three deals, primarily, with the age of the New Kingdom, the age of Hatshepsut and Tutankhamun, of Ramesses the Great and Nefertiti, whose relics have come to shape the best part of ancient Egypt's popular identity. This is, as well, the most fantasized period in all of ancient history.

Epitomized in the late-Romantic histories of Gaston Maspero (1846–1916) and given scholarly rigour by Adolf Erman and James Henry Breasted in the decades before the First World War, the traditional narratives of pharaonic history had been cemented after the British invasion of the semi-independent Ottoman Province of Egypt in 1882 whilst it was under the governance of Evelyn Baring, later Lord Cromer, when unprecedented numbers of Western egyptologists were given the run of its antiquities.

As the sixth son of the second marriage of the head of an international bank, Evelyn Baring spent his adult life in the manner of those times, in colonial administration. His mission in Egypt, a land of peasant farmers, huge estates and an international income from the sale of cotton, was to protect the British-owned Suez Canal – the highway to British India – to 'save society', and enable repayment of the national debt to its European creditors. Cromer's obituary in the *Times* of London describes him as 'a great ruler, and the maker of modern Egypt', a

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thankless two decade-long task as he describes it, which had entailed the reformation of Egypt's government, railways and irrigation systems whilst simultaneously lowering the national literacy rate, endorsing unjust executions, sanctioning the use of harmful physical labour and grossly offending the religious and nationalist sensibilities of virtually all Egyptians.

Neither Cromer nor Gaston Maspero, the Parisian professor whom Cromer's administration placed in control of Egypt's antiquities, were intellectuals with grand theories of history or humanity. And though Maspero was kindlier in his writings than Cromer, both of them were products of a class unthinkingly secure in its place in European society and the 'great sweep of history', which, they assumed, had set Western culture at the top of the evolutionary tree. So the writings of both hold parables on the virtues of firm governance, on the glories of imperialism and war and on the inevitable corruption – the 'indolence and inertia' – of so-called 'rotten' states.

Filled with dreams and nightmares that any contemporary Westerner could recognize, such works had provided the Europe of the day with false illusions of familiarity with alien and faraway lands.

The essential difference between the European colonization of modern and ancient Egypt is that the administration which Cromer had worked to establish was overturned in the revolution of 1952 whereas the sweeping late Victorian narratives of 'ancient Egyptian history' have not changed at all. And certainly, the underlying attitudes that they embody were widely present amongst foreign egyptologists in the decades that I spent in Egypt.

A core group of modern egyptologists, however, have a different view of pharaonic history, and certainly, any public expression of the assumptions or underlying opinions of their august predecessors would see them thrown off a modern campus. Nonetheless, the overarching narratives of the present academic industry, the quasi-academic consensus that deciphers and explains the relics of pharaonic culture for students and the general public alike, is still firmly stuck inside the 'ancient Egypt' of the nineteenth-century West.

So it is not uncommon to read profiles of 'ancient Egyptian personalities' along with speculations on their sexuality and endocrine levels or to see a pharaoh's battle order laid out in the manner of a Prussian

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military academy, whilst individual kings are graded on the quality of their government in the manner of Lord Cromer reporting on the character of Egypt's 'Oriental' ministers of state.

Now, I am not suggesting that the egyptologists who have bequeathed that vision of 'ancient Egypt' were malevolent and that their works be shunned. The histories, for example, of Erman and Breasted, and the archaeology of Petrie, Borchardt and the like, established the framework and the language of modern egyptology whilst their decisions on what relics to study, keep and conserve and what to ignore or destroy have bequeathed most of the 'ancient Egypt' of today. So, as Edward Said has commented in a similar context, to ignore their work would be 'stupid . . . because some of their ideas seem politically incorrect by the standards of our time'.

Our huge advantage over those old historians, however, is that we have realized that they had inhabited a specific system of belief rather than the realm of universal truth and that to continue fine tuning their narratives of history would amount to little more than extending a disastrous nineteenth-century dialogue. At this point, then, to paraphrase Remy de Goncourt, it would not be the knight who is foolish, but Sancho Panza.

So, the present industry of 'ancient Egypt' might well ask: what's left if the traditional narratives of 'ancient Egypt' are abandoned? How can new histories be made?

First, perhaps, by acknowledging that once the certainties of colonialism are removed – for who now would knowingly assume the authority to describe the thoughts and images once held in the fragments of a mummy's brain? – any new histories of this most distant culture should be tentative and inconclusive. Chance, too, has decided much of what presently remains of the reality of pharaonic culture, what has survived the moth, the mouse and the flame, the changes in the Nile's floodplain, the centuries of looting and archaeology and what is still undiscovered. So there can never be a final word.

Some things, though, seem certain. Unlike the modern world, pharaonic culture was not centred on the written word. As the vast mass of its surviving relics insist, the energy of high pharaonic culture was mostly spent in acts of offering and festivals, in expeditions and in building, manufacture, draughting and design. And the best part of what survives

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of all of that was made in the workshops, the studios and the mason's yards of the pharaonic state.

An essential component of that millennial courtly industry, the font of its forms and textures, its space, its line, its rhythms, its compositions and materials, were held in the great river and the landscapes through which it flowed. And that same fast-flowing stream and its accompanying winds had given pharaoh's fleets prompt access to quantities of materials and manpower such as the world had never seen.

Cruising down the modern Nile holds nothing of the majesty of its ancient torrent and its burgeoning annual flood. Late in the 1960s, as the last inundation was receding, leaving tiny pools of water like mirrors in the mud, I saw three farmers dragging a heavy plank, one at either end and one tugging on a rope tied to its middle, pushing a little of the river's syrupy silt onto the dry sand of the desert's edge so as to enlarge their hand-worked fields by a foot or so. With the completion of the High Dam at Aswan, that unique environment, its tiny scale, its certain pace, its stark distinction between field and desert that had provided the populations of the lower Nile with sensibilities and a way of life, had been lost for ever.

The bulk of the pharaonic population seems to have spent much of their lives upon the river's floodplain, for, outside some of the royal settlements and those of a few provincial governors, the millions who had farmed the region of the lower Nile, who fed the courts of pharaoh and built enormous monuments, seem to have disappeared beneath the silt. Only the little deserts which lie beyond the fields preserve something of the air of the ancient environment along with the physical remains of a few of its inhabitants. And the stressed bones that are occasionally found in the smaller desert burials show that outside the orbit of the court, hard, hard work had been the normal run of things.

Here, then, are the outlines of a wider vision of the ancient courtly past than that viewed through a nineteenth-century gauze. A history shorn of traditional Western narratives and one in which the ancient environment and modern archaeology play an equal role alongside the texts and the surviving relics.

My history of the New Kingdom is divided into eleven parts, and

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like my earlier volumes it is ordered in the manner of most histories, in passing time. But where those previous volumes mostly dealt in longer periods of time than the people of those days would have been aware of, the relics and writings of the New Kingdom are sufficiently numerous to permit the description of individual decades and even some individual events in numbered years BC.

Part One describes the re-unification of the ancient state at the beginning of the New Kingdom, a period whose history is traditionally related in terms of a potent Hellenistic tale of invasion and liberation and, finally, an exodus from Egypt by the alien court of the so-called Hyksos kings.

Cutting through strata after strata of belief, the opening chapters describe how earlier generations of historians had tailored their understanding of pharaonic texts and the discoveries of early archaeologists to fit that Hellenistic history.

Part Two describes how the researches of a single egyptologist in the 1950s and the subsequent excavation of an enormous Levantine settlement at a site named Tell el-Dab'a have disproved all the earlier histories of those times.

Part Three, however, shows how the same old tropes continue to haunt the excavation of Tell el-Dab'a. At this point, the relevant Hellenistic texts are themselves shown to be fragmented and ambiguous, and the few pharaonic texts that had long since been employed to give them an authentic voice and added detail are found to have been misused.

Part Four, 'Back on the Ground', relates what is genuinely known of the events surrounding the New Kingdom's beginnings. It begins with an account of life in ancient Tell el-Dab'a, a Bronze Age site of unrivalled size and cultural complexity which is compared to the surviving written record and spare relics of the kings of Thebes who had re-united the pharaonic kingdom over a span of several decades.

Part Five shows how the Thebans' sudden increased access to the cultures of the Eastern Mediterranean through the seaports at Tell el-Dab'a had a huge effect upon pharaonic courtly culture. Abandoning the traditional racial stereotyping of the images of the three so-called 'foreigners' that has long dominated pharaonic descriptions of

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non-pharaonic peoples, we recover something of contemporary attitudes to people of other cultures.

Part Six describes the generational labours involved in the re-establishment of the full pharaonic state. Though its governmental structures are still little understood, contemporary inscriptions tell that the court's primary occupation in those times was to revive the principal activities of the two earlier kingdoms: that is, to revive the living ritual of the pharaonic court, to make tombs for the noble dead and stone houses – i.e. 'temples' – for the gods. The first major constructions of the New Kingdom court were built at Abydos and Thebes; the definitive monument of this new-made age, the graceful Theban temple of King Hatshepsut.

Part Seven concerns the reigns of Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III and notions of masculine and feminine in a period whose history has long been trapped in the emotions and ambitions of far later ages.

Fresh explanations are proposed for the depiction of Queen Hatshepsut in her later role as king and the subsequent destruction of those images. And we look again at her co-regent and successor, the man the Victorians called 'the Napoleon of ancient Egypt', and question the common assumptions of pharaonic courtly histories that are based on militarism, imperialism and the personalities of individuals.

Part Eight, 'Jour and Contre-jour', documents the violent shifts in courtly culture that took place during the reigns of Amenhotep III and Akhenaten. This is the pivotal period of New Kingdom history, the moment when the court's traditional place in the pharaonic universe was changed for ever.

Extensive archaeological investigations coupled with the many fine relics of this era allow a close view of those two courts and of the frenetic labours of their builders and craftsmen, whose products present a fundamental transformation of the pharaonic identity.

Part Nine, 'The State Reprised', describes the anxious age which followed that remarkable explosion. It begins with the self-conscious rebuilding of the traditional pharaonic order and the construction of many of ancient Egypt's famous monuments; it ends with the dissolution of that state after the establishment of another enormous settlement close to Tell el-Dab'a and the open sea.

Maspero and his successors employ the so-called 'Sea People' in

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their histories of this disturbed age in order to explain and illustrate the disintegration and disappearance of all the Bronze Age cultures of the Eastern Mediterranean. Back on the ground, however, the archaeological evidence points to alternatives to that now-standard tale and looks to more modern notions of ethnicity and nationhood to recover something of the reality of pharaonic culture in those times.

A recent and very rare discovery has served to elucidate the typically ambiguous contemporary accounts of a single historical event; namely, the assassination of Ramesses III. And that, in turn, introduces the splendid royal settlement which was built beside the same king's mortuary temple in western Thebes. Texts on stone and papyrus composed during that period provide a unique overview of the farmlands along part of the lower Nile and the activities of the court that those farmers had supported.

A half century later, that well-ordered state-wide system of supply had been amicably dissolved. A description of a Theban expedition to the Levant provides something of the changed circumstances of the age that followed. The richly caparisoned tombs of a dozen pharaohs of those times were discovered in the 1940s, but most of those kings are nothing more today than names in genealogies. In similar fashion, the best part of the histories of the later smaller courts remains unknown and most of them have left but modest traces; a few of their rulers are occasionally glimpsed in the literature of foreign invaders.

An epilogue outlines the history of a single village throughout the full five centuries of New Kingdom history. A mass of documents from a single settlement – that of the royal tomb-makers at Deir el-Medina – describes daily life at Thebes in greater detail than that of any earlier era of pharaonic history. The archaeology of that village, moreover, allows entry into the physical realities of those people's lives. And, in an uncanny climax, the slow ending of the mature pharaonic state is documented at a personal level in the writings and activities of a single village family.

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NOTES ON TRANSLATION AND THE TEXT

Though pharaonic texts have been translated with remarkable consistency for well over a century and the grammar of the ancient language in all its phases is well understood, the contemporary tone and purposes of formal inscriptions remains elusive, as does the contemporary meaning and significance of many common words and phrases. (For an outstanding example of this ambiguity, see p. 300.)

This lack of definition has greatly aided the continuing use of the theatre in which the traditional narratives of pharaonic culture are acted out. For, though many words and phrases that are commonly used in translations are recognized by specialists as jargon and approximations, for general readers, terms such as 'butler', 'architect' and 'durbar' may quickly conjure up an 'ancient Egypt' like that of British India.

Even such simple terms as 'wife' or 'husband' can mislead, for marriage was unknown in pharaonic culture (see further p. 511). Titles, too, like those that are commonly translated as 'general', 'major' and the like, serve to send 'regiments' of 'ancient Egyptian' soldiers off to fight in modern wars; similarly, the use of 'minister' to describe a person close to the king anticipates the existence of 'ministries of state' for which there is no evidence.

Further extending such Westernizations into that distant past, terms such as 'slavery' inadvertently introduce the alien concept of a monetized economy into pharaonic culture and fortify the use of other inappropriate terms, such as those that describe a large gathering of ancient dwellings as a 'city', a 'metropolis' or as an example of 'urbanization', all of which depend on the presence of a market economy (see further pp. 208–9). In similar fashion, a text that records an ancient villager swapping carrots for a coffin is given a political twist when it is portrayed as a nascent example of modern capitalism (see further pp. 512 and 525). As valuable as the works of paleo-economists and anthropologists and similar disciplines can be in describing ways of being different from those of the modern world, attempting to explain aspects of pharaonic culture by pushing its relics through the sieves of modern theory is but another way of colonizing an ancient and now largely lost reality.

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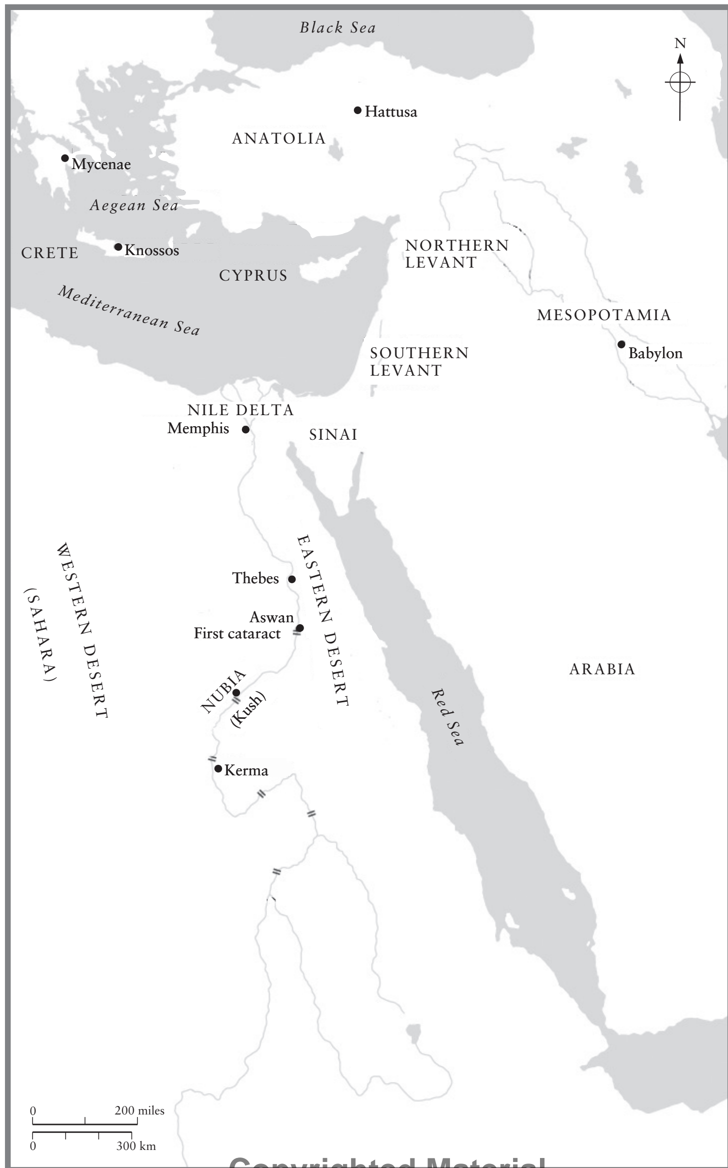

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The regions and cultural centres of the Eastern Mediterranean Bronze Age.

Here, then, as in the previous two volumes, I employ as few descriptive terms as is practical and use them with specific meaning. 'Ancient Egypt', for example, refers to the modern construct rather than ancient reality, for which I use 'pharaonic culture' – 'culture', here, referring to a group of objects with a shared set of characteristics that is usually assumed to have embodied the identity of a group of people.

The few titles that I employ – 'queen', 'prince' and the like – are but loose descriptions of senior members of the extended family of the royal household and do not identify the 'wives' or 'children' of the king; nor, certainly, do they imply an order of succession to the throne. The term 'courtier' has been awarded to people with substantial monuments of stone who appear to have been close to the throne and had access to state resources but were not a part of the royal household. 'Governors', alternatively, describes the senior members of large households who may have passed their youth within the royal household but who maintained large households at a distance from the royal residence and undertook various 'provincial' duties on behalf of the pharaonic state.

The term 'palace' does not describe a royal residence in the manner of Versailles or Buckingham, but a group of relatively modest mudbrick buildings that housed unusually large numbers of domestic quarters, shrines or temples, storerooms, kitchens, wells, workshops and archives. 'Mansions' and 'villas' denote the somewhat smaller versions of palaces that have been excavated which appear to have been the residences of the households of governors, courtiers and the senior so-called 'priests' of major temples.

I assume that the large settlements that held clusters of such buildings along with many smaller dwellings were centres of the pharaonic 'state' – a state, however, that was not a modern nation state (see further pp. 109 *ff*. and 131).

Two centuries of egyptology have provided pharaonic sites and people with more names than the characters in a Russian novel. As in the previous volumes of this history I have used versions of pharaonic names that are in common English usage: not Ramsis for Ramesses, nor Sethos for Seti, or Hashepsowe for Hatshepsut, or Akhanyati for Akhenaten. In similar fashion, I have used the common though semantically challenged terms 'mortuary temple', 'alabaster' and 'pharaoh' – the last in that list being indiscriminately employed

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in tandem with the word 'king'. And both of those words simply describe the *titular* leader of the pharaonic state.

Concerning my use of ancient texts. I have usually quoted outdated translations to accompany my descriptions of old excavations and traditional interpretations of ancient history. But, to avoid confusion, the names of people and places that appear in those old translations have been changed to match those used in the body of my text.

To keep something of the pace and texture of pharaonic writing, I have often used longer extracts of translation than is usual. The reader should be aware, however, that most of the texts that are quoted are untypical, most pharaonic inscriptions being little more than repetitious phrases.

As for geographic terminology, to avoid confusion between the name of a royal settlement in the Nile's delta with the pharaohs who are presently described as Ramesses I to Ramesses XI, I have named that site 'Pi-Ramesses'; this, apparently, being the same location that the King James Bible names as 'Rameses' (see further p. 6 *ff.*).

As is common practice, I have also named the enormous Levantine settlement whose remains presently underlie several modern villages by the name of one of those villages, Tell el-Dab'a, and I have used an English plural for the Arabic term 'gezira' – i.e. 'geziras' – rather than the Arabic plural.

My 'Libya' refers to the coastline of the eponymous modern state rather than the 'Libya' of current egyptology, which would appear to describe the lands of all the ancient inhabitants who lived to the west of Egypt. I have also abandoned the common egyptological description of the ancient people living to the east of Egypt as 'Asiatics' – a vague term that originated in nineteenth-century scholarship when its populations were described as immigrants (see further pp. 17–18). Here, then, I employ the term 'Levantine' to denote the peoples of the regions currently occupied by Syria and Palestine, Israel and Jordan; all the other names used to describe ancient regions and cultures outside the valley of the lower Nile are given on the map on p. xxi.

Finally, the term 'Hellenistic' has not been used in a derogatory sense but as a descriptive term that identifies the sumptuous classical cultures of the ancient East following the conquests of Alexander the Great.

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PART ONE

Facts and Fictions

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In the Beginning

In the beginning the kings came from the south. Travelling north along the valley of the Nile they had settled at its ending where the river had begun to split into several channels and spread out across its delta. There it was some 4,500 years ago that the pharaonic court created the pyramid-building state which is known today as ancient Egypt's Old Kingdom. And once again, two centuries after that court had disintegrated, another court had travelled northwards up that narrow valley, settled in the same region and overseen the creation of the culture which is known today as ancient Egypt's Middle Kingdom. And yet again, two centuries after that most elegant of courts had similarly dissolved, another band of southern kings and courtiers had travelled northwards up the same slim valley with the same objectives. This time, however, it was different. For the majority of those later kings chose not to settle at the ending of the river's valley but further north, within its delta.

Now, the core of pharaonic culture – its acts of offering to the dead and to the gods and to the king – had been measured and sustained by the annual rising of the river's flood and the passage of the sun, moon and stars across the slender slot of soil which is held between the cliffs that stand on either side of the Nile's valley. And all the architecture that had held those acts of offering – ancient Egypt's palaces, tomb chapels and temples – had been a synthesis of the materials, forms and orientations of that unique environment.

The delta's plain, alternatively, a wide and silty fan of streams and water meadows, held nothing of the valley's symmetries and orientations and nothing of the raw materials which were essential for the construction of high pharaonic culture. So though those later courts shipped vast quantities of building stone downstream and set great

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temples upon the delta's plain, the core of that most ancient state, its raw materials, its organizing principles, its very gods, lay in the narrow valley to the south.

The relocation created a profound disjunction in pharaonic culture – a gap between the everyday and court convention. From that time onwards, from the beginning of the age which is now known as the New Kingdom, the ancient heartlands were embellished from a distance. And the so-called 'Southern Settlement' of Thebes in Upper Egypt which had long been a centre of pharaonic courtly culture was transformed, its cemeteries and temples elaborated and enlarged so that, today, they are one of the great sacred spaces of the world.

The move away from the relative isolation of the narrow valley had also resulted in ever-increasing contact with other cultures of the wider region and would transform the temper of the pharaonic court. A broader understanding of time and space developed so that the images and texts created in the royal workshops of the time of Hatshepsut, of the Amenhoteps, of Akhenaten, Tutankhamun, and the Ramessides show enormous shifts in style and sensibility from anything that their craftsmen had previously made. Now individual events, battles, voyages, invasions even, were pictured and recorded on state monuments, and pharaoh was not only represented as a timeless courtly figure in the ancient manner but as a champion on earth to be celebrated in verse and in poses akin to those that the later classical world would identify as heroic.

At first glance, that new-found dynamism would appear to hold the ingredients from which a modern history of those times could be composed, especially as the sheer quantity of texts and monuments which have survived from the age of the New Kingdom surpasses all those from previous eras of pharaonic history. But that is an illusion. With the exception of a few relatively well-documented periods that barely extend beyond a single century, not nearly enough data has survived from any era of pharaonic history to construct a full version of its history. Pharaonic scribes, moreover, were little interested in recording history in the modern manner, as a series of successive events with narratives of cause and effect, of success or failure, decline and fall. Before all else, so they record, the generations of the gods had created the substance of the universe out of formless chaos and had ordered the

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agricultural year within their narrow valley in harmony with all forms of life. Any particular event, any threat of interruption to that endless cycle, was but a temporary pause of little consequence that would inevitably be resolved by the return to good pharaonic order.

Hence the seemingly numberless descriptions and depictions of the ceremonials that harmonized pharaonic courtly life with the agricultural year, with the annual rising of the river, and with the movements of the sun and stars. Those continuities, those ageless rhythms, were the touchstones of pharaonic culture, its identity and sustenance. They ordered the design and construction of the temples that were the houses of its gods, whilst the ancient line of pyramids built at the ending of the river's valley had contained the disruption of the death of individual kings within the cyclical precisions of pharaonic ritual. To step outside such a dominating matrix would have been to step outside that narrow universe into the formless chaos lying outside the valley of the lower Nile.

Yet from the New Kingdom's very beginnings in the sixteenth century BC, when the royal texts report that the pharaohs had dislodged an alien monarchy from the delta, the court's increasing contact with other courts and cultures of the region brought home the implacable force of passing time and individual events. Frequently invigorating, sometimes violent, ultimately destructive, the fragmented records of similar encounters throughout the following centuries – the last period of pharaonic courtly history – provide a unique window onto ancient Egypt, telling something of how that ancient culture had viewed itself and something also of what it had regarded as essential for its continuing existence.

All contemporary accounts of the history of the conflicts as that third wave of pharaohs had travelled up the Nile's valley had been lost when, following the adoption of Greek and Latin throughout the land of Egypt, hieroglyphic texts were no longer understood. A broad outline of those events, however, had been preserved at second hand in a lengthy Greek history of the ancient kingdom known as the *Aigyptiaka*, which had been compiled in the third century BC by one Manetho, an Egyptian temple priest who had drawn his information directly from ancient hieroglyphic archives. And even though, in turn, Manetho's history too was lost, his account of those events had been quoted in a

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Latin text compiled three centuries later by the classical historian Josephus. Known as the *Contra Apion*, that work has survived until today and yet influences all modern histories of those times.

An embattled Jew of the first century AD, Josephus had quoted extracts of Manetho's lost history in the course of a fierce polemic supporting his contention that the founding narrative of his faith, the story of the Israelite Exodus from Egypt, possessed a true and ancient dignity.

> Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Let my people go . . . I have heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage . . . I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage . . .
>
> [And] . . . the LORD shall bring thee into the land of the Canaanites . . . a land flowing with milk and honey . . .
>
> And the children of Israel journeyed from Ramesses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside children . . . And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds . . .
>
> (King James Bible, 1611)

Josephus had considered Manetho's history to be of such importance to his argument that, he tells us, he will quote the ancient pagan priest in 'his own words, just as if I had produced the man himself in the witness-box':

> I will begin with the writings of the Egyptians . . . Wherefore Manetho an Egyptian . . . compiling a historie of the customes and religion of his forefathers, collected (as himselfe reporteth) out of the Egyptians holy writings . . .
>
> . . . God being angrie with us, contrarie to all expectation, an obscure people taking courage, came from the East, and pitching their Tents in our countrie conquered it by force, no man resisting them, & committing our princes to bonds, did finally burne our cities, and destroy the temples of our Gods, & behaved themselves most cruelly against all the Inhabitants, killing many of them, and making slaves of the rest . . .
>
> This nation was called Hyksos, which signifieth Kings shepheards . . .
>
> . . . these foresaide kings and shepheards . . . have ruled Egypt five hundred and eleven yeares, and after these the king of Thebes, and the king of the residue of Egypt, uniting their forces togither, invaded the

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> sayde shepheards, and held on great and long wars against them, and . . . the sayde shepheards were overcome [and] shut up in a place called Avaris . . . [and pharaoh] endevored by force to subdue them, and for this cause besieged them with foure hundreth and foure score thousand armed men, and at last despairing to take them by siege, he covenented with them that they should safly depart out of Egypt . . . [and] togither with all their families and goods and cattle [they] departed out of Egypt into the wildernes [where] they builded a citie in the countrie now called Judea . . . and this citie they called Jerusalem.
>
> (translation by Thomas Lodge, 1602)

What Josephus had seen was that an episode of Manetho's *Aigyptiaka* had told the same story as the central narrative of the Book of Exodus, though from the opposing point of view. That just as Manetho had described the beginnings of the ancient Egyptian New Kingdom as the liberation of the ancient kingdom from the chaos of a court of foreigners, so too the Book of Exodus had described the departure of a mass of foreigners from Egypt as a liberation and as the foundation of another holy state.

Here then, as has so often happened with later reconstructions of ancient Egyptian history, the relics of pharaonic Egypt had become entangled with the central narratives and beliefs of later Western cultures. And down until today, the fresh-found discoveries about that ancient kingdom are fitted to those same old narratives, and if they will not fit they are frequently ignored.

PAPER AND PAPYRI

Until the early nineteenth century and Jean François Champollion's decipherment of hieroglyphs, the Bible's word and classical texts such as those of Josephus had been the West's sole sources of information about the ancient world. And both were understood to hold true history. For classical texts were considered both as a font of earthly wisdom and as a window onto a rich lost past, whilst the Bible, of itself, was held to be infallible.

So, in the 1730s, every page of the learned Rector Rollin's *Ancient*

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History of the Egyptians, Carthaginians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes and Persians, Macedonians and Grecians was footnoted with a mix of classical and Biblical references. Here too, following Josephus, Manetho's Hyksos play a major role in pharaonic history having travelled, so Rollin describes, from 'Arabia or Phoenicia and seized a great part of Lower Egypt'.

Similarly, almost a century later, when the young Champollion published two splendid volumes on the geography of ancient Egypt, he too had cited, along with the maps of Jean-Baptiste d'Anville – Louis XV's antiquarian mapmaker – and the writings of contemporary travellers, exactly that same mix of ancient sources. A few years later too, following his decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphics, Champollion partly confirmed Manetho's account of the departure of the Hyksos from Avaris when he translated the text of a pharaonic papyrus in the library of François Sallier in Aix-en-Provence that told a tale of two warring rulers in ancient Egypt, one living in the Nile's delta, the other at Thebes, 400 miles to the south. Even in those first years, when knowledge of ancient Egyptian was rudimentary, Champollion had understood that a northern king named in that papyrus as Apopi was the king that Manetho had listed in the *Aigyptiaka* as the Hyksos king Apophis. The Provençale papyrus had also added another episode to Manetho's story, telling how Apophis had insultingly complained that the roars of hippopotami kept by a southern prince in a pool at Thebes were keeping him awake at night.

'So Seqenenre, the ruler of the Southern City', a translation of that papyrus tells, 'summoned his high officials and every ranking soldier and he repeated every issue concerning King Apophis to them. And they were silent for a while, being unable to answer him . . .' Unfortunately, the text is broken at that point but, nonetheless, it would appear to be a prologue, in the typical manner of pharaonic scribes, to an account of the southerners' expulsion of the Hyksos from Avaris just as Manetho's *Aigyptiaka* also describes. At all events, for the first time in some fifteen centuries the translation of the surviving fragments of an ancient Egyptian text appeared to have inadvertently confirmed Josephus' contention that the Book of Exodus records a genuine historical event.

Like many of his era, however, Champollion was highly sceptical of Christianity and its texts and argued publicly against several common

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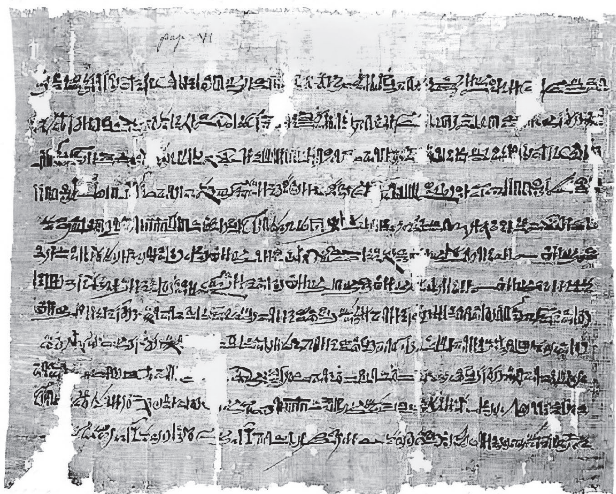

A sheet from the scroll of Papyrus Sallier I, from which Champollion deciphered the name of the Hyksos king Apophis. The texts of such scrolls were often cut into sections and mounted between sheets of glass. It is some eight and a half inches high.

theories of the time that had enlarged upon Josephus' linkage of the Bible with Manetho's *Aigyptiaka*, proclaiming that Manetho's Hyksos were the enslaved descendants of the Biblical Patriarch Jacob and that they had built the pyramids. Such was the Bible's continuing hold upon the Frenchman's mind, however, that in his geography of ancient Egypt Champollion proposed that a village in the western delta was the site of the city of Ramesses from which, the Bible describes, Moses had led his people out of Egypt.

Champollion found further evidence of Egypt's Hyksos kings on the fragments of another ancient papyrus, known today as the Turin Canon after the city in which it is now kept. Written, as are all such papyri, in a form of cursive hieroglyphic, this unique though very tattered document had once held a sequence of the names of 250 pharaohs who had ruled the ancient kingdom in succession over a period of some fifteen centuries. And remarkably enough, some of its surviving

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fragments described a succession of kings as *heka-khasut*: as 'rulers of mountain lands', a phrase that Champollion had quickly recognized was the original pharaonic form from which Manetho had derived the Greek term 'Hyksos'. It fitted like a glove.

Nor was that all. Not only had the fragments of the Turin Canon provided Manetho's Hyksos with a genuine pharaonic pedigree but they also recorded that the *heka-khasut* had been 'six rulers of mountainous lands' who had reigned for more than a hundred years. And that, in turn, enabled Champollion to calculate a rough date for the ending of Hyksos rule in Egypt and, by extension, a theoretical time-frame for the Biblical Exodus. For he had discovered a correspondence between the Turin Canon's register of kings and some of the kings of Manetho's History, which lists the years those kings had ruled. An approximate concordance that had enabled Champollion to calculate a fixed date for the departure of the Hyksos kings from Egypt which is just two centuries adrift from those of most modern estimates, that are presently set at around 1530 BC.

AND THEN TO EGYPT

Champollion took but a single trip – in the winter of 1828–9 – to the ancient land which held him in lifelong fascination. Then, for the first time in fifteen centuries, the texts upon the ancient standing monuments of Egypt were read and understood again. Then too, deep in Upper Egypt, some sixty miles south of Thebes, he encountered the Hyksos once again in an 'inscription of magnificent hieroglyphics' engraved on the wall of a rock-cut tomb chapel. 'Without a doubt', Champollion wrote to his brother, the texts in that chapel 'had been placed in the tomb of one of those brave men who . . . had almost completed the expulsion of the shepherds and delivered Egypt from the barbarians'. Thus Egypt's ancient history was firmly set into the narratives of Manetho and Josephus.

Quarried into the limestone cliffs that edge the river's valley, the small, dark, barrel-vaulted chamber which holds that text is one of a row of similar chapels that mark the burials of some of the courtiers of the pharaonic settlement of Nekhen, which had stood beside the

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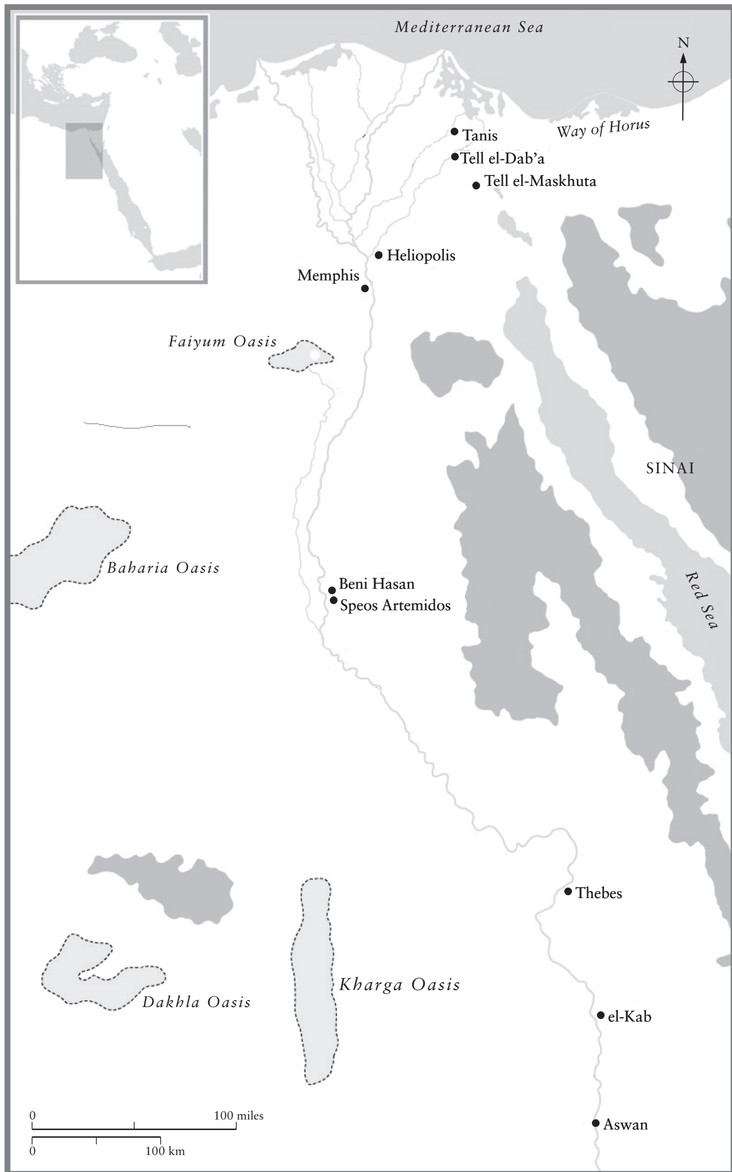

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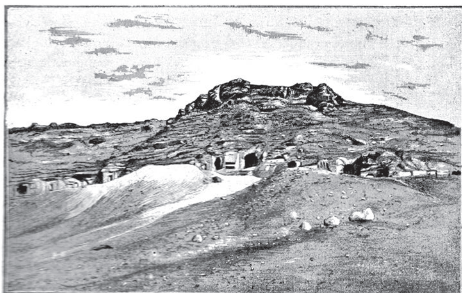
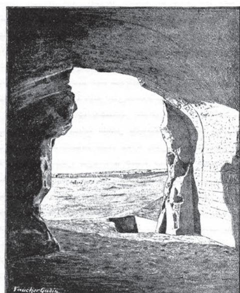
The major pharaonic sites with connection to the Hyksos and the Old Testament.

silvery river in the fields below. Known nowadays as the archaeological site of el-Kab, Nekhen was a very ancient foundation of which little had survived above ground beyond that modest row of tomb chapels and a great grey rectangle of a mud-brick wall; an enormous and mostly empty compound at the end of a long and ancient track that runs along a prehistoric pathway through the mountains of the Eastern Desert to the shore of the Red Sea.





Two nineteenth-century views of the rock-cut cemetery in the cliffs at el-Kab. The barrel vault is typical of that cemetery's tomb chapels, which are of the age of Ahmose, son of Ibana.

The chapel that so excited Champollion had been made, so its inscriptions tell, for a certain Ahmose, called 'son of Ibana' to differentiate him from the similarly named pharaoh in whose militia he had served. Held in some forty vertical lines of carefully sculpted hieroglyphs that cover almost half the chapel's walls, they tell tales of victories and sieges, parts of which are rendered here in the splendidly Biblical prose of the scholar who, to this day, remains the single most influential historian of ancient Egypt in the English language, James Henry Breasted (1906):

> Ahmose, son of Ibana, triumphant; says: 'I will tell you, O all ye people, of the honours which came to me . . . I spent my youth in the city of Nekhen, my father being an officer of the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, Seqenenre . . .
>
> Then I served as an officer in my father's stead, in the ship 'The Offering' in the time of the Lord of the Two Lands, King Ahmose,

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> triumphant, while I was still young . . .Then, after I set up a household, I was transferred to the northern fleet, because of my valour and followed the king on foot when he rode abroad in his chariot.
>
> [Then] the king fought on the water in the canal [named] Djedka at Avaris and I fought [and] brought away a hand. It was reported to the royal herald. The king gave to me the Gold of Valour.
>
> Then there was again fighting in this place; I again fought [and] brought away a hand. The king gave to me the gold of bravery in the second place.
>
> The king fought . . . south of this city; then I brought away a living captive . . . [and] the king presented me with gold in double measure.
>
> The king captured Avaris; I took captive there one man and three women, total four; his majesty gave them to me for slaves . . .

Cut in fine relief, a small scene set close to that long inscription shows the old warrior seated beside his partner whilst their grandson, the scribe Paheri, 'the son of his daughter, who causes his name to live', makes offerings to them in the age-old manner of pharaonic courtly culture. Other inscriptions in the chapel tell that Paheri had also ordered the decoration of the chapel himself and thus, presumably, the creation of the text describing his grandfather's fight with the Hyksos 'causing', as so many such inscriptions say, 'his name to live'. Here at last, it seemed as if the story of the Exodus had found a firm place in ancient history.

Not surprisingly, Champollion was swiftly followed to Ahmose's little chapel by a stream of prelates and egyptologists who corrected and enlarged his copies of its texts, work that continues to this day. They also followed him to an elegant rock-cut shrine on the west side of the Nile in Middle Egypt some 200 miles north of el-Kab where a large inscription cut in a later age upon a temple frieze describes how vagabond kings had ruled from Avaris without the gods. In those times, the text continues, the fields had been devastated, the roads had lain untrodden and temples were so neglected that children had danced on their roofs. But then pharaoh had ordered the southern militias to be re-equipped so that harmony could be re-established. And so the temples were restored and their strict calendars of offerings were set in operation once again so that the gods would come back to their houses. 'Such damage will not

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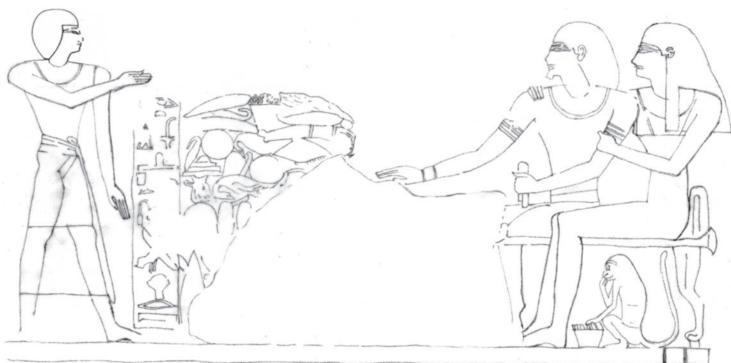

Paheri offers food to the spirits of Ahmose, son of Ibana and his partner, the lady Ipu; one of hundreds of such interactions between the living and the dead that are pictured on the walls of pharaonic tomb chapels and which, as their accompanying inscriptions say, will 'cause their names to live for ever'.

happen again,' the text continues, 'for the god Amun has ordered that my decree will remain like the mountains; that when the sun shines, it will spread its rays over my names for the course of eternity.' Following the accounts of classical visitors to the site, Champollion named that impressive rock-cut temple as the 'Cave of Artemis', which, as the Speos Artemidos, is the name that in egyptology it bears to this day.

Another row of pharaonic tomb chapels of provincial worthies lies near that lonely desert shrine, in the cliffs above the east bank of the river at a site which is now called Beni Hasan. There it was, behind elegantly pillared façades that Champollion declared to be so like Doric columns 'that at first glance you might be deceived by them', he found 'an exquisite triumph of perfection' drawn out upon the chapels' walls: row upon row of lively little figures working at a variety of tasks or bringing wares and produce in offering to the chapels' noble owners. Champollion and his small team of draughtsmen spent fifteen days drawing those images and texts, his interest especially roused by a distinctively alien line of figures, a group of bearded men carrying crooked bows and harps, spears and axes and walking with their women and their children; a register, he writes, of such historical interest that he 'had the scene copied with Jansenist rigour, so that there is not a line in our copy which is not in the original'.

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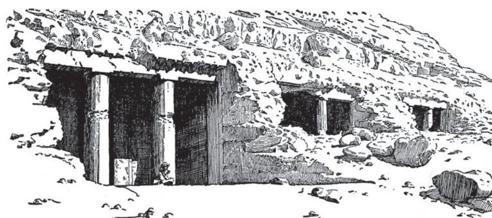
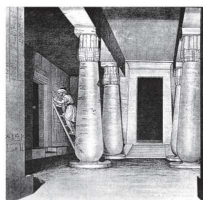
The quarry temple of the Speos Artemidos sketched by Giuseppe Angelelli, a member of Champollion's Egyptian expedition. The inscription from the time of Hatshepsut is on the temple's façade.

This time, however, Champollion's intuition had deserted him. For, as the scholars who followed him to Beni Hasan quickly realized, the unique scene on the northern wall of the tomb chapel of the courtier Khnumhotep, a noble described as a 'guardian of the desert's doors', does not portray foreign captives as Champollion had believed but the members of a desert caravan whose dress, beards and haircuts show them to be visitors from the Levant. Inscriptions accompanying those carefully observed images name the foreigners as 'Aamu', a common term in hieroglyphic texts denoting people who had hailed





*The tomb façades at Beni Hasan. Angelelli's drawing (*right*) shows one of Champollion's draughtsmen working with 'Jansenist rigour' in a chapel similar to those at Beni Hasan.*

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from regions to the north and east of the Nile Valley – those, that is, of the Levant. Their leader, of whom the accompanying texts provide the ancient Levantine name of Abisharie, is also described as a *heka-khasut*, as a 'ruler of mountainous lands' – as a 'Hyksos'. The donkeys of his little caravan are described as carrying bags of galena, a silky, dark grey powder once mined in Egypt's eastern deserts and widely used by pharaonic courtiers in rituals and as an eye liner.

The painted register in a Beni Hassan tomb chapel, showing a desert caravan whose leader is described in an accompanying inscription as a 'ruler of mountainous lands', as a 'heka-khasut', as a Hyksos. It is nine feet long.

This was the West's first glimpse of images of some of the ancient people who had come down into pharaoh land from the Levant. And though the scene had been painted centuries before the arrival of Manetho's Hyksos, the menfolk's bronze-tipped weapons are clearly northern in design and the people of that caravan, no less, are shown wearing coats of many colours in the manner of the Biblical Patriarch Joseph. So both the Hyksos and the Bible's Patriarchs found shape and form in that fine painting, a visual identity that in history books and illustrated Bibles they have retained until today.

No discoveries of similar moment were made about the Hyksos in the decades following Champollion's voyage up the Nile. In that same period, however, King Ahmose and his embattled successors were ensconced in European history books as the warrior kings whose armies had expelled the Hyksos from the land of Egypt. The mould was cast, and any additional information about the Hyksos that would be unearthed throughout the following two centuries was fitted to that fundamental form.

Yet even as Champollion and his successors were constructing the West's outline of ancient Egyptian history and exploring its connection to the Exodus, other Western academics were undertaking critical examinations of the Bible's texts in which the books of the Old

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Testament were subjected to a wide range of literary and linguistic analyses. And for the first time in Christian history, the historical accuracy of the Bible's first five books – the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses – was scrutinized along with their relationship to the archaeology of that region which contemporary scholarship was beginning to reveal. And many questions were emerging.

If, for example, some of the stories in the Books of Genesis and Exodus had taken place in the second millennium BC as Champollion's Egyptian chronology had suggested, then their frequent references to cash and camels could only have been added many centuries later, for neither had been present in that most distant age. Now, too, the Pentateuch's authorship was put in doubt. For though it clearly contained passages written in far older times, the bulk of its texts appeared to have been composed in ancient Hebrew, a later language native to the kingdom of ancient Israel, which would imply that the Pentateuch had been compiled after the Exodus had taken place.

Such impious observations caused widespread and ongoing waves of anger and anxiety throughout nineteenth-century Europe, to which the apparent concordance between the Book of Exodus and Josephus' *Contra Apion* served as a powerful balm. Indeed, after the Bible itself, the translations of Josephus' various writings were the most widely read texts of nineteenth-century Europe. So intense was public interest in the Hyksos in those years, moreover, that in the half century following Champollion's death some 10,000 books, essays and articles had variously speculated on the subject.

Who, then, were these Hyksos? Some things seemed sure. The forms of the names of the six Hyksos kings which are listed in some of the surviving fragments of Manetho's history belonged to an ancient intercontinental language group that the good professors of the University of Göttingen had named as 'Semitic' after one of the three sons of Noah. Which, in the climate of the day, had led to the suggestion that the origins of the Hyksos were to be sought in Asia alongside the oldest attested forms of the Semitic language group and that, by association, Manetho's account of the invasion of Egypt by shepherd kings must have been an episode in the wanderings of an imaginary Aryan tribe that had eventually produced the cultures of ancient Greece and medieval Germany! A notion that, by 1846, had led the

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scholar Josias Bunsen to opine that the Hyksos invasion of Egypt had been nothing less than 'Asia taking her revenge on Africa'.

Others, alternatively, proposed that the Hyksos had been a tribe from another branch of the Semitic language group; Arabs, perhaps, or Phoenicians. Had they fled from Babylon? Or were they warriors from the Trojan war, Greek gods or Indian Brahmins? And had they really travelled down to Egypt on camels in the manner of the Biblical Patriarchs, or with donkeys, as they appear in Khnumhotep's tomb chapel at Beni Hasan? The theories multiplied. Then, in 1861, an archaeologist digging in the Nile's delta reported that he had looked into the 'very faces of the Shepherd Kings'.

MUD, MARSH AND GRANITE

> *Sir, it is not in vain that you have recognized the joint identity of Tanis and Avaris, for you have inaugurated the era of discoveries that are now taking place. The furrow was opened up by you and already our efforts have been rewarded by a harvest which will soon be, I hope, followed by another still more abundant.*
>
> *Accept, Monsieur, the assurance of the profound respect of your devoted servant.*
>
> *Auguste Mariette, 1861*

Auguste Mariette, *archéologue extraordinaire*, had been drawn to excavate the ruins of Tanis by a single block of rose-red granite cut into the elegant form of an enormous twelve-foot sphinx that had dominated the Louvre's Egyptian collections for decades. To Mariette, the statue augured that more such prizes might be uncovered at that same remote location in the Nile's delta, whilst the scholarly suggestion that Tanis was the site of the long-lost fortress of Avaris had added the intriguing notion that shades of Abraham and Jacob, Joseph and Moses might also be found amongst its relics.

In Mariette's day, the wreckage of ancient Tanis was sprinkled over a sprawl of mounds which rose above the papyrus swamps and marshlands of the eastern delta like extinct volcanoes. By far the largest ruin

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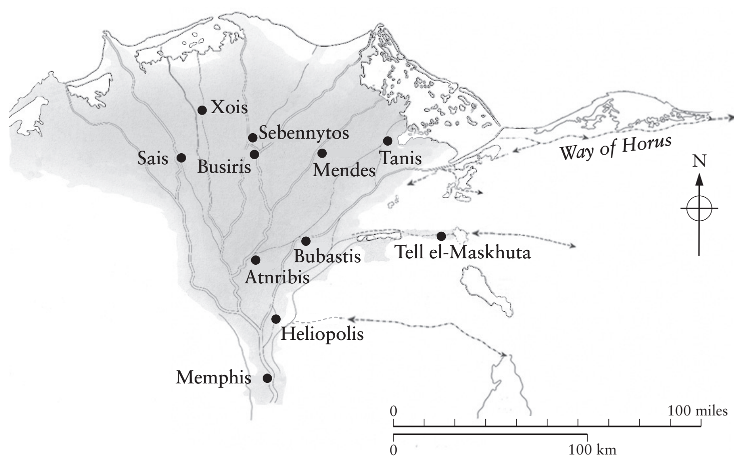

The modern Nile delta, showing some of the major pharaonic settlements and the area presently under cultivation. In ancient times, the coastline was far further south, which allowed several settlements, now inland, immediate access to the open sea. Major land routes to the south Levant are shown in dotted line. Tell el-Maskhuta lies in the Wadi Tumilat, a desert oasis often identified as the Biblical 'Land of Goshen'.

field in that region, the remnants of its enormous walls, a long dark rim of fissured brick enclosing an area of some fifty acres that had once held the settlement's main temples, contained half-buried fragments of broken architecture, stelae and statues, columns, obelisks and building blocks.

Mariette had begun his excavations at the site in the spring of 1860 as part of a pioneering seven-pronged exploration of the Nile's delta. Considerable undertakings employing the forced labour of hundreds of local farming families and their children, they were but a modest portion of an astonishing six-year enterprise commanding thousands of such labourers throughout the length of Egypt. Backed and financed by the Egyptian government and working with just a handful of expatriate assistants, Mariette's unique enterprise would expose the major, though half-buried, monuments at Giza and Saqqara, Dendera, Thebes and Abydos and place them under government control, thus rescuing those sites from further plundering by foreign entrepreneurs who had been mining

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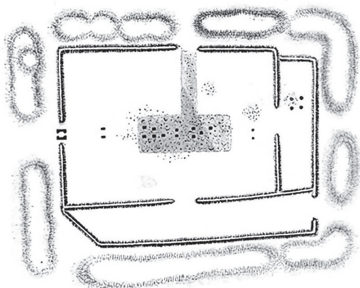

The Louvre Sphinx, and Lepsius' sketch map of Tanis showing the location of the main temple and its enclosure walls in the decade before Mariette's excavations in 1855. The temple's walls are a third of a mile long.

them for decades and parcelling their prizes into the saleroom lots that presently form the basis of the great Egyptian collections of Europe.

The letter quoted in this chapter's opening epigraph – which, in the manner of the time, was a formal publication of Mariette's first discoveries at Tanis – is addressed to Monsieur le Vicomte Emmanuel de Rougé, a successor of Champollion as Professor at the Collège de France and curator at the Louvre. A decade earlier, de Rougé had given Mariette, the son of a provincial government official, the salaried post of assistant curator at the Louvre and enabled him to build an excavation house and a career in Egypt. And from that time up to his death in 1872 he provided Mariette with encouragement and scholarly commentaries on the monuments and texts that his protégé was uncovering.

Like Champollion before him, de Rougé visited Egypt but once and was, essentially, a man of the European museums. Celebrated for transforming his predecessor's brilliantly intuitive understanding of hieroglyphic texts into an academic discipline, de Rougé was the first person in modern times to fully translate Monsieur Sallier's papyrus in Aix-en-Provence, with its story of the quarrel between the northern and southern courts, and also the text that describes the Thebans' attack on Hyksos Avaris which Champollion had copied from the walls of Ahmose's tomb chapel at el-Kab. And by the 1850s, de Rougé had determined that Avaris was not as Champollion's geography had described, located in the western half of the Nile's delta, but in its east

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and at the royal settlement of Tanis, which he had then encouraged Mariette to excavate.

Now, the site from which the Louvre's stone sphinx had been transported had long since been identified as a large royal settlement. Ever since Champollion's day, Europeans versed in hieroglyphic had visited the fields of ruins beside the village of San el-Hagar and had reported that many of its stones and statues bore the names of different pharaohs and that the architectural fragments at the site were the wrecks of major pharaonic temples. Thus, by virtue of its sheer size and the quality and quantity of its remains, Tanis had been identified as a royal residence.

The reasoning that led de Rougé to dub the site as 'Hyksos Avaris' was founded upon a series of phonetic leapfrogs. For de Rougé noted that Champollion's geography had described the name 'Tanis' as a Greek form of the name of a settlement named 'Djan' or 'Djanet' in hieroglyphic texts. The same Greek place name, Champollion had further argued, had also been used in ancient Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible instead of the 'Tsoan' of the original Hebrew text, a form that Christian Bibles in their turn had traditionally rendered as 'Zoan', which, phonetically, is close to 'Djan'. Why, even the nearby Egyptian village of San el-Hagar – 'San of the stones' – Champollion had noted, reflected that same ancient name. And that, it seemed, had closed the circle: Tanis was the Biblical city of Zoan.

To those researches, de Rougé added the further proposal that the names of Avaris and Tanis were similarly linked by the hieroglyphic term 'Djanet', which appeared to echo the phonetics of the pharaonic phrase for 'the settlement of the Levantines', the term that the scribe who had written Sallier's papyrus employed to denote the residence of the Hyksos kings and which, following Manetho, Champollion had already translated simply as 'Avaris'. (To this day, indeed, the term 'Avaris' is used as a catch-all translation for a number of ancient phrases that the hieroglyphic texts employ to denote the stronghold of the Hyksos kings.)

So even before Mariette's gangs of workmen had started digging into the site, the mounds of ancient Tanis had lain in the shadow of the Book of Exodus, and when they uncovered part of a massive granite stela engraved by the craftsmen of King Ramesses II, it had

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appeared that de Rougé's Parisian deductions were vindicated. For the figures drawn above the stela's long inscription showed Ramesses worshipping Seth, a Levantine deity, whilst the texts below told of the celebration of the 400th year of the foundation of a temple for that alien god, an anniversary that approximately corresponded both to the length of Hyksos rule in Egypt as given in Manetho's *Aigyptiaka* and to the period of the oppression of the Israelites in Egypt which is given in the Book of Exodus. Even the stela's images, it seemed to Mariette, betokened an alien presence at the site, for he describes the image of Seth, the foreign god, as having an unusually angular head, high cheekbones and small, hard eyes, whereas the features of Egyptian Ramesses, he thought, seemed 'calm, and regular, and breathe only a tranquil majesty'.

Standing six and a half feet high, the 'Four Hundred Year Stela' shows Ramesses II offering jars of wine in celebration of an anniversary of the god Seth. Discovered, drawn and re-buried by Mariette, this huge block of rose granite was rediscovered in the 1930s and transported to the Cairo Museum.

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The Hyksos had appeared to come into yet sharper focus as Mariette's workmen dug out groups of fine-made statues from Tanis' mud and dust. Cut from blocks of shining southern granite and later exhibited at the Cairo Museum which the indefatigable Mariette was engaged in planning, most of these large, majestic works show stern-faced pharaohs seated on the throne of state or as a crouching lion with a human head in the manner of the Great Sphinx of Giza.

Their numerous inscriptions showed that those statues had been respected and re-used over several centuries. For whilst their sculpted images had been left untouched, many of their accompanying hieroglyphic inscriptions had been chiselled away and replaced with the names of later pharaohs, several of which were those of Hyksos kings named in the Turin Canon. Brutally broken and disfigured at later dates as would seemingly befit the statues of despised invaders, these powerful works seemed to epitomise the fate of Manetho's Hyksos, who had come down into Egypt like a wolf on the fold.

One of them, especially, a life-sized dyad some five feet high cut from dark grey granite, caught Mariette's attention. This, it seemed to him, was an epitome of Hyksos imagery. Later, in a museum guidebook, he described the eccentric sculpture as a

> group of two figures . . . with enormous wigs arranged in thick braids . . . Their features are hard, accusing, and bear a great resemblance to those of the sphinxes with a lion's mane. The upper lip is shaved, but the cheeks and chin are adorned with a long wavy beard. Each of them holds in his extended hands ingeniously arranged groups of waterfowl and fish all mixed with lotus flowers . . .

In another letter to de Rougé, Mariette observes that, although one might imagine

> that the sculpture's outlandish appearance is due to foreigners . . . it also bears the imprint of the region where the shepherd kings had established themselves. For what gives the delta its true character . . . is the myriad waterfowl that scatter over the branches of the river, on the canals and lakes. In the delta also, fish are abundant . . . and lastly, in the delta where the surfaces of the canals extend like green carpets . . . we meet the lotus . . . Far from seeming strange, therefore, the statue

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The life-sized granite statue group, the so-called 'fish bearers', that Mariette unearthed at Tanis. The figures' heavily lined faces and their wigs and beards show this extraordinary work to be a product of the Middle Kingdom court and thus far older than the Hyksos kings that Mariette had thought they represented.

> group belongs to the place where it was found and . . . shows the same men that you see along the way today, that come to you with their hands full of fish and wild game and with their wrists bound around with thick bracelets of lotus stalks.

'Do not be misled by this sculpture's alien character,' Mariette thoughtfully continues,

> for it is Egyptian in origin and intention . . . yet to speak more exactly it has been carved for strangers, for it cannot be viewed for long without recognizing that it belongs for the most part to the art of the banks of the Nile . . . In sum, the colossi of Tanis have shown us the conquest of the Shepherd Kings was a peaceful conquest, free from reprisals and revenge

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> and that the Hyksos conquerors become Egyptian in their arts and in religion, while still remembering, here and there, the mother country.

Mariette's keen eye and his experiences in the delta's landscape had challenged Manetho's literary assertions. Such monuments, he considers, were hardly the products of the nomads who, so Manetho describes, 'did burne our cities, and destroy the temples of our Gods, & behaved themselves most cruelly ...' Nonetheless, those observations had not shaken Mariette's fundamental belief in the characterizations of the Hyksos by Manetho and Josephus, for he concludes by reporting that 'there are no monuments that belong more incontestably to the agitated period of the Shepherd Kings of Egypt.' So the finds at Tanis were fitted willy-nilly into the previously conceived vision of ancient history based on the European respect for the Bible, kingship and the classics, a history for which the regal images from ancient Tanis had provided the Hyksos kings with a dark and powerful presence. All that was needed to complete the cast of that story of invasion and exodus were images of its other actors – the native pharaohs from the south of Egypt whom both Manetho and the contemporary hieroglyphic texts had described as ridding the kingdom of a line of alien pharaohs.

DUST AND GOLD

> *during the researches made by the Arabs in the year 1827, at Qurna [i.e. western Thebes], they discovered in the mountain ... a small and separate tomb, containing only one chamber, in the centre of which was placed a sarcophagus, hewn out of the same rock ... In this sarcophagus was found [a coffin] ... The moment the Arabs saw that [it] was highly ornamented and gilt, they immediately, from their experience in such matters, knew that it belonged to a person of rank. They forthwith proceeded to satisfy their curiosity by opening it, when they discovered, placed around the head of the mummy, but over the linen, a diadem, composed of silver and beautiful mosaic work, its centre being formed of gold, representing an asp, the emblem of royalty.*
>
> *Giovanni d'Athanasi, 1836*

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The ancient cemeteries of western Thebes had been thoroughly ransacked decades before Mariette had taken control of the Egyptian monuments. And from the paintings and sculptures of its tomb chapels to its coffins and its mummies, the funerary jewellery and the accompanying papyrus scrolls, the haul had been terrific.

CATALOGUE

OF

MR. SALT'S COLLECTION

OF

EGYPTIAN ANTIQUITIES.

Seventh Day's Sale

[Lot] 986. The Mummy of a Priest, 5 ft. 7 in. high, in a case, £12. 15s.

The case in which this Mummy is contained, was, previously to its being sold, discovered by those learned in hieroglyphics, to be that which had belonged to the body of a king . . . the result of which was, that it was purchased at a mere trifle for the British Museum.

The royal family, in which several persons of this [royal] name are found . . . flourished before the period of the eighteenth dynasty . . .

Leigh Sotheby, 1836

The coffin that Mr Sotheby describes had contained the mummy of King Nebkheperre Intef, one of several little-known monarchs who had ruled at Thebes in the decades before the major conflicts with the Hyksos. Working on behalf of foreign traders, local villagers had uncovered the burial along with several others on the long low limestone ridge that marks both the northern end of the Theban cemeteries and the mouth of the winding wadi which leads up to the Valley of the Kings in the desert hills beyond.

Known today as the Dra Abu el-Naga after a nearby village, the area had a potential of which Mariette had long been aware, having

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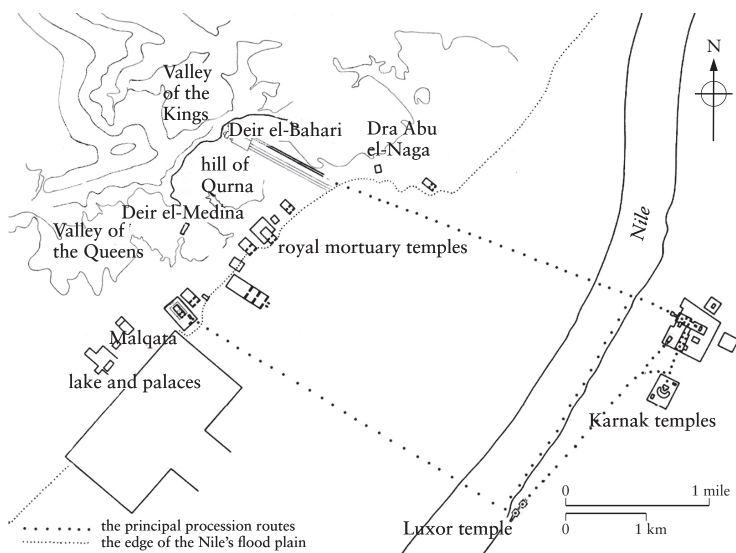

Sketch map of modern-day Thebes, with the current names of major ancient sites.

purchased on the Louvre's behalf two splendid royal coffins from that same cemetery in the years before his appointment as an official of the Egyptian administration. Later, when charged by the French government to find some 'curiosités et d'objets d'art' to present to a cousin of the King of France, he had dug there briefly himself, and on opening a colourful if somewhat modest coffin which was buried in loose stone and dust found to his surprise that its owner had been interred with golden jewellery and a splendid courtly dagger. Though both the coffin and the dagger were inscribed with the name of a King Kamose, a golden bracelet on the mummy's arm bore the name of the pharaoh Ahmose, whom the texts in the el-Kab tomb chapel describe as leading an assault on the Hyksos fortress of Avaris, which had led Mariette to suspect that he had uncovered the displaced burial of the warrior king himself.

Encouraged by both the appearance of such unexpected treasures and the eloquence of some visiting Europeans, Mohammed Said Pasha, the ruler of the Ottoman province of Egypt, formally recognized the

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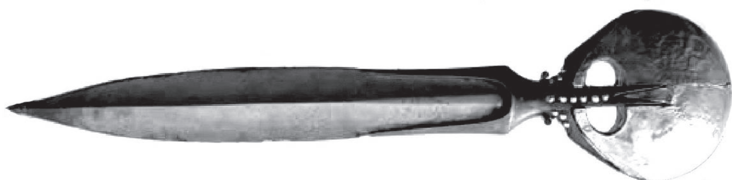
potential of the country's ancient monuments on 1 June 1858, placing all of them, from Aswan to Alexandria, under state ownership and assigning Mariette as their official guardian, as the 'Directeur des Travaux d'antiquités en Égypte'. A product of ongoing negotiations by a group of French diplomats and the entrepreneur Ferdinand de Lesseps, to whom Said Pasha would later grant the concession to construct the Suez Canal, the appointment of Mariette had saved Egypt's monuments from further decades of depredation and led to the creation of Egypt's *Service des Antiquités*.



This elegant dagger was said to have been tied to the left arm of King Ahmose's mummy with a cord of plaited papyrus. Twelve inches long, its shaft is of gilded bronze, the handle is of silver, and the pommel, which is covered in gold foil, is fastened to the handle with a row of golden pins.

Even as he had begun the enormous excavations that would clear millennia of smothering debris from most of Egypt's grandest monuments, Mariette had understood that Said Pasha also expected him to bring more treasure to his court. So from the beginning of that work, in the winter of 1858–9, he set several small digs under way especially to find such prizes. And one of those, a team of twenty labourers and a local foreman taken from the huge workforces engaged in clearing the major Theban temples, he set to work upon the Dra Abu el-Naga under the eye of his friend and assistant Marius Bonnefoy.

In ancient times, the slope of the Dra Abu el-Naga and much of the plain below had been covered in small mud-brick tomb chapels with burial chambers cut into the underlying rock. All trace of those monuments, however, seemed to have vanished so that from the ridge of the Dra Abu el-Naga down across the pockmarked fan of debris to the temples at the edges of the Nile-side fields there was little to be seen but heaps of shattered limestone, sand, loose mud bricks and a fine grey dust.

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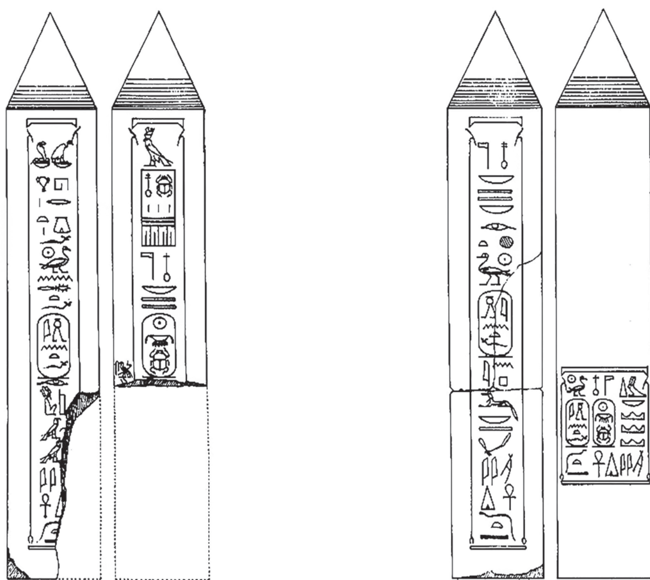
Nonetheless, a recently discovered text known as Papyrus Abbott after its early European owner listed some ten royal tombs in that same area, which, coupled with a stream of antiquities appearing in the European antiquities market, led Mariette to conclude that more royal burials were to be found. In their first months of digging, however, Bonnefoy's men appear to have uncovered little more than a splendid pair of twelve-foot limestone obelisks engraved with the names and titles of King Nebkheperre Intef, for though there are hints of other discoveries in Mariette's correspondence, all accounts of them were lost in the Cairo floods that destroyed the early records of the *Service des Antiquités*.



A nineteenth-century engraving of the lost obelisks of King Nebkheperre Intef. They were cut from limestone and stood some twelve feet high.

Later in that same season, the French consular agent at Luxor wrote urgently to Cairo telling Mariette that the Dra Abu el-Naga work gang, which, following the death of Bonnefoy from sunstroke, had been largely left to its own devices, had found another golden coffin along with a considerable treasure. Unfortunately, the agent's letter

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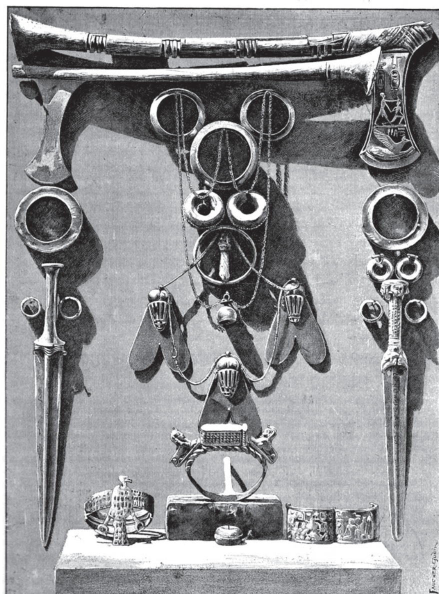
continued, the provincial governor had not recognized Mariette's appointment and had taken the new-found treasure under his own authority and ordered his officials to deliver it directly to Said Pasha in Cairo. Fearful that those new prizes would be used as diplomatic gifts and thus elude the cases of his planned museum, Mariette set sail for Luxor, encountered the boat of the governor's officials midstream and, after a lively shipboard confrontation, confiscated some four pounds of golden jewellery and a magnificent coffin, all of which he personally presented to Said Pasha in his Cairo palace. Fortunately for Mariette, Egypt's ruler had been amused by his tale, and thus the role of the *Service* as the national government agency for antiquities was sanctioned and confirmed.

Two royal names were engraved upon the lavishly decorated jewellery and some of the axes and daggers which appear to have been



The treasure from Queen Ahhotep's burial that Mariette confiscated for the newly established museum. The engraving shows the treasure as it had been displayed in the Cairo Museum in the time of Maspero.

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found inside the golden coffin; that of King Kamose, whose displaced burial Mariette seemed to have discovered a few years earlier, and that of King Ahmose, whom the inscriptions in the tomb chapel at el-Kab describe as having fought at Avaris. The inscription on the coffin's lid, however, announced that it had been made for 'the king's great queen, Ahhotep'. This coffin being of the same magnificence, size and design as the royal coffins which had previously been found on the Dra Abu el-Naga, Queen Ahhotep was naturally assumed to have been a senior member of the same household as that of the two pharaohs whose names appear in her burial, and to have lived in the times of the Hyksos wars.

In 1881, accounts of the conflict between Thebes and Avaris were greatly enlivened by the discovery of a cache of some fifty royal mummies that had been hidden by Theban officials in the last days of the united pharaonic state, for the sensational find had included the mummy of Theban pharaoh Seqenenre, whom Monsieur Sallier's papyrus describes as having fought against the Hyksos. Seqenenre's cadaver, moreover, seems frozen in a spasm of violent death, his teeth clenched, his mummy twisting, his hair matted in a mass of blood, brain and sand, his skull smashed by five heavy blows of which, as the Victorian anatomist Grafton Elliot Smith described, 'the first two and the fourth were caused in all probability by an axe . . . The fifth was probably caused by a spear, [and the third by a] blunter instrument – probably a stick, possibly the handle of the spear that inflicted the fifth wound,' a rendering of events further sharpened in the 1970s by the observation that Seqenenre's deadliest wounds had probably been inflicted by a Levantine bronze axe. That the mummy displayed no evidence of defensive wounds, Elliot Smith suggested, showed that the middle-aged monarch had been assailed whilst sleeping or that he had been felled by a single blow and further assaulted whilst he had lain bleeding on the ground. Recent examinations, alternatively, have suggested that the mummy's hands may have been bound at the time of the attack.

So, the painted images of the Aamu caravan in the tomb chapel at Beni Hasan, the dark granite sculptures of the kings of Tanis and the splendid golden burials from Thebes, whose smoothly placid forms and large round eyes gave them an air of cheerful meditation, were joined by the grotesque corpse of a murdered king. And all of them

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now served to illustrate those ancient literary struggles of national liberation – to link Thebes to Tanis and to Avaris and, through the writings of Josephus and the Bible, Avaris with ancient Israel.

Yet there were many objections to such broad connections. Even as Champollion had compiled his 'complete list of the kings' and recorded 'the expulsion of the Shepherds, the restoration of the Egyptian monarchy . . . and the exit of the Hebrews from Egypt', he had noted that 'uncertainties still exist over the precise age of those important facts'. As a child of revolution, however, he was hardly interested in validating the stories of the Bible and had never returned to the subject again.

Throughout the following decades, as Champollion's chronology of ancient Egypt's kings was corrected and refined, his initial objections to accepting Josephus' linkage of the Biblical Exodus with the expulsion of the Hyksos from Egypt had grown apace. For the Bible states that at the beginning of their travels 'the children of Israel journeyed from Ramesses to Succoth' and, as Champollion had recognized, that first-named location shared its name with the royal settlement named in hieroglyphic texts as Pi-Ramesses – as 'the settlement of [King] Ramesses'. And the first king named Ramesses had ruled some two and a half centuries after King Ahmose and the conflicts with the Hyksos.

The simplest solution to such problems – and one often adopted by egyptologists when faced with such seeming contradictions – is to assume that one, at least, of the ancient texts is mistaken. In this case, the antique error, so de Rougé and many other scholars believed, had been identified in an essay upon the Exodus published by the Berlin professor Richard Lepsius in 1849, which proposed that Josephus had been mistaken in linking the expulsion of the Hyksos to the Biblical Exodus. But the breaking of that link also had the unfortunate effect of erasing all mention of the Exodus from secular history, for not a single text outside of the pages of the Bible describes a mass exodus of people from ancient Egypt other than that of the expulsion of the Hyksos from Avaris. And how on earth, one might reasonably ask, could the departure of some 600,000 people, a considerable proportion of the pharaonic population of those times, have left no trace in the contemporary hieroglyphic record?

In answer to such awkward questions, de Rougé had recommended

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patience, faith and continued study. 'For though the chronology [of the kings of ancient Egypt] presents many uncertainties,' he wrote,

> if the peculiarities scattered throughout the Biblical account are carefully collected, we will find a king who forced his slaves to build the city of Ramesses in Lower Egypt . . . and then the Bible says 'after a long time, that king died.' Now, only the reign of Ramesses II who ruled for sixty-eight years and built a city in the Nile's delta to which he gave his name suits such circumstances . . . Yet the terrible catastrophe that accompanied the Exodus only appears compatible with a small number of years, so Merneptah, the son of Ramesses II, is probably the Pharaoh of the Red Sea . . .

Bolstered by such learned ruminations and despite the continuing corrosive effects of contemporary Bible scholarship upon their traditional beliefs, most Westerners still held the Exodus' foundational narratives to be essentially true. And, in common with de Rougé, most egyptologists assumed that, as the Bible implies, the Biblical Exodus had taken place in the reign of Ramesses II or that of his successor, Merneptah.

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Looking for the Exodus

To the exasperation of many, Mariette blocked all archaeological explorations in Egypt other than those undertaken by his *Service des Antiquités*. And as a financial crisis had slowly grown in Egypt throughout the 1860s, he had neither the funds nor the inclination to embark upon such speculative ventures as digging for evidence of the Biblical Exodus.

By January 1881, moreover, at the time of Mariette's death from diabetes, both modern Egypt and its ancient monuments were in a terrible state of flux. For as the finances of the Egyptian government had slowly staggered into bankruptcy following a crash in the international cotton market, so the tombs and temples that Mariette's forty-odd excavations had exposed were increasingly damaged by windborne salt and sand, by flooding and humidity, by theft and tourism and by the encroachment of farms and settlements. And all the while, antiquities from locations yet unknown to historians were being sold in foreign salesrooms whilst the ancient sites within the delta – the uncounted remains of millennia of human habitation – were being heavily mined for fertilizer, for they were rich in phosphates. Nor had the funding for Mariette's *Service* increased in the years before his death when the Khedive Ismail, Said Pasha's successor as Egypt's ruler, had ceded economic control of the country to the governments of Britain and France.

From his first days in Egypt, therefore, Professor Gaston Maspero, of the Collège de France and Mariette's successor as Directeur des Travaux, saw that both the *Service* and the standing monuments were facing a major crisis, a situation brought home to him during an official inspection of the ancient sites – and his first view of Egypt's monuments – aboard Mariette's old Nile steamer, the *Menchiéh*:

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> I was struck by the lack of genuine stability that those seemingly indestructible ruins presented and also by an obligation to preserve them. I had planned to complete Mariette's excavations and to begin the consolidation of some temples. Yet our budget, which comes directly from the state exchequer, is not equal to the simultaneous accomplishment of those two tasks. Indeed, it is insufficient, to allow us even the accomplishment of one of them. How then to proceed?

Throughout the following months, as the governments of Britain, France and the Ottoman Empire and the various ministries of the Khedive bickered and prevaricated over the reallocation of Egypt's national resources whilst the bulk of its people continued to face starvation, the crisis worsened. In February 1882, with the support of large sections of the urban population, regiments of the Egyptian army under Colonel Ahmad Arabi revolted, threatening both the repayment of the Khedives' debts to his European creditors and the control of the Suez Canal, which, in the decade since its completion, had become the main highway of the British Empire.

The response had been peremptory. In June of that year, the city of Alexandria and its fortifications – the maritime gates to Egypt – were heavily bombarded by the British Navy. And in the succeeding months, after a lopsided confrontation in the desert in which a British Expeditionary Force slaughtered Arabi's Egyptian regiments, Cairo was occupied and an alien administration imposed, which, in the words of its best-known Minister Plenipotentiary, Evelyn Baring, later Lord Cromer, 'would not annex Egypt, but would do as much good to the country as if it had . . . would not interfere with the liberty of action of the Khedivial Government, but . . . would insist on the Khedive and the Egyptian Ministers conforming to [its] views . . . would not break [its] promise to the Frenchman but . . .'

At first, Cromer's novel form of imperialism seemed to work to the advantage of the pharaonic antiquities, for his administration was eager to stress that Britain would not loot its newly acquired territory. Moreover, as part of an effort to mollify the French for their loss of financial governance in Egypt, Maspero had been reaffirmed as the Directeur des Travaux, working under the offices of the Khedival Ministry of Works. In reality, however, Maspero was caught between

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opposing forces: on the one hand the ministers of the Khedive Taufiq, who regarded the French professor with suspicion, and on the other the officials of the British administration, who cut Maspero's departmental allowance to levels even lower than those the Ottoman administration had inflicted upon Mariette.

Before Maspero could consider what to do, however, the anger and chaos caused by the British invasion and occupation triggered riots and the hasty evacuation of many of the country's foreign residents, including Maspero and his family, who endured a horrendous month-long journey back to France which had begun aboard the *Menchiéh*, where he and his family had taken refuge and where, at the height of the riots, his wife had given birth to a child that subsequently died. Just four months later, however, Maspero and his family were back in Cairo and he was engaged in establishing a new role for the cash-strapped *Service*, a role that has affected the study, collection and presentation of pharaonic culture to this day.

One of the earliest examples of Maspero's restructuring can be seen in how he dealt with a request from a group of foreign worthies and academics eager to conduct an archaeological search for physical traces of the Exodus. First mooted a year earlier in the time of Mariette by the Swiss egyptologist Édouard Naville, it had proposed that a fund should be raised in Great Britain

> for the purpose of conducting excavations in the Delta, which up to this time has been very rarely visited by travellers, and where but one site (Tanis/Zoan) has been explored by archaeologists. Yet here must undoubtedly lie concealed the documents of a lost period of Biblical history . . . It seems highly desirable that having so admirably surveyed Palestine and Sinai, that [the Palestine Exploration Fund, founded 1865] should include within the range of its work the eastern part of the Delta, the city of Tanis and the [Biblical] Land of Goshen.

Though that initial proposal had not received so much as an acknowledgement from the old Directeur, with the coming of the British administration in Egypt it had been revived, another committee had been convened and a similar request was sent from London to Cairo with the additional suggestion that, to encourage financial support for the excavations, some of the antiquities that would doubtless

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be uncovered should be presented to those who had donated funds towards the expedition.

This time around, London's request was met with qualified acceptance, for Maspero had seen that the excavation of sites which the *Service* lacked the resources to investigate, protect or conserve could be to its advantage. Maspero, however, warned the London committee that the Khedival government was intent on guarding Egypt's antiquities by maintaining the enforcement of an old decree that forbade the export of antiquities. 'Those of you,' he added, 'who have never had anything to do with Orientals cannot imagine how suspicious and quick they are in such matters.' Thus advised, the learned Dr Birch, the elderly Keeper of Oriental Antiquities at the British Museum whose support would have been a major asset to the London committee, would have nothing to do with it, adding that, at all events, he was not interested in 'sentimental archaeology'. For Birch, as for most other egyptologists of his time, the only purpose of an excavation was the collection of fine objects, more texts, and the plans of major buildings.

Nonetheless, the committee's organizers, the Keeper of Coins and Medals at the British Museum Reginald Stuart Poole and the popular author Amelia Edwards, who after a trip down the Nile had become an indefatigable supporter of the archaeological exploration of Egypt, had both persisted. And slowly, with Maspero acting as a sympathetic broker between London and the Khedival government, the idea took hold and even gained the half-hearted approval of British officials in Cairo who had seen the monetary benefits of excavations to the farmers of the poorer regions of the country.

Maspero would negotiate dozens of similar programmes of excavation throughout the following decades, Italian, German, and American expeditions following in the footsteps of the British and the French. And the policy of the so-called *partage* – the division of an excavator's finds into two lots, one of which was retained for the Cairo Museum with the remainder ceded to the foreign institutions who had funded the work – was officially instituted. Formulated in times of bloodshed and colonialism, this radical change of policy from the days of Mariette quickly encouraged the then novel academic discipline of field archaeology and, also, egyptological connoisseurship, which yet

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operates alongside a sophisticated world-wide market in ancient Egyptian antiquities.

In some ways, the direct participation of foreign governments and institutions in Maspero's expanded programme of excavation has benefitted the monuments of Egypt in the form of several splendid long-term archaeological projects and the conservation and documentation of some of Egypt's most celebrated temples. Until the 1980s, however, it had also served to strip Egypt of large quantities of fine museum pieces and had encouraged the widespread operation of small, often privately funded expeditions whose aims were the collection of antiquities. And those erratic and often piecemeal excavations have left many sites part-excavated, part-documented and entirely unconserved.

Just as the London committee for excavating in the Nile's delta had anticipated, the prospect of uncovering hard evidence of the Biblical Exodus attracted considerable interest in late Victorian England. From the Chief Rabbi to the Archbishop of Canterbury, from the atheist Professor Huxley to the President of the Society of Antiquaries and the surgeon Sir Erasmus Wilson, who had previously paid for the transportation of Cleopatra's Needle to London, from Robert Browning to Sir Henry Layard, the excavator of Nineveh, and Sir Charles Newton, the excavator of the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, the committee quickly obtained the backing of an extraordinary range of luminaries along with the necessary funds. Britain, it was argued, lagged behind the rest of Europe in the quality of its national collections of antiquities – and after all, financing British Biblical excavations, as a contemporary remarked, would cost no more than keeping a pack of foxhounds.

Back in Cairo, Maspero continued to tread softly. The British, he observed, had no one equipped to take on the task of excavation in Egypt. In reply, Amelia Edwards suggested that they might employ the celebrated Dr Schliemann, who was involved in digging up an antique Anatolian fortress which he had famously proclaimed was Homer's Troy (and from which he had personally extracted a fine gold treasure). Schliemann was delighted: 'how would it be,' he wrote to Amelia Edwards, 'if you, Mrs Schliemann and I dig up Naucratis [an ancient Greek colony in Egypt of then unknown location] next winter?' Wisely anticipating that the abrasive self-publicist would cause ructions with his superiors, Maspero rejected the proposal out of hand.

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Yet the Directeur was loath to lose the chance of foreign-funded excavations working under his control, especially at sites that were unexplored and which his department was unable to protect. Many of the statues that Mariette had unearthed at Tanis some twenty years before, Maspero informed the London committee, still lay unguarded at the site, and he offered to take a young man under his wing and train him for the work of excavation and transportation. Following the success of the British occupation, however, the London committee was no longer thinking of operating in partnership with the Khedival *Service des Antiquités* and was developing ambitions for a wider field of operations that resulted in a change of its original title from the Delta Exploration Fund to the Egypt Exploration Fund.

Who, then, should undertake the Fund's first excavation? Amelia Edwards suggested that an occupying British regiment should be employed; the army, however, was required for further military operations in the Sudan. Reginald Stuart Poole, alternatively, put forward the name of Édouard Naville, who had originated the idea of self-funding expeditions operating in Egypt. And Maspero was delighted. 'Of all the persons whom you could propose,' he had replied,

> M. Naville is by far the one that is most agreeable to me. It's been fifteen years since we knew each other, and the friendship I had for him from the beginning only increased from year to year. If he agrees to come, it will be one of the great pleasures of this affair . . . Thank you . . . for your committee's disinterestedness. I will try to make, in addition to the scientific benefits, all possible material advantages.

And indeed, at the end of Naville's first season of working, Maspero was able to arrange for two large sculptures from the excavation to be awarded to the expedition's principal donor, Sir Erasmus Wilson, who, in turn, presented them to the British Museum.

As a young army captain, Naville, a pious member of a family of *haute-bourgeois Genevois* bankers and academics, had been involved in the formative years of the Red Cross, helping to care for the remnants of a defeated French army in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War. Aged forty when he accepted the role of archaeologist for the Egypt Exploration Fund, he had a strong scholarly reputation, having studied in London and Bonn, in Paris at the Collège de France with de

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Rougé and at Berlin University, first as a student of Lepsius and later as his German professor's executor as the editor of the final sections of the enormous *Denkmäler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien*, one of egyptology's foundational works and the product of Lepsius' three-year field survey of the pharaonic monuments. At the time he undertook to excavate for the Fund, Naville was also engaged, at Lepsius' suggestion, in producing another egyptological landmark, the first comparative edition of the texts of the so-called Egyptian Book of the Dead.

But, as a young man, Naville had also become enchanted with the Egyptian landscape. 'The first impression of the desert is that of admiration,' he had written; 'it is like the sight of the sea, perhaps even more grandiose, for the sea changes constantly, its waves move, they are sometimes calm, sometimes lifted by the wind; here, on the contrary, it is infinite in its extension . . .' Having spent several winters on the Nile copying inscriptions in tomb chapels and temples and accompanying Maspero on that first fateful voyage of inspection up the Nile, he was delighted to accept the task of searching for the route of the Exodus.

Prospecting for a promising site with which to start, Naville first visited Mariette's old dig at Tanis, embarking on the then complicated voyage to the site along several irrigation canals. Yet though Maspero had been keen for the London Fund to work at Tanis and for the site to be cleared of statues, his cautionary observation to his friend that it was 'in the midst of a country devastated by cholera and will be unhealthy for strangers for a few more months' could hardly have been encouraging, whilst its sheer remoteness, the windblown dust, the fetid mud and pools of stagnant water led the aspiring archaeologist to describe the place as simply frightful. A more promising alternative, Naville reported to the Fund's committee, was the Wadi Tumilat, a desert valley some thirty miles long that lay a little to the north of Cairo and ran between the eastern edges of the Nile's delta and the lakes at the northern end of the Red Sea.

The Wadi Tumilat had been identified as the Biblical Land of Goshen since the time of the first Christian monks and pilgrims. Many Bible scholars of Naville's day, moreover, considered it to have been the region that the Book of Genesis describes as that given to the Patriarch Joseph by pharaoh, and later as the province which the Book of Exodus describes as the region from which that fateful journey began. Certainly,

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the wadi contained one of the two ancient caravan tracks that had connected pharaonic Egypt with the Levant; the other route, which Naville considered to have been marshy and inherently unhealthy, being the coastal highway known in pharaonic times as the 'Way of Horus', which ran east from the brackish edges of the Nile's delta and up along the Mediterranean coast and into the Levant.

A canal had been cut along the Wadi Tumilat to join the Nile to the Red Sea during the sixth century BC, and the constant flow of fresh Nile water that it provided enabled the desert wadi, which previously had only been partly watered by the Nile's annual flood, to be farmed along its entire length all the year round; a relatively recent fruitfulness in pharaonic terms which may well have contributed to its later identification as the Biblical Land of Goshen. In the 1860s too, though that ancient canal had long since silted up, the Wadi Tumilat was rendered fertile once again when, at a terrible cost to local labour, another canal, the so-called Sweet Water Canal, had been cut along its length to supply the needs of thousands of farm workers who were engaged in excavating the nearby Suez Canal.

Some thirty-five archaeological sites have been identified within the Wadi Tumilat, most of them appearing as dark mounds standing along the low horizon of the desert's edge. Once there had been many such in Egypt. Known as 'tells', they were composed of drifted sand and the disintegrating mud brick, pottery and dust of ancient settlements built one atop the other so that their remains lie in successive strata. Named Tell el-Maskhuta, the largest tell in the Wadi Tumilat had long attracted Naville's attention, for in the course of his mid-century survey of the Egyptian monuments Professor Lepsius had recorded the presence at the site of several fine statues that bore the name of Ramesses, one of which the early monks and pilgrims in the region had identified as an image, no less, of Moses. Whatever else, therefore, the wadi was an ancient holy landscape. Several European engineers, moreover, had constructed villas beside Tell el-Maskhuta whilst they worked on the cutting of the Suez Canal, and some of the handsome granite statues that were uncovered during the digging of their foundations had been set up in the gardens of the newly founded city of Ismailia on the Suez Canal. Here, then, Naville decided, would be a good place to start the search for Israel in Egypt and the route of the Biblical Exodus.

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Aided by Monsieur Jaillon, a French engineer who built one of those villas and who had returned and gathered up a hundred men to serve as Naville's excavators, one of the deserted villas was re-opened and a number of large trenches cut through the centre of Tell el-Maskhuta just a few hundred yards from where, a few months earlier, Arabi's troops had set up earthworks and dug out trenches in their failed attempt to block the invading British Expeditionary Force on their march to Cairo. And as the labourers dug, so they turned up more stones and statues from the age of Ramesses II, and other pieces too, of later times.

Now, some of these statues bore inscriptions containing the name of an ancient god who, the Book of the Dead describes, had single-handedly created the elements of the pharaonic universe. Naville transcribed this as the name 'Tum' rather than the term 'Atum' that is used today, and he combined his transcription with another of the adjacent hieroglyphs, which he transcribed as 'Pi' and translated as 'abode', rather than the terms 'city' or 'settlement' that are used today. So the ancient 'settlement of Atum' became the name 'Pi-Tum'. And that, Naville concluded, spelled out the name 'Pithom', which the Book of Exodus describes as one of pharaoh's 'treasure cities' and a dwelling place of the Israelites in Egypt.

Most of Naville's report on his excavations consists of similar linguistic arguments. The people of the Exodus, he concludes, had passed through Pithom/Tell el-Maskhuta before arriving at the Ramesses of the Old Testament, which, he concludes, was not a city but a region at the eastern end of the Wadi Tumilat beside the banks of Lake Timsah, the 'Lake of Crocodiles'. A rush-filled marsh in ancient times, this lake seemed an appropriate location for the drama of the parting of the Red Sea and the destruction of pharaoh's army that the Book of Exodus describes. Naville, it seemed, had retraced the route of the Biblical Exodus.

What, however, had caused a stir in London as Amelia Edwards' bulletins on Naville's work appeared in the daily press, and would later send the slender volume on his excavations into four reprints over the following eight years, were some massive mud-brick walls that his workmen had uncovered at the centre of Tell el-Maskhuta. For a visiting Member of Parliament and an official of the Fund's committee

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had observed that the bricks in those walls had been made without straw, a phenomenon, he informed Naville, that he had never seen before in all his trips to Egypt. (To this day, chopped straw is a fundamental ingredient of Egyptian sun-dried mud bricks.) So those great brick walls at the centre of the putative City of Pithom seemed to have lacked the very ingredient, chopped straw, that the Book of Exodus describes pharaoh as denying the work gangs of the Hebrews:

> And Pharaoh commanded . . . the taskmasters of the people and their officers, saying, Ye shall no more give the people straw to make brick, as heretofore: let them go and gather straw for themselves . . . And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Ramesses.
>
> from the Book of Exodus 5:6–7 and 1:11

That last phrase even seemed to explain the mysterious lack of doors and windows in the massive rooms whose walls Naville's men had dug out: they were the ruins of the very storerooms, the treasure cities, that the Israelites had built for pharaoh.

Back in London, Amelia Edwards wondered if 3,000 strawless bricks could be transported to England and gifted to the expedition's donors, a suggestion that was put to rest when it was calculated that the Fund could not afford to pay for their transportation and that, in any event, what ancient straw there may once have been within those ancient bricks had probably been eaten away by insects. Nonetheless, 'The Store-City of Pithom and the Route of the Exodus', as Naville entitled his report, was an archaeological and ecclesiastical bestseller. So it must have been something of a shock to the committee when, in the months before the beginning of the Fund's second winter season of excavation, Naville announced that he was withdrawing from the work in order to see his three-volume edition of the Egyptian Book of the Dead through the press. For who could take his place?

The man they chose could hardly have been more different. Ten years Naville's junior, the Englishman William Matthew Flinders Petrie was virtually self-educated, knew hardly any hieroglyphic and had made but a single trip to Egypt. He was, however, a well-practised member of an idiosyncratic British tradition of the study of ancient monuments that had long since engaged a range of landowners and soldiers, vicars, diarists and geologists and had come to a remarkable

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perfection in the last half of the nineteenth century. Petrie, too, was regarded as something of a prodigy in London's archaeological and anthropological societies, for in his single trip to Egypt he had surveyed the Great Pyramid of Giza with such acuity and accuracy that the Royal Academy had subsidized the publication of his volume on the work.

'A good deal of the rash and hasty generalization of our time . . . arises from the unreliability of the evidence upon which it is based' – so General Augustus Henry Lane-Fox Pitt Rivers, one of British archaeology's most celebrated practitioners and a supporter of young Petrie, had observed. On such excavations, things were mapped and measured, weighed and ordered in great detail and the commentaries on their findings set within the broader intellectual currents of their age, from Ruskin's theories on the moral integrity of fine craftsmanship to Darwin's evolutionism and E. B. Tylor's cultural anthropology, which aimed to trace man's rise from savagery to the culture of the modern West.

Like Naville, Petrie had been enchanted by the land of Egypt. Unlike Naville, however, whose view of its history was based on ancient texts, Petrie was fascinated by Egypt's people and by the minutiae of the country's distant past which the desert had preserved but which egyptologists largely ignored. Yet as the archaeologist Pitt Rivers had declared, even the most modest relics can yield valuable historical evidence of human evolution:

> Nails, pottery, and flint flakes, wherever they were employed, became thickly strewed in the soil . . . they afford reliable, and constantly recurring, evidence of the age of the works . . . Next to coins, fragments of pottery afford the most reliable of all evidence, and, on this account, I have elsewhere spoken of pottery as the human fossil, so widely is it distributed.

In similar fashion, one of Petrie's lectures given to the Royal Anthropological Society on his first return from Egypt considered 'The Domestic Arrangements of the Ancient Egyptians'. Another, most remarkably, outlined the then entirely novel notion of the compilation of a chronology of the changing shapes of the pottery that littered most of Egypt's ancient places.

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> Around Cairo the heaps [of pottery sherds] are such that to any one visiting them for the first time, they are more astonishing than anything else in that city; the magnificent Arab architecture, and even the unrivalled museum of Bulaq [Mariette's then new museum], do not strike the visitor as so completely beyond all experience and reason, as do the rubbish mounds that seem to wall in the city on two sides.

What Petrie had realized on that first trip was that, by careful analysis, those acres of sherds could be placed in a temporal sequence, showing the development, the 'evolution', of pottery shapes. So that whether or not the ancient sites contained inscribed monuments or any other texts, they could still be assigned to specific spans of time. 'Entire civilizations, whole histories,' he later wrote, 'lay just beneath the sand and dust.' Petrie had also seen, like Maspero, that in reality the West's so-called 'eternal Egypt' was 'like a house on fire, so rapid was the destruction going on. My duty was that of a salvage man, to get all I could, quickly gathered in, and then when I was sixty I would sit down and write it up.'

In that single trip to survey the Giza pyramids, Petrie had found his life's passion and a task for which he was ideally suited: the retrieval of the histories that lay unprotected in Egypt's ancient sites. Though hardly wealthy, he was prepared to work again in Egypt for the Fund without any payment and was eager, even, to take on 'frightful' Tanis.

DIGGING FOR THE EXODUS

> *Beyond the civilized regions of modern Egypt, past even the country palm-groves, where a stranger is rarely seen, there stretches out to the Mediterranean a desolation of mud and swamp, impassable in winter, and only dried into an impalpable salt dust by the heat of midsummer. To tell land from water, to say where the mud ends and the lakes begin, requires a long experience; the flat expanse, as level as the sea, covered with slowly drying salt pools, may be crossed for miles, with only the dreary changes of dust, black mud, water, and black mud again, which it is impossible to define as more land than*

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