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**THE RISE**

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**AND FALL**

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**of ANCIENT**

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**EGYPT**

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**TOBY WILKINSON**

*Early Dynastic Egypt*

*Royal Annals of Ancient Egypt*

*Genesis of the Pharaohs*

*The Thames & Hudson Dictionary of Ancient Egypt*

*Lives of the Ancient Egyptians*

*The Egyptian World* (editor)

THE RISE AND FALL OF

# ANCIENT EGYPT

TOBY WILKINSON

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“My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:

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Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!”

Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

—PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY, “Ozymandias”

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## TIMELINE

All dates are B.C.. The margin of error is within a century or so circa 3000 B.C. and within two decades circa 1300 B.C.; dates are precise from 664 B.C. The system of dynasties devised in the third century B.C. is not without its problems—for example, the Seventh Dynasty is not recognized as being wholly spurious, while several dynasties are known to have ruled concurrently in different parts of Egypt—but this system remains the most convenient method for subdividing ancient Egyptian history. The broader periods are more modern scholarly conventions.

PERIOD/DYNASTY/KING	DEVELOPMENTS: IN EGYPT	OUTSIDE EGYPT
<b>EARLY DYNASTIC PERIOD, 2950–2575</b>		
First Dynasty, 2950–2750		Newgrange chambered tomb built in Ireland
NARMER AHA DJER DJET DEN ANEDJIB SEMERKHEP QAA	Unification of Egypt	
Second Dynasty, 2750–2650		
HETEPSEKHENWY NERRA NINETIER (several ephemeral kings) PERIBSEN KHASEKHEM(WY)		Emergence of Elamite kingdom  Earliest evidence of silk-weaving in China
Third Dynasty, 2650–2575		
NETJERIKHEP (DJOSER), 2650–2610 SEKHEMKHEP KHABA SANAKHT HUNI, 2600–2575	Step Pyramid at Saqqara	Emergence of Indus civilization
PERIOD/DYNASTY/KING	DEVELOPMENTS: IN EGYPT	OUTSIDE EGYPT

## OLD KINGDOM, 2575–2125

<b>Fourth Dynasty, 2575–2450</b>	Zenith of pyramid building	
SNEFERU, 2575–2545		
KHUFU, 2545–2525	Great Pyramid at Giza	
DJEDFRA		
KHAFRA	Great Sphinx completed	
(ephemeral unnamed king)		
MENKAURA		
SHEPSESRAF		
<b>Fifth Dynasty, 2450–2325</b>	Sun temples	
USERKAF		
SAHURA		
NEFERIRKARA KAKAI		
SHEPSESARA IZI		
NEFEREFRA		
NIUSERRA INI		
MENKAUHOR		
DJEDKARA ISESI		Kingdom of Akkad founded by Sargon
UNAS, 2350–2325	Pyramid Texts compiled	
<b>Sixth Dynasty, 2325–2175</b>		
TETI		
USERKARA		
PEPI I, 2325–2275		
MERENRA		
NEFERKARA PEPI II, 2260–2175	Harkhuf's expeditions to Nubia	
<b>Eighth Dynasty, 2175–2125</b>		
Eighteen ephemeral kings, including:		
NEMTYEMSAF II	Decline in royal authority	
NETIQERTY SEPTAH		
IBI		
NEFERKARA		
NEFERKAUHOR		
NEFERIRKARA		
PERIOD/DYNASTY/KING	DEVELOPMENTS: IN EGYPT	OUTSIDE EGYPT

## FIRST INTERMEDIATE PERIOD, 2125–2110

<b>Ninth/Tenth Dynasty, 2125–1975</b>	Rise of the Osiris cult	
Several kings, including:		
KHETI I		
KHETI II		
MERIKARA		
<b>Eleventh Dynasty, 2080–1938</b>		
INTEF I	Civil war begins	Main phase of Stonehenge
INTEF II		Emergence of Minoan civilization on Crete; collapse of Indus civilization
INTEF III		

## MIDDLE KINGDOM, 2010–1630

MENTUHOTEP II, 2010–1960	Civil war ends; Egypt reunified	
MENTUHOTEP III, 1950–1948		
MENTUHOTEP IV, 1948–1938		
<b>Twelfth Dynasty, 1938–1755</b>	Literature flourishes	
AMENEMHAT I, 1938–1908		
SEUSRET I, 1918–1875	Nubian fortresses built	
AMENEMHAT II, 1876–1842		Earliest evidence for domestic horses in Central Asia
SEUSRET II, 1842–1837		
SEUSRET III, 1836–1818		
AMENEMHAT III, 1818–1770	Land reclamation in the Fayum	Code of Hammurabi compiled
AMENEMHAT IV, 1770–1760		Traditional date for the foundation of the Shang Dynasty in China, 1766
SOBKNEFERU, 1760–1755		
<b>Thirteenth Dynasty, 1755–1630</b>		Asiatic immigration into the delta
At least fifty kings, including:		Foundation of the Hittite Kingdom
SOBKHOTEP III		

## SECOND INTERMEDIATE PERIOD, 1630–1539

<b>Fourteenth Dynasty</b>	Political fragmentation	
Several ephemeral kings, beginning with:		
NEHESY		
<b>Fifteenth (Hyksos) Dynasty, 1630–1520</b>		
Six kings, including:		
KHYAN, 1610–1570		
APEPI, 1570–1530	Civil war with Thebes	
KHAMUDI, 1530–1520		
<b>Sixteenth Dynasty</b>		
Numerous ephemeral kings, including:		
NEFERHOTEP III		
MENTUHOTEP I		
<b>Seventeenth Dynasty, 1630–1539</b>		Emergence of Mycenaean civilization in Greece;
Numerous kings, including:		Babylonia sacked by the Hittites
RAHOTEP		
NUBKHEPERA INTef		
SOBKHEMAY II		
SEQENENRA TAA, 1545–1541	Battles against the Hyksos	
KAMOSE, 1541–1539		

## NEW KINGDOM, 1539–1069

### Eighteenth Dynasty, 1539–1292

AHMOSE (I), 1539–1514	Hyksos defeated and expelled	
AMENHOTEP I, 1514–1493	Valley of the Kings inaugurated	
THUTMOSE I, 1493–1481	Conquest of Nubia	
THUTMOSE II, 1481–1479		
THUTMOSE III, 1479–1425 and HATSHEPSUT, 1473–1458	Battle of Megiddo, April 1458	Mycenaean conquest of Crete, end of Minoan civilization
AMENHOTEP II, 1426–1400	Egyptian empire in Levant	
THUTMOSE IV, 1400–1390		Linear B script
AMENHOTEP III, 1390–1353	Monumental buildings at Thebes	
AMENHOTEP IV/AKHENATEN, 1353–1336	Foundation of Akhetaten, 1349	
NEFERNEFERUATEN, 1336–1333		
SMENKHKARA, 1330–1332		
TUTANKHAMUN, 1332–1322		
AY, 1322–1319		
HOREMHEB, 1319–1292	Army rises to prominence	Height of Olmec civilization in Mexico

### Nineteenth Dynasty, 1292–1190

RAMSESSES I, 1292–1290		
SETI I, 1290–1279		
RAMSESSES II, 1279–1213	Battle of Kadesh, May 1274	
MERENPTAH, 1213–1204	Libyan invasion, 1209	Hittite capital sacked
SETI II (SETI-MERENPTAH), 1204–1198		
AMENMESSE, 1204–1200		
SIPTAH, 1198–1193		
TAWUSRET, 1198–1190		

### Twentieth Dynasty, 1190–1069

SETHNAKHT, 1190–1187		
RAMSESSES III, 1187–1156	Battle against the Sea Peoples	Traditional date for the fall of Troy, 1184
RAMSESSES IV, 1156–1150		Collapse of Mycenaean civilization
RAMSESSES V, 1150–1145		
RAMSESSES VI, 1145–1137		
RAMSESSES VII, 1137–1129		
RAMSESSES VIII, 1129–1126		
RAMSESSES IX, 1126–1108	Tomb robberies begin	
RAMSESSES X, 1108–1099		
RAMSESSES XI, 1099–1069		

## THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD, 1069–664

<b>Twenty-first Dynasty, 1069-945</b>	Formal division of Egypt	Composition of the <i>Rig Veda</i> in India
NEBHEHESEDJET, 1069-1045 (HEHIBOR, 1069-1063) (PINEHEM I, 1063-1033) AMENEMHESU, 1045-1040 PASEBAKHAENNIUT I, 1040-985 AMENEMOPE, 985-975 (PINEHEM II, 985-960) OSORKON THE ELDER, 975-970 SIAMUN, 970-950 PASEBAKHAENNIUT II, 950-945		
<b>Twenty-second Dynasty, 945-715</b>		
SHOSHENQ I, 945-925	Egyptian conquest of Judah	Death of Solomon, division of Hebrew Kingdom into Israel and Judah
OSORKON I, 925-890 SHOSHENQ II, 890 TAKELOT I, 890-874 OSORKON II, 874-835 SHOSHENQ III, 835-793 SHOSHENQ IV, 793-783 PAMAY, 785-777 SHOSHENQ V, 777-740 PADIBASTET (II), 740-730 OSORKON IV, 735-715	Secession of Thebes	Rise of Assyrian Empire  Traditional date for the foundation of Carthage, 814 Emergence of Etruscan civilization in Italy Earliest recorded Olympic Games, 776 Traditional date for the foundation of Rome, 753 Homer composes <i>The Iliad</i> and <i>The Odyssey</i>
<b>Twenty-third Dynasty, 838-720</b>		
TAKELOT II, 838-812 PADIBASTET (I), 827-802 IUPUT I, 812-802 SHOSHENQ VI, 802-796 OSORKON III, 796-768 TAKELOT III, 773-754 RUDAMUN, 754-735 INY, 735-730 PEFTJAUWYBAST, 730-720	Civil war in Thebes  Kushite conquest of Thebes	
<b>Twenty-fourth Dynasty, 740-715</b>		
TEFNAKHT, 740-720 BARENRENEF, 720-715		
<b>Twenty-fifth (Kushite) Dynasty, 728-657</b>		
PIANKHI, 747-716 SHABAAQO, 716-702 SHABITQO, 702-690 TAHARQO, 690-664 TANUTAMUN, 664-657	Kushite conquest of Egypt, 728  Assyrian invasions	Capital of Assyria moved to Nineveh, 705

## LATE PERIOD, 664–332

### Twenty-sixth (Saite) Dynasty, 664–525

PSAMTIK I, 664–610	Reintegration of Thebes	Babylonian conquest of Assyria; Nineveh sacked, 612
NEKAU II, 610–595		Jews exiled to Babylon; earliest Mayan pyramids built
PSAMTIK II, 595–589		
WAHIBRA, 589–570	Babylonian invasion repulsed	Persian conquest of Babylonia, 539; birth of the Buddha and Confucius
AHMOS II, 570–526	Greek trading center at Naukratis	
PSAMTIK III, 526–525		

### Twenty-seventh Dynasty (First Persian Period), 525–404

CAMBYSES, 525–522	Persia conquers Egypt	
DARIUS I, 522–486	Ancient Suez Canal built, 497	Roman republic founded 509; Athens adopts democracy, 509–507
XERXES I, 486–465		Battle of Thermopylae, 480; deaths of the Buddha and Confucius
ARTAXERXES I, 465–424		Completion of the Parthenon in Athens, 432; Peloponnesian War, 431
DARIUS II, 424–404		Deaths of Euripides and Sophocles, 406

### Twenty-eighth Dynasty, 404–399

AMENIRDIS, 404–399	Rivalry between delta dynasts	Execution of Socrates, 399
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### Twenty-ninth Dynasty, 399–380

NAVSAURUS I, 399–393		
HACAR, 393–392		
PASHENUPUT, 392–391		
HACAR (restored), 391–380		
NAVSAURUS II, 380		

### Thirtieth Dynasty, 380–343

NAKHTNEBEE, 380–362	Egypt hires Spartan mercenaries	
DJEDNER, 365–360		
NAKHTHORHEB, 360–343		Death of Plato, 347

### Thirty-first Dynasty (Second Persian Period), 343–332

ARTAXERXES III, 343–338	Persia reconquers Egypt	
ARSES, 338–336		
DARIUS III, 335–332		

## MACEDONIAN DYNASTY, 332–309

ALEXANDER III (THE GREAT), 332-323	Alexander visits Siwa oracle	
PHILIP ARRHIDAÆUS (PHILIP III OF MACEDON), 323-317		
ALEXANDER IV, 317-309		

PERIOD/DYNASTY/KING	DEVELOPMENTS: IN EGYPT	OUTSIDE EGYPT
<b>PTOLEMAIC PERIOD, 309-30</b>		
PTOLEMY I, 304-282	Alexandria Library founded	
PTOLEMY II, 285-246	Pharos completed, 280	Outbreak of First Punic War, 264
PTOLEMY III, 246-221	Theban rebellion, 205-186	Outbreak of Second Punic War, 218; Hannibal crosses the Alps
PTOLEMY IV, 221-204		
PTOLEMY V, 204-180		
PTOLEMY VI, 180-145	Rome intervenes to save Egypt	Outbreak of Third Punic War, 149; Rome destroys Carthage, 146
PTOLEMY VIII AND CLEOPATRA II, 170-116		
PTOLEMY IX, 116-107 and CLEOPATRA III, 115-101		
PTOLEMY X, 107-88		
PTOLEMY IX (RESTORED), 88-80		
PTOLEMY XI and BERENIKE III, 80		
PTOLEMY XII, 80-58	Temple of Horus consecrated, 70	
CLEOPATRA VI, 58-57 and BERENIKE IV, 58-55		
PTOLEMY XII (RESTORED), 55-51	Cleopatra meets Antony, 53	Caesar lands in Britain, 55
CLEOPATRA VII, 51-30 and PTOLEMY XIII, 51-47 and PTOLEMY XIV, 47-44 and PTOLEMY XV CAESARIÓN, 44-39	Cleopatra meets Caesar, 48	Assassination of Caesar, 44 Rome conquers Egypt

### PROPER NAMES

Names of ancient Egyptian people and places have been given in the form most closely approximating the original usage (where this is known), except when the classical form of a place-name has given rise to a widely used adjective. Therefore, “Memphis” (and “Memphite”) are used instead of “Men-nefer” or the earlier “Ineb-hedj,” “Thebes” (“Theban”) rather than “Waset,” “Sais” (“Saite”) instead of “Sa,” and “Herakleopolis” (“Herakleopolitan”) instead of “Nen-nesut.” For ease of reference, the modern equivalent is given in parentheses after the first mention of an ancient place-name in the text, and the ancient equivalents are given for classical toponyms.

For reasons of accessibility, the names of the Persian and Greek rulers of Egypt in the sixth to first centuries B.C. have been given in their classical and anglicized forms, respectively: for example, Darius instead of Dariyahavush, Ptolemy rather than Ptolemaios, Mark Antony instead of Marcus Antonius.

The Roman numerals (e.g., Thutmose I–IV, Ptolemy I–XV) are a modern convention, used to distinguish between different kings in a sequence who shared the same birth name. Throughout most of Egyptian history, the kings were referred to principally by their throne names; these are formulaic, often long-winded, and generally unfamiliar except to Egyptologists.

### DATES

All dates are B.C., except in the Introduction and Epilogue or unless explicitly stated. For dates before 664 B.C., there is a margin of error that ranges from ten to twenty years for the New Kingdom to as much as fifty to a hundred years for the Early Dynastic Period; the dates given in the text represent the latest scholarly consensus. From 664 B.C. onward, sources external to Egypt make a precise chronology possible.



# INTRODUCTION

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TWO HOURS BEFORE SUNSET ON NOVEMBER 26, 1922, THE ENGLISH Egyptologist Howard Carter and three companions entered a rock-cut corridor dug into the floor of the Valley of the Kings. The three middle-aged men and one much younger woman made an unlikely foursome. Carter was a neat, rather stiff man in his late forties, with a carefully clipped mustache and slicked-back hair. He had a reputation in archaeological circles for obstinacy and a temper, but was also respected, if somewhat grudgingly, for his serious and scholarly approach to excavation. He had made Egyptology his career but, lacking private means, was dependent on others to fund his work. Fortunately, he had found just the right man to bankroll his current excavations on the west bank of the Nile at Luxor. Indeed, his patron was now beside him to share in the excitement of the moment.

George Herbert, fifth earl of Carnarvon, cut a very different figure. Raffish and debonaire even for his fifty-six years, he had led the life of an aristocratic dilettante, as a young man indulging his love of fast cars. But a driving accident in 1901 had nearly cost him his life; it had left him weakened and prone to rheumatic pain. To spare himself the cold, damp air of English winters, he had taken to spending several months each year in the warmer, drier climate of Egypt. So had begun his own, amateur interest in archaeology. A meeting with Carter in 1907 inaugurated the partnership that was to make history. Joining the two men on this “day of days”—as Carter was later to describe it—were Carnarvon’s daughter, Lady Evelyn Herbert, and Carter’s old friend Arthur “Pecky” Callender, a retired railway manager who had joined the excavation only three weeks earlier. Although a novice to archaeology, Callender had a knowledge of architecture and engineering that made him a useful member of the team. His carefulness and dependability appealed to Carter, and he was well used to Carter’s frequent mood swings.



*Howard Carter and the governor of Qena province greet Lady Evelyn Herbert and Lord Carnarvon on their arrival at Luxor station, November 23, 1922.* SOURCE: UNKNOWN

Just three days into the excavation season (which was due to be the last season—even Carnarvon’s fortune was not inexhaustible), workmen had uncovered a flight of steps leading

downward into the bedrock. Once the staircase had been fully cleared, an outer blocking wall had been revealed, covered with plaster and stamped with seal impressions. Even without deciphering the inscription, Carter had known what this meant: he had found an intact tomb from the period of ancient Egyptian history known as the New Kingdom, an era of great pharaohs and beautiful queens. Was it possible that beyond the blocking wall lay the prize for which Carter had been striving for seven long years? Was it the last undiscovered tomb in the Valley of the Kings? Always a stickler for correctness, Carter had put decorum first and ordered his workmen to refill the flight of steps, pending the arrival from England of the expedition's sponsor, Lord Carnarvon. If there was a major discovery to be made, it was only proper that patron and archaeologist should share it together. So on November 6, Carter sent a telegram to Carnarvon: "At last have made wonderful discovery in Valley; a magnificent tomb with seals intact; re-covered same for your arrival; congratulations."

After a seventeen-day journey by ship and train, the earl and Lady Evelyn arrived in Luxor to be met by an impatient and excited Carter. The very next morning, work to clear the steps began in earnest. On November 26, the outer blocking wall was removed to reveal a corridor filled with stone chips. From the pattern of disturbance running through the fill, it was clear that someone had been there before: robbers must have entered the tomb in antiquity. But the seal impressions on the outer blocking wall showed that it had been resealed in the New Kingdom. What might this mean for the state of the burial itself? There was always the possibility that it would turn out in the end to be a private tomb, or a cache of funerary equipment collected from earlier robbed tombs in the Valley of the Kings and reburied for safety. After a further day of strenuous work, in the heat and dust of the valley floor, the corridor was emptied. Now, after what must have felt like an interminable wait, the way ahead was clear. Carter, Carnarvon, Callender, and Lady Evelyn found themselves before yet another blocking wall, its surface also covered with large oval seal impressions. A slight, darker patch of plaster in the top left-hand corner of the wall showed where the ancient robbers had broken in. What would greet this next set of visitors, more than three and a half thousand years later?

Without further hesitation, Carter took his trowel and made a small hole in the plaster blocking, just big enough to look through. First, as a safety precaution, he took a lighted candle and put it through the hole, to test for asphyxiating gases. Then, with his face pressed against the plaster wall, he peered through into the darkness. The hot air escaping from the sealed chamber caused the candle to flicker, and it took a few moments for Carter's eyes to grow accustomed to the gloom. But then details of the room beyond began to emerge. Carter stood dumbstruck. After some minutes, Carnarvon could bear the suspense no longer. "Can you see anything?" he asked. "Yes, yes," replied Carter, "wonderful things." The following day, Carter wrote excitedly to his friend and fellow Egyptologist Alan Gardiner, "I imagine this is the greatest find ever made."

Carter and Carnarvon had discovered an intact royal tomb from the golden age of ancient Egypt. It was crammed, in Carter's own words, with "enough stuff to fill the whole upstairs Egyptian section of the B[ritish] M[useum]." The antechamber alone—the first of four rooms entered by Carter and his associates—contained treasures of unimaginable opulence: three colossal gilded ceremonial beds, in the shapes of fabulous creatures; golden shrines with images of gods and goddesses; painted jewelry boxes and inlaid caskets; gilded chariots and

fine archery equipment; a magnificent gold throne, inlaid with silver and precious stones; vases of beautiful translucent alabaster; and, guarding the right-hand wall, two life-size figures of the dead king, with black skin and gold accoutrements. The royal name on many of the objects left no doubt as to the identity of the tomb owner: the hieroglyphs clearly spelled out Tut-ankh-Amun.

By curious coincidence, the breakthrough that had allowed ancient Egyptian writing to be first deciphered, and had thus opened up the study of pharaonic civilization through its numerous inscriptions, had occurred exactly a century before. In 1822, the French scholar Jean-François Champollion published his famous *Lettre à M. Dacier*, in which he correctly described the workings of the hieroglyphic writing system and identified the phonetic values of many of the important signs. This turning point in the history of Egyptology was itself the result of a long period of study. Champollion's interest in ancient Egyptian writing had been prompted when he'd first learned about the Rosetta Stone as a boy. A royal proclamation inscribed in three scripts (Greek, demotic characters, and hieroglyphics), the stone had been discovered by Napoleonic troops at el-Rashid (Rosetta) during the French invasion of 1798, when Champollion was eight years old, and it was to provide one of the main keys to the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphics. Champollion's early genius for languages had enabled him to become proficient in Greek and, crucial in this endeavor, Coptic, the liturgical language of the Egyptian Orthodox Church and a direct descendant of ancient Egyptian. Armed with this knowledge, and with a transcription of the Rosetta Stone, Champollion correctly translated the hieroglyphic version of the text and so began the process that was to unlock the secrets of ancient Egyptian history. His grammar and dictionary of the ancient Egyptian language, published posthumously, allowed scholars, for the first time, to read the words of the pharaohs themselves, after an interval of more than two thousand years.

At the same time that Champollion was working on the mysteries of the ancient Egyptian language, an Englishman, John Gardner Wilkinson, was making an equally important contribution to the study of pharaonic civilization. Born a year before Napoléon's invasion, Wilkinson traveled to Egypt at the age of twenty-four and stayed for the next twelve years, visiting virtually every known site, copying countless tomb scenes and inscriptions, and carrying out the most comprehensive study of pharaonic monuments undertaken to that point. (For a year, in 1828–1829, Wilkinson and Champollion were both in Egypt, traveling and recording, but it is not known if the two ever met.) On his return to England in 1833, Wilkinson began compiling the results of his work and published them four years later. The three-volume *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians*, together with the two-volume *Modern Egypt and Thebes* (published in 1843), was and remains the greatest review of ancient Egyptian civilization ever accomplished.

Wilkinson became the most famous and most honored Egyptologist of his age, and is regarded, with Champollion, as one of the founders of the subject. Just a year before Wilkinson died, Howard Carter was born, the man who was to take Egyptology—and the public fascination with ancient Egypt—to new heights. Unlike his two great forebears, Carter stumbled into Egyptology almost by accident. It was his skill as a draftsman and painter, rather than any deep-rooted fascination with ancient Egypt, that secured him his first position on the staff of the Archaeological Survey at the age of seventeen. This brought Carter the

opportunity to train under some of the greatest archaeologists of the day—including Flinders Petrie, the father of Egyptian archaeology, with whom he excavated at Amarna, the capital city of the heretic pharaoh Akhenaten and the probable birthplace of Tutankhamun. By copying tomb and temple scenes for various expeditions, Carter became intimately acquainted with ancient Egyptian art. His firsthand knowledge of many of the major archaeological sites would, no doubt, have been supplemented by reading the works of Wilkinson. So it was that, in 1899, Carter came to be appointed inspector general of monuments of Upper Egypt, and four years later of Lower Egypt. But his hot temper and stubbornness brought his promising career to an abrupt end when he refused to apologize after an altercation with some French tourists, and he was promptly sacked from the Antiquities Service (then under French control). Returning to his roots, Carter earned his living for the next four years as an itinerant watercolorist, before joining forces with Lord Carnarvon in 1907 to begin excavating, once again, at Thebes.

After fifteen long, hot, and none-too-fruitful years, Carter and his sponsor finally made the greatest discovery in the history of Egyptology.

After sunset that November day in 1922, the astonished party made its way back to Carter's house for a fitful night's sleep. It was impossible to take in everything that had happened. They had made the greatest archaeological discovery the world had ever seen. Nothing would be the same again. But one final question nagged at Carter. He had found Tutankhamun's tomb, and the bouquets of flowers left over from the royal funeral, but did the king himself still lie, undisturbed, in his burial chamber?

The new dawn brought with it a feverish rush of activity, as Carter began to appreciate the immensity of the task that lay before him. He realized he would need to assemble—almost quickly—a team of experts to help photograph, catalogue, and conserve the vast number of objects in the tomb. He started contacting friends and colleagues, and informed the Egyptian antiquities authorities about the spectacular discovery. A date of November 29 was agreed upon for the official public opening of the tomb. The event would be covered by the world press, the first major archaeological discovery of the media age. Thereafter, it would be impossible for Carter to retain control of the situation. If he wanted to solve the mystery of the king's final resting place, quietly, and in his own time, he would have to do so before the official opening, and go behind the backs of the antiquities officials.

On the evening of November 28, a matter of hours before the press were due to arrive, Carter and his three trusted companions slipped away from the crowds and entered the tomb once more. His instinct told him that the black-skinned guardian figures framing the right-hand wall of the antechamber had to indicate the location of the burial chamber. The plaster wall behind them confirmed as much. Once again Carter made a small hole in the plaster wall, at ground level, just big enough to squeeze through, and with an electric flashlight this time instead of a candle, he crawled through the opening. Carnarvon and Lady Evelyn followed; Callender, being a little too portly, stayed behind. The three inside found themselves face-to-face with an enormous gilded shrine that filled the room. Opening its doors revealed a second shrine nested within the first ... then a third, and a fourth shrine concealing the stone sarcophagus. Now Carter knew for certain: the king's burial lay within, having been undisturbed for thirty-three centuries. After squeezing back out into the

antechamber, Carter hastily, and rather clumsily, disguised his unauthorized break-in with a basket and a bundle of reeds. For another three months, no one else would see what Carter, Carnarvon, and Lady Evelyn had seen.

The public unveiling of Tutankhamun's tomb made newspaper headlines around the world on November 30, 1922, capturing the public's imagination and generating a wave of popular interest in the treasures of the pharaohs. But there was more to come. The official opening of the burial chamber on February 16, 1923, was followed a year later by the lifting of the one-and-a-quarter-ton lid from the king's immense stone sarcophagus—a feat expertly accomplished by Callender with his engineering background. Inside the sarcophagus, there were yet more layers protecting the pharaoh's body: three nested coffins, to complement the four gilded shrines. The two outer coffins were of gilded wood, but the third, innermost coffin was of solid gold. Inside each coffin there were amulets and ritual objects, all of which had to be carefully documented and removed before the next layer could be examined. The whole process, from lifting the lid of the sarcophagus to opening the third coffin, took more than eighteen months. Finally, on October 28, 1925, nearly three years after the discovery of the tomb and two years after Carnarvon's untimely death (not from the pharaoh's curse but from blood poisoning), the moment was at hand to reveal the boy king's mummified remains. Using an elaborate system of pulleys, the lid of the innermost coffin was raised by its original handles. Inside lay the royal mummy, caked in embalming unguents that had blackened with age. Standing out from this tarry mess, and covering the king's face, was a magnificent funerary mask of beaten gold in the image of the young monarch. Above his brow were the vulture and cobra goddesses, and around his neck was a broad collar of inlaid glass and semiprecious stones. Carter and Tutankhamun had come face-to-face at last.



*Howard Carter cleaning Tutankhamun's second coffin.*

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The mask of Tutankhamun is perhaps the most splendid artifact ever recovered from a

ancient civilization. It dazzles us today as it did those who first beheld it in modern times almost a century ago. During the 1960s and '70s, it formed the highlight of the traveling Tutankhamun exhibition, drawing crowds of millions around the world, from Vancouver to Tokyo. Although I was too young to visit the show when it came to London, the book published to accompany the exhibition was my first introduction to the exotic world of ancient Egypt. I remember reading the book on the landing at home, at age six, marveling at the jewels, the gold, the strange names of kings and gods. The treasures of Tutankhamun planted a seed in my mind that was to grow and flourish in later years. But the ground had already been prepared. A year earlier, at the age of five, while leafing through the pages of my first childhood encyclopedia, I had noticed an entry illustrating different writing systems. Never mind the Greek, Arabic, Indian, and Chinese scripts: it was the Egyptian hieroglyphs that captured my imagination. The book gave only a few signs, but they were enough to allow me to work out how to write my own name. Hieroglyphs and Tutankhamun set me on the path to becoming an Egyptologist.

Indeed, writing and kingship were the twin cornerstones of pharaonic civilization, the defining characteristics that set it apart from other ancient cultures. Despite the efforts of archaeologists to uncover the rubbish dumps and workshops that would reveal the daily lives of ordinary citizens, it is the abundant written record and the imposing edifices left behind by the pharaohs that continue to dominate our view of ancient Egyptian history. In the face of such powerful testimonies, perhaps it is not surprising that we are inclined to take the texts and monuments at face value. And yet the dazzling treasures of the pharaohs should not blind us to a more complex truth. Despite its spectacular monuments, magnificent works of art, and lasting cultural achievements, ancient Egypt had a darker side.

The first pharaohs understood the extraordinary power of ideology—and of its visual counterpart, iconography—to unite a disparate people and bind them in loyalty to the state. Egypt's earliest kings formulated and harnessed the tools of leadership that are still with us: elaborate trappings of office and carefully choreographed public appearances to set the ruler apart from the populace; pomp and spectacle on grand state occasions to reinforce bonds of loyalty; patriotic fervor expressed orally and visually. But the pharaohs and their advisers knew equally well that their grip on power could be maintained just as effectively by other, less benign means: political propaganda, an ideology of xenophobia, close surveillance of the population, and brutal repression of dissent.

In studying ancient Egypt for more than twenty years, I have grown increasingly uneasy about the subject of my research. Scholars and enthusiasts alike are inclined to look at pharaonic culture with misty-eyed reverence. We marvel at the pyramids, without stopping to think too much about the political system that made them possible. We take vicarious pleasure in the pharaohs' military victories—Thutmose III at the Battle of Megiddo, Ramesses II at the Battle of Kadesh—without pausing too long to reflect on the brutality of warfare in the ancient world. We thrill at the weirdness of the heretic king Akhenaten and all his works, but do not question what it is like to live under a despotic, fanatical ruler (despite the modern parallels, such as in North Korea, that fill our television screens). Evidence for the darker side of pharaonic civilization is not lacking. From human sacrifice in the First Dynasty to a peasants' revolt under the Ptolemies, ancient Egypt was a society in which the relationship between the king and his subjects was based on coercion and fear, not love and

admiration—where royal power was absolute, and life was cheap. The aim of this book is to give a fuller and more balanced picture of ancient Egyptian civilization than is often found on the pages of scholarly or popular works. I have set out to reveal both the highs and the lows, the successes and the failures, the boldness and the brutality that characterized life under the pharaohs.

The history of the Nile Valley lays bare the relationship between rulers and the ruled—relationship that has proved stubbornly immutable across centuries and cultures. The ancient Egyptians invented the concept of the nation-state that still dominates our planet, five thousand years later. The Egyptians' creation was remarkable, not only for its impact, but also for its longevity: the pharaonic state, as originally conceived, lasted for three millennia. (By comparison, Rome barely managed one millennium, while Western culture has yet to survive two.) A key reason for this remarkable survival is that the philosophical and political framework first developed at the birth of ancient Egypt was so well attuned to the national psyche that it remained the archetypal pattern of government for the next one hundred generations. Despite prolonged periods of political fragmentation, decentralization, and unrest, pharaonic rule remained a powerful ideal. A political creed that harnesses itself to national myth can embed itself very deeply in the human consciousness.

It is extremely difficult to engage with a culture so remote in time and place from our own. Ancient Egypt was a sparsely populated tribal society. Its polytheistic religion, its premonetary economy, the low rate of literacy, and the ideological dominance of divine kingship—all these defining characteristics are utterly alien to contemporary Western observers, myself included. As well as a familiarity with two centuries of scholarship, the study of ancient Egypt thus requires a huge leap of imagination. And yet, our common humanity offers a way in. In the careers of ancient Egypt's rulers, we see the motives that drive ambitious men and women revealed in the pages of history for the very first time. The study of ancient Egyptian civilization likewise exposes the devices by which people have been organized, cajoled, dominated, and subjugated down to the present day. And with the benefit of hindsight, we can see in the self-confidence of pharaonic culture the seeds of its own destruction.

The rise and fall of ancient Egypt holds lessons for us all.

# The Nile Valley and Surrounding Regions



*Mediterranean Sea*

NEAR EAST

*Delta*

**LOWER EGYPT**

Memphis

*Birket Qarun*

*THE FAYUM*

*BAHARIYA OASIS*

*Bahr Yusuf*

*River Nile*  
EASTERN DESERT

*FARAFRA OASIS*

Asyut

WESTERN (LIBYAN) DESERT

*Wadi Hammamat*

*DAKHLA OASIS*

*KHARGA OASIS*

**UPPER EGYPT**

Gebel el-Silsila

*KURKUR OASIS*

Abu

First cataract

*Red Sea*

**LOWER NUBIA**

*DUNQUL OASIS*

Darb el-Arba'in

Second cataract

*SALIMA OASIS*

**UPPER NUBIA**

Third cataract

Fourth cataract

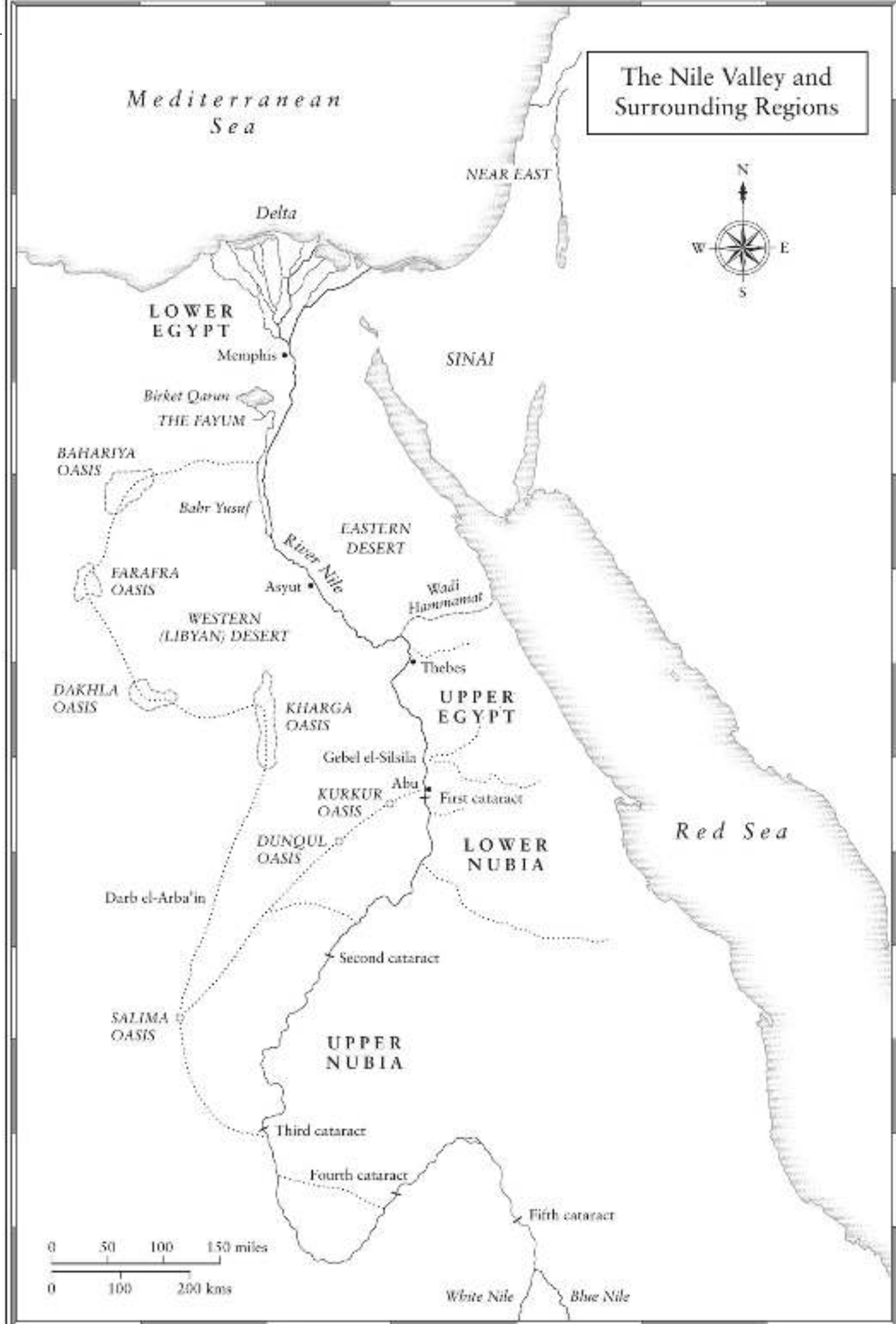
Fifth cataract

0 50 100 150 miles

0 100 200 kms

*White Nile*

*Blue Nile*





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