



THE
EGYPTIANS

AN INTRODUCTION

ROBERT MORKOT

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THE EGYPTIANS

Of all ancient societies, Egypt perhaps has the widest popular appeal. The huge amounts of archaeological material, from the vast and imposing temples to the small objects of daily life, make us believe that we can approach the society and empathize with it.

This study introduces the reader to the broad span of Egyptian history and cultural development from its origins to the arrival of Islam. It examines the structure of Egyptian society, its changes over time, and the ways in which the economy and religious institutions were used to bind society together. Challenging some of the accepted truths and highlighting the enormous gaps in our knowledge, the author also explains the place of Egypt in the Western European tradition that led to the development of academic Egyptology, and considers how the West has constructed its own version of the Egyptian past.

Robert G. Morkot lectures in Egyptology at the University of Exeter. His areas of interest include relations between Egypt and other ancient societies, notably Nubia, and Egypt in the Western tradition. Among his publications are *The Black Pharaohs, Egypt's Nubian Rulers* (2000) and *The Historical Dictionary of Ancient Egyptian Warfare* (2003).

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First published 2005
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016
Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005.

“To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge’s collection of thousands of eBooks please go to www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk.”

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN 0-203-48653-6 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-203-57023-5 (Adobe eReader Format)
ISBN 0-415-27103-7 (hbk)
ISBN 0-415-27104-5 (pbk)

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PREFACE

Writing a 'general' and 'introductory' book on ancient Egypt is a daunting and challenging task. However deep one's specialist knowledge, this is the opportunity to reveal one's ignorance to the world. It is tempting to repeat the 'accepted lies of our discipline', but if you want to argue detailed rejections of them, there is not really the space to do it to the satisfaction of colleagues.

The approach to ancient Egypt that I have adopted in this book is modelled very closely on introductory courses I have taught over a number of years. These go back to ask some very basic questions, such as 'Where is Egypt?' and 'Who were the Egyptians?'. The answers are frequently far from straightforward, and allow us to look at the broader issues of what Egypt means and has meant. So, rather than a stream of 'facts', accepted truths or the opinions of Egyptologists, I have deliberately tried to raise the question of the limits of our evidence. In confronting these issues, I also deal with an issue that is perhaps much less appealing to the general reader, but immensely significant: how has the Egyptian past been reconstructed in terms of its history, culture and society? This in turn raises the issues of imperialism and appropriation which are now widely discussed in ancient history, and increasingly so in Egyptology. But I have tried to avoid this becoming entirely discourse, and present a wide range of 'information' and 'facts' that represent our (academic Egyptology's) current view of ancient Egypt. Inevitably, my own interests and preoccupations will come through, perhaps to the annoyance of colleagues, but I have tried to raise issues that are not always covered in other general introductions.

I have dispensed with the paraphernalia of footnotes in favour of a more straightforward guide to further reading.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks go to Richard Stoneman for asking me to write this book, and to the readers of the original outline for their valuable and constructive comments, which I have tried to incorporate. My thanks also go to Stephen Quirke and the late Dominic Montserrat, who have presented the range of alternative Egypts in their work, both written and, in Stephen's case, practical, through his pioneering curatorship at the Petrie Museum. The series of volumes *Encounters with Ancient Egypt*, deriving from a conference at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London, devised by Dominic Montserrat and John Tait, presents this range of alternative Egypts and marks a shift in attitude among (some) Egyptologists. Dominic's death has deprived British Egyptology of one of its most challenging and enquiring teachers.

My thanks, as always, to John Vincent and Peter James for support, advice and ideas. Also to my students and classes for being victims of experiments, not always successful, in trying to understand ancient Egypt and what it means to us now.

All illustrations are by the author, unless they are credited otherwise.

DEFINING ANCIENT EGYPT

Unlike ‘ancient Greece’, which, culturally, embraced a region far wider than the narrow geographical limits of its modern namesake, or ‘Rome’, which was culturally diverse within its broad political boundaries, Egypt, ancient, medieval, and modern, is closely defined in geographical terms. Yet ‘placing’ Egypt in the world is actually fraught with difficulties: Egypt belongs in different places according to historical and political episodes, cultural changes, and individual viewpoints. The question ‘Where is Egypt?’ can elicit a wide range of responses, most of them ‘correct’ in some senses, but all of them requiring some qualification.

WHERE IS EGYPT?

The most obvious answer, but not necessarily the one most frequently given, is ‘Africa’. To an African-American/British audience, this would be the first, and perhaps only, location, not only in simple geographical terms, but in broader cultural and perceptual ones as well. Others might prefer to limit the reply with ‘north’ or ‘north-east’ Africa, effectively separating Egypt from ‘black Africa’. For European scholarship Egypt’s cultural place in ‘Africa’, and Africa’s cultural impact on Egypt, have been constantly changing. Much early Egyptology viewed Egypt as distinctly African, but the borders were redefined in the nineteenth century, drawing a line across Sudan, south of which became the world of ethnology and anthropology, contrasted with archaeology (large stone-built monuments) and written records to the north. Some Egyptologists and anthropologists have argued that there was an African basis to

Egyptian culture and institutions, notably the kingship; others have preferred to treat Egypt as totally separate from Africa. There can be no doubt that the origins of Egyptian civilization lie in Africa. But the name, and perception, of 'Africa' is itself an important issue. Today, we tend to speak about Africa and 'African' peoples and cultures as if somehow they were a homogeneous entity. This in itself is a residue of colonial attitudes that denies the variety and complexity of cultures and peoples in that vast continent. Indeed, the name 'Africa' is a fine example of the specific becoming general. Deriving from the name of a small 'tribal' group of part of Tunisia, the Afri, Africa was the name given to a Roman province, and then became more widely applied first by the Byzantines, and then (as Ifriqiya) by the Arab conquerors, as a general term for north-west Africa. It was adopted by Europeans for the same region, eventually being used for the whole continent. Africa is, quite literally, a colonial name.

In the European academic tradition, in museums and universities, Egypt has been included in the 'Near East' for a range of reasons. The Near East was a term used for the former territories of the Ottoman Empire, and had a utility that the inaccurate modern replacement 'Middle East' lacks. Middle East now seems to be used as a confused blanket term for the Islamic world (itself confused with the 'Arab world'). The ancient Near East can, legitimately, be treated as a central interacting block of states, from (modern) Iran in the east to Greece and Libya in the west. As the academic disciplines developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Near East was a region that particularly attracted attention: it had formed the eastern part of the Roman Empire, and before it the Hellenistic kingdoms, the Persian, Babylonian and Assyrian empires, and their predecessors. There was also immense interest in the exotic world of Western Europe's main political rival, the Ottoman Empire, which was close, yet strikingly different. In the Near East, Western Europe rediscovered the physical remains of its cultural ancestry, which was already well known through Greek and Latin literature. For scholarship, there were numerous large standing monuments to be observed, inscriptions recorded, 'art works' to be transferred to museums, and, with the development of archaeology, there were cemeteries and town mounds to dig in. Archaeology in much of sub-Saharan Africa is much more recent, so there is still

an enormous imbalance in our understanding of the greater part of the continent.

These two placings for Egypt, Africa and the Near East represent not quite opposed points of view. Locating Egypt raises issues about how Europeans, who are largely those who have written Egyptology, have viewed Egypt both as part of, and distinct from, 'Africa'. It is also a useful starting point for discussing issues of culture and influences which we consider in later chapters.

Modern perceptions of where Egypt is are very different to those of the past. All terminology is, of course, subjective. To the Greeks 'Egypt' was the land of the Nile Valley, bounded by Asia on the east, 'Libya' (their term for the whole of the rest of north Africa) on the west, and Aithiopia (a vast, ill-defined region at the southernmost limit of the world) to the south. The Greek name *Aigyptos* (L. *Aegyptus*) derives from the name given to the city of Memphis, *Hu(t)-ka-Ptah*, meaning 'The House of the *Ka* (-Soul) of Ptah'. In the languages of western Asia the country was known as *Musri* (modern Arabic *Misr*), and is found as such in biblical and Assyrian texts. To the Assyrians, Egypt was in the West. The Assyrian records of the Sargonid Period (721–626 BC) refer to the pharaoh as the 'King of the Westland'. To them, the 'Mediterranean' (the central sea) was not central at all; it was the 'Great Sea', the 'Upper Sea' (contrasted with Lower Sea, the Gulf) or the 'Sea of the Setting Sun'. Presumably, the Kushites thought of Egypt as, in some sense, 'north', lying downstream on the same river. To the Romans, and their cultural heirs, Egypt was in the East, the Orient.

NAMING EGYPT

All of these locations of Egypt have been established by other peoples, or in relation to other peoples and places. For the Egyptians, Egypt was, of course, the centre. But 'Egypt' itself is a name imposed from outside: imposed by the Romans as the name of a province of their empire. And this brings us to one of the key problems of Egyptology and studying Egypt. Because, as we shall see in Chapter 3, the early European reconstructions of ancient Egypt's history and geography relied on Greek, Roman and biblical sources, as well as contemporary Arabic names, the literature displays a confusing, not to say bewildering, array of variant name forms. In his attempts to decipher hieroglyphics, Champollion used names known from such Greek and

Roman sources to find the Egyptian forms. As the proper Egyptian pronunciation was unknown to the Egyptologists (and still is) the names used in literature were 'Latinized', so that we often find Latinized forms of Greek versions of Egyptian names. In recent years, many Egyptologists have preferred to use a written form of the Egyptian name that is closer to a direct rendering of the Egyptian hieroglyphic signs (although it may not resemble the way the name was pronounced in ancient times).

So, to take one common name, the old form derived from the Greek and Latin writers was 'Amenophis' but the form from the hieroglyphic is 'Amenhotep'. Similarly, we have 'Sethos' and 'Sety', 'Sesostris' and 'Senusret' or 'Senwosret', 'Ammenemes' and 'Amenemhat'. The problem persists, as some writers prefer to use the Latinized forms and some the more Egyptian forms. Some writers even prefer to use the Latinized forms for pharaohs and Egyptian forms for others in order to distinguish the pharaohs, resulting in sentences that talk about a pharaoh 'Amenophis III' and his official Amenhotep. Not all pharaohs are mentioned in Greek and Roman sources (Hatshepsut, Akhenaten and Tutankhamun being the three obvious ones) so they have no Latinized forms; consequently, those who use the old forms have to mix them with Egyptian forms.

The reasons for using a form which is derived directly from the Egyptian are obvious. While we still cannot be certain how names were pronounced (Egyptian lacks vowels, so we only have the consonants) the Egyptian forms are a more honest attempt at rendering what is written in the hieroglyphic.

The same problem occurs with names of gods and goddesses, some writers preferring, for example, the Greek 'Arsaphes' for 'Herishef', and 'Satis' for 'Satet' (or 'Satjet'). Most divine names, however, still appear in their Latin/Greek forms: Osiris (rather than the Egyptian Usir), Isis (not Aset), Nephthys (not Nebet-hat), and Thoth (not Djehuty).

With place names the confusion increases since parts of archaeological sites are usually known by the Arabic names for the particular mound (*kom* or *tell*) or area. Generally, Egyptologists still refer to ancient towns and cities by the Greek (or Latinized Greek) names. Heliopolis (*Helios-polis*, the city of the sun) was the Greek name for the ancient Egyptian Iunu (meaning 'the Pillar'); Thebes was

a Greek name for Waset; Memphis was the Greek form of the Egyptian ‘Men-nofer’; and Bubastis comes from ‘Per-Bast’ (‘Temple/Domain of Bast’, the cat goddess).

The forms used here are generally the ‘Egyptian’ ones, although gods such as Isis and Osiris still appear in the more familiar Greek style. The ‘Egyptian’ forms of names are derived from a ‘transliteration’ of the original Egyptian (which is usually written in hieroglyphic). The Egyptian language was written with signs which give the consonants and some ‘semi-vowels’: there were no full vowels in Egyptian (as in modern Arabic). A transliteration of, for example, the name we read as ‘Amenhotep’ combines the signs and sign groups *I-mn-hotp*. Conventionally, Egyptologists insert vowels to get ‘Amen-hotep’. The transliterations can only be approximate, as Egyptian has, for example, four different sounds for ‘h’: in technical works these are identified with ‘diacritical’ marks (dots and lines under the letter).

This confusing system of names is the result of the way in which Egyptology, and the understanding of the Egyptian language, developed.

The Egyptians themselves used a number of names for their land, but most reflected duality, rather than unity. The Nile Valley, ‘Upper Egypt’, enclosed for most of its length by limestone cliffs, was ‘Ta-Shemau’ and was represented in hieroglyphic by a flowering sedge plant (or ‘lily’). The broad expanse of the Delta, Lower Egypt, was ‘Ta-Mehu’, represented by a clump of papyrus.

By the time of the New Kingdom we find references to ‘this land of KeMeT’. Kemet means ‘black’ and is generally taken to mean the land which is covered by the silt during the inundation of the Nile. Many Afrocentrist writers have argued that Kemet defines Egypt as the ‘land of the black people’, but this is a grammatically incorrect reading. That Kemet means the land rather than people is further confirmed by its use in contrast to DeSHReT, the ‘red’, a term for the areas beyond the cultivation, continuing into the deserts.

The Egyptians thought of their land as the result of the unification of two kingdoms, and Egyptian ideology emphasized this duality to the Roman Period. Each kingdom had its own crown and protective deities. Ta-Shemau, Upper Egypt, had as its symbol the sedge plant, and, as its ruler, the king wore the white crown. The protective goddess was the vulture, Nekhbet. Ta-Mehu, Lower

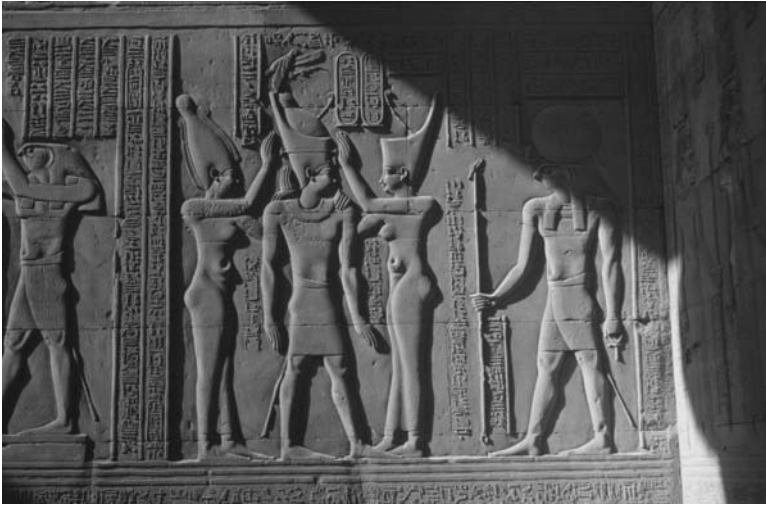


Figure 1.1 The king crowned by the goddesses of Upper and Lower Egypt. Ptolemaic Period, temple of Kom Ombo.

Egypt, was symbolized by the bee, or the papyrus, the Red Crown and the goddess Wadjet (Buto) (Figure 1.1).

Egypt was also divided into smaller districts which are generally known by the Greek-derived word *nome*, rather than the Egyptian term for them, *sepat*. Earlier Egyptologists thought that the division into nomes was a vestige of how Egypt had been before the unification, that each represented one of the chiefdoms which were eventually brought together into the two kingdoms. There were eventually 42 nomes, each represented by an androgynous figure symbolizing the fecundity of the flooding Nile (Figure 1.2). Outside the Nile Valley and Delta were regions that were ruled by Egypt, but not defined as nomes, notably the Oases of the Western Desert and the Wadi Natrun.

WHO WERE THE EGYPTIANS?

Did a 'Dynastic Race' sail from Mesopotamia along the Gulf and around Arabia then up the Red Sea? Or did they spread from some intermediate place such as Dilmun (Bahrain) in both directions? Few rational Egyptologists would nowadays subscribe to this idea. It was,

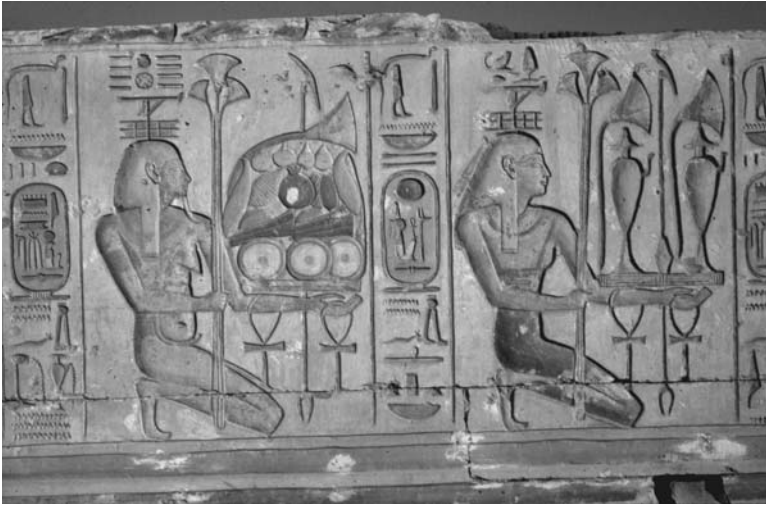


Figure 1.2 A fecundity figure with the sign of the nome of Khemenu (*Hermopolis*) in Middle Egypt: part of a procession in the temple of Ramesses II at Abydos, nineteenth dynasty.

however, very popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The leading British archaeologist of Egypt, Flinders Petrie, formed the 'Dynastic Race' theory to explain the rapid development of Egyptian civilization, assuming that Africans needed an external impetus. Deriving from nineteenth-century anthropological theories, Petrie's Dynastic Race theory was not fully accepted by Egyptologists, but it had a deep influence, notably on the American George Reisner in his reconstruction of Nubian cultures, and it was still being argued by W. B. Emery, excavator of important early royal cemeteries, in his study of early Egypt in 1961.

Speculation about the 'race' of the Egyptians began in the eighteenth century and increased during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the growing European influence over the Near East, Africa and Asia. Ideas about race were used as a justification for imperial expansion, and some of the developing academic disciplines were called upon to lend support to the racial theories. Notable among these were language studies, with languages soon being used to define peoples. The new theory of 'Evolution' too, was a major factor. Early anthropology proposed a 'unilinear' evolutionary development for humans, and claimed to produce scientific

evidence for this by complex cranial measurements. The living ‘races of mankind’ were then ordered along a presumed scale of development. As a result, the Egyptians could be blackened or whitened according to the personal agenda of the writer.

The Dynastic Race theory was the ‘scientific’ (in that it was claimed to be based on archaeological evidence) exposition of the attitude that Egypt, being in Africa, was unable to produce a high culture, therefore the Egyptians (or, at least, the ruling class) must have come from somewhere else. As with every other significant cultural group (such as the Dorians in Greece) in late nineteenth-century interpretations, this place of origin turned out to be somewhere in central Asia, the supposed Indo-European/Aryan homeland. As the German Egyptologist, Heinrich Brugsch, put it in one of the most influential of late nineteenth-century histories of Egypt:

according to ethnology, the Egyptians appear to form a third branch of the Caucasian race, the family called Cushite; and this much may be regarded as certain, that in the earliest ages of humanity, far beyond all historical remembrance, the Egyptians, for reasons unknown to us, left the soil of their early home, took their way towards the setting sun, and finally crossed that bridge of nations, the Isthmus of Suez, to find a new fatherland on the banks of the Nile.

(Heinrich Brugsch, *Egypt Under
The Pharaohs*, 1891: 2–3)

Brugsch here summarizes the European academic view that had developed during the nineteenth century, and which had completely overturned the view of Egypt as African. Egyptology generally adopted a view that the ancient Egyptians were a ‘brown’ north African race or the result of a mixture of black African and lighter-skinned peoples. Physical anthropology shows that there is a strong continuity in the appearance of the Egyptians from ancient to modern times.

The most extreme form of the Dynastic Race theory claims that civilization came from somewhere other than Earth itself. There is no good archaeological evidence that the ancient Egyptians or their

culture came from Mars or any other distant planet or galaxy, through 'Stargate' or by spaceship! But whether or not Egypt was the creation of extra-terrestrial peoples, there are many writers who insist that Egypt was the repository of a 'Higher Culture' of, for example, the lost races of Atlantis. None of these ideas gets much sympathy from Egyptologists, but they do belong to the very broad range of uses and perceptions of ancient Egypt. These ideas may lack 'scientific' or archaeological authority, but that does little to diminish their popularity and indeed, just as biblical and classical literature before, they have resulted in archaeological investigations, if only to refute them. Egyptologists may ignore or despise these extreme uses of ancient Egypt and its culture, but they capture the public imagination in numerous books, newspapers and television programmes. They also represent that search for 'the other' that Egypt has represented to outsiders since ancient times.

WHO WERE THE ANCIENT EGYPTIANS?

Our knowledge of the prehistory of north Africa has changed quite dramatically in the past thirty years. Environmental studies now show that, rather than one phase of desiccation, the Sahara has had several wet and dry phases, and these have affected movements of animals and peoples. With the desiccation of the Sahara in the period 10,000–5000 BC peoples moved from the central regions in different directions, some coming into the Nile Valley – or initially settling along the desert plateau above the swampy valley. Current research suggests that the southern regions of Nubia may have fallen within the seasonal rain belt much later than we had previously thought, perhaps as late as the New Kingdom. The Wadi Howar, originally a tributary of the Nile which connected with it in the Dongola Reach, runs from Darfur, Kordofan and Chad. The Wadi may even have been able to support some arable production and pastoralism into the early centuries AD, and perhaps served as a route between the Nile and regions further west throughout ancient times. The complexity of climatic change suggests that for a long period before the emergence of Egypt as a unified state, there were peoples, probably pastoralists, ranging over large regions of what is now the Sahara.

Evidence from recent excavations in some Delta sites shows that there were very close contacts between that region and Canaan from the late prehistoric period into the Early Dynastic. There was considerable trade between the two regions, and there were Asiatic settlers in Egypt, and Egyptian settlements (probably trade based) in Sinai and Canaan.

The evidence of language is also relevant here. Ancient Egyptian belongs to a language group known as 'Afro-Asiatic' (formerly called Hamito-Semitic) and its closest relatives are other north-east African languages from Somalia to Chad. Egypt's cultural features, both material and ideological and particularly in the earliest phases, show clear connections with that same broad area. In sum, ancient Egypt was an African culture, developed by African peoples who had wide-ranging contacts in north Africa and western Asia.

WHAT DID THE ANCIENT EGYPTIANS LOOK LIKE?

The European idea of the ancient Egyptians has varied a lot in the past three hundred years, and has been the subject of much recent study. Martin Bernal in *Black Athena* shows how Egyptian culture and peoples were 'blackened' and 'whitened' according to racial prejudices, bolstered by changes in academic thought. This is epitomized in the quotation from Heinrich Brugsch above, which promotes the idea that the ancient Egyptians were Caucasians. Much nineteenth-century painting of biblical events or episodes set in ancient Egypt includes elite Egyptians who are remarkably European in colouring and appearance. 'Brown' and black people appear, but nearly always in the role of servants or slaves: the main characters of pharaohs and female royalty (such as the princess in the numerous pictures of the 'finding of Moses') are distinctly white. In these paintings ancient Egypt was used for all sorts of purposes. From the Egyptological perspective, these choices are certainly wrong: the ancient Egyptians were not 'white' in any European sense, nor were they 'Caucasian'.

So were they 'black'? This depends, in part, on your own point of view and how you would define 'black'. Much Afro-American literature promotes the view that the ancient Egyptians were essentially like modern Afro-Americans. The more extreme (and, it must be said, racist) versions state that the present-day Egyptians are



Figure 1.3 The Egyptian elite as they wished to be seen: Sennefer, the Mayor of Thebes, and his wife, depicted in conventional manner: Tomb of Sennefer, Thebes (Luxor), eighteenth dynasty.

'only' Arabs who came in later. Certainly, there have been migrations from Arabia throughout medieval and early modern times, and no doubt in ancient times as well. However, the Arab Conquest of CE (AD) 641 was, like the Roman or Norman conquests in England, essentially an elite conquest rather than a mass population movement. In Egypt, once the country had been taken over there were large-scale conversions to Islam, but the population remained essentially that of late Roman Egypt.

One major problem in discussing ethnicity is time. There is a tendency in both polarized extremes to dismiss the later historical phases (from the end of the New Kingdom onwards). Both groups say that by then the Egyptians were no longer 'Egyptian', having been replaced or 'diluted' by increasing numbers of 'foreigners'. Both assume some sort of ideal early-Egyptian race, in the one case 'black' and in the other perhaps less clearly defined. This ignores earlier non-Egyptians in Egypt, and places too much emphasis on the foreign ancestry of individual pharaohs. It raises the fundamental question of how *we* define ancient Egypt. Both professional Egyptologists and other interest groups impose a time limit on ancient Egypt. The attitudes of Egyptologists are of immense importance in forming the attitudes of secondary literature. For a long time the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods have been regarded as distinctly 'after', and the first millennium has not been given equal importance with the earlier 'kingdoms'. Yet if we look at Egyptian culture, there is much in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt that is a direct continuation of the earlier periods. We cannot expect any society to remain monolithic and unchanging over five thousand years. The evidence, increasing in quantity and diversity from the earlier to the later phases, also puts our attempts to understand out of balance. There is a tendency in general works (such as this one) to illustrate aspects of Egypt by using evidence from different periods. This again is perhaps a problem of the timescale involved, and the apparently unchanging culture; we would not do this with, for example, Mesopotamia, much less with Greece or Rome.

At all periods there were 'foreign' populations absorbed into Egypt, most notably the Libyan tribes. There were settlements of Greeks (from Greece, the islands and Asia Minor) and Macedonians in the Ptolemaic Period. There were people from the south ('Nubia')

in Egypt at all periods, and in the Aswan region they must always have been a significant element of the population. Similarly, Asiatic and other captives of war would have been integrated. In the New Kingdom we have good evidence for royal marriages with foreign princesses, who were accompanied by large numbers of female attendants, some of whom would have been given in marriage to courtiers. Not all of the sons of foreign rulers who were educated at the Egyptian court returned to their homelands, and many took up administrative offices and married Egyptian wives.

It is impossible to make a generalization about the appearance of a single population over a period of five thousand years, but we can say that the earliest population of ancient Egypt included African people from the upper Nile, African people from the regions of the Sahara and modern Libya, and smaller numbers of people who had come from south-western Asia and perhaps the Arabian peninsula. By the period of the unification of Egypt, and the beginning of 'Dynastic' history, these peoples had been living in Egypt for thousands of years: they were indigenous. Throughout the succeeding millennia individuals and groups (generally fairly small) of people from all of those same regions continued to settle in Egypt, but there were no mass movements of population that 'replaced' the original population.

So, what is the evidence for the appearance of the ancient populations? We have extensive human remains preserved as skeletons or mummies. The better-preserved mummies, particularly of royalty, require little imagination or restoration to give an impression of the appearance of the person when alive. Less well-preserved or skeletal remains require reconstruction, and considerable advances have been made in recent years in the re-creation of faces from skulls. This, of course, gives us the features of the person, but not necessarily skin, hair or eye colour. It should also be noted that the majority of the well-preserved remains are of members of the elite; relatively few non-elite cemeteries have been examined in detail.

There is a wealth of artistic representation in the form of statuary, relief sculpture and painting from all periods of Egyptian history, and depicting all social classes. As in all societies where portraiture is practised there are various conventions, idealizations and period styles which affect the image. The face of the reigning

monarch frequently influences the portrayal of his subjects, perhaps most obviously in the reign of Akhenaten. There are certainly specific types of face at certain periods, but this does not necessarily indicate any ethnic change.

The most important conventions in Egyptian art are the distinguishing of male and female by colour: men are painted red-brown, women creamy yellow (Figure 1.3). These conventions clearly reflect a social ideal: that elite women are paler because they stay indoors and do not work in the fields. In the New Kingdom these conventions change slightly, and Nefertiti, for example can be coloured red-brown like Akhenaten; slightly later, pinkish tones were added to the palette and used for female figures (e.g. Nefertari, wife of Ramesses II). There is also an idealization of the figure, particularly the body. This is notable in, for example, statues of Senusret III where the face is lined and, if not old, at least 'careworn', yet the body is the ideal youthful image. Occasionally, royal images do not conform to the ideal, as with some statues of Amenhotep III and his son Akhenaten. But these deviations from the ideal are relatively rare, and were created with a specific ideological message.

Foreigners too are designated by conventions. At times these can be almost caricatures of racial stereotypes, but that is to emphasize their foreignness, and their difference, particularly when they appear as enemies of Egypt. In some instances, such as in the scenes of Nubian captives in the tomb of Horemheb at Saqqara, the foreign captives are portrayed with great sympathy, and it is the petty Egyptian officials who are shown unflatteringly. When a foreigner was absorbed into Egyptian society s/he could be shown as an Egyptian. For example in the tomb of Tutankhamun's Viceroy of Kush, Huy, a Nubian prince named Heqa-nefer, is depicted. Because he appears as a subject foreigner bringing the tribute of Nubia to the pharaoh, Heqa-nefer is shown wearing the feathered headdress and costume of a Nubian, and is painted black in colour. Yet, in his own tomb, where he was portrayed as a member of the Egyptian elite, Heqa-nefer was depicted as any other Egyptian official, painted red-brown in colour and wearing conventional Egyptian costume. Occasionally foreigners seem to emphasize their origins, such as the Nubian mercenaries depicted on stelae from Gebelein, the Asiatic soldier with his Egyptian wife and servant on a stela from Amarna, and the Kushite pharaohs of the twenty-fifth dynasty.

SELF-DEFINITION: WHO DID THE EGYPTIANS THINK THEY WERE?

Ancient Egypt had no myth recording the origin of the population or the foundation of the state dependent upon one 'people' as, for example, Rome and the Israelites had. Egyptian origins of both the people and the state are attributed to the creation of the gods. Insofar as they defined themselves at all, an Egyptian was simply someone who lived in Egypt and presumably conformed, to a greater or lesser degree, to Egyptian culture, and spoke the language. There does not appear to have been a view of being Egyptian based upon 'race' or 'ethnicity'. The descriptions of individuals in documents as 'the Kushite', 'the Syrian' or 'the Libyan' are usually due to the type of document and the context. There is also an unspoken assumption that, although we have rich evidence of 'foreigners' in the New Kingdom and later Egypt, there were fewer in the Old and Middle Kingdoms. It may be true that from the New Kingdom to Roman times 'foreigners' came from a greater range of countries, and from much further away than in earlier times, but there would always have been significant groups of people from the south ('Nubia'), the west ('Libya') and the east (the desert, Sinai and southern Canaan).

The Egyptians did distinguish themselves from other peoples. The lists of foreign or subject countries and city-states that can be found in temples from the New Kingdom onwards carry the name of the place surmounted by a figure representing it. The names are then grouped together, usually as northern and southern localities. The broad divisions of peoples that Egyptians recognized were established, like so much royal ideology, in the developing years of the state, and reflected those early direct contacts with their nearest neighbours to the south, west and east. These groups were called *remetj*, the 'people', representing the Egyptians themselves; *Nebesiu*, black-skinned southerners ('Nubians'); *Tjebenu*, 'Libyans', and *Aamu*, 'Asiatics' (originally representing the people of south Canaan). As Egyptian knowledge of the world expanded, new peoples and places were included in lists, but still clustered in the same groups. When, in the eighteenth dynasty, Egypt became involved with the kingdoms of Assyria and Babylonia, Mitanni in north Syria and Khatti (the Hittites) in Anatolia, along with the people of Cyprus,