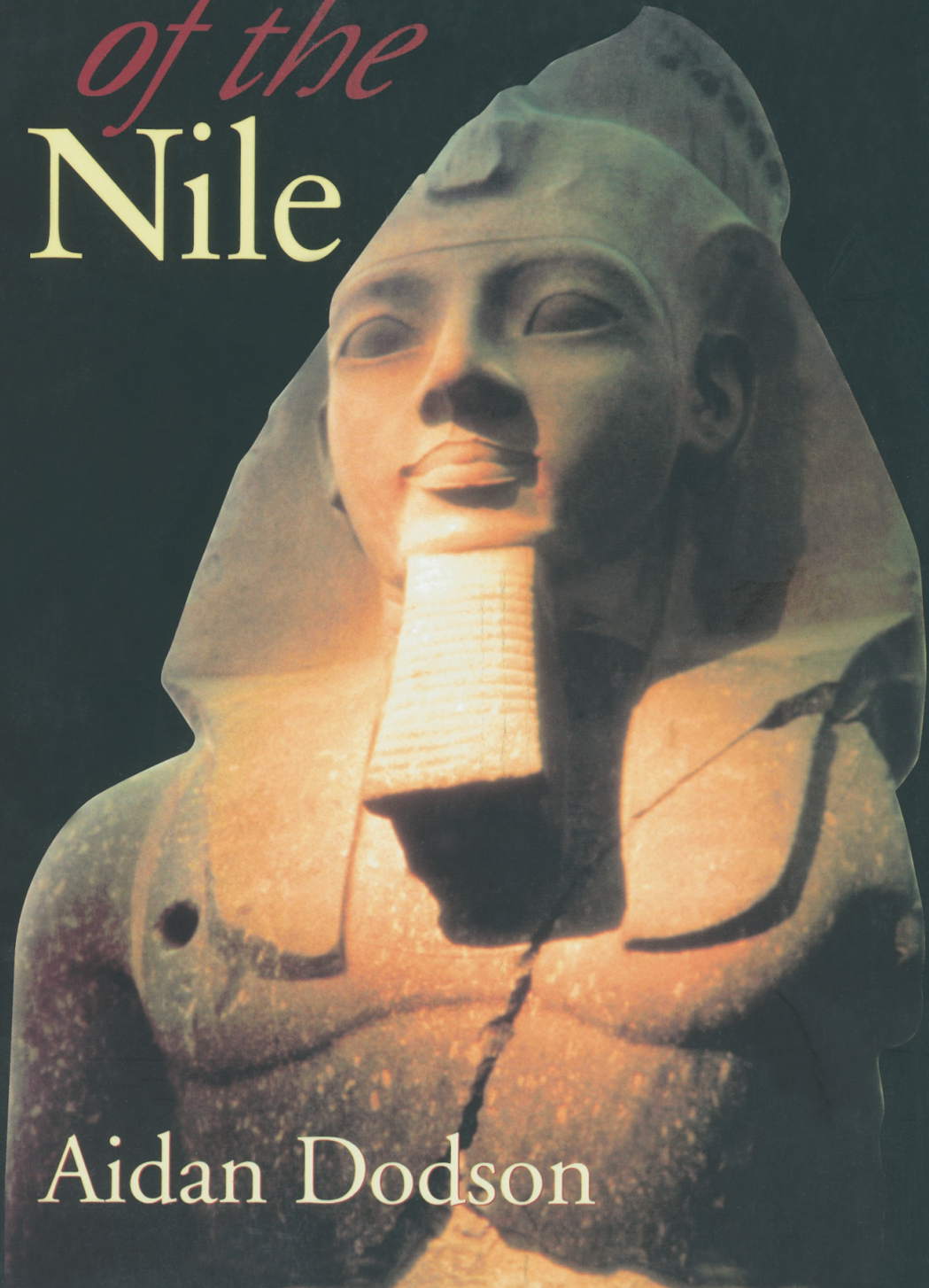


Monarchs *of the* Nile



Aidan Dodson

Monarchs of the Nile

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Second Edition

Aidan Dodson

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The American University in Cairo Press

The American University in Cairo Press

First published in Egypt in 2000 by
The American University in Cairo Press
113 Sharia Kasr el Aini
Cairo, Egypt
<http://aucpress.com>

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First published by the Rubicon Press 1995
Second, revised edition 2000

Second printing 2002

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Dar el Kutub No. 9219/00
ISBN 977 424 600 4

Printed in Egypt

*To the memory of Professor A.F. Shore (1924-1994), Brunner Professor of Egyptology
at the University of Liverpool, 1974-1991*

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Acknowledgments

Most Egyptologists possess the intention to write ‘their’ history of Egypt at some stage in their career. This book could perhaps be viewed as the edited highlights of what may (or may not) one day grow into something larger: in any case, my thanks go to George Hart for his part in bringing about its appearance at this particular point in time, as well as Anthea Page and Juanita Homan for publishing its first edition, and Neil Hewison and Pauline Wickham for their part in this one.

Unless otherwise stated, all photographs were taken by the author, with acknowledgments to objects’ owning institutions. My illustrative thanks also go to Jacke Phillips for allowing me to raid her Sudanese archive.

Salima Ikram stands in my debt for her role in the publication of this second edition, as well as standing amongst those of my friends and family to whom gratitude is owed for reading and commenting upon the manuscript of the first edition: the others are Don and Edna Dodson, Christine Everall, Nicole Mostafa (née Freeman), Julie Hudson, Linda Pike and Niamh Wall. I am especially indebted to Linda for the time and effort she took to excise obscurities and other more unfortunate ‘Dodsonisms’ from the very first drafts of the text; Julie also deserves particular thanks, for her painstakingly proof-reading of the penultimate draft of the first edition, in spite of the heavy burden of finishing off a book of her own to a tight schedule. Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Dyan Hilton, for all her help with with proofreading the final draft of the manuscript of this edition, and for all her support. To one and all, however, I would like to wish 𓆎𓅓𓏏 — ‘Life, Prosperity and Health!’

Preface

The kings of Egypt have exerted a fascination in the West since time immemorial. Initially this was through their appearances in the Bible; more recently as a result of the nigh-on two centuries of excavation that have revealed to the world the physical remains of the kings, their people and their culture. The peak of popular interest was probably reached as a result of the 1922 discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun, rekindled by the touring exhibition of some of that king's treasures in the 1960s and 1970s. Now, ancient Egypt is part of the curriculum of many schoolchildren, as well as having spawned large numbers of enthusiast-groups around the world, thus guaranteeing continuing awareness of the ancient civilization at all levels of society.

A considerable number of histories of ancient Egypt exist, but all of the more recent ones adopt a fairly broad-brush approach, in which the individual rulers are made to take fairly subsidiary roles in the general sweep of events. The only books to look at matters on a detailed king-by-king basis are far too out of date to bear any kind of use, and any new in-depth study along such lines is a long way off.

Against this background, the present volume attempts to present to a general audience concise accounts of the lives and times of some of the more significant - and/or interesting - occupants of the Egyptian throne, from the unification of the country around 3000 BC, down to the extinction of native rule just under three millennia later. It does not pretend to substitute for a proper history, but aims to provide something of a continuous narrative through the employment of fairly extensive summaries of prior/subsequent events as parts of the actual biographies.

Some of the rulers included, such as Tuthmosis III, had a major impact on their time, and were remembered by their own people until the very civilization collapsed. Others, such as Tutankhamun, were soon forgotten by the Egyptians themselves, only to burst into popular culture thousands of years after their

deaths, as a result of the labours of modern archaeologists. Still more remain unknown outside the small circle of professional Egyptologists, but had careers that call out for wider dissemination. It has been my intention to provide a mix of all three categories, in an attempt to present a balanced view of Egyptian kings and their spectrum of achievements.

In doing so, one becomes painfully aware of the gaps in our knowledge, and the wide range of the possible interpretations that can be placed on a single body of 'hard' evidence. Indeed, on some subjects, such as the reigns of Akhenaten and his successors (the so-called 'Amarna Period' of the Eighteenth Dynasty, c. 13901-300 BC), there are probably as many reconstructions as there are Egyptologists who have considered the matter. In view of this, any attempt at presenting a fully 'balanced' account of certain pharaohs would involve disfiguring the narrative with so many digressions and summaries of the various arguments as to make it virtually unreadable. Accordingly, I have made the conscious decision to omit such matter as far as possible, restricting myself in all but a few cases to using the words 'probably', 'perhaps' and so-forth where problems exist.

The reconstructions given thus reflect what I believe to be the best or most likely readings of the available evidence, some of which has only emerged in the last year or two. Indeed, there are a number of cases where I have considerably revised my opinions, as compared with that expressed in the first edition of the book, and which may yet need further modification should it ever go to a third edition.

For those who wish to investigate matters further, and/or learn more about some of the alternate views held on various points, a *Guide to Further Reading* will lead the individual around the basic bibliography of each reign dealt with. Concerning this section, a conscious decision was taken to restrict entries almost exclusively to books in English, partly to keep its size down to manageable proportions, and partly with a view to the target readership of this volume and the kind of works that are likely to be available in, or through, public libraries. For those who desire to delve still deeper, most of the works cited contain extensive bibliographies, which will allow access to primary and secondary literature in periodicals and/or foreign languages.

As far as practicable, I have concentrated on the lives and acts of the kings and (ruling) queens themselves, with their monuments given secondary importance. For some monarchs, however, their monumental tombs represent *all* that is known of them, and there one has had to treat them in rather more detail than would be the case if rather more sources of information were available. This is particularly the case in the chapters covering the Archaic Period and Old

Kingdom. Even then, an attempt is made to venture beyond bald description to allow the reader to gain some appreciation of the individuals who were *Monarchs of the Nile*.

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Department of Archaeology
University of Bristol
1 March 2000

Chapter 1

The Land and its People

The modern Arab Republic of Egypt (A.R.E.) occupies 992,000 square kilometres of the north-east corner of the African continent. However, only a tiny proportion — 4% — of the territory is inhabited. A small number of the population live in the oases of the Western Desert, but the overwhelming majority live in a narrow strip bordering the River Nile. Indeed, it is as this strip of land that Egypt has of old been defined, the two being so nearly synonymous.

This fertile band divides into two distinct elements. In the south, the cultivable area varies in width from nothing to a number of kilometres, beyond which it gives way to low desert that rapidly rises up to the arid plateaus of the Eastern (Arabian) and Western (Libyan) Deserts. In contrast, the Delta, beginning just north of modern Cairo, spreads out in a great triangle towards the Mediterranean, with kilometre upon kilometre of flat, fertile land, criss-crossed by canals and wholly dissimilar to the valley in both appearance and ethos.

Traditionally, the ancient Egyptian state was held to have extended from the shores of the Mediterranean to Aswan; however, at many points in its history, it reached far south into Nubia, encompassing the southern part of the A.R.E. and the northern part of the Democratic Republic of the Sudan. This section of the Nile, now lost below the waters of Lake Nasser, created by the building of the High Dam at Aswan, was far more barren than that further north, and mainly of interest as a source of raw materials and a trade-route to the far south.

Communication south of Aswan was hindered by a series of cataracts, or rapids, the First just above that city, the Sixth and last just below modern Khartoum.

It has become the ultimate Egyptian cliché to describe Egypt as being the ‘gift of the Nile’, a phrase coined by the Greek writer Hecetaeus, and almost universally mis-attributed to the famous traveller Herodotus, who visited Egypt around 450 B.C.. By this he meant that without the river, the country and its civilization would not — could not — have existed in anything like the form that is so well known. Outside the margins of the river and the handful of oases, the country is desert, incapable of supporting a sedentary population, and inhabited solely by nomads, whose modern representatives are the *bedouin*.

Today, agriculture in Egypt is predicated upon perennial irrigation, made possible by a series of dams built across the river since the beginning of the twentieth century. However, until this change in the river regime, the growing of crops depended on the annual, natural, inundation of the Nile. In summer, rains in the Ethiopian highlands swell the river’s tributaries, the Atbara and Blue Nile; today, this merely restocks Lake Nasser, but in the past, it led to the flooding of the Nile valley and delta, an inundation given divine personification as Hapy. The water, covering all of the agricultural land, receded in October/November, leaving behind on the fields a rich layer of alluvium. In this, crops were planted, ready for the harvest in March/April, with little or no watering required in the interim.

So fundamental to the Egyptian way of life was this cycle that the three calendrical seasons were named *Akhet* (Inundation), *Peret* (Growing) and *Shemu* (Drought). Each was divided into four thirty-day months, added to which were five festival-days, together making up a civil year of 365 days. The lack of a leap-year, to take into account the $365\frac{1}{4}$ -day solar year, meant that the calendar gradually slipped until the season-names bore no relation to the agricultural cycle; only after 1,460 years did the seasons and calendar slip back into synchronization..

Agriculture was the principal occupation of the Egyptian population, based upon small villages, dotted up and down the river. The nature of the inundation system meant that, apart from the period after the rising of the water, when dykes would have to be maintained to prevent the water from leaving the fields too early, or flooding habitations, and the physical sowing and harvesting of crops, work was rather easier than under perennial cultivation methods: on the other hand, it meant that men could more easily be diverted to labour on public works, as they frequently were. The fairly low ancient population in pharaonic times, no more than four or five million, additionally meant that agriculture did not need to be particularly intensive to provide for adequate sustenance, plus a surplus –

particularly for the taxes which were needed to support the many activities of the State.

Land was worked by a wide variety of private individuals and state organizations. Prominent amongst the latter were the temples, which owned huge areas of arable and grazing land, together with livestock and the tied labour to work it. The produce went towards the offerings to the deity, paying his or her priests, and part-funding building and restoration costs, together with the wide variety of activities which focussed on a cult centre.

While the state cults – Amun of Thebes, Ptah of Memphis, Re of Heliopolis, and many more – had large full-time staffs, the far more numerous local deities often had their shrines manned on a part-time basis, whereby local people of a certain standing spent a number of months of the year serving as their god's priesthood. Thus, a priest will frequently also have been a farmer, a scribe, a soldier or a craftsman: religion was just one of a person's civic duties, rather than a specific vocation.

Figure 1.1. *The Nile inundation at Dahshur: in the background are the ruined 'Black Pyramid' of Ammenemes I HI and the 'Bent Pyramid' of Seneferu Seneferu.*



This rather effectively characterises the all-pervading nature of ancient Egyptian religion: rather like Islam, it was bound up in a way of life, making it very difficult to separate out the sacred and the profane. Personal piety was far more concerned with a person's own relationship with his or her preferred god than the massive ceremonial that surrounded the state gods. Indeed, the latter was a wholly different facet of man's relationship with the divine sphere, being more part of the magical maintenance of the universe than the simple giving of praise and offering of prayers. Where the two aspects might coincide was in the area of oracles. On festival days, the cult-statue of the deity would be carried out of his or her temple in procession, and individuals might place petitions before the image, to which the god would indicate assent or rejection.

Local government was carried out by councils, the *kenbut*, comprising the more prominent individuals of the area, with functions both administrative and judicial. Throughout historic times, the country was divided into provinces (nomes), their numbers varying at different periods. At particular points in Egyptian history, they were key administrative units; at others, they seem to have been little more than nominal groupings of towns. The other important administrative division was between the Nile valley and its delta. At certain times, each half of the country might have a discrete body of officials; in periods of disorder, the two elements had a tendency to become independent polities.

The population of Egypt has always been mixed, varied racial types, ranging from the light skin-tones of the north to the dark brown seen in the far south. Negroid features are to be found in the areas of the ancient kingdom that penetrated deep into the modern Sudan. In addition to the indigenous population, the country was subject to considerable immigration, peaceful and warlike, particularly into the north-east Delta – as witnessed by the Bible stories of Abraham and Joseph. By later times, Egypt was thus a fairly cosmopolitan society, with foreign gods worshipped in a number of centres, and men of foreign extraction holding senior government and military positions.

The position of women in Egyptian society seems generally to have been much higher than usual in ancient civilizations; although restricted in the range of occupations open to them, they appear to have been fully competent at law — i.e. without a need to be under the tutelage of a male — and in some instances, literate. While the known examples of female pharaohs are exceptional, that they were able to hold the throne at all bears witness to the status of women.

Based upon the prominence of the funerary monuments of the Egyptians, modern popular opinion generally holds the view that they were a gloomy folk, obsessed with death and the preparations for it. However, even the most

superficial study of the available material gives the lie to this: it is quite clear that the Egyptian character was fully the opposite. Their funerary preparations were rather a manifestation of a desire to prolong earthly life into eternity: Heaven was seen quite simply as a bigger, better, Egypt. There can be few more satisfactory endorsements of a society than for its citizens to desire its indefinite continuity.