

PETER A. CLAYTON

# CHRONICLE OF THE PHARAOHS

THE REIGN-BY-REIGN RECORD OF THE  
RULERS AND DYNASTIES  
OF ANCIENT EGYPT

WITH 350 ILLUSTRATIONS  
130 IN COLOR



THAMES AND HUDSON

For Janet,  
in celebration of our heb-sed



(Half-title) Ramesses III smites enemies before Amun. South wall of First Pylon, Medinet Habu (Thebes).  
(Frontispiece) Painted limestone relief with Merytaten offering mandrake fruit to her husband, Smenkhkare. Berlin Museum.

Any copy of this book issued by the publisher as a paperback is sold subject to the condition that it shall not by way of trade or otherwise be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including these words being imposed on a subsequent purchaser.

© 1994 Thames and Hudson Ltd, London  
Text © 1994 Peter A. Clayton

First published in the United States of America in 1994 by Thames and Hudson Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10110

Library of Congress Catalog Card  
Number 94-60269  
ISBN 0-500-05074-0

All Rights Reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any other information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

Printed and bound in Slovenia

# CONTENTS

pages 6-7

**Preface:**

**God-kings of the Nile**

pages 8-13

**Introduction:**

**The Chronology of Ancient Egypt**

**DYNASTIES '0'-2 pages 14-29**

## THE FIRST PHARAOHS

**The Early Dynastic Period**

**3150-2686 BC**

*From Narmer to Khasekhemwy:  
the unification of Egypt*

**DYNASTIES 3-6 pages 30-67**

## THE PYRAMID BUILDERS

**The Old Kingdom**

**2686-2181 BC**

*Djoser, Khufu, Khafre and Menkaure:  
the pyramids of Saqqara and Giza*

**DYNASTIES 7-17 pages 68-97**

## CHAOS AND REBIRTH

**The First Intermediate Period**

**2181-2040 BC**

*The collapse of central authority:  
competing kings of Memphis and Herakleopolis*

**The Middle Kingdom**

**2040-1782 BC**

*From Mentuhotep I to Queen Sobeknefru:  
reunification and expansion into Nubia*

**The Second Intermediate Period**

**1782-1570 BC**

*Invasion of the Hyksos:  
Asiatic rule from Avaris in the Delta*

92953

## **PREFACE: GOD-KINGS OF THE NILE**



Copper alloy kneeling statuette of Amenemhet III (1842–1797 BC), part of a rare group of figures in this metal of the king, his wife and chief scribes (pp. 87–9). George Ortiz Collection, Geneva.

Egyptian civilization was one of the greatest in the ancient world, and certainly the most long lived, lasting for more than 3000 years. In the popular mind the immediate images are those of the pyramids, the great Sphinx at Giza, the enormous temples and the fabulous treasures that have been preserved in the dry sand of Egypt. But what of the people who were responsible for such splendours?

The ancient Egyptian pharaohs were god-kings on earth who became gods in their own right at their death. They indeed held the power of life and death in their hands – their symbols of office, the crook and flail, are indicative of this. They could command resources that many a modern-day state would be hard pressed to emulate. One has only to conjure with some statistics to realize this. For example, the Great Pyramid of Khufu (Cheops) at Giza, originally 481 ft (146 m) high and covering 13.1 acres (5.3 hectares), was the tallest building in the world until the 19th century AD, yet it was constructed in the mid-3rd millennium BC, and we still do not know exactly how it was done. Its base area is so vast that it can accommodate the cathedrals of Florence, Milan, St Paul's and Westminster Abbey in London and St Peter's in Rome, and still have some space left over.

The vast treasures of precious metal and jewellery that, miraculously, escaped the attentions of the tomb robbers are almost beyond comprehension. Tutankhamun's solid gold inner coffin is a priceless work of art; even at current scrap gold prices by weight it would be worth almost £1 million (\$1.5 million), and his gold funerary mask £105,000 (\$155,000). He was just a minor pharaoh of little consequence – the wealth of greater pharaohs such as Ramesses II, by comparison, is unimaginable.

The names of other great pharaohs resound down the centuries. The pyramid-builders numbered not merely Khufu, but his famous predecessor Djoser – whose Step Pyramid dominates the royal necropolis at Saqqara – and his successors Khafre (Chephren) and Menkaure (Mycerinus). Later monarchs included the warriors Tuthmosis III, Amenhotep III, and Seti I, not to mention the infamous heretic-king Akhenaten. Yet part of the fascination of taking a broad approach to Egyptian history is the emergence of lesser names and fresh themes. The importance of royal wives in a matrilineal society and the extent to which Egyptian queens could and did reign supreme in their own right – Sobeknefru, Hatshepsut, and Twosret to name but three – is only the most prominent among several newly emergent themes.

The known 170 or more pharaohs were all part of a line of royalty that stretched back to c. 3100 BC and forward to the last of the native pharaohs who died in 343 BC, to be succeeded by Persians and then a Greek line of Ptolemies until Cleopatra VII committed suicide in 30 BC. Following the 3rd-century BC High Priest of Heliopolis, Manetho – whose list of Egyptian kings has largely survived in the writings of Christian clerics – we can divide much of this enormous span of time into 30 dynasties. Egyptologists today group these dynasties into longer



The royal family: the 18th Dynasty king Akhenaten (1350–1334 BC) and his queen Nefertiti with three of their six small daughters. The intimacy of the scene is unprecedented in earlier Egyptian art. Berlin Museum.

eras, the three major pharaonic periods being the Old, Middle and New Kingdoms, each of which ended in a period of decline given the designation 'Intermediate Period'.

In *Chronicle of the Pharaohs*, that emotive and incandescent 3000-year-old thread of kingship is traced, setting the rulers in their context. Where possible, we gaze upon the face of pharaoh, either via reliefs and statuary or, in some rare and thought-provoking instances, on the actual face of the mummy of the royal dead. Across the centuries the artist's conception reveals to us the god-like complacency of the Old Kingdom pharaohs, the careworn faces of the rulers of the Middle Kingdom, and the powerful and confident features of the militant New Kingdom pharaohs. Such was their power in Egypt, and at times throughout the ancient Near

East, that Shelley's words, 'Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!', do indeed ring true as a reflection of their omnipotence.

Many books are published each year on ancient Egypt, on different aspects of its history and culture. Here, for the first time, an overall view is taken of those incredible people, the pharaohs who, although human after all, were looked upon by thousands as gods on earth and whose very achievements were, and even today still appear to be, the creations of the gods themselves.



Ramesses II (1279–1212 BC), in a typically aggressive pose, grasps a trio of Asiatic prisoners by the hair, ready to despatch them with the incongruously small axe held in his left hand. Cairo Museum.

### Egypt and the Nile

Egypt is a land of extreme geographical contrasts, recognized by the ancient Egyptians in the names that they gave to the two diametrically opposed areas. The rich narrow agricultural strip alongside the Nile was called *Kmt*, 'The Black Land', while the inhospitable desert was *Dsrt*, 'The Red Land'. Often, in Upper Egypt, the desert reaches the water's edge.

There was also a division between the north and the south, the line being drawn roughly in the area of modern Cairo. To the north was Lower Egypt where the Nile fanned out, with its several mouths, to form the Delta (the name coming from its inverted shape of the fourth letter, *delta*, of the Greek alphabet). To the south was Upper Egypt, stretching to Elephantine (modern Aswan). The two kingdoms, Upper and Lower Egypt, were united in c. 3100 BC, but each had their own regalia. The low Red Crown (the *deshret*) represented Lower Egypt and its symbol was the papyrus plant. Upper Egypt was represented by the tall White Crown (the *hedjet*), its symbol being the flowering lotus. The combined Red and White crowns became the *shmt*. The two lands could also be embodied in The Two Ladies, respectively the cobra goddess Wadjet of Buto, and the vulture goddess Nekhbet of Nekheb.

(Below) Symbols of Upper and Lower Egypt

UPPER EGYPT

White Crown  
(hedjet)

LOWER EGYPT

Red Crown  
(deshret)Double Crown  
(shmt)

Lotus



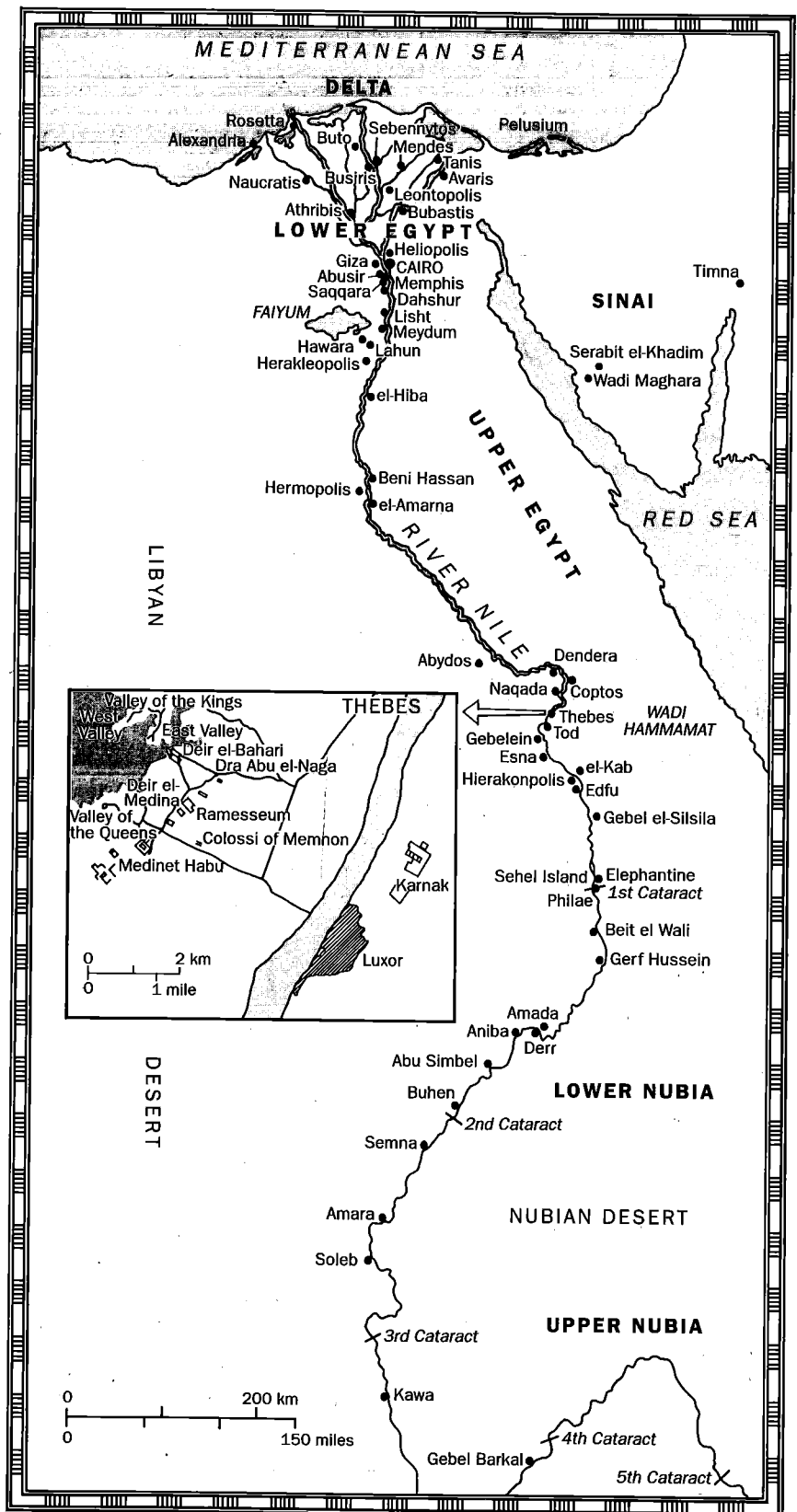
Papyrus



Vulture



Cobra



## INTRODUCTION: THE CHRONOLOGY OF ANCIENT EGYPT

In the early 6th century BC Solon (c. 640–560 BC), the Athenian statesman and legislator, travelled to Egypt. There he visited the temple in the city of Naucratis in the Delta, a city recently settled by Greeks from Miletus. Solon, as a great statesman from a great city, was justly proud of Athens and its long history, but he was sharply put in his place by the priests of the temple with whom he was discussing history when they tartly reminded him: 'You Hellenes [Greeks] are but children.' They meant, and rightly so, that Greek history could not in any way equate in time and content with that of Egypt.

In this they were correct, but it is interesting to reflect that the priests themselves were only the inheritors of a long historical tradition that stretched back almost 3000 years. Whilst they obviously had sources to hand which are no longer extant today, they were living at a time when the grandeur of ancient Egypt was long past and we do not know exactly what historical records were then available to them. That some detailed records existed is proved by the fact that Manetho, a Graeco-Egyptian priest born at Sebennytos in the Delta, was able to write a detailed history of Egypt 300 years later in the 3rd century BC.

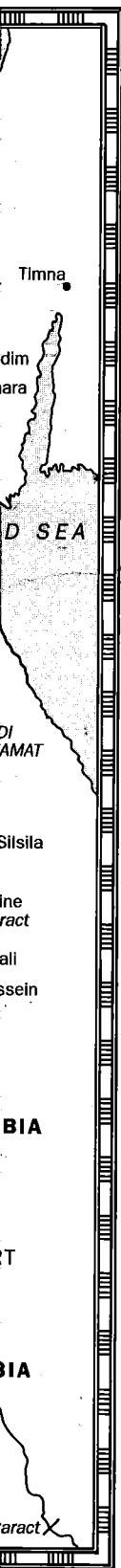
### Manetho and the history of Egypt

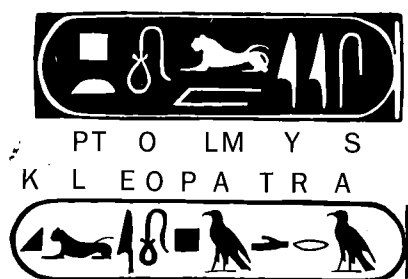
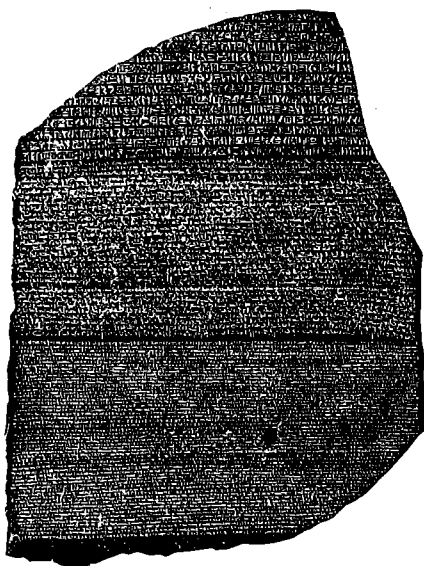
Manetho's *Egyptian History* (also known as *Notes about Egypt*) gives us the basic structure or skeleton of Egyptian chronology that we use today. He divided Egyptian history into dynasties (essentially, ruling houses) and we recognize 30 of them from the unification of Egypt in c. 3100 BC down to the death of the last native Egyptian pharaoh, Nectanebo II, in 343 BC. Sometimes the last phase of ancient Egyptian history after this date has two dynasties added – the 31st and 32nd – which are the Second Persian Period, and the Macedonian rulers linked with the Ptolemaic Dynasty, which ends with the suicide of the last of the Ptolemies, Cleopatra VII, in 30 BC.

Curiously, although great reliance is placed on Manetho, no full text of his work survives. Perhaps one day a papyrus edition will be found, possibly coming from one of the cities of the Faiyum which have produced so much literary and historical material on papyri from the Graeco-Roman period. Manetho's *History* is known to us only by chance since it was highly thought of in antiquity and several writers whose works have survived quoted extensively from it. Principal amongst these was Josephus (writing in the late 1st century AD), in his *Jewish Antiquities* and *Contra Apionem*, and the Christian chronographers Sextus Julius Africanus, whose *Chronicle* comes down to c. AD 220, and Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, whose writings add another 100 years into the early 4th century. Some 500 years later, the work of the last two writers was used as a basis for a history of the world by George the Monk who was secretary (hence his also being known as Syncellus) to the Byzantine Patriarch Tarasius (784–806). All these authors took what they wanted for their own purposes from their sources and so Manetho's account only exists in fragments within these later works.

### MANETHO AND THE CULT OF SERAPIS

Manetho lived during the reign of Ptolemy I, Governor and Satrap of Egypt from 323 to 305 and king from 305 to 282 BC. Plutarch tells us that Manetho was one of the two priestly advisors to the king and that he had been concerned with the introduction of the cult of Serapis. This god, represented as a bearded man with a corn modius (measure) on his head, was a conflation of Egyptian and Greek ideas which had wide appeal and whose cult, under Rome, spread as far as Roman York (*Corpus Inscr.* lat. VII, 240). Alexandria was noted for its temple to Serapis with the famous cult statue by the sculptor Pyxis, introduced into the temple about 286 BC, as well as for its later library and also being the burial place of Alexander the Great. Manetho's association with the foundation of the cult may be acknowledged by the appearance of his name on a statue base found in the temple of Serapis at Carthage (CIL VIII, 1007); it may have been a portrait bust of him, but we shall never know.





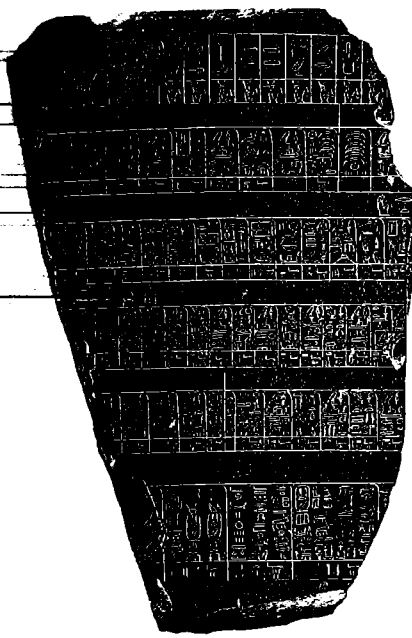
(Above) The Rosetta Stone is perhaps one of the most famous antiquities in the world. It passed to Britain under Article 16 of the Treaty of Alexandria, 1801. By comparing the cartouche of Ptolemy on the Stone with the cartouche of Cleopatra on the Philae obelisk at Kingston Lacy, Dorset, Champollion was able to identify several coincidental letters, forming the basis of his decipherment. British Museum.

Manetho's sources were very mixed. He obviously had access to temple records, since we know that he was a priest in the temple at Heliopolis (the Biblical city of On). His name itself has overtones of learning because it appears to be associated with Thoth, the ibis-headed god of wisdom who invented hieroglyphs. It may mean 'Beloved of Thoth' or possibly 'Gift of Thoth'. He had sources such as the official papyrus histories, the sacred books in the temple and, not least, the historical inscriptions on the temple walls such as the king lists described below, Ramesses III's account of his battles with the Sea Peoples at Medinet Habu, and many more that have not been preserved. To all these possible sources, however, he added a lot of popular traditions and stories of the kings, some of which are far from credible. He was also, obviously, conversant with the writings of Herodotus, the Greek historian from Halicarnassus, who had visited Egypt around 450 BC and written much about the land and its history in Book 2 of his *History*.

### Egyptian chronology: the evidence from inscriptions

From an incomplete and variously corrupt literary history it is possible to examine some of the actual written sources. Whilst these had survived from ancient Egyptian times, after about the end of the 4th century AD they could no longer be read. The latest dated inscription in Egyptian hieroglyphs occurs on the temple of Philae in AD 394. Thereafter the 'key' was lost although many scholars during the European Renaissance, and later the Jesuit priest Athanasius Kircher (1602–80), made valiant attempts at decipherment, often with incredible results. In 1761 another priest, the Abbé Jean Jacques Barthélemy, published a paper in which he suggested that the oval rings in which a number of the hieroglyphic signs occurred enclosed royal names. It was working from those 'ovals', now called cartouches, that Jean François Champollion was able to 'crack the code' of Egyptian hieroglyphs with the **Rosetta Stone**. This odd-shaped slab of black basalt was found by a French officer of engineers, Lieutenant P.F.X. Bouchard, serving with the Napoleonic Expedition in Egypt, at Fort Julien at the Rosetta mouth of the Nile in 1799. It is inscribed in three scripts representing two languages. The upper portion is written in Egyptian hieroglyphs, the centre in the Egyptian demotic script, and the lower section is in Greek. The latter was easily translated, revealing that the inscription, the Decree of Memphis, is a decree of Ptolemy V, dated to Year 9 of his reign, 196 BC. With this as a base Champollion was able to work toward his eventual epoch-making paper, *Lettre à M. Dacier*, in 1822 which opened the floodgates to the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphs.

Apart from priestly inscriptions such as the Rosetta Stone, the Shabaka Stone (p. 192) and others such as the Schel boulder inscription No. 81 (p. 33), there are only a few sources with actual lists pertaining to Egyptian history and chronology. References to small, specific areas of chronology, often only reflecting an individual's part in it, occur, but the evidence is slight and often difficult.

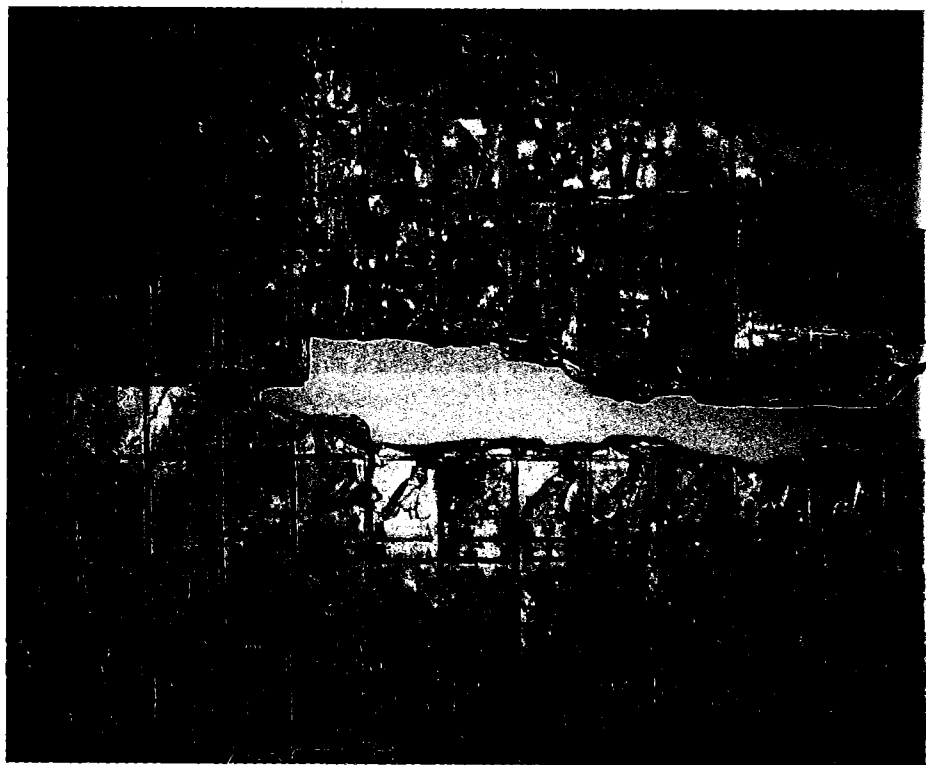


(Above) A section of the Palermo Stone (17 inches high, 9¾ inches wide or 43.5 x 25 cm). It is thought that originally this monument was just over 6½ ft (2 m) long and about 23½ inches (60 cm) high. It is laid out in a series of boxes which give the king's name and then the events of that reign by numerical year (like the dating of laws by regnal year in England). Thus we find entries under a king's name, such as 'Year 4 First Occurrence of the Feast of Sokar'. Similar dating by year and events occurs on a number of the small ivory labels from Abydos and Saqqara that were tied to individual items such as sandals (pp. 22, 24). Palermo Museum, Sicily.

The earliest evidence surviving is the **Palermo Stone**, which dates from the 5th Dynasty (2498–2345 BC). One large section of this black diorite slab is in the Palermo Museum in Sicily and smaller fragments are in the Cairo Museum and the Petrie Museum, University College London. The Palermo fragment is inscribed on both sides and records some of the last Predynastic kings before 3150 BC followed by the kings through to Neferirkare in the mid-5th Dynasty.

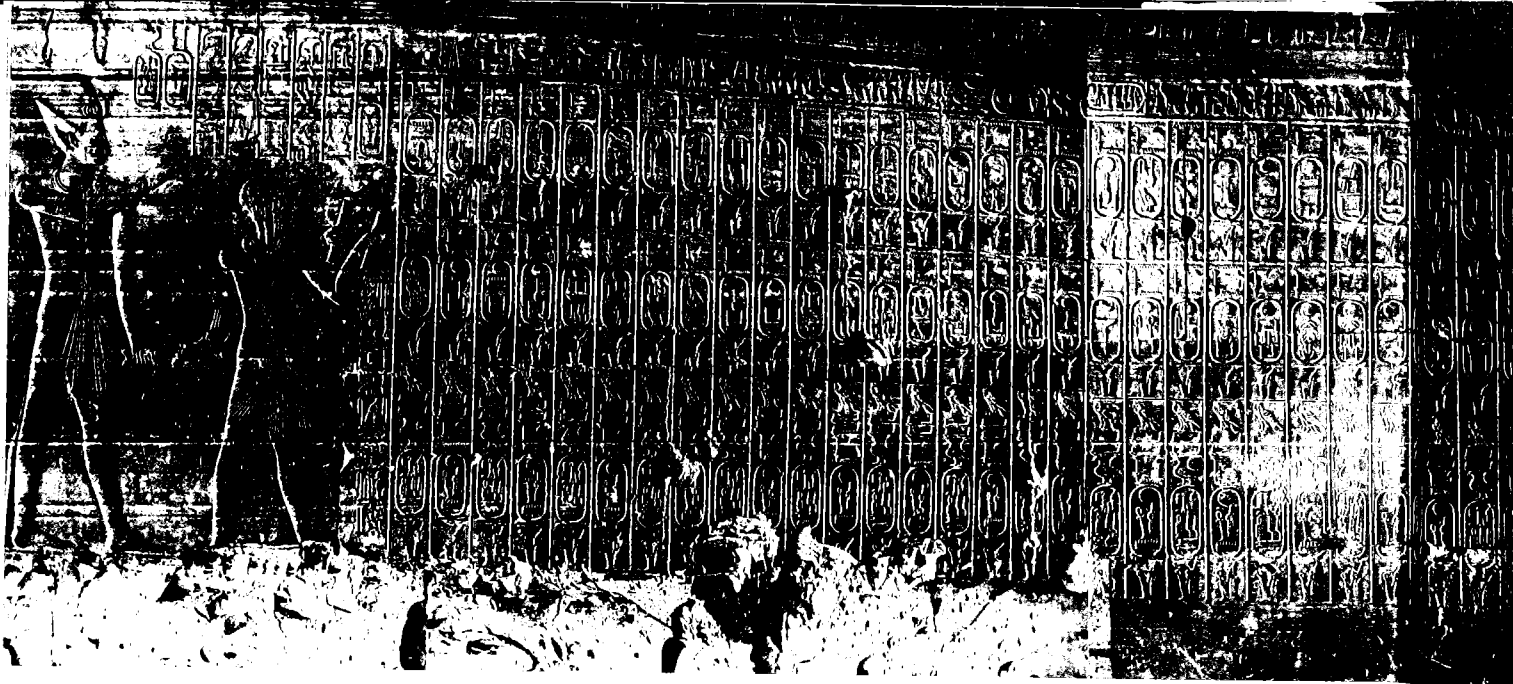
The **Royal List of Karnak** (now in the Louvre) has a list of kings running from the first king down to Tuthmosis III (1504–1450 BC). It has an added advantage in that it records the names of many of the obscure kings of the Second Intermediate Period (Dynasties 13–17).

The **Royal List of Abydos** is still *in situ* on the walls of the corridor in the Hall of Ancestors in the magnificent temple of Seti I (1291–1278 BC). It shows Seti with his young son (later Ramesses II) before a list of the cartouches of 76 kings running in two rows from the first king to Seti I (the third row of cartouches on the wall beneath these merely repeats Seti's own). The kings of the Second Intermediate Period are not given (hence the value of the Karnak List, above), neither are there the cartouches of the kings at the end of the 18th Dynasty after Amenhotep III, who were not considered acceptable because of their association with the Amarna 'heresy' (Akhenaten, Smenkhkare, Tutankhamun and Ay: see pp. 120–139). A badly damaged duplicate of this list, but arranged in three rows instead of two, was found in the nearby temple of Ramesses II. Known as the **Abydos King List**, it is now in the British Museum.



(Right) The Abydos King list in the British Museum is a much inferior duplicate of the larger Royal List (p. 12) in the Hall of Ancestors or Records in the temple of Abydos.





Seti I and his young son, the future Ramesses II, worship the cartouched names of their ancestors in the Hall of Ancestors or Records in the temple of Abydos. Unacceptable ancestors such as Queen Hatshepsut and the 'Amarna' pharaohs (pp. 120-39) are conveniently omitted from the list.

### THE MALADJUSTED CALENDAR

The discrepancy between the Egyptian civil year of 365 days and the true year of 365¼ days led to some curious anomalies. One inscription from the reign of Amenemhet III (1842-1797 BC) records a visit by the king's treasurer Harurre to Serabit el-Khadim, in Sinai, to extract turquoise ore in the third month of what was, according to the civil calendar, winter. However, the actual weather conditions prevailing were those of high summer because the calendar was some seven months out, and Harurre records how he and his men suffered badly from 'the mountains that brand the skin' with the very great heat. As a Ramesside papyrus records in the 13th century BC, 'Winter is come in Summer, the months are reversed, the hours in confusion'.

One other list inscribed on stone is the **Royal List of Saqqara**, now in the Cairo Museum. It was found in the tomb of the Royal Scribe Thunery at Saqqara and has 47 cartouches (originally it had 58) running from Anedjib of the 1st Dynasty to Ramesses II, again omitting those of the Second Intermediate Period.

### Egyptian chronology: the Royal Canon of Turin

The finest record of the chronology of the Egyptian kings is unfortunately the most damaged and now incomplete. It is a papyrus known as the Royal Canon of Turin, in which museum it is to be found. Originally the property of the king of Sardinia, tragically, it was badly packed and severely damaged during transportation. The list of the kings, originally over 300 of them, is written in a fine literate hand in the hieratic script on the back of a long Ramesside papyrus which has accounts on the front, or recto side. This dates it to having been written about 1200 BC. Like the scraps remaining from Manetho, and the first line of the Palermo Stone, it begins with dynasties of gods which are followed by those of earthly kings. A useful aspect is that it gives the exact lengths of each reign in years and even months and days. Its condition is such that piecing the fragments together is like solving a gigantic jigsaw puzzle with many pieces missing, so that what would have been the premier source for Egyptian chronology is an epigraphist's nightmare.

### Fixing true dates by the stars

Even with the chronological information available, as outlined above, it may come as a surprise to realize that it is extremely difficult to fix true or absolute dates in Egyptian chronology. Most of the information given in the inscriptions mentioned is relative, in that it shows a sequence of kings relative to each other with sometimes a length of time between each reign, but to fix them in an absolute framework is a different matter altogether. Absolute dates from ancient Egypt rely on astronomical

dating. This is done by reference to the civil and astronomical calendars in a complicated calculation involving the Sothic cycle of 1460 years, based on the heliacal rising of Sirius, or Sothis, the 'dog star'. The ancient Egyptians knew that the year consisted of 365 days, but they made no adjustment for the additional quarter of a day each year – as we do with Leap Year every four years at the end of February. Hence their civil and astronomical calendars were gradually moving out of synchronization and could bring about extremes of dating between the two. Eventually, every 1460 years, the two calendars coincided and were correct for a short time, until they gradually became out of step again until the end of the next cycle.

The heliacal rising of Sirius was, ideally, supposed to coincide with New Year's Day in the civil calendar, but did so only every 1460 years. The 3rd-century AD grammarian Censorinus records that in AD 139 the first day of the Egyptian civil year and the heliacal rising of Sirius did actually coincide – this being the end of a Sothic cycle. This phenomenon is also confirmed by a reverse type on the billon tetradrachms issued at the mint of Alexandria with the standing figure of a haloed phoenix and the Greek word AION (indicating the end of an era); it is also dated by the characters L B to regnal year 2 of the emperor Antoninus Pius, which fell between 29 August AD 138 and 28 August 139. It is possible, working backwards, to deduce that comparable coincidences had occurred in 1317 BC and 2773 BC.

The occurrence of a heliacal rising of Sirius is recorded in the 7th year of the reign of Senusret III (1878–1841 BC) of the 12th Dynasty. The event is dated to the 16th day of the 4th month of the 2nd season in the 7th year of the king. (There were only three seasons, not four, in ancient Egypt: inundation, sowing and harvest; then the cycle started again.) By calculating from the 'coincidences' of 1317 BC and 2773 BC, this rising can be fixed at 1872 BC. Another such sighting recorded occurred on the 9th day of the 3rd month of the 3rd season in the 9th year of Amenhotep I (1551–1524 BC); this produces a date somewhere within a 26-year range in the second half of the 16th century BC, since it cannot be quite so closely tied as the Senusret date.

This shows just how fluid Egyptian chronology can be, essentially calculated on a structure of regnal years for each king (where known) and which, by counting backwards and forwards, are basically anchored to the three heliacal risings of Sirius mentioned. It is generally accepted that Egyptian chronology is on a firm footing from 664 BC, the beginning of the 26th Dynasty (Saite Period) and the reign of Psammetichus I. There are then outside links to the chronology of historical Mediterranean civilizations which become firmer as the full classical and Roman periods are reached. Margins of error in the dynasties prior to the 26th are variable; whilst in the New Kingdom 20 years might be acceptable, this will increase as earlier periods are reached so that dates around the unification and in the Early Dynastic Period (Dynasties '0'–2) could be subject to fluctuations of anything between 50 and 200 years.

#### DATES FOLLOWED IN CHRONICLE OF THE PHARAOHS

Some recent literature, both scholarly as well as 'fringe', has suggested outlandish and unacceptable changes in the chronology. Principal amongst the former is *Centuries of Darkness* by Peter James (1991), and amongst the latter the books of Velikovsky and Von Däniken. It is small wonder then that there is often such a variety in the dates suggested in much of the literature. In this book the dating followed is largely that put forward by Dr William J. Murnane in his *Penguin Guide to Ancient Egypt* (1983).