

# THE HISTORY OF EGYPT

## UNDER THE PTOLEMIES.

### INTRODUCTION.

**W**HEN letters first rose in Greece and Rome, the writers found a rich harvest of fable and tradition, out of which they wove those beautiful tales that we now read as the beginning of Greek and Roman history. The Egyptians were not favoured with historians who could thus fix and hand down to us their traditions; but, on the other hand, they had from far earlier times carved the names and deeds of their kings on the granite temples, and thus, instead of a rich poetic fable, they have left us a bald reality.

In each case, the history of the country begins with scattered and dark hints, which some minds seize upon as treasures and others overlook as worthless, but which the historian can neither safely lean upon nor yet wholly fling from him; and this is the case with the history of Egypt before the time when Abraham drove his herds into that country in search of food, which the drought had made scarce in Canaan.

Egypt was then broken up into several little kingdoms. Upper Egypt, the most powerful of these, had been ruled over by a race of kings who reigned in This, a city near the spot, or perhaps on the spot, where Abydos afterwards stood; and who had held Thebes, and

Manetho.

*Manetho.* some of them Memphis, as part of their kingdom. We are told the names of seventeen who reigned in This ; after which that city fell, and Thebes rose to be capital of Upper Egypt ; and it was perhaps in the reign of the second or third Theban king that Abraham entered the Delta.

The city of Elephantine, on an island in the Nile, just below the cataract at the southern boundary of Egypt, was also the capital of a little kingdom ; and we know the names, and nothing but the names, of nine kings who had reigned there. Elephantine no doubt fell when Thebes rose over the city of This.

Memphis was the capital of the rich corn-fields of Lower Egypt, or the land of Mizraim as it is called in the Old Testament ; and perhaps the tenth of those Memphite kings whose names are known to us was reigning in the time of Abraham.

We likewise have the name of one king who reigned at Heracleopolis ; and, as that city is close to Memphis, it is most likely that he ruled over Memphis, and made Heracleopolis the capital of Lower Egypt during his reign.

The people of both Upper and Lower Egypt seem to have been Copts, children of Cham or Ham, and from him they called their country Chemi ; and they spoke a language which, after it has undergone the changes of so many ages, we even now know as Coptic. Their religion was the same as what Herodotus and Diodorus afterwards found there : many cities had already their sacred animals ; the bull Apis in Memphis, the bull Mnevis in Heliopolis, and the goat Mando in Mendes, were fed and waited upon at the cost of those cities, and worshipped as images of Chem, or Amun-Ra, the Sun.

Their buildings were much the same as those which afterwards rose in such massive grandeur. Venephres, king of This, had al-

## ABRAHAM.

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ready built pyramids at a city named Cochoe ; the older part of the great temple of Thebes, now called the temple of Karnak, was already begun ; and Abraham most likely saw the obelisk of Osirtesen I., which even yet stands at Heliopolis.

Wilkinson's  
Thebes.

The carved writing, by means of figures of men and animals, which was afterwards, when easier ways of writing came into use, called sacred carving, or hieroglyphics, was even then not new. The inscriptions of the Osirtesens do not show us hieroglyphics in their earliest form ; in them we see many words spelt alphabetically mixt up with the symbols or pictures of objects and actions. There had been, most likely, many ages before their time during which the hieroglyphics were wholly symbolic, before alphabetic spelling had been thought of.

Egypt. Inscrip.  
plate 6.

The journey of Abraham into Egypt was not that of a single family ; there was at the same time a great migration going on, of Phenicians, moving out of their own country into Lower Egypt, and along the African coast of the Mediterranean. We shall hereafter see that the Greek settlers at Cyrene had to drive them back from the coast, and tradition says that Phenician Dido was kindly received by them at Carthage. They were peaceably driven out of Canaan by other troops of herdsmen who were moving westward from Chaldæa and Mesopotamia, and who made the pasture-land too crowded for their loose and scattered way of life.

Manetho.

Pausanias,  
lib. i. 7.

Gen. xi.

Abraham found Lower Egypt a well-tilled corn country ; the king, or Pharaoh, was surrounded by princes and servants, and was by no means looked upon by Abraham as his equal, as the little kings of Canaan had been.

Gen. xii.

Abraham did not remain long in Lower Egypt ; from the head of the Red Sea he went southward, and returned home by Mount Sinai and Petra ; but the Phenicians settled in crowds in the Delta,

*Eratosthenes.* and may have been a cause of great wealth to the country, as about that time Suphis, and his brother and successor Sensuphis, who were Coptic kings of Memphis, were strong enough to conquer Thebes, and rich enough to build the two largest of the pyramids near Memphis.

*Manetho.*

But the Phenicians soon got too strong for the country which had given them a home ; they chose a king of their own, named Salatis, who at first ruled over his countrymen without rebelling against the Egyptians ; but he afterwards seized Memphis, and from thence sent forth his armed bands, each year, at harvest time, to gather in a duty upon corn, and the pay for his troops. He had an army of two hundred and forty thousand men ; and he strongly fortified the city of Avaris, perhaps that afterwards called Pelusium, as a frontier town against the Assyrians. In the third or fourth reign of these Phenician shepherds, or herdsmen, or Hycsos as they were called by the Egyptians, they even conquered Thebes, and reigned over all Egypt.

*Eratosthenes.*

It was in the reign of Apophis, one of these Phenicians, when the two countries of Canaan and Lower Egypt were filled by the same people, that, among other slaves brought into Egypt by the caravans from the east, was a young Jew named Joseph, who chanced to be sold into the service of the captain of the guard. Little could his master have foreseen the coming greatness of his slave, or how much his name would be known in after ages.

*Gen. xxxvii.*

Joseph soon rose to the head of his master's household, and afterwards to be the king's chief minister. He foresaw a scarcity of corn, and bought up the harvest in years of plenty ; and with these stores, in the years of scarcity, he bought from the starving Egyptians the freeholds of their estates, which he afterwards let them hold as tenants of the crown, at a rent of one-fifth of the crop. The

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priests, however, were allowed to keep their freeholds, as being a privileged order in the state.

Thus this Asiatic minister made the king the landlord of the country, and the land was held by what is now known in Asia as the Ryot tenure. But in Asia the farmers are tenants at a changeable rack-rent of about one-half of the crop; whereas the Egyptians paid a fixt and low rent of one-fifth. The Egyptian landholder was therefore rich enough to have peasants or slaves under him, while the Indian Ryot is himself the peasant-tenant of the crown. This rent was in the place of all direct taxes, and, except the duties upon manufactures, and upon the exports and imports, no other tax was laid upon Egypt till it was conquered by the Persians. Jones on Rent.

Asseth, one of these Phenician kings, is said to have brought, no doubt from Babylon the birth-place of astronomy, a better knowledge of the length of the year than was then found in Egypt. The Egyptian year had been divided into twelve months of thirty days each, and Asseth, without altering the months, added to the end of the year five days, which were called by the Greeks the *epagomenæ*. But this change in the calendar seems not to have been generally received till a hundred years later, when it was ordered by one of the Coptic kings of Thebes. Manetho.

Soon after the death of Apophis, the kings of Thebes and Memphis made common cause against the Phenicians, and, driving them out of the rest of the country, blocked up their forces in the strong city of Avaris. Here they were besieged by Amosis king of Thebes, and then driven through the desert into Syria, where they built the city of Jerusalem, while the unarmed part of the nation remained as slaves in Lower Egypt.

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## INTRODUCTION.

From this time we find Upper Egypt rising in wealth and power ; and though we are still told the names of the kings of Memphis, they seem to have been under the sceptre of their more powerful Theban neighbours. The inscriptions of the reigns of Amun-mai Thor II. and Osirtesen II., at Cosseir, the port on the Red Sea which is nearest to Thebes, prove that the trade to Arabia and across Arabia had begun even before the Phenicians had been driven out of Egypt.

Wilkinson's  
Thebes.

Manetho.

Chebros, the son of Amosis, reigned after him ; and the Jews, who had been well treated in the Delta in grateful recollection of the services of Joseph, now began to be harshly used by the Theban kings ; task-masters were set over them, and they were cruelly over-worked at the fortifications of Memphis and Heliopolis, and at the other buildings of Lower Egypt.

Exodus,  
i. 8.

i. 11.

Amunothph I., the son-in-law of Chebros, reigned next. He is the first of the kings whose tombs are now found in the Valley of Tombs near Thebes. These royal burial-places are tunnelled into the side of the hills, and are wide and lofty rooms, whose ceilings are upheld by columns, and whose walls are covered with paintings and sculptures. In the tomb of Amunothph I. are well-formed statues, and sculptures in high relief ; on one of the walls is painted a funeral procession by water, with a mummy-lying in one of the boats, which shows how very early were the customs both of making mummies and of ferrying the dead over the river, which Diodorus saw in use thirteen hundred years later, and from which the Greeks borrowed the boat of Charon.

Wilkinson's  
Thebes.

Mesphra-Thothmosis I. made some additions to the great temple at Thebes, which had been begun by Osirtesen I. ; he also built at Tombos in Ethiopia, whence we learn that part of that country had already been brought under the sceptre of Egypt.

## THEBAN KINGS.

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Amun-Nitocris, or Neit-thor (for the guttural is written either with a TH or a C), the last Memphite sovereign, then reigned over Thebes. Eratosthenes says that she reigned for her husband. She was handsome among women and brave among men, and one of the more powerful sovereigns of Egypt; she was a great builder, and set up two obelisks and two small temples at Thebes, and built the smallest of the three large pyramids near Memphis. Henceforth all Egypt was under one sceptre.

Mesphra-Thothmosis II. was most likely the husband of Nitocris; he outlived her, and in many cases had her name cut out of the monuments, and his own carved in the place of it. He added to the buildings at Thebes, and built at Samneh in Ethiopia.

Wilkinson's  
Thebes.

Thothmosis III. also added to the buildings at Thebes, and built at Memphis, at Heliopolis, at Samneh, and at Talmis in Ethiopia. In his tomb at Thebes, which, like those of the other kings, is a set of spacious rooms tunnelled into the hill, is a painting of men of the several conquered nations bringing gifts to the king. There are Egyptians; there are negroes bearing ivory, apes, and leopard-skins; there are Ethiopians with rings, hides, apes, leopards, ivory, ostrich-eggs and feathers, a camelopard, hounds with handsome collars, and long-horned oxen; and there are men of a white nation, with short beards and white dresses, bringing gloves, vases, a bear, an elephant, and a chariot with horses. At Thebes there is a brick arch with this king's name upon it; and, though there are vaulted rooms of an earlier time, this is perhaps the earliest arch known.

There are two chains of reasoning by which we may hope to fix the date of this reign: first, Herodotus says that Mœris, a king who governed Memphis, lived nine hundred years before his time; secondly, Theon says that Menophres was king when the calendar was reformed, and when the dog-star rose heliacally on the first day of



the month of Thoth, or B.C. 1321. On which we remark—first, that Mœris and Menophres were most likely a Thothmosis, as they are nearer to Mesphres than to any other name; second, that the figure of Thothmosis III. is often drawn with a palm-branch, the hieroglyphic for ‘year,’ in each hand, which may be meant to point out that he made some change in the length of the civil year; third, that Plutarch says that the god Thoth, who may in this case have been meant for Thothmosis, taught the Egyptians the true length of the year. These reasons are perhaps not very strong; but in a part of the history where we find so few traces of chronology, we follow any thing which seems as if it would guide us.

Wilkinson's  
Thebes.

Amunothph II. has left his name upon temples at Apollinopolis Parva, at Eilethyas, and at Elephantine, of all of which he was most likely the builder. The sculptures in his tomb are in the best style of Egyptian art, for borders, for vases, and for the human figure.

Manetho.

This seems to have been the king who drove the Israelites out of Egypt. He was warned by the priests, says the Egyptian historian, to cleanse the country of the lepers who were working in the quarries on the east side of the Nile. They had then risen in arms under the guidance of a priest of Heliopolis, named Osarsiph [or Joseph], who afterwards changed his name to Moses. He made laws for his countrymen, and bound them by an oath not to worship the gods and sacred animals of Egypt.

Exodus, xii.37.

The Jews marched out of the Delta, in number six hundred thousand men, beside women and children. After leaving the head of the Red Sea, they turned southward, along the coast, to Mount Sinai, and then northward, by Petra, towards Canaan; and with them went out a crowd of Arabs, who were part of the Phenician herdsmen of the Delta, and who are called Mixed People by the Jewish writers.



## THEBAN KINGS.

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Thothmosis IV. built the small temple between the fore-legs of the great Sphinx near Memphis; but it may be doubted whether the rock was carved into the form of this huge monster in his reign, or at an earlier time. He built at El Berkel, the capital of Ethiopia; and in the sculptures on the walls of a temple at Silsilis he is being carried in a palanquin, surrounded by his fan-bearers, and receiving the gifts of the conquered nations.

Hieroglyphics  
plate 80.

Wilkinson's  
Thebes.

Amunothph III. seems to have built more in Ethiopia than any other Egyptian king; he also began the temple of Luxor; but he is most known by his colossal statue at Thebes, called the statue of Memnon, which is sixty feet high though sitting, and which Strabo, Pausanias, and so many other Greek and Roman travellers, heard utter its far-famed musical sounds at sunrise.

Of Amunmai Anamek we know little beyond his statue in the British Museum; and of Rameses I. nothing but his tomb at Thebes.

Amunmai Amunaan, or Osirei I., began the palaces at Abydos and at Old Quorneh, and made great additions to the temple of Karnak. The whole of his sculptures and buildings are remarkably beautiful, and in the best style of art. His tomb is at Thebes; and the sarcophagus which it once held is now in Sir John Soane's museum.

This king seems to have been successful in his wars, and among the paintings on the walls of his tomb is a procession of the several conquered nations bringing their gifts.

Rameses II., or the Great, was the king under whom Egypt reached its greatest height in arms, in arts, and in wealth. His palace at Thebes yielded to no building in the world for beauty and costliness. Its spacious rooms, in the middle open to the sky, but with roofs resting upon columns round the sides, were standing in all their glory when Hecatæus travelled in Upper Egypt, and its

Diod. Sic.  
lib. i.

ruins are even now looked at with wonder by our travellers : it was called the Memnonium, from the king's first name, Amun-mai, or Mi-amun, which the Greeks changed into Memnon. He added to the temple of Luxor, and set up two obelisks in front of it, one of which is now at Paris. The temple of Osiris, and the palace called the Memnonium at Abydos, which were begun by his father, were for the most part built in this reign. His statues and obelisks are found in all parts of Egypt, and lead us to call this the Augustan, or when speaking of Egypt we ought perhaps to say the Philadelphian, age of Coptic art : it had reached its greatest beauty, and was not yet overloaded with ornament.

The sculptures on the walls of the Memnonium at Thebes show the king's victories over people of the Tartar, Arab, Ethiopian, and Negro races ; and the hieroglyphics, which were read to Germanicus by one of the priests, recounted his conquests of the Libyans, Ethiopians, Medes, Persians, Bactrians, Scythians, Syrians, Armenians, Cappadocians, Bithynians, and Lycians, together with the weight of gold and silver, and the other gifts, which these nations sent to Thebes as their yearly tribute.

Tacitus,  
 Annal. lib. ii.

The population of the country may be counted at five millions and a half, as there were seven hundred thousand men able to carry arms ; and the gold and silver mines alone were said to bring in each year the unheard-of sum of three million two hundred thousand minæ, or seven millions sterling.

Diod. Sic.  
 lib. i. 49.

After the reigns of three other kings, about whom we know but little, came Rameses III., whose palace at Medinet Abu, and other buildings and historical sculptures, prove that his reign fell very little short of that of Rameses II. in wealth and conquests.

He was followed by eight or ten other kings of the family, and most of them of the name, of Rameses ; but, during their reigns,