

Makers of the Western Tradition

P O R T R A I T S F R O M H I S T O R Y



VOLUME 1

ted by J. Kelley Sowards

Fifth Edition

MAKERS OF THE WESTERN TRADITION

Portraits from History
Volume 1

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*To Oliver, Elliott, Meredith, Sam, and Peter,
my darling grandchildren*

Preface

Are men and women able to force change upon history by their skill and wits, their nerve and daring? Are they capable of altering its course by their actions? Or are they hopelessly caught up in the grinding process of great, impersonal forces over which they have no real control?

Historians, like theologians, philosophers, and scientists, have long been fascinated by this question. People in every age have recognized great forces at work in their affairs, whether they perceived those forces as supernatural and divine, climatological, ecological, sociological, or economic. Yet obviously at least a few individuals—Alexander, Charlemagne—were able to seize the opportunity of their time and compel the great forces of history to change course. Still others—Socrates, Martin Luther, Galileo—were able, solely by the power of their thought or their vision, to shape the history of their period and of all later time more profoundly even than the conquerors or military heroes.

The purpose of this book is to examine the careers and the impact of several figures who significantly influenced the history of Western civilization, or who embodied much that is significant about the periods in which they lived, and at the same time to introduce the student to the chief varieties of historical interpretation. Few personalities or events stand without comment in the historical record; contemporary accounts and documents, the so-called original sources, no less than later studies, are written by people with a distinct point of view and interpretation of what they see. Problems of interpretation are inseparable from the effort to achieve historical understanding.

The readings in this book have been chosen for their inherent interest and their particular way of treating their subject. Typically, three selections are devoted to each figure. The first selection is usually an autobiographical or contemporary biographical account; in a

few instances, differing assessments by contemporaries are included. Next, a more or less orthodox interpretation is presented; it is often a selection from the "standard work" on the figure in question. The final selection offers a more recent view, which may reinforce the standard interpretation, revise it in the light of new evidence, or dissent from it completely. In some cases, two very different recent views are set side by side.

A book of this size cannot hope to include full-length biographies of all the individuals studied. Instead, each chapter focuses on an important interpretive issue. In some chapters, the figure's relative historical importance is at issue; in others, the significance of a major point mooted in the sources; in still others, the general meaning of the figure's career, as debated in a spread of interpretative positions. In every chapter, it is hoped, the problem examined is interesting and basic to an understanding of the figure's place in history.

The fifth edition, like the previous ones, is based on responses to a questionnaire by colleagues across the country who used the fourth edition in their classes. Their comments about which chapters or selections appealed to students and which did not, their suggestions about which figures ought to be deleted and which added or substituted, and their candid observations were extremely helpful in the revision.

Volume 1 contains one entirely new chapter, on Christopher Columbus. In addition, two chapters—those on Akhenaton and Peter Abelard—have been brought back from earlier editions. The chapter on Akhenaton is substantially revised and updated. Volume 2 contains three new chapters, on Voltaire, Simone de Beauvoir, and Margaret Thatcher; two chapters—those on Cecil Rhodes and Sigmund Freud—contain new selections.

All the selections in the readings were carefully reviewed, and the chapter reading lists were updated.

J. K. S.

Contents

AKHENATON: THE HERETIC KING 3

A Hymn to Aton 4

James H. Breasted, *The Dawn of Conscience* 6

Donald B. Redford, *The Criminal of Akhetaton* 9

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING 16

THE IMAGE OF SOCRATES: MAN OR MYTH? 19

Aristophanes, *The Clouds* 21

Plato, *The Apology* 33

Moses Hadas and Morton Smith, *Socrates: A Modern
Perspective* 39

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING 43

THE "PROBLEM" OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT 47

The Ancient Sources: Arrian, Eratosthenes, and Plutarch 50

W. W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great and the Unity of Mankind* 53

N. G. L. Hammond, *The New Alexander* 61

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING 67

JULIUS CAESAR: THE COLOSSUS THAT BESTRODE THE NARROW WORLD 71

Suetonius, *The Life of Caesar* 74

x *Contents*

Theodor Mommsen, *The Heroic Image of Caesar* 80

Ronald Syme, *Caesar the Politician* 84

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING 90

AUGUSTINE: THE CEREBRAL SAINT 93

St. Augustine, *The Confessions* 95

Etienne Gilson, *The Confessions: What Did They Mean?* 103

Peter Brown, *The Confessions: How Did They Work?* 107

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING 110

CHARLEMAGNE AND THE FIRST EUROPE 113

Einhard, *The Emperor Charlemagne* 115

Heinrich Fichtenau, *A New Portrait of the Emperor* 121

F. L. Ganshof, *A More Somber Light* 126

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING 131

PETER ABELARD: "THE KNIGHT OF DIALECTIC" 135

Peter Abelard, *The Story of My Misfortunes* 137

Charles Homer Haskins, *A "Renaissance Man" of the Twelfth Century* 142

David Knowles, *The Substance of Abelard* 145

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING 150

ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE AND THE WRATH OF GOD 153

William of Tyre and John of Salisbury, *Eleanor and the Chroniclers* 156

Amy Kelly, *Eleanor, the Queen of Hearts* 160

Marion Meade, *Eleanor the Regent* 165

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING 172

LEONARDO DA VINCI: UNIVERSAL MAN OF THE RENAISSANCE 175

Giorgio Vasari, *In Praise of Leonardo* 178

John Herman Randall, Jr., *Leonardo the Scientist* 184

Ladislao Reti, *Leonardo the Technologist* 188

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING 198

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS: ADMIRAL OF THE OCEAN SEA 201

Christopher Columbus, *The Ship's Log* 203

Bartolomé de las Casas, *From Success to Failure* 212

Samuel Eliot Morison, *The End of the Admiral* 217

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING 221

MARTIN LUTHER: PROTESTANT SAINT OR "DEVIL IN THE HABIT OF A MONK"? 225

Martin Luther, *The Protestant Luther* 228

Hartmann Grisar, *The Catholic Luther* 231

Erwin Iserloh, *Luther between Reform and Reformation* 236

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING 241

ELIZABETH I, THE ARMADA, AND THE "BLACK LEGEND" 245

Sir Francis Bacon, *The Legendary Elizabeth* 247

James Anthony Froude, *The "New" Elizabeth* 251

Garrett Mattingly, *Elizabeth and the "Invincible" Armada* 257

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING 262

THE CRIME OF GALILEO 267

Galileo Galilei, *The Two Chief World Systems* 270

Giorgio de Santillana, *The Crime of Galileo* 276

Stillman Drake, *A Historical Speculation* 281

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING 287

LOUIS XIV: "THE SUN KING" 291

Louis, Duc de Saint-Simon, *The Memoirs* 294

xii *Contents*

Voltaire, *A Rationalist View of Absolutism* 300

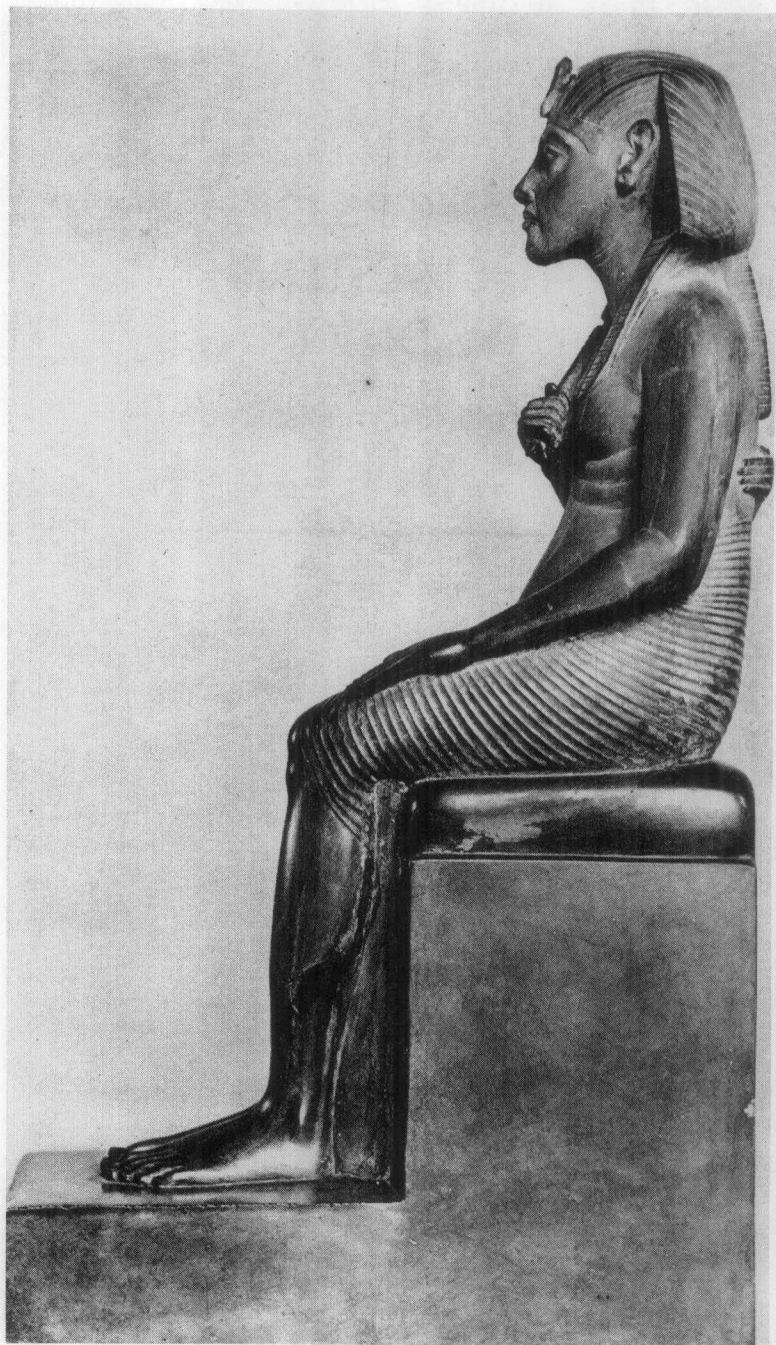
Pierre Goubert, *Louis XIV and the Larger World* 305

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING 311

MAKERS OF THE WESTERN TRADITION

**Portraits from History
Volume 1**

FIFTH EDITION



The Bettmann Archive

AKHENATON: THE HERETIC KING

- c. 1377 B.C. Reign began
- c. 1372 B.C. Founded new capital of
Akhetaton
- c. 1360 B.C. Died

With the enormous distance in time that separates us from ancient Egypt and the Near East, the scale of individual human size is reduced nearly to the point of oblivion. Even the greatest kings and conquerors, high priests, viziers, queens and "chief wives" tend to be reduced to lists of properties and exploits, names without substance or dimension.

For Egypt in particular the problem is compounded by the fact that the Egyptian culture tended to stress timelessness and eternity rather than history or individuals. The Egyptians had no continuous chronology. The names of successive pharaohs and their identifying epithets were often run together, overlapped, and sometimes blandly falsified in records and inscriptions or deliberately obliterated—probably for political purposes. The great modern British Egyptologist Sir Alan Gardiner, speaking of this maddening anonymity of Egyptian history, notes however that "in one case only, that of Akhenaten towards the end of Dyn. XVIII, do the inscriptions and reliefs bring us face to face with a personality markedly different from that of all his predecessors."¹

This is the famous "heretic king," the most intriguing figure in Egyptian history.

¹Sir Alan Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1st ed., 1961; 1972), p. 55. The reader will note the first of several variations in the spelling of Akhenaton in this passage. Hieroglyphics did not write the vowels and there were consonant sounds we do not have. Hence considerable latitude in rendering names is to be expected.—ED.

A Hymn to Aton

There is no contemporary biographical account of this remarkable ruler, nor should we expect to find one. But what is more intriguing, conscious efforts apparently were made to obliterate every trace of him and of his reign. His name was systematically hacked out of official inscriptions and omitted from king lists. Even the genealogical lines, so important to Egyptian royal continuity, were altered. But a handful of inscriptions did remain, the most substantial being the Long Hymn to Aton, from the tomb of one of Akhenaton's successors, Eye. Part of this inscription follows below. Although the authorship of the hymn is not recorded it is quite possible that Akhenaton himself wrote it. Yet it is not about him. It is about the god Aton, the disk of the sun, to whom Akhenaton subordinated all the other myriad of Egyptian gods, "sole god, like whom there is no other!" This was the apostasy of "the heretic king." This was the offense that seems to have created the animus toward Akhenaton, nearly unique in Egyptian history.

Thou appearest beautifully on the horizon of heaven
Thou living Aton, the beginning of life!
When thou art risen on the eastern horizon,
Thou hast filled every land with thy beauty.
Thou art gracious, great, glistening, and high over every land;
Thy rays encompass the lands to the limit of all that thou hast made:
As thou art Re, thou reachest to the end of them;
(Thou) subduest them (for) thy beloved son.

.
When thou settest in the western horizon,
The land is in darkness, in the manner of death.
Every lion is come forth from his den;
All creeping things, they sting.
Darkness is a shroud, and the earth is in stillness,
For he who made them rests in his horizon.

At daybreak, when thou arisest on the horizon,
When thou shinest as the Aton by day,
Thou drivest away the darkness and givest thy rays.

.
All the world, they do their work.
All beasts are content with their pasturage;

Trees and plants are flourishing.
 The birds which fly from their nests,
 Their wings are (stretched out) in praise to thy *ka*.
 All beasts spring upon (their) feet.
 Whatever flies and alights,
 They live when thou hast risen (for) them.
 The ships are sailing north and south as well,
 For every way is open at thy appearance.
 The fish in the river dart before thy face;
 Thy rays are in the midst of the great green sea.

.
 How manifold it is, what thou hast made!
 They are hidden from the face (of man).
 O sole god, like whom there is no other!
 Thou didst create the world according to thy desire,
 Whilst thou wert alone:
 All men, cattle, and wild beasts,
 Whatever is on earth, going upon (its) feet,
 And what is on high, flying with its wings.

The countries of Syria and Nubia, the *land* of Egypt,
 Thou settest every man in his place,
 Thou suppliest their necessities:
 Everyone has his food, and his time of life is reckoned.
 Their tongues are separate in speech,
 And their natures as well;
 Their skins are distinguished,
 As thou distinguishest the foreign peoples.
 Thou makest a Nile in the underworld,
 Thou bringest it forth as thou desirest
 To maintain the people (of Egypt)
 According as thou madest them for thyself,
 The lord of all of them, wearying (himself) with them,
 The lord of every land, rising for them,
 The Aton of the day, great of majesty.

.
 Thou art in my heart,
 And there is no other that knows thee
 Save thy son Nefer-kheperu-Re Wa-en-Re,
 For thou hast made him well-versed in thy plans and in thy strength.

The world came into being by thy hand,
 According as thou hast made them.
 When thou hast risen they live,

6 *Makers of the Western Tradition*

When thou settest they die.
Thou art lifetime thy own self,
For one lives (only) through thee.
Eyes are (fixed) on beauty until thou settest.
All work is laid aside when thou settest in the west.
(But) when (thou) risest (again),
[Everything is] made to flourish for the king, . . .
Since thou didst found the earth
And raise them up for thy son,
Who came forth from thy body:
the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, . . . Akh-en-Aton. . . and
the Chief Wife of the King . . . Nefert-iti, living and youthful forever
and ever.

The Dawn of Conscience

JAMES H. BREASTED

The name of Akhenaton was scarcely known at all in Egyptian studies until the beginning of this century and the excavations at Tell el-Amarna. The documents and inscriptions that came to light—including the Hymn to Aton—fascinated Egyptologists, and they began to reconstruct the history of this king and his age. A leading role was taken by the American Egyptologist James H. Breasted. Breasted created an engaging portrait of the young pharaoh, hardly more than a boy, who turned his back upon the militaristic aggressiveness of his father, Amenhotep III, in favor of a new and revolutionary religious revelation. Breasted argued that Akhenaton was not only the first clearly discernible individual in history but the first person in history to conceive the worship of a single god, in his case Aton, the disk of the sun. Further, Breasted argued, Akhenaton anticipated the Hebrew monotheism of Moses and he adduced, as part of his case, the great Hymn to Aton and its clear affinities with the Old Testament, in particular Psalm 104.

Breasted's account of Akhenaton and his religious revolution continues in the following excerpt, taken from his most famous book, The Dawn of Conscience.

On a moment's reflection, such fundamental changes as these suggest what an overwhelming tide of inherited thought, custom, and tradition had been diverted from its channel by the young king who was

guiding this revolution. It is only as this aspect of his movement is clearly discerned that we begin to appreciate the power of his remarkable personality. Before his time religious documents were commonly attributed to ancient kings and wise men, and the power of a belief lay chiefly in its claim to remote antiquity and the sanctity of immemorial custom. Until Ikhnaton the history of the world had largely been merely the irresistible drift of tradition. The outstanding exception was the great physician-architect, Imhotep, who introduced stone architecture and built the first stone masonry pyramidal tomb of the Thirtieth Century B.C. Otherwise men had been but drops of water in the great current. With the possible exception of Imhotep, Ikhnaton was the first individual in history. Consciously and deliberately, by intellectual process he gained his position, and then placed himself squarely in the face of tradition and swept it aside. He appeals to no myths, to no ancient and widely accepted versions of the dominion of the gods, to no customs sanctified by centuries—he appeals only to the present and visible evidences of his god's dominion, evidences open to all, and as for tradition wherever it had left material manifestations of other gods in records which could be reached, he endeavoured to annihilate it. A policy so destructive was doomed to encounter fatal opposition. . . .

Here had been a great people, the onward flow of whose life, in spite of its almost irresistible momentum, had been suddenly arrested and then diverted into a strange channel. Their holy places had been desecrated, the shrines sacred with the memories of thousands of years had been closed up, the priests driven away, the offerings and temple incomes confiscated, and the old order blotted out. Everywhere whole communities, moved by instincts flowing from untold centuries of habit and custom, returned to their holy places to find them no more, and stood dumfounded before the closed doors of the ancient sanctuaries. On feast days, sanctified by memories of earliest childhood, venerable halls that had resounded with the rejoicings of the multitudes, as we have recalled them at Siut, now stood silent and empty; and every day as the funeral processions wound across the desert margin and up the plateau to the cemetery, the great comforter and friend, Osiris, the champion of the dead in every danger, was banished, and no man dared so much as utter his name. Even in their oaths, absorbed from childhood with their mothers' milk, the involuntary names must not be suffered to escape the lips: and in the presence of the magistrate at court the ancient oath must now contain only the name of Aton. All this to them was as if the modern man were asked to worship X and swear by Y. Groups of muttering priests, nursing implacable hatred, must have mingled their curses with the execration of whole communities of discontented tradesmen—bakers