

Then and There Series

# ANCIENT EGYPT



E. J. SHEPPARD

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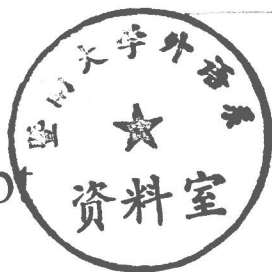
THEN AND THERE SERIES

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# Ancient Egypt



E. J. SHEPPARD M.A.

*Illustrated from contemporary sources by*



DUDLEY PARRETT



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To my son, Anthony

*Acknowledgments*

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## TO THE READER

IN this book you will find many things that seem strange and perhaps difficult to believe. That is partly because Egypt is such a very different country from yours, but chiefly because the 'patch' of history which is described in this book happened a very long time ago. Here we go right back nearly to the beginning of all history. You can get an idea of how far back the story of Ancient Egypt is if you look at the time chart on page 76. The *Pyramids*\* are now almost fifty centuries old!

You may wonder how we can possibly know much about a time so long ago and, even more, how we know what the people who lived then thought. The answer is that the Ancient Egyptian kings and nobles liked to tell the world all about themselves and their doings. They did not want to be forgotten. So they made a great many written records on the walls of temples, in books and on the walls of their grand graves or tombs. Besides written records, they also buried in their graves all kinds of things they had used while still alive. These things tell us today about their everyday life, their furniture and food and houses.

So, in writing this book, I have used the records written by the Ancient Egyptians themselves, the pictures they drew and the things they buried.

I could have written a much longer book for there is much more to learn about these clever people, but I hope that after reading it you will want to find out more for yourself about the wonders of the past in Egypt.

\* You will find the meaning of words printed like *this* in the Glossary on page 74.

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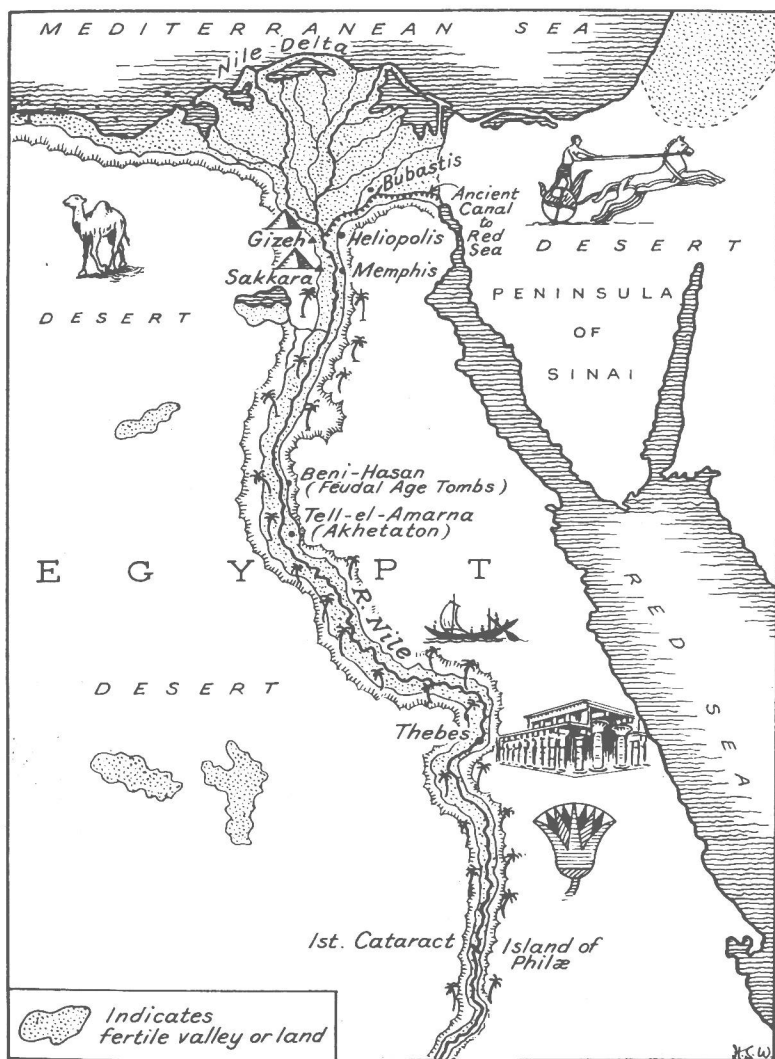
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## THE LAND OF EGYPT

On the next page is a picture-map of the land of Egypt. Look at it carefully and imagine that it is painted in colours, or, better still, trace the map for yourself and then colour it. If you were to do this, you should paint a picture looking something like a long, wavy, green-black snake with a blue line all along its back, lying stretched out on the yellow, sandy desert, with its wide, flat head on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, and its tail, which is off the map, in the mountains of Abyssinia.

You can guess that the thin blue line on the back of the snake is the famous River Nile. The green snake itself is the narrow strip of the river valley where there is wonderfully rich soil for growing plants and trees. Perhaps you thought that Egypt was all sandy desert. You would have been quite right if there were no River Nile, for there is very little rain in Egypt either in summer or winter, so it would all be like the Sahara Desert but for its life-line, the great river. The Nile is four thousand miles long from its source to its mouth. It comes down from mountains and forests, pours over cataracts and past cliffs, cuts its way through deep gorges where the rocks come close on either side, and finally flows down to the shallower parts where the river valley spreads out and cities can be built. At last it flows into the Mediterranean Sea. Here the land is now flat, because so much rich, black earth, carried



A picture-map of Ancient Egypt

down through the centuries, has collected there. The river now divides up into many streams and ambles gently through the marshes to the sea; this part is called the Delta.

You may wonder where this black soil comes from. Each summer an amazing thing happens in Egypt: the river rises and rises and rises until it floods all the floor of the valley.



The river Nile in flood

Why does this happen? Because far away up in the Abyssinian mountains the rains have fallen and swollen the streams; these all pour into the river, which goes rushing down the mountainside like a torrent, carrying with it this rich, black soil. The Egyptians call the great overflowing of the Nile the *inundation*. The water spreads out over the land on either side of the river and stays there for many days. When the floods sink back and the ground is uncovered, there is a thin layer of the black



soil all over it, left behind by the flood. This is the great treasure of Egypt, for this is good earth in which green crops flourish, while beyond, on either side of the river valley, stretch the dreary, barren wastes of the desert.

To us, however, the sand is one of the most exciting parts of Egypt. It holds secrets! If we could take a journey up the Nile from the Delta to the First Cataract, we should see along the banks many buildings, some modern ones and also the ancient ruins of temples and tombs, but always beyond we should be gazing at the desert, for many of the secrets of Ancient Egypt lie buried there and the sand holds secrets well. Many things buried in England for hundreds of years rot and disappear, but things buried in the sands of Egypt for thousands of years remain the same. This is partly because the sand is so dry, but also because it actually contains a kind of preservative, called *natron*, which prevents decay. Because of this, all kinds of metals, stones, paints, cloth, bones and even paper have been buried and so preserved by the sand. There they lie hidden until they are dug up and discovered. The men and women who do this work of digging up the past are called *archaeologists*, and the things they have already found in Egypt can be seen in museums there or in other parts of the world. In the second part of this book you will find more about their work and some of their most famous discoveries.

Now we will imagine ourselves travelling up the Nile by boat, as many tourists do today. We must start at the mouth and go up, because this is the way the history of Ancient Egypt goes: it begins in the Delta and goes upstream. On our journey the story of the ancient Egyptians unfolds for us, rather like a time-line which stretches itself out beside the line of the river.

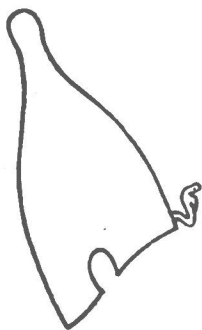
We begin at Heliopolis, the earliest capital, on the edge of the Delta. This name, which was given it later by the Greeks, means City of the Sun. The sun which poured down on them continually was so important to the Egyptians that one of their greatest gods was Ra or Re, the sun-god. In Heliopolis there was a great temple for the worship of Ra, and also a palace for the king, who had grown very powerful.

At first there were two separate kingdoms in Egypt, called Upper and Lower Egypt. The Lower kingdom was near the mouth of the river and the Upper kingdom further upstream. Each king had his own special crown.

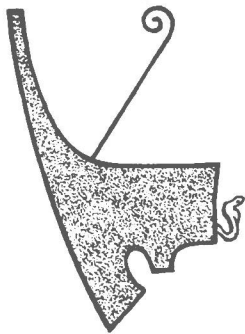
Below is the tall white crown of Upper Egypt; the curious red crown of Lower Egypt; and the two combined by King Menes, ruler of both lands. Each has a serpent at the front.



Ra



The white crown

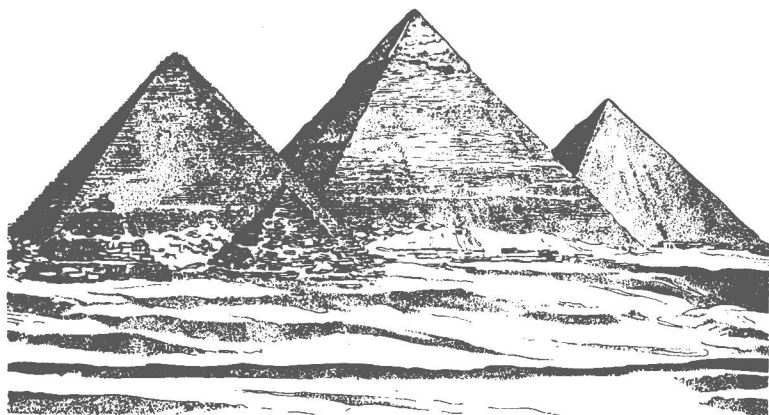


The red crown



Both crowns combined

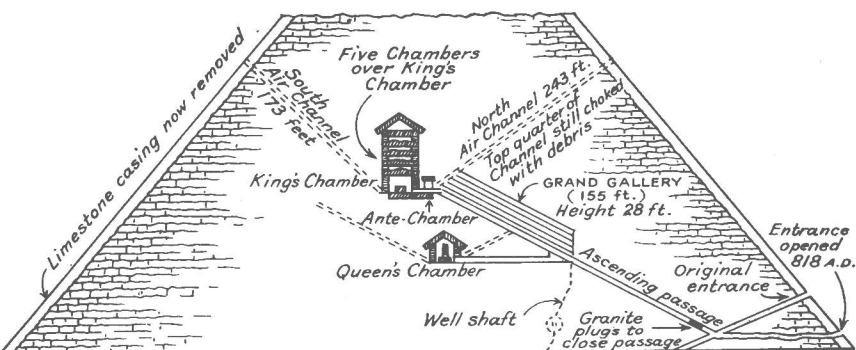
Leaving Heliopolis, we soon come to the great modern city of Cairo, the capital of Egypt today. Here there is a national museum, where many treasures rescued from the sand are safely stored. Just outside of Cairo, on the edge of the Western Desert, there are three places which you can see marked on the picture map; they are Memphis, Gizeh, and Sakkara. Memphis was once a famous city, for it was the second capital of Egypt; after he had united the Upper and Lower kingdoms, King Menes decided to move the capital to this place, which was on the border between the two. For many centuries Memphis was a wonderful city, but today only a few ruins remain, scattered among the palm-trees, around a village called Mitrahineh. Memphis has almost disappeared, but at Gizeh and Sakkara there are great monuments, too huge to be buried by the sand, which have lasted until the present day to proclaim the power of these proud kings. Most famous of all are the Pyramids.



Every traveller goes to see them today, just as, long ago, in the sixth century before Christ, the old Greek historian

Herodotus did when he was collecting stories for his history. He called them one of the Seven Wonders of the World (can you find out what the other six are?) and actually tried to measure the Great Pyramid himself. Since the time of Herodotus their facing stones have become rough and worn, but still these gigantic pyramids of solid stone stand there on the edge of the desert to remind us of the power and skill of these ancient rulers.

Here is a diagram of part of the Great Pyramid :



I expect you know that the Kings of Egypt were called *Pharaohs* and that the Pyramids were built as tombs for them and their queens. Under the huge pile of stones was the burial chamber. (This is not shown in the diagram above.)

You can see what a huge mass of solid stone the Pyramid was, except for the rooms later called by the Arabs the King's Chamber and the Queen's Chamber.

The entrances to all the passages were blocked with large stones, and the whole was then sealed off and hidden from the outside.

Why did these Egyptians take so much trouble over burying their kings? Chiefly, because they believed that

their kings would live, after death, in the tomb and enjoy another life there. So they must be provided with all the things they would need, such as food and clothes and furniture, and all these things were buried in the tomb with the dead king. Often the furniture and clothes were very costly and beautiful, decorated with fine gold. The queens had their jewels buried with them too.

Now many of these things were very valuable, and so the passage-way into the chamber was meant to be so secret that no one would ever find it and steal the treasures. But although everything was done to make the tombs safe and secret, they were often plundered. Tomb robbers either managed to find the secret passage or sometimes dug one of their own and so broke into the burial chamber. Bit by bit most of the precious and beautiful things were stolen. Only one royal tomb, so far as we know, survived whole and untouched, to be found in 1922 with the seal still unbroken and everything in the tomb exactly as it had been placed there thousands of years ago. Of this famous discovery you will read more later in this book.

Beside the Pyramids there were noblemen's tombs and tomb chapels, where the dead king or nobleman could pray. The walls of these chapels were carved with pictures of daily life on a big estate. They showed cows being milked and corn harvested and loaded on to donkeys. Other pictures show the jeweller at work and the copper-smith making the tools for cutting great blocks of stone for the Pyramids. There are other pictures too of paper-making, weaving and pottery, showing the potter's wheel and tall closed furnaces. These and many other pictures tell us how the people lived in the Pyramid Age.

Towering above the sand at Gizeh is the strange Sphinx with the head of a king and the body of a lion.



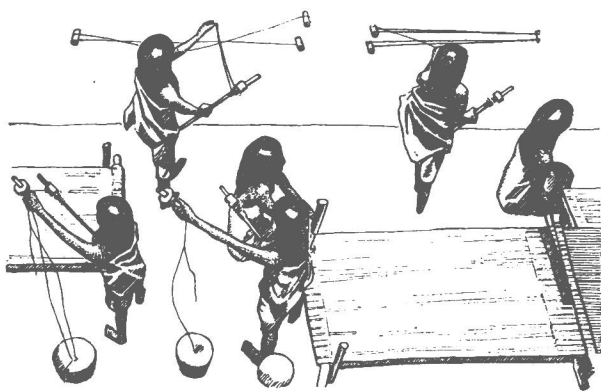
The Great Sphinx at Gizeh

All these monuments have survived through almost fifty centuries for us to see and wonder at today though the sand is always threatening to cover them up. They have lasted much longer than the line of kings who built them. For the first great Kingdom of Egypt, called the Old Kingdom, fell to pieces, but its Pyramids still stand.

Now we must travel upstream, leaving the Delta behind us, and with it the Old Kingdom. Soon the cliffs begin to rise up on either side of the river. If we stop and explore these cliffs we shall find tombs here too, not Pyramids, but caves hollowed out of the rock. Here noblemen were

buried who lived long after the last of the Pyramids had been built. When the power of the mighty Pharaohs of the Old Kingdom gradually weakened, the nobles grew rich and strong, often stronger than the Pharaoh himself. So this is called the Feudal Age. These nobles could afford to build grand tombs for themselves, and these are particularly exciting to us because inside them they put little models of their servants doing all the work of the nobleman's estate. The idea was that just as the nobleman and his wife had been waited on in their lifetime, so after death they would live a life of ease and luxury with servants to look after them in the spirit world.

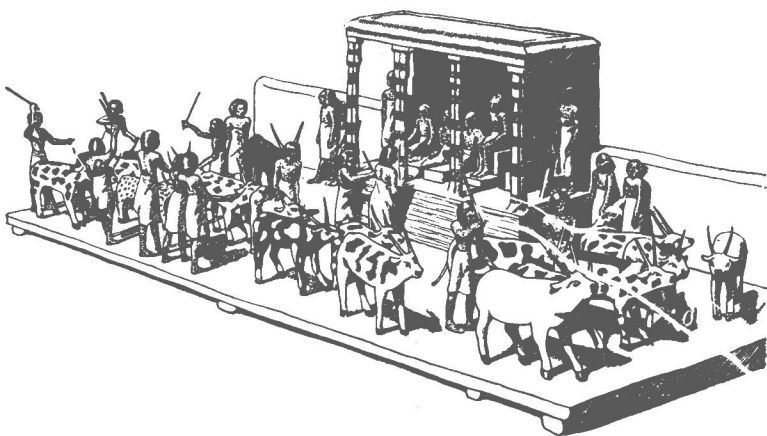
Let us go inside the tomb of Mehenkwtetre and see for ourselves. Here is a picture of one of these models:



The nobleman and his wife would need fine linen clothes to wear in Paradise, and so here are women servants spinning and weaving for them. Can you see how they do the spinning? When the American archaeologists found this tomb, some of the linen threads were still unbroken after four thousand years, and so they could see how fine and strong they were. If you look at the picture on page 56

you can see what kind of clothes the women made. Of course, it is so hot in Egypt that only cool, light clothes are needed, and so Mehenkwetre usually wore only a pleated skirt of fine white linen and a special deep collar, called a *pectoral*, enamelled in bright colours. His wife wore a long loose dress, also of white linen, with a dainty necklace or a gay pectoral and ear-rings. Often the linen was woven so finely that it was like silk, and in some Egyptian wall paintings the people's legs show through the linen, as they do through nylon stockings today.

In the picture below Mehenkwetre is inspecting his cattle. Can you see him sitting in a kind of grandstand with his son standing beside him and scribes keeping the records, while the herdsmen drive the animals in front of him? Another model showed the nobleman's butchers at



work killing one of the animals and preparing meat for their lord's table; there is also a line of dead birds hung up, waiting to be used. Perhaps the nobleman himself had caught these, when he went fowling in the Nile marshes.





Nobleman fowling with a throwing stick and a cat

This was a favourite sport. Besides eating meat and poultry, Mehenkwetre and his wife would need bread, and so there was a model granary for storing his corn and also a model bakery where his servants are busy grinding the grain into flour and making loaves just like those we have today.



Model Bakery