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The Amarna Period and the Later New Kingdom (c.1352–1069 BC)

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When Amenhotep III died, he left behind a country that was wealthier and more powerful than it had ever been before. The treaty with Mitanni concluded by his father had brought peace and stability, which resulted in a culture of extraordinary luxury. A large percentage of the income generated by Egypt's own resources and by foreign trade went into building projects of an unprecedented scale; inscriptions enumerate the enormous quantities of gold, silver, bronze, and precious stones used in the construction and decoration of the temples. Egypt's wealth was symbolized by the sheer size of the monuments—everything had to be bigger than before, from temples and palaces to scarabs, from the colossal statues of the king to the *shabti* figures of his élite.

Peace had also changed the Egyptians' attitude towards their foreign neighbours, who were no longer primarily seen as the hostile forces of chaos surrounding Egypt, the ordered world created at the beginning of time. Amenhotep's court had become a diplomatic centre of international importance, and friendly contact with Egypt's neighbours had led to an atmosphere of openness towards foreign cultures. During the earlier part of the dynasty, immigrants had introduced their native gods into Egypt and some of these deities had become associated with the Egyptian king, especially in his warlike aspect, but now foreign peoples were themselves seen as part of god's creation, protected and sustained by the benevolent rule of the sun-god Ra and his earthly representative, the pharaoh.

New Kingdom Religion

The sun-god and the king lay at the heart of Egyptian theological thinking and cultic practice as they had developed over the previous centuries. The daily course of the sun-god, who was also the primeval creator-god, guaranteed the continued existence of his creation. In the temple, the sun-god's daily journey through the heavens was symbolically enacted by means of rituals and hymns, the principal aim of which was to maintain the created order of the universe. The king played a crucial role in this daily ritual; he was the main officiant, the sun priest, who had an intimate knowledge of all aspects of the sun-god's daily course. Every sunrise was a repetition of the 'first occasion', the creation of the world in the beginning. Ra himself went through a daily cycle of death and rebirth; at sunset he entered the netherworld, where he was regenerated and from which he was reborn in the morning as Ra-Horakhty. Light could not exist without darkness; without death there could be no regeneration and no life. Together with the sun-god the dead were also reborn; they joined Ra on his daily journey and went through the same eternal cycle of death and rebirth. Osiris, the god of the dead and the underworld, with whom the deceased were traditionally identified, was increasingly seen as an aspect of Ra, and the same held true for all other gods, for, if the sun-god was the primeval creator, then all the other gods had emerged from him and were therefore aspects of him. In this sense a tendency towards a form of monotheism is inherent in the religion of New Kingdom Egypt.

Towards the end of the reign of Amenhotep III the cult of many gods as well as that of his own deified self were increasingly solarized, but at the same time the king appears to have tried to counterbalance this development by commissioning an enormous number of statues of a multitude of deities and by developing the cult of their earthly manifestations as sacred animals. However, in hymns from the very end of the reign, the sun-god is clearly set apart from the other gods—he is the supreme god who is alone, far away in the sky, whereas the other deities are part of his creation, alongside men and animals. Amenhotep III's successor was soon to find a radically different solution to the problem of unity and plurality.

Although the seat of government during most of the New Kingdom was the northern capital, Memphis, the 18th-Dynasty kings had originated from Thebes, and this city remained the most important religious centre of the country. Its local god, Amun ('the hidden one'), had become associated with the sun-god Ra and as Amun-Ra King of the

Gods was worshipped in every major temple in Egypt, including Memphis. The king was the bodily son of Amun born from the union of the god with the queen mother in a sacred marriage that was ritually re-enacted during the annual Opet Festival in Amun's temple at Luxor. During the great processions that formed part of this important festival, the king was publicly acclaimed as the earthly embodiment of Amun; thus the king and the god were intimately linked by a powerful amalgam of religious and political ties. All of this had made Amun-Ra the most important god of the country, whose temple received a substantial part of Egypt's wealth and whose priesthood had acquired considerable political and economic power. This, too, was soon to change under Amenhotep's successor.

Amenhotep IV and Karnak

There can be little doubt that Amenhotep IV was officially crowned by Amun of Thebes, for he is described as 'the one whom Amun has chosen (to appear in glory for millions of years)' on some scarabs from the beginning of his reign, but this token reference to Amun cannot conceal the fact that the new king was clearly determined right from his accession to go his own way. When exactly this accession took place is still the subject of controversy; clearly Amenhotep was not originally meant to succeed his father, for a crown prince Thutmose is known from earlier in Amenhotep III's reign. Amenhotep IV is mentioned as 'real king's son' on one of the many mud jar sealings found in his father's palace at Malkata, most of which are associated with the three *sed*-festivals (jubilees) celebrated by Amenhotep III during the last seven years of his reign. Opinions are divided over the issue of a possible co-regency between Amenhotep III and IV; some scholars have opted for such a period of joint rule lasting for some twelve years, others have at best admitted the possibility of a short overlap of one or two years, whereas the majority of scholars reject it entirely.

Amenhotep IV began his reign with a major building programme at Karnak, the very centre of the cult of Amun. The exact location of these temples is unknown, but some, perhaps all of them, were situated to the east of the Amun precinct and orientated towards the east—that is, to the place of sunrise. The temples that he started to build here and elsewhere were dedicated not to Amun, however, but to a new form of the sun-god whose official name was 'The living one, Ra-Horus of the horizon who rejoices in the horizon in his identity of light which is in the sun-disc', a long formula that was soon enclosed in two cartouches

just like the names of a king, and that was often preceded in royal inscriptions by the words 'my father lives'. The name of the god could be shortened to 'the living sun-disc' or simply 'the sun-disc' (or, to use the Egyptian word, the Aten). The word itself was not new; it had previously been used to refer to the visible celestial body of the sun. During the reign of Amenhotep III this aspect of the sun-god had become increasingly important, especially in the later years of his reign. During the king's *sed*-festivals, his deified self had been identified with the sun-disc and in several inscriptions, most clearly in one on the back pillar of a recently discovered statue, the king calls himself 'the dazzling Aten'. Originally this 'new' form of the sun-god was depicted in the traditional manner, as a man with a falcon's head surmounted by a sun-disc, but early in the reign of Amenhotep IV this iconography was abandoned in favour of a radically new way of depicting a god—as a disc with rays ending in hands that touch the king and his family, extending symbols of life and power towards them and receiving their offerings. Although the Aten clearly takes precedence over the other gods, he does not yet replace them entirely.

One of the Karnak temples is devoted to a *sed*-festival, a remarkable fact because kings did not normally celebrate their first jubilee until their thirtieth regnal year. Unfortunately there is no indication of the exact date of this festival of Amenhotep IV, but it must have taken place within the first five years of the reign, possibly around years 2 or 3; if so, it might well have come at the regular interval of three years after the last *sed*-festival of Amenhotep III, which had been celebrated not long before the latter's death. This would provide an additional argument against the assumption of a co-regency between Amenhotep III and IV. The Aten, who is present in every single episode of the jubilee rituals depicted on the walls of the new temple, is now evidently identical with the deceased solarized Amenhotep III, and the *sed*-festival celebrated by his son is as much a festival for the Aten as for the new king, even though the latter is of necessity the chief actor in the rituals. The Aten is the 'divine father' who rules Egypt as the celestial co-regent of his earthly incarnation, his son. That the Karnak jubilee was not considered to be Amenhotep IV's own official first *sed*-festival is proved by a later inscription in which a courtier at Amarna includes a wish to see the king 'in his first jubilee' in his funerary prayers, clearly indicating that such a festival had not yet taken place.

Another extraordinary feature of the Karnak buildings of Amenhotep IV is the unprecedented prominence of the king's wife, Nefertiti, in their decoration, and hence in the rituals that took place in them. One

structure is devoted entirely to her alone, her royal husband being absent from the reliefs. Nefertiti is given a new name, Neferneferuaten, and she, often accompanied by her eldest daughter, Meritaten, performs many rituals that had until then been reserved for the king, including those of 'presenting Maat' (maintaining the order of the universe) and 'smiting the enemy' (subduing the powers of chaos). At this early stage of the reign it is not so much that she is acting as an official co-regent of her husband, but rather that the royal couple together now represent the mythical twins that in the traditional religion were called Shu and Tefnut, the first pair of divinities to issue from the androgynous creator-god Atum. The original triad consisting of Atum, the primeval father, his son Shu and his daughter Tefnut is now replaced by a triad consisting of the Aten as the father and the living king and queen as his children. The unique iconography of both royals as displayed in statuary and reliefs reflects this new interpretation of their divine status.

Akhenaten and Amarna

Early in the fifth year of his reign, Amenhotep IV decided to sever all links with the traditional religious capital of Egypt and its god Amun, and to build an entirely new city on virgin soil that would be devoted solely to the cult of the Aten and his children. At the same time he changed his name to Akhenaten, meaning 'he who acts effectively on behalf of the Aten' or perhaps 'creative manifestation of the Aten'. The new city, nowadays known as Amarna, was called Akhetaten, 'Horizon of the Aten'—that is, the place where the Aten manifests himself and where he acts through his son, the king, who is 'the perfect child of the living Aten'. Whether there were political as well as religious motifs for this drastic decision remains unknown, although the king appears to hint at opposition to his religious reforms in the decree inscribed on a series of 'boundary stelae' defining the territory of Akhetaten. Opposition there must have been, especially among the dispossessed priestly establishment of the great temples of Amun at Thebes and probably elsewhere as well. Even before the move to Akhetaten some of the revenues of the established cults had been diverted to the cult of the Aten, and the situation must have deteriorated even further when the king abandoned the city of Amun for his new capital.

Before we examine this city, its inhabitants, and the new Atenist religion as it was practised there, we must briefly summarize the main political events of the reign of Akhenaten. We do not know when

exactly he took up residence in Akhetaten, but presumably it was within a year or two of its foundation; the oaths sworn on that occasion by the king regarding the boundaries of the city's territory were renewed in regnal year 8. As soon as the decision to move had been made, all building activities at Thebes ceased, although the king's original name was removed from the inscriptions and replaced by the new one.

Once Akhenaten was firmly settled in his new residence, a further radicalization of his religious reforms took place. In year 9, the official name formula of the Aten was changed to 'the living one, Ra, ruler of the horizon who rejoices in the horizon in his identity of Ra the father who has returned as the sun-disc'. Although this new formula removed the name of the god Horus (which smacked too much of traditional concepts), it clearly put even more emphasis on the father-son relationship between the Aten and the king. Probably at the same time as this name change took place, the traditional gods were banned completely and a campaign was begun to remove their names and effigies (particularly those of Amun) from the monuments, a Herculean task that can only have been carried out with the support of the army. The traditional state temples were closed down and the cults of their gods came to a standstill. Perhaps most important of all, the religious festivals with their processions and public holidays were no longer celebrated either.

The role of the military during the Amarna Period has long been underestimated, partly because Akhenaten was thought to have been a pacifist. More recently, however, it has been recognized not only that the king's programme of political and religious reform could never have succeeded without active military support, but also that Akhenaten sent his army abroad to quash a rebellion in Nubia in year 12. It has even been suggested that he may have been involved in a confrontation with the Hittites, who during Akhenaten's reign defeated the Hurrian empire of Mitanni, Egypt's ally, thus destroying the carefully maintained balance of power that had existed for several decades, although the diplomatic archive from Akhetaten (the 'Amarna letters') shows that Egyptian military activity in northern Syria usually took the form of limited police actions, the main goal of which was to prevent the volatile vassal states in the area from switching sides. It was also in year 12 that a great ceremony took place, during which the king received the tribute from 'all foreign countries gathered together as one', an event that may well be connected with the Nubian campaign of the same year.

Royal Women in the Amarna Period

At about the same time as these political events, an important change took place within the royal family. Nefertiti had so far produced six daughters, but no son, and, although she never lost her prime position as 'great royal wife', a second wife of Akhenaten had appeared on the scene at Akhetaten. It has often been speculated that she was a Mitannian princess, but her name Kiya is a perfectly normal Egyptian one and there is nothing to suggest that she was of foreign extraction. She was given the newly created title 'greatly beloved wife of the king', which sets her apart from other ladies in the royal harem, while at the same time distinguishing her clearly from Nefertiti. In or shortly before regnal year 12 she suddenly disappears from the monuments; her name was erased from the inscriptions and replaced by those of Akhenaten's daughters, most frequently that of Meritaten, and her representations were likewise altered. Since even the funerary equipment prepared for her, including a magnificent anthropoid coffin, was adapted for a different royal person, it is most likely that Kiya at some point fell from grace, perhaps because she had borne Akhenaten not only a further daughter, but perhaps also a male heir. There is no hard evidence to support this theory, but a single inscription from about this time mentions 'the King's bodily son, his beloved, Tutankhaten' (the future king Tutankhamun (1336–1327 BC)), who was almost certainly a son of Akhenaten, but not of Nefertiti.

The latter's influence increased even further during the later part of the reign, when she became the official co-regent of her husband as Neferneferuaten with the throne name Ankh(et)kheperura; her role as queen consort was taken over by her eldest daughter, Meritaten. What prompted Akhenaten to appoint a co-regent, a step taken only in exceptional circumstances, is unknown. Perhaps opposition to his regime elsewhere in the country (that is, in Thebes) was threatening to get out of control, making it necessary to have someone who could act as king and perhaps even take up residence outside Amarna; at any rate, a Theban graffito dated to her regnal year 3 reveals that Neferneferuaten owned a 'Mansion of Ankhkheperura in Thebes' that employed a scribe of divine offerings of Amun, a clear indication that an attempt at reconciliation with the old cults was undertaken. Most of this text consists of the scribe's prayer to Amun, with a poignant appeal to the god to come back and dispel the darkness that had descended upon his followers.

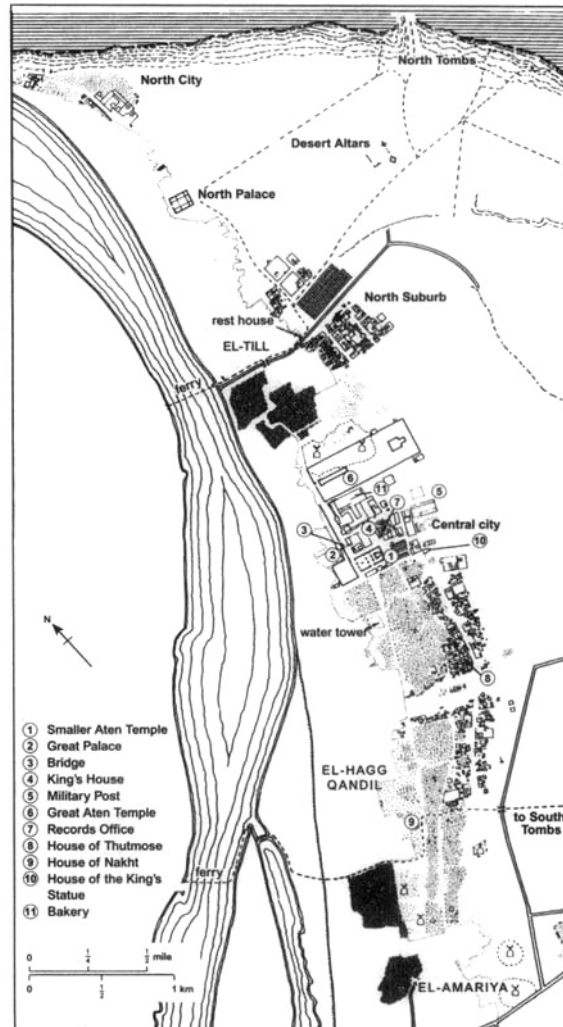
Whether or not Nefertiti survived Akhenaten, who died in his year 17, is uncertain. An ephemeral king Smenkhkara with virtually the same throne name as Nefertiti/Neferneferuaten appears in some inscriptions from the end of the Amarna Period; in one or two rare representations he is accompanied by his queen Meritaten. The identity of this Smenkhkara is uncertain. Many scholars continue to see him as Nefertiti's male successor, perhaps a younger brother or even another son of Akhenaten, but there is a strong possibility that 'he' was actually none other than Nefertiti herself who, like Hatshepsut before her, had assumed a male persona and ruled alone for a brief period after the death of Akhenaten, with Meritaten in the ceremonial role of 'great royal wife'. Akhenaten's successor probably did not survive him for very long, and, when he/she died, the very young Tutankhaten, the only remaining male member of the royal family, mounted the throne. Early in his reign he and his queen, his half-sister Ankhesenpaaten, abandoned Amarna and restored the traditional cults. With him, one of the most incisive periods in Egyptian history came to an end.

The Art and Architecture of the Amarna Period

The earliest representations of Amenhotep IV show him in a traditional style closely resembling the one used to portray both Thutmose IV and Amenhotep III, but not long after his accession Amenhotep IV had himself depicted with a thin, drawn-out face with pointed chin and thick lips, an elongated neck, almost feminine breasts, a round protruding belly, wide hips, fat thighs, and thin, spindly legs. At first the new style was still fairly restrained, but on most of the Theban monuments and during the early years at Amarna the king's features were depicted in such an exaggerated way as to make him look like a caricature; later in the reign a more balanced style developed. It was not only Akhenaten, Nefertiti, and their daughters who were depicted in this style, but all other human beings as well, albeit in a less exaggerated form. This is not surprising, since representations of private individuals had always followed the artistic model of the king of their time, and Akhenaten in particular put much emphasis on the fact that he was the 'mother who gives birth to everything' who had 'created his subjects with his *ka*'. He was the creator-god upon earth who fashioned mankind after his own image.

There can be little doubt that the extraordinary manner in which Akhenaten portrayed himself, his family (and, to a lesser extent, all

other human beings) on his monuments somehow reflects the king's actual physical appearance, albeit in an exaggerated style that has been termed 'expressionist' or even 'surrealist'. Inscriptions tell us that it was the king himself who instructed his artists in the new style. Not



Plan of the site of Amarna, showing the main city and the outlying temples, shrines, and settlements

only the human figure is affected by it, but also the way they interact. Scenes of the royal family display an intimacy such as had never before been shown in Egyptian art even among private individuals, let alone among royalty. They kiss and embrace under the beneficent rays of the Aten, whose love pervades all of his creation. Another characteristic feature of the Amarna style is its extraordinary sense of movement and speed, a general 'looseness' and freedom of expression that was to have a lasting influence on Egyptian art for centuries after the Amarna Period had come to an end.

In a different way, speed is also the determining factor of a new building technique. Again, the earliest structures of Amenhotep IV employed the traditional large sandstone blocks commonly used for temple walls, but these were soon replaced in both Thebes and Amarna by very much smaller blocks, the so-called *talatat*, typically measuring about 60 × 25 cm. and therefore small enough for a single man to lift and carry. This made it much easier to erect a large building in a relatively short space of time. The new method was abandoned again after the Amarna Period, perhaps because it had by then become apparent that the reliefs carved on walls constructed of such small blocks, needing as they did a great deal of plaster finishing to close the gaps between individual stones, did not withstand the test of time as well as traditionally built walls. Certainly Akhenaten's successors soon found out that it also took far less time and effort to demolish buildings constructed of *talatat*.

The 'looseness' of the Amarna art style is perhaps also matched by the city plan of Akhetaten, at least as far as the living quarters are concerned. Despite the fact that it was a newly planned city, it was not built on a rigid orthogonal grid like the Middle Kingdom town of Kahun, which had reflected the highly structured, bureaucratic society of its time. The layout of Amarna is far more like a cluster of small villages centred around loosely grouped houses both large and small, each with its own subsidiary buildings such as grain silos, animal pens, sheds, and workshops. The variety in size of these compounds matches the differences in wealth and status between their owners. Many of them have their own well, a unique feature of this city, which made its inhabitants independent of the Nile for their daily water supplies. In general Amarna looks more like a city that developed naturally over a period of time, rather than as a result of careful planning.

Needless to say, however, the temples and palaces are a different matter. Both were intimately linked with Akhenaten's religious ideas and for this reason they must have been designed and planned by the

king himself in close cooperation with architects and artists who worked under his personal 'instruction', as inscriptions never tire of telling us. We cannot describe these buildings in detail here, but a few significant features must be mentioned. First of all, Akhenaten and his family lived some distance away from the main city in what is now known as the North Riverside Palace. A long spacious avenue, the 'royal road', ran via the North Palace (the queen's residence) in a straight line of about 3.5 km. to the Central City with its two palaces (one used among other things for ceremonial state occasions like the reception of foreign envoys, the other serving as the king's working palace with a 'window of appearances', through which he rewarded loyal officials) and two major Aten temples. Of these, the Great Temple to the Aten was the Amarna equivalent of the great temple enclosure of Amun-Ra at Thebes; it contained several separate buildings, including a structure with a *benben*-stone, the sacred sun symbol, the archetype of which stood in the temple of Ra at Heliopolis. This is one of the indications of the influence of Heliopolitan theology on Akhenaten's thinking, another being that the king had planned a cemetery for the sacred Mnevis bull of Ra-Atum of Heliopolis at Amarna. The other Aten temple was very much smaller and lay immediately to the south of the king's working palace. It appears to have been dedicated to the king as well as to the Aten and may have been the equivalent of the traditional so-called temples of a million years, and, like the temples of that name on the Theban west bank, may have served as a mortuary chapel for Akhenaten that was orientated towards the entrance of the wadi in which the royal tomb was located.

The most conspicuous difference between, on the one hand, the Aten temples both at Amarna and earlier on at Karnak, and, on the other hand, the traditional temples is that the former are open to the skies. A typical temple of the traditional type began with a pylon and an open peristyle court followed by a succession of further courts and rooms, which gradually became smaller and darker as the worshipper penetrated further into the building. In the innermost sanctuary the cult image of the god was kept in a shrine that for most of the time was in total darkness. Akhenaten's god was there for all to see, however, and no man-made cult image was, therefore, needed. The only statues to be found in Atenist temples are representations of Akhenaten and other members of the royal family. In the architecture of these temples a deliberate effort has been made to create as little shadow and darkness as possible; even the lintels above the doorways were open in the middle. These 'broken' lintels were an architectural innovation that

continued to be used for certain temple doorways until Graeco-Roman times. The king worshipped his god in open courtyards studded with a large number of small altars on which offerings to the Aten were made. Why there are so many altars remains a mystery; perhaps the most likely explanation is that they are altars for the dead who are being fed in the temples as part of the daily cult.

Light was the most essential aspect of the Aten, who was a god of the light that emerged from the sun's disc and kept every living being alive in continuous creation. He was the creator-god who ruled the world as the celestial king. And, just as the Aten was king of the world, so Akhenaten was the god of his subjects. His daily 'procession', when he drove in his chariot along the royal road from the North Riverside Palace to the Central City, replaced the traditional divine processions during which the inhabitants of a town could come into contact with the deities whose statues were normally hidden from view in the temple. Akhenaten was, as his name indicates, the 'creative manifestation of the Aten', through whom the Aten does his beneficial work. It was the king who 'made' mankind and especially his élite, whom he had chosen himself. In their inscriptions these officials denied their true background, even though some of them must surely have come from influential families; they all presented themselves as having been poor, wretched orphans, owing their whole existence to the king who had 'created them with his *ka*'. The king's work was likened to the annual inundation of the Nile, which sustained mankind and all other living beings. Personal piety was now identical with total loyalty towards Akhenaten personally. In their private houses the Amarna élite kept small shrines with altars and stelae representing the holy royal family, which replaced the old household shrines for local deities.

Tombs and Funerary Beliefs at Amarna

Even in the tombs of the élite at Akhetaten, the king totally dominated the wall decoration. Representations of Akhenaten and his wife and children (as well as depictions of the various temples of Akhetaten) were ubiquitous, and hymns and offering formulas were dedicated as often to the king as to the Aten. It is notable that these offering formulas were frequently—although not exclusively—addressed to the god by the king himself rather than by the tomb-owner. The only surviving copies of the famous *Great Hymn to the Aten*, the most comprehensive text on the main dogmas of the new religion (probably composed by Akhenaten himself), are found in these tombs. This

hymn and all other texts at Amarna were written in a newly created official language that was much closer to everyday speech than the classical Egyptian that had so far been used for official and religious texts. The boundary between official and vernacular language did not disappear completely, but the use of the latter for literary compositions was greatly stimulated by this development and gave rise to a whole new literature in the centuries after the Amarna Period.

Osiris, the most important god of the dead, appears to have been proscribed from the very beginning of Akhenaten's reign. Even the doctrine that viewed Osiris as the nocturnal manifestation of the sun-god, well established in funerary religion long before Amarna, was rejected by Akhenaten. The Aten was a god of life-giving light; during the night he was absent, but it is unclear where he was thought to go. Darkness and death were completely ignored instead of being regarded as a positive, necessary state of regeneration. At night the dead were simply asleep like every other living being and like the Aten himself. They were not in the 'Beautiful West', the underworld, and their tombs were not even physically located in the west but in the east, where the sun rises. The 'resurrection' of the dead took place in the morning, when the Aten arose. The Aten himself represented 'the time in which one lives', as the *Great Hymn* expressed it. The mode of existence of the dead was, therefore, one of a continual presence with the Aten and the king in the temple, where they (or their *ba*-souls) fed on the daily offerings. For this reason the Amarna private tombs were full of representations of the temples of the Aten and of the king driving along the royal road towards the temples and offering in them. The temples and palaces of Akhetaten were the new hereafter; the dead no longer lived in their tombs but on earth, among the living. The tombs, therefore, served only as their nightly resting places. Mummification persisted, because at night the *ba* returned to the body until sunrise. For this reason, funerary rites, including offerings and tomb equipment, appear to have continued as well, although most *shabti* figures no longer have the chapter from the *Book of the Dead* traditionally inscribed on them. It is difficult to be sure what the Amarna Period private coffins and sarcophagi looked like, since no examples have ever been found at Amarna. On Akhenaten's own large stone sarcophagus the four winged goddesses who traditionally stood at the corners were replaced by figures of Nefertiti, and some finds from other sites suggest that private sarcophagi may also have been decorated with depictions of members of the family of the deceased rather than funerary deities. There was also no 'judgement of the dead' before the throne of

Osiris, which the deceased formerly had to pass through in order to gain the status of a *maaty* ('righteous one'); instead, the king's officials earned their life after death by following Akhenaten's teaching and by being totally loyal to him during their lifetime. Akhenaten was the god who granted life and a burial after old age in his favour; he embodied *maat* and it was through loyalty to him that his subjects could become *maatyu*. Without this there would be no life after death, and continued existence upon earth depended on the king, who therefore monopolized all aspects of the Amarna religion, including funerary beliefs.

Life outside Amarna during the Amarna Period

Most of our knowledge of Akhenaten's new religion derives from his early monuments at Thebes and from the city at Amarna itself. What happened in the rest of the country, especially after the king had moved to his new city, is very much less clear. Akhenaten would almost certainly have travelled outside Akhetaten; he even stipulates (on the 'boundary stelae') that, if he were to die elsewhere, his body should be brought back to Amarna and buried there. Apart from early building activities in Nubia, we know of Aten temples in Memphis and Heliopolis and there may have been others. Some Memphite blocks display the late form of the Aten name (after regnal year 9), and a stray block from Thebes also has this form; therefore, even after the radicalization of Akhenaten's reform, construction work outside Amarna obviously continued. What we do not know is the extent to which the traditional cults were really abolished; our picture is very much coloured by a later description of the situation in the Restoration Decree of Tutankhamun, the tenor of which is quite obviously propagandistic.

In everyday practice, the new religion probably only replaced the official state cult and the religion of the élite; the majority of the people must have continued to worship their own traditional, often local gods. Even at Amarna itself there are a fair number of surviving votive objects, stelae, and wall paintings that depict or mention gods such as Bes and Taweret (both connected with childbirth); the harvest-goddess Renenutet; the protective deities Isis and Shed ('the saviour', a new form of Horus not found before Amarna); Thoth (the god of the scribes); Khnum, Satet, and Anuket (the triad of Elephantine); Ptah of Memphis; and even Amun of Thebes.

It is not always easy to decide whether tomb reliefs, stelae, and items of burial equipment that mention the Aten together with traditional gods such as Osiris, Thoth, or Ptah date from the beginning of the

reign or later, or even from the time immediately after the Amarna Period. Nor do we know whether the deceased buried in a necropolis other than that of Akhetaten were supposed to partake of offerings in the Aten temple at Amarna or in their home town, or how the dead were thought to live on in places where there was no Aten temple at all. Much further research is needed here, particularly in the necropolis of Memphis, where many tombs of this period have yet to be discovered.

It is also unclear what happened to the civil administration during the Amarna Period. Clearly Akhetaten had replaced Thebes as the religious capital and the centre of the state cult, but did it also replace Memphis as the administrative capital? One of the two viziers resided at Amarna, but his northern colleague remained posted at Memphis. It is probable that this city in fact retained its position of administrative centre for the country throughout the Amarna Period. The situation during the Saite Period may well afford a parallel: the 26th-Dynasty kings greatly favoured Sais, their home town (although they were originally of Libyan descent), which functioned as their capital, and much of the state revenues went to the temple of its goddess Neith. Yet Memphis remained the administrative centre of Egypt throughout the Saite Period, a situation that persisted until the successor of Alexander the Great removed the latter's mortal remains to Alexandria and made this city the centre of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt.

The Aftermath of the Amarna Period

Although the Amarna episode lasted barely twenty years, its impact was enormous. It is perhaps the single most important event in Egypt's religious and cultural history and it left deep scars on the collective consciousness of its inhabitants. Superficially, the country returned to the traditional religion of the time before Akhenaten, but in reality nothing would ever be the same again. Some of the changes can be detected in the burial arrangements of the élite, always a good barometer of shifting religious attitudes. Most conspicuous are the developments in tomb architecture. At Memphis in particular, free-standing tombs appear that in all essential aspects resemble temples. In Thebes rock tombs continue to be used, but their architecture and decoration are adapted to the same new concept, that of the tomb as the private mortuary temple for its owner, whose funerary cult is integrated with the cult of Osiris. This god, who had been banned by Akhenaten, was now universally seen as the nocturnal manifestation of Ra, and his role in funerary matters increased dramatically as



Plan of a group of tombs in the New Kingdom necropolis at Saqqara, where many important officials of the late 18th and 19th–20th Dynasties were buried

compared to the days before the Amarna Period. In these tombs, the solar symbol *par excellence*, the pyramid, previously a royal prerogative, sat on the roof of the central chapel, usually with a capstone (pyramidion) showing scenes of worship before Ra and Osiris. In the central chapel itself the main stele, the focal point of the cult, often showed a symmetrically arranged double scene comprising both of these gods seated back to back. Statues that had previously been typically placed in temples began to appear in private tombs, including images of various deities and naophorous statues that show the deceased holding a shrine with an image of a god.

The reliefs and paintings on the walls of the tombs were no longer primarily concerned with scenes from the owner's career and professional occupation, although such scenes do not disappear completely, but instead concentrate on showing him adoring Ra, Osiris, and a wide variety of other gods and goddesses, wearing a long pleated linen costume (often wrongly called the 'dress of daily life') and an elaborate wig. The same festive costume also appears on anthropoid sarcophagi and *shabtis*, which hitherto had shown the deceased exclusively as a

mummy. Apart from one or two examples from very early in the reign of Tutankhamun, scenes in which the deceased is shown presenting offerings to the king disappear completely; his place is now occupied by Osiris enthroned. In general, religious scenes and texts, often taken from the *Book of the Dead*, dominated the post-Amarna tomb decoration. Illustrations and textual excerpts from various exclusively royal funerary compositions such as the *Litany of Ra* and the so-called *Books of the Underworld* began to appear on the walls of private tombs, first at Deir el-Medina, but soon elsewhere as well. All of these features may be explained as a reaction against Akhenaten's total monopolization of the funerary cult of his subjects and the role that the Aten temples had played in Amarna religion as the new 'hereafter'. The tomb-owners now had their own temples in which they themselves worshipped the gods, without the intervention of the king, whose role was thus minimized.

The changes in funerary culture just outlined are symptomatic of the totally different relationship between the gods and their worshippers, and the role played by the king in this relationship. In another 200 years, the ultimate consequence of this new world-view would be shown by the realization of the so-called Theban theocracy, whereby Amun himself was thought to rule as king of Egypt, governing his subjects by means of direct intervention in the form of oracles. Before we can discuss this development, however, we must return to the political and dynastic history of Egypt following the end of the Amarna Period.

Tutankhamun

The young Tutankhaten, still a child, had ascended the throne at Amarna, but soon afterwards, perhaps as early as his first regnal year or shortly afterwards, he abandoned the city founded by his father. People continued to live in Akhetaten for some time, but the court moved back to Memphis, the traditional seat of government. The old cults were restored and Thebes once more became the religious centre of the country. The king's name was changed to Tutankhamun and the epithet 'ruler of southern Heliopolis', a deliberate reference to Karnak as the centre of the cult of the sun-god Amun-Ra, was added to it. The name of his great royal wife, his half-sister Ankhesenpaaten, was likewise altered to Ankhesenamun. Tutankhamun was by no means the first ruler in the history of the dynasty to have ascended the throne as a child. Both Thutmose III and Amenhotep III had been very young at their accessions, but in both cases a senior female member of the royal

family (Hatshepsut and Mutemwiya, respectively) had acted as regent during their early years. No such option was available now; therefore the role of regent was played by a senior military official with no bloodlinks with the royal family, the commander-in-chief of the army, Horemheb. His titles as regent indicate that he gained the right to succeed Tutankhamun if he were to die without issue. Horemheb would in fact eventually become king himself, and in his Coronation Text (a unique inscription giving an account of his rise to power, carved on the back of a statue now in the Egyptian Museum, Turin), he seems to suggest that it was he who advised the king to abandon Amarna 'when chaos had broken out in the palace' (that is, after the deaths of Akhenaten and his ephemeral successor). Obviously the army had come to the conclusion that Akhenaten's experiment had ended in disaster and had withdrawn its support from the religious reforms they had initially helped to carry through, another tell-tale sign of the important role played by the military in this whole affair.

The most important document of Tutankhamun's reign is the so-called Restoration Stele, which presents an extremely negative description of the state in which Akhenaten's reforms had left the country. The temples of the gods had become ruins, their cults abolished. The gods had, therefore, abandoned Egypt; if one prayed to them, they no longer answered, and, when the army was sent to Syria to expand the boundaries of Egypt, it met with no success. The prominence of this last phrase probably indicates why the army no longer supported the Amarna policy. During Akhenaten's reign, Egypt's ally Mitanni had been defeated by the Hittites, who were now the major power in the north. This had prompted some of Egypt's vassals, notably Aziru of Amurru, to try to establish an independent buffer state between the two rival superpowers. Egypt was beginning to lose some of its northernmost territory, and the army, restricted to limited police actions in Syria, was obviously unable to do anything about it. With the accession of Tutankhamun, these restrictions were evidently lifted, since the reliefs in the inner courtyard of Horemheb's magnificent Memphite tomb (decorated around this time) include the claim that his name was 'renowned in the land of the Hittites', thus suggesting that, early in Tutankhamun's reign, Horemheb must have been engaged in military confrontations with the Hittites. These skirmishes, as well as later ones, seem to have failed to establish a new balance of power. On the other hand, simultaneous attempts to reassert Egyptian authority in Nubia, documented by these same reliefs, were probably more successful.

In Egypt itself, a major campaign to restore the traditional temples and to reorganize the administration of the country was set in motion. The enterprise was led by the chief of Tutankhamun's treasury, Maya, who was sent on a major mission to temples from the Delta to Elephantine, in order to levy taxes on their revenues, which had previously been diverted to the Aten temples. Some of the measures later described in Horemheb's Coronation Text and in his great Karnak Edict may actually have been carried out during the reign of Tutankhamun. Maya was also responsible for the gradual demolishing of the temples and palaces of Akhenaten, first at Thebes, but later at Amarna as well. Most of the Theban *talatat* found their way into the foundations and pylons of new construction works in Luxor and Karnak. As overseer of works in the Valley of the Kings, Maya must have organized the transfer of Akhenaten's mortal remains to a small undecorated tomb in the valley (assuming that the body found in KV 55 is indeed Akhenaten's, as seems likely); later he was responsible for the burials of Tutankhamun and his successor Ay (1327–1323 BC) and for the reorganization of the workmen's village at Deir el-Medina when work began on the tomb of Horemheb.

The Reigns of Ay and Horemheb

The events surrounding the death of Tutankhamun are still far from clear. The king died unexpectedly in his tenth regnal year, at a time when Egypt was engaged in a major confrontation with the Hittites that ended in an Egyptian defeat at Amqa, not far from Qadesh. News of this disaster reached Egypt at about the time of Tutankhamun's death. We do not know whether Horemheb himself was leading the Egyptian troops in this battle, but the fact that he does not appear to have been involved in the burial arrangements for Tutankhamun, despite his role as regent and heir presumptive, is highly suggestive. Instead, Ay, a senior court adviser who had been one of Akhenaten's most trusted officials and may have been a relative of Amenhotep III's wife, Queen Tiy, conducted the obsequies and shortly afterwards ascended the throne. Apparently he did so at first as a kind of interim king, for Tutankhamun's widow, Ankhesenarnun, was trying to negotiate a peace with the Hittites by writing to the Hittite king Shupiluliuma to ask him for a son who could marry her and become king of Egypt, in order that Egypt and Hatti should become 'one country', an extraordinary step that may possibly have been instigated by Ay. This request met with much suspicion in the Hittite capital and,

when Shupiluliuma was finally convinced of the Egyptian queen's honorable intentions and sent his son Zannanza to Egypt, the unfortunate prince was murdered *en route*, perhaps by forces loyal to Horemheb in Syria. The result was prolonged warfare with the Hittites.

King Ay, who must have been fairly aged when he mounted the throne, ruled for at least three full years. A fragmentary cuneiform letter appears to suggest that he tried to make amends with the Hittites, denying all responsibility for the death of the prince, but to no avail. He also made a conscious effort to prevent Horemheb from asserting his rights after his death, for he appointed an army commander called Nakhtmin (possibly a grandson of his) as his heir. Despite this, however, Horemheb succeeded in ascending the throne after Ay's demise and soon set out to deface the monuments of his predecessor and to destroy those of his rival Nakhtmin.

If Horemheb's path to the throne had been beset with difficulties, his actual reign (1323–1295 BC) appears to have been relatively uneventful. It should be borne in mind, however, that there are few inscriptions from the later part of his reign. Even its length is still uncertain; his highest attested date is year 13, but on the basis of Babylonian chronology and two posthumous texts many claim that he reigned for nearly twice as long as this. The unfinished state of his royal tomb in the Valley of the Kings (KV 57), however, even if it was not begun before his year 7, is difficult to reconcile with such a long reign. Trouble with the Hittites over territories in northern Syria continued, and around regnal year 10 the Egyptians appear to have made an unsuccessful attempt to reconquer Qadesh and Amurru, although it is typical of the reign that our sources for this confrontation are Hittite, and not Egyptian texts. It is even possible that Horemheb finally came to an agreement with his enemy, for a later Hittite text refers to a treaty that had been in force before it was broken during the reigns of Muwatalli and Sety I (1294–1279 BC).

At home, Horemheb embarked on a number of major building projects, including the Great Hypostyle Hall in Karnak. He may also have begun the systematic demolition of the city of Amarna, still inhabited at this time. Two stone fragments including a statue base bearing his cartouches were found there. The reorganization of the country was also taken in hand with great gusto. The Great Edict, which he published on a stele in the temple of Karnak, enumerates a large number of legal measures enacted in order to stamp out abuses such as the unlawful requisitioning of boats and slaves, the theft of cattle hides,

the illegal taxation of private farmland and fraud in assessing lawful taxes, and the extortion of local mayors by officials organizing the king's annual visit to the Opet Festival during the journey from Memphis to Thebes and back. Other paragraphs deal with the regulation of the local courts of justice, the personnel of the royal harem and other state employees, and the protocol at court.

Perhaps the most salient feature of Horemheb's reign is the way that he legitimized it; after all, he was of non-royal blood and was, therefore, unable to claim a 'genealogical' link with the dynastic god Amun. It is often maintained that his queen, a songstress of Amun called Mutnedjmet, should be identified with a sister of Nefertiti of that name, but this is not very likely as she appears to have become his wife well before his accession, quite apart from the fact that the legitimizing force of such a royal marriage may well have been questionable, given the circumstances. In his Coronation Text Horemheb does not hide his non-royal background, but instead puts much emphasis on the fact that, as a young man, he was chosen by the god Horus of Hutnesu, presumably his home town, to be king of Egypt; he then goes on to describe how he was carefully prepared for his future task by being the king's (that is, Tutankhamun's) deputy and prince regent, a claim largely substantiated by the inscriptions in his pre-royal tomb in the Memphite necropolis. It is Horus of Hutnesu who finally presents him to Amun during the Opet Festival procession, and who then proceeds to crown him as king. Horemheb thus owes his kingship to the will of his personal god and to divine election during a public appearance of Amun (that is, by means of an oracle). In this respect Horemheb's coronation resembles that of Hatshepsut (1473–1458 BC), who had also been elected by an oracle of Amun after having been regent. However, Hatshepsut was at least able to claim to be of royal blood herself and actually stressed that Amun had fathered her by the queen mother, a subject that Horemheb carefully avoids in his Coronation Text.

Rameses I

The principle of electing a non-royal heir was adopted by Horemheb and the early Ramessid rulers, the first of whom was appointed by Horemheb as prince regent during his lifetime with much the same titles as he himself had held under Tutankhamun. This man, Paramessu, acted as Horemheb's vizier as well as holding a number of military titles including that of commander of the fortress of Sile, an

important stronghold on the landbridge connecting the Egyptian Delta with Syria–Palestine. The role assigned to Paramessu once more reveals Horemheb's preoccupation with the military situation in Egypt's northern territories. Paramessu's family came from Avaris, the former capital of the Hyksos, and the role of its local god Seth, who had retained strong connections with the Canaanite god Ba'al, appears to have been comparable with that of Horus of Hutnesu in Horemheb's career. In the light of this it is interesting to observe that Horemheb built a temple for Seth at Avaris. The Ramessid royal family considered the god Seth to be their royal ancestor, and an obelisk (originally from Heliopolis), recently discovered, on the seabed off the coast of Alexandria, shows Sety I as a sphinx with the head of the Seth-animal offering to Ra-Atum.

When Horemheb died, apparently childless, Paramessu succeeded him as Rameses I (1295–1294 BC). With him began a new dynasty, the 19th, although there is some evidence to suggest that the Ramessid pharaohs considered Horemheb as the true founder of the dynasty. Rameses I must have been old when he mounted the throne, since his son and probably also his grandson had already been born before his accession. During his short reign (barely one year), and maybe even before, his son Sety was appointed vizier and commander of Sile but also held a number of priestly titles linking him with various gods worshipped in the Delta, including that of high priest of Seth. In his Coronation Text Horemheb had mentioned that he had equipped the newly reopened temples with priests 'from the pick of the army', providing them with fields and cattle. From other documents we know that retired soldiers were often given a priestly office and some land in their native towns, so Sety may also not have been particularly young when his father mounted the throne.

Sety I and the 'Restoration'

Sety I must be credited with the bulk of the restoration of the traditional temples, continuing and surpassing the efforts of his predecessors. Everywhere inscriptions of pre-Amarna pharaohs were restored, and the names and representations of Amun hacked out by Akhenaten were recarved. He also soon embarked on an ambitious building programme of his own. Practically everywhere in the country, and particularly in the great religious centres of Thebes, Abydos, Memphis, and Heliopolis, new temples were erected or existing ones expanded. Among the latter was the temple of Seth at Avaris, a city that was soon

to become the new Delta residence of the Ramessid rulers. At Karnak, Sety continued the construction of the Great Hypostyle Hall begun by Horemheb, which was connected with his own mortuary temple at Abd el-Qurna, directly opposite Karnak on the west bank of the Nile. Together with Hatshepsut's temple at Deir el-Bahri, which he restored, these buildings provided a splendid new setting for the important annual Beautiful Feast of the Valley, during which Amun of Karnak visited the gods of the west bank and people came to the tombs of their deceased relatives to eat, drink, and be merry in their company. At Abydos Sety I built a magnificent cenotaph temple for the god Osiris, following Middle Kingdom and early 18th-Dynasty examples. The famous king-list in this temple, a list of the royal ancestors participating in the offering cult for Osiris, provides the first evidence that the Amarna episode was now completely obliterated from official records. In the list Amenhotep III is directly followed by Horemheb, and other sources indicate that the regnal years of the kings from Akhenaten to Ay were added to those of Horemheb.

Sety's building programme was made possible because he reopened several old quarries and mines, including those in Sinai, and also because, like his predecessors, he raided Nubia for captives who could be employed as cheap labour. Security was another reason for these Nubian campaigns, for the finances for his building projects came from the exploitation of gold mines both there and in the Eastern Desert. The mines in the latter area in particular were worked on behalf of Sety's great Osiris temple at Abydos; in regnal year 9 the road leading to them was provided with a resting-place, a newly dug well, and a small temple. In Nubia there was a failed attempt to sink a new well to make the more profitable mines in some of the remoter areas accessible.

Further resources had previously come from the Egyptian territories in Palestine and Syria and it was now essential to reassert Egyptian authority over these areas. Sety began in his regnal year 1 with a relatively small-scale campaign against the Shasu in southern Palestine, soon followed by military expeditions further north. In a later war he moved into territory held at the time by the Hittites and managed to reconquer Qadesh, which in turn prompted Amurru to defect to the Egyptian side. The result was a war with the Hittites during which both vassal states were lost again, followed by a period of guarded peace. Sety I was also the first king to have to face incursions by Libyan tribes along the western border of the Delta. These tribes, who appear to have been motivated primarily by famine, were to continue to cause prob-

lems throughout the rest of the New Kingdom, but little is known about this first attempt to settle in Egypt, other than the fact that Sety's campaign against them probably took place before his confrontation with the Hittites.

The reliefs on the northern exterior wall of the Great Hypostyle Hall documenting the Libyan and Syrian campaigns are in a new, much more realistic style, which, despite a few precursors from the time of Thutmose IV and Amenhotep III, was clearly influenced by the realism of the Amarna style. More than the traditional scenes of slaying the enemy with their strong symbolic content, these battle reliefs create the feeling that we are looking at a real, historical event. An important role in these reliefs is played by a 'group-marshaller and fan-bearer' called Mehy (short for Amenemheb, Horemheb, or some similar name), who accompanies Sety in a number of scenes. It is unlikely that this man was ever more than a trusted military officer who perhaps conducted some of the campaigns instead of the king himself, but Sety's successor Rameses II (1279–1213 BC), eager to stress his own role on the battlefield during the reign of his father, had Mehy's names and figures erased and in some cases replaced by his own as crown prince.

Rameses II

Unfortunately it is not known how long Sety I occupied the throne. His highest attested regnal year is his eleventh, but he may have ruled for a few years more. Towards the end of his reign—we do not know exactly when—he appointed his son and heir Rameses as co-regent while the latter was still 'a child in his embrace'. The sources for this co-regency all date from Rameses' reign as sole king, however, and he may well have exaggerated its length and importance. It is nevertheless significant that Rameses received the kingship in this way. Although clearly a son of Sety I, he was almost certainly born during the reign of Horemheb, before his grandfather ascended the throne, and at a time when both Rameses I and Sety I were still simply high officials, a fact later emphasized rather than disguised by Rameses II himself in much the same way as Horemheb had done in his Coronation Text. Although his father was obviously king when Rameses II was crowned as co-regent, his election resembles that of Horemheb. Clearly the succession of the crown prince was not a foregone conclusion and had to be secured while his father was still alive. Only later, when Rameses II ruled alone, did he revert to the old 'myth of the birth of the divine king' that had legitimized the rulers of the 18th Dynasty.

Very early in his reign, probably still as co-regent of his father, he went on his first military campaign, a limited affair aimed at quelling a 'rebellion' in Nubia. Reliefs in a small rock temple at Beit el-Wali commemorating the event show the young king in the company of two of his children, the crown prince, Amunherwenemef, and Rameses' fourth son, Khaemwaset, who, although shown standing proudly in their chariots, must have been mere striplings at the time. Throughout the Ramessid Period the royal princes, who in the 18th Dynasty had only occasionally been depicted in the tombs of their non-royal nurses and teachers, would be prominent on the royal monuments of their father, perhaps in order to emphasize that the kingship of the new dynasty was now well and truly hereditary again. Almost without exception every Ramessid crown prince held the title, honorific or real, of commander-in-chief of the army, a combination first seen in the case of Horemheb, the founder of their dynasty.

In his fourth regnal year Rameses II mounted his first major campaign in Syria, as a result of which Amurru once again returned to the Egyptian fold. This was not to last long, however, for the Hittite King Muwatalli decided at once to reconquer Amurru and to try to prevent further losses of territory to the Egyptians, with the result that the following year Rameses again passed the border fortress at Sile, this time in order to wage war directly against his rival. The battle of Qadesh that followed is one of the most famous armed conflicts of antiquity, perhaps not so much because it was significantly different from earlier battles, but because Rameses, despite the fact that he was unable to achieve his goals, presented it at home as a huge victory described at large in lengthy compositions, which, in a propaganda campaign of unprecedented proportions, were carved on the walls of all the major temples.

In actual fact, Rameses had wrongly been led to believe that the Hittite king was in the far north at Tunip, too scared to confront the Egyptians, whereas in reality he was nearby on the other side of Qadesh. Rameses had, therefore, made a quick advance to Qadesh with only one of his four divisions and was then suddenly obliged to face the huge army that the Hittite king had mustered against him. Muwatalli first destroyed the advancing Egyptian second division, which was about to join the first, then turned around to crush Rameses and his troops. In his later descriptions of the battle Rameses tells us that this was his true moment of glory, for, when even his immediate attendants were ready to desert him, he called out to his father Amun to save him, then almost single-handedly managed to fight off the

Hittite attackers. But Amun heard his prayers and rescued the king by causing an Egyptian support force from the coast of Amurru to arrive in the nick of time. These forces now attacked the Hittites in the rear and, together with Rameses' division, severely reduced the number of the enemy's chariots and sent the remainder fleeing, many of them ending up in the river Orontes. With the arrival of the third division at the close of the combat, followed by the fourth at sunset, the Egyptians were able to reassemble their forces and were now ready to face their enemy the next morning. But, despite the fact that the Egyptian chariotry now outnumbered their Hittite counterparts, Muwatalli's formidable army was able to hold its ground and the battle ended in stalemate. Rameses declined a Hittite peace offer, although a truce was agreed. The Egyptians then returned home with many prisoners of war and much booty, but without having achieved their goal. In subsequent years several other fairly successful confrontations in Syria-Palestine took place, but each time the vassal states conquered on these occasions quickly returned to the Hittite fold once the Egyptian armies had gone home, and Egypt never regained Qadesh and Amurru.

In year 16 of Rameses II's reign, Muwatalli's young son Urhiteshub, who had succeeded his father as Mursili III, was deposed by his uncle Hattusili III and, two years later, after some failed attempts to regain his throne with the help first of the Babylonians, then of the Assyrians, he finally fled to Egypt. Hattusili immediately demanded his extradition, which was refused, and so the Hittite king was ready to wage war against Egypt again. Meanwhile, however, the Assyrians had conquered Hanigalbat, a former vassal state that had recently defected to the Hittites, and were now threatening Carchemish and the Hittite empire itself. Faced with this menacing situation Hattusili had no choice but to open peace negotiations with Egypt, which finally led to a formal treaty in regnal year 21. Although the Egyptians had to accept the loss of Qadesh and Amurru, the peace brought a new stability on the northern front, and, with the borders open to the Euphrates, the Black Sea, and the eastern Aegean, international trade soon flourished as it had not done since the days of Amenhotep III. It also meant that Rameses II could now concentrate on the western border, which was under constant pressure from Libyan invaders, particularly on the fringes of the Delta, where Rameses built a whole series of fortifications. In year 34 the bond with the Hittites was further strengthened by a marriage between Rameses and a daughter of Hattusili, who was received with much pomp and circumstance and was given the Egyptian name Neferura-who-beholds-Horus (i.e. the King).

This Hittite princess was only one of seven women who gained the status of 'great royal wife' during Rameses' very long reign of sixty-seven years. When he had become his father's co-regent he had been presented with a harem full of beautiful women, but apart from these he had two principal wives, Nefertari and Isetnefret, both of whom bore him several sons and daughters. Nefertari was 'great royal wife' until her death in about year 25, when the title passed on to Isetnefret, who appears to have died not long before the arrival of the Hittite princess. Four daughters of Rameses also held the title, Henutmira, long believed to have been his sister rather than a daughter, Bintanat, Merytamun, and Nebettawy. These were the most exalted among the king's daughters, of whom there were at least forty in addition to some forty-five sons. Many of them appear in long processions on the walls of the great temples built by their father, who was to outlive several of his children. They were buried one after the other in a gigantic tomb in the Valley of the Kings (KV 5), which has recently been rediscovered. It resembles the underground galleries that Rameses started to build at Saqqara for the burial of the sacred Apis bulls of the god Ptah, which had until then been placed in separate tombs.

During his long years on the throne, Rameses II carried out a vast building programme. He began by adding a great peristyle courtyard and pylon to the temple of Amun in Luxor, built by Amenhotep III and completed by the last 18th-Dynasty kings. The courtyard was planned at a curious angle to the rest of the temple, presumably in order to create a straight line across the river to the site of the king's mortuary temple, the Ramesseum, in much the same way as his father had done with the Great Hypostyle Hall at Karnak and his Abd el-Qurna temple on the west bank. Rameses also built a temple for Osiris at Abydos, smaller than his father's, but equally beautiful. During the rest of his reign he gradually filled the country with his temples and statues, many of which he usurped from earlier rulers; there is hardly a site in Egypt where his cartouches are not found on the monuments. Particularly impressive is the astonishing series of eight rock temples in Lower Nubia, including two at Abu Simbel, most of which must have been built with a work force rounded up from among the local tribes, as is attested in the case of Wadi es-Sebua, built for the king by Setau, the viceroy of Nubia, after he had held a *razzia* in year 44.

Among the hundreds of statues of deities and kings that Rameses usurped, those erected by Amenhotep III, the last king before the Amarna Period, were particularly favoured, as were those made by the kings of the 12th Dynasty, the great rulers of the classical period of

Egyptian history that served as a model for the new Egypt now taking shape, after the radical break in the tradition constituted by the Amarna Period. The same reflection on a great past is also evident from a renewed interest in the classical writers of the Old and Middle kingdoms, especially the 'teachings' or 'instructions' of old sages such as Ptahhotep and Kagemni, and descriptions of chaos such as those of Neferti and Ipuwer. It was perhaps because Ramessid scribes felt that these earlier works could not be equalled, let alone surpassed, that contemporary literature, such as love poetry and folk tales and mythical stories that sprang from an oral tradition, was written not in classical Egyptian, but in the modern language first introduced in inscriptions by Akhenaten.

Rameses II was also the king who expanded the city of Avaris and made it his great Delta residence called Piramesse ('house of Rameses'), the Raameses of biblical tradition. Its location has long been disputed, but it has now been established beyond reasonable doubt that it is to be identified with the extensive remains at Tell el-Dab'a and Qantir in the eastern Delta. The city was strategically situated near the road leading to the border fortress of Sile and the provinces in Palestine and Syria and also along the Pelusiac branch of the Nile, and it soon became the most important international trade centre and military base in the country. Asiatic influence had always been strong in the area, but now many foreign deities such as Ba'al, Reshep, Hauron, Anat, and Astarte, to mention only a few, were worshipped in Piramesse. Many foreigners lived in the city, some of whom became high-ranking officials. One office that was more often than not held by foreigners was that of 'royal butler', a senior executive position outside the normal bureaucratic hierarchy, the holder of which was often entrusted with special royal commissions. As a result of the peace treaty with the Hittites, specialist craftsmen sent by Egypt's former enemy were employed in the armoury workshops of Piramesse to teach the Egyptians their latest weapons technology, including the manufacture of much sought-after Hittite shields. Indeed, by this date the Egyptian army itself counted among its ranks many foreigners who had come to Egypt as prisoners of war and had subsequently been incorporated into the country's combat forces.

Many of Rameses' high officials lived and worked in Piramesse, but most of them appear to have been buried elsewhere, particularly in the necropolis of Memphis. About thirty-five tombs of the Ramessid Period have so far been excavated there, some of them very large. These tombs still took the form of an Egyptian temple, but, compared to the tombs

of the late 18th Dynasty, the workmanship had declined. The earlier tombs had walls built of solid mud-brick masonry with a limestone revetment set against the interior faces, but now the walls consisted entirely of a double row of limestone orthostats with the space in between filled with rubble, and the same technique was used for their pylons and pyramids. In addition, the quality of the limestone itself was often not very good, and, rather than carefully making the blocks fit against each other, a liberal amount of plaster was used to fill the gaps between the blocks. Nor do the reliefs carved on them compare favourably with those in the older tombs in the cemetery. This general decline in the quality of the workmanship can be observed throughout the country, even in the king's own temples; of the two main relief-sculpting techniques, the superior, but more time-consuming and more expensive, raised relief all but disappeared after the first years of the reign, in favour of the common sunk relief. Generally speaking, Rameses' monuments impress more by their size and quantity than by their delicacy and perfection.

Rameses II was the first king since Amenhotep III to celebrate more than one *sed*-festival. The first took place in year 30 and then another thirteen followed, at first at more or less regular intervals of about three years, and then, towards the end of his long life, annually. Amenhotep III had become deified during his three jubilees, but in this respect Rameses had less patience than his great predecessor, for already by his eighth year we hear of a colossal statue being carved which was given the name 'Rameses-the-god'. Colossal statues of the king with similar names were set up in front of the pylons and by the doorways of all the great temples and these received a regular cult as well as being objects of public worship for the inhabitants of the towns in which they stood. Inside the temples, Rameses-the-god had his own cult-image and processional bark along with the other deities to whom they were dedicated; in reliefs Rameses II is often shown offering to his own deified self.

Among the king's many sons who held high positions, the second son of Queen Isetnefret, Khaemwaset, must be singled out. He was high priest of Ptah in Memphis and acquired a reputation as a scholar and magician that would survive until Roman times. No other son of Rameses II left so many monuments and many of these were inscribed with learned, sometimes archaic, texts. Although, as we have seen, the reign of Rameses II saw a marked revival of classical traditions, Khaemwaset must clearly have had a special interest in Egypt's glorious past, for he also restored several pyramids of Old Kingdom

pharaohs in the Memphite necropolis, and in some of his own monuments tried to copy the style of Old Kingdom tomb reliefs. As high priest of Ptah, one of his duties was to see to the burial of the sacred Apis bull and it is to Khaemwaset that the first galleries (rather than individual tombs) of the Serapeum are due. He also travelled the length and breadth of the country in order to announce his father's first five *sed*-festivals, which were traditionally proclaimed from Memphis. By year 52 of his father's reign, Khaemwaset was the eldest surviving son and therefore became crown prince, but at that stage he must have been in his sixties already, and he died a few years later, around year 55. He was almost certainly buried in the Memphite necropolis and not in the princely gallery tomb in the Valley of the Kings (KV 5), but whether he was really interred in the Serapeum, as many believe, is less certain.

After Khaemwaset's death Rameses II lived on for another twelve years until he finally died in the sixty-seventh year of his reign, the longest reigning monarch since Pepy I (2321–2287 BC) of the 6th Dynasty. During the last years of his reign he had become a living legend and he was clearly much admired (and envied) by his successors. His memory would live on in later traditions both under his own name and under that of Sesostris, in reality the name of several Middle Kingdom rulers whose monuments he had so avidly usurped. His twelve eldest sons had died before him, and it was Merenptah (1213–1203 BC), the fourth son of Isetnefret and crown prince since the death of Khaemwaset, who eventually succeeded him.

Rameses II's Successors

During the first years of his reign Merenptah, who must have been fairly advanced in years already, sent several military expeditions abroad, not only to Nubia, but also into Palestine, where he subdued the rebellious vassals of Ashkelon, Gezer, and Yenoam; the 'victory stele' that records these victories also contains the first reference in Egyptian sources to Israel, albeit not as a country or city, but as a tribe. The major event of Merenptah's reign occurred in his year 5, however, and the victory stele really deals with this: a campaign against the Libyans. They had been a problem even during his father's and grandfather's reigns, but the fortresses Rameses II had built along the western borders of the Delta were obviously unable to prevent the invasion of a massive coalition of Libyan and other tribes led by their

king, Mereye.

The previous decades had seen a great migration in the Aegean and Ionian world that had probably been caused by widespread crop failure and famine. According to a long inscription at Karnak (between the Seventh Pylon and the central part of the temple), Merenptah had actually sent grain to the starving Hittites, still Egypt's ally in the East. Many important centres of Mycenaean Greece had been violently destroyed and the western fringes of the Hittite empire had begun to collapse. The marauding 'Sea Peoples', as they were soon to be called in Egypt, had also reached the coast of North Africa between Cyrenaica and Mersa Matruh, which in the Late Bronze Age was seasonally occupied by foreign seafarers sailing from Cyprus via Crete to the Egyptian Delta. In this area, the Sea Peoples joined the Libyan tribes and with a force of some 16,000 men marched on Egypt; since they brought their women and children with them, as well as cattle and other belongings, they were obviously planning to settle in Egypt. They had actually penetrated the western Delta and were moving southwards, threatening Memphis and Heliopolis, when Merenptah confronted them and, in a battle that lasted for six hours, managed to defeat them. The Libyans were destined to fail on this occasion because, as Merenptah says on his victory stele, their king, Mereye, had already been 'found guilty of his crimes' by the divine tribunal of Heliopolis, and the god Atum, who presided over the tribunal, had personally handed the sword of victory to his son Merenptah, making the battle nothing less than a 'holy war'. Thousands of enemies were killed, but great numbers were also captured and settled in military colonies, especially in the Delta, where their descendants would become an increasingly important political factor (see Chapter 12).

The rest of Merenptah's reign appears to have been peaceful, and the king used it to build at least two temples and a palace in Memphis. He must have realized that he did not have many years left, however, for his mortuary temple on the Theban West Bank is constructed almost exclusively from blocks removed from earlier structures, particularly the nearby temples of Amenhotep III. He died in his ninth year. After his death, trouble over the succession broke out, for, although the next king, Sety II (1200–1194 BC), was almost certainly the eldest son of Merenptah, a rival king, Amenmessu, ruled for a few years, at least in the south of the country. When exactly this happened is still the subject of much controversy; it has been suggested that Amenmessu deposed Sety II for some time between the latter's years 3 and 5, but others have the trouble set in at the beginning of the reign.

Whatever the truth may be, Sety ruthlessly erased and usurped all of Amenmessu's cartouches and later texts refer to the rival ruler as 'the enemy'.

When Sety II died, after a reign of almost six full years, his only son, Saptah (1194–1188 BC), succeeded him. However, Saptah was not a son of Sety's principal queen, Tausret (1188–1186 BC); instead he had been born to him by a Syrian concubine called Sutilja. More importantly, he was only a young boy who suffered from an atrophied leg caused by poliomyelitis; his stepmother, Tausret, therefore remained 'great royal wife' and acted as regent. She was not the only power behind the throne, however, for a powerful official called Bay, described as the 'chancellor of the entire land', who was himself a Syrian, appears to have been the true ruler of the country at this date. He is depicted several times with Saptah and Tausret and in some inscriptions he even claims that it was he who 'established the king on the throne of his father', an extraordinary phrase normally reserved for the gods. When Saptah died in his sixth regnal year Tausret reigned on as sole ruler for another two years, doubtless with the support of Bay. After Hatshepsut and Nefertiti she was the third queen of the New Kingdom to rule as pharaoh. With her death the 19th Dynasty came to an end.

Rameses III and the 20th Dynasty

How the next dynasty gained power remains unclear. The only indications of the political events at this date derive from a stele erected on the island of Elephantine by its first ruler, Sethnakht (1186–1184 BC), and an account written down in the Great Harris Papyrus from the beginning of the reign of Rameses IV (1153–1147 BC), some thirty years later. On the stele, Sethnakht relates how he expelled rebels who on their flight left behind the gold, silver, and copper they had stolen from Egypt and with which they had wanted to hire reinforcements among the Asiatics. The papyrus describes how a state of lawlessness and chaos had broken out in Egypt because of forces from 'outside'; after several years in which there was no one who ruled, a Syrian called Irsu (a made-up name meaning 'one who made himself'—that is, 'upstart') seized power, and his confederates plundered the country; they treated the gods like ordinary human beings and no longer sacrificed in the temples, a description that resembles the one given of the Amarna Period in the years of the Restoration. The gods then chose Sethnakht to be the next ruler, just as they had Horemheb at the end of the 18th

Dynasty, and he re-established order.

From these texts we may perhaps conclude that, after the death of Tausret, Bay had tried to seize power and may even have succeeded for a brief time until he was expelled by Sethnakht. The date of the Elephantine stele is not Sethnakht's regnal year 1, as one might expect on a victory stele, but year 2, and this date is not given at the beginning of the text, as was customary on stelae, but towards the end. It has, therefore, been suggested that it represents the date of Sethnakht's victory and at the same time the true date of his accession, having counted in retrospect the time it took him to overcome his adversaries as his first year. Be that as it may, he did not enjoy his newly gained kingship for long, for he died soon afterwards and was succeeded by his son Rameses III (1184–1153 BC).

Although the new king inherited peace and stability from his father, he soon had his fair share of troubles as well. In year 5 he had to fight off further advances by Libyan tribes, who had used the period of internal struggle to penetrate into the western Delta as far as the central Nile branch. By this time the Egyptians appear to have accepted this peaceful immigration as inevitable, but, when a revolt against the pharaoh broke out because he interfered in the succession of their 'king', Rameses III quickly responded and brought them back under Egyptian control. A further Libyan campaign took place in year 11. Far more challenging, however, was the great battle against the Sea Peoples in year 8.

Since the days of Merenptah, when some of the Sea Peoples had first tried to enter Egypt from the west, their movements had turned the whole of the Middle East upside down. They had destroyed the Hittite capital Hattusas and swept away their whole empire; they had conquered Tarsus and many of them had settled in the plains of Cilicia and northern Syria, razing Alalakh and Ugarit to the ground. Cyprus had also been overwhelmed and its capital Enkomi ransacked. Clearly their ultimate goal was Egypt, however, and in year 8 of Rameses III they launched a combined land and sea attack on the Delta. But the Egyptians were well aware of the imminent danger and had moved a large defence force to Djahy (southern Palestine, perhaps the Egyptian garrisons in the Gaza strip) and fortified the mouths of the Nile branches in the Delta. When the assault finally came, Rameses' troops were well prepared for it and were able to beat the invaders back. Although the Sea Peoples had changed the east Mediterranean world for good, they never succeeded in conquering Egypt and their presence in Syria–Palestine does not at first seem to have affected Egypt's sway

over its northern territories.

At home, Rameses III spent a lot of time and energy on his building projects, foremost of which was his large mortuary temple at Medinet Habu, begun shortly after his accession and finished by year 12; it still stands today as one of the best preserved temples of the New Kingdom (the decoration on its exterior walls including scenes from the battle with the Sea Peoples). It was closely modelled on the Ramesseum of his great predecessor Rameses II, whom Rameses III tried to emulate in many other ways; his own royal names were all but identical to those of Rameses II and he even named his sons after the latter's numerous offspring. The building of Medinet Habu and other projects, including the expansion of Piramesse, do not appear to have been hampered by the various threats to Egypt's borders. We also hear of a major expedition to Punt, perhaps the first since the famous venture to that remote land in the days of Hatshepsut, and another one to Atika, perhaps the copper mines of Timna.

All was not well in Egypt, however. The period of turmoil before Rameses' accession had led to corruption and various abuses, and he was forced to inspect and reorganize the various temples throughout the country. The Great Harris Papyrus enumerates the huge donations of land he made to the most important temples in Thebes, Memphis, and Heliopolis, and to a lesser extent to many smaller institutions as well. By the end of his reign a third of the cultivable land was owned by the temples and of this three-quarters belonged to Amun of Thebes. This development upset the balance between temple and state and between the king and the ever more powerful priesthood of Amun. An overall loss of control over the state finances and economic crisis were the result; grain prices soared and the monthly rations to the workmen at Deir el-Medina, which had to be paid by the state treasury, were soon in arrears, leading in year 29 to the first recorded organized strikes in history. Things were made worse by repeated raids by groups of Libyan nomads in the Theban area, which created a general sense of insecurity.

This gradual breakdown of the centralized state may well have been one of the reasons behind an attempt on the life of Rameses III, or, if it was not, the general unrest and insecurity may at least have given the conspirators the idea that they could count on general support if they succeeded. The plot originated in the king's harem, presumably in Piramesse, where one of the officials involved, the scribe of the harem, Paury, had a house. He was just one of several harem officials implicated; the ringleaders were one of Rameses' wives, called Tiy, and

some other women from the harem, as well as several royal butlers and a steward; all of them were 'stirring up the people and inciting enmity in order to make rebellion against their lord'. The ultimate goal was to put Tiy's son Pentaweret on the throne instead of the king's lawful heir. Apparently the plan was to murder the king during the annual Opet Festival in Thebes, but included in the preparations were also magical spells and wax figurines, which were smuggled into the harem. The plot must have failed, however, for the king's mummy shows no signs of a violent death, and his crown prince, Rameses IV, and not Pentaweret eventually succeeded him. When all of this happened we do not know, but the records of the court hearings and the sentences passed on 'the great criminals' (most of them were forced to commit suicide) were written down at the beginning of the reign of Rameses IV, who also compiled the Great Harris Papyrus, which contains his father's 'testament', suggesting that the assassination attempt took place towards the end of Rameses III's thirty-one-year reign.

Rameses IV

All of the remaining 20th-Dynasty kings were called Rameses, a name they adopted at their accession, adding it to their birth-name. They were probably all related to Rameses III, although in some cases we do not know exactly how. During their reigns, Egypt lost control over its territories in Syria–Palestine and the importance of Nubia was rapidly declining as well. Apart from the temple of Khonsu in Karnak, no major temples were built even by those Ramessid rulers who reigned long enough to do so. Rameses IV was the fifth son of his father and had become crown prince around the latter's regnal year 22, after four older brothers had died. The sons of Rameses III were not buried in a gallery tomb in the Valley of the Kings like those of Rameses II, but in separate tombs in the Valley of the Queens. Judging by the name of his mother, Rameses III's Great Royal Consort Isis-Ta-Habadjilat, the new king must have had at least some foreign blood running through his veins. At the beginning of his reign he embarked on several building projects, especially his royal tomb and mortuary temple at Thebes, for which he doubled the workforce of Deir el-Medina to 120 men. Probably in connection with these projects he mounted several expeditions to the quarries of the Wadi Hammamat, where little activity had taken place since the days of Sety I, as well as to the turquoise and copper mines in Sinai and Timna. None of his building plans came to

fruition, however, for he died after a reign of five (perhaps seven) years, before he could complete any of them, despite his prayers on a large stele in Abydos asking Osiris to grant him a reign twice as long as the sixty-seven years of Rameses II.

During Rameses IV's reign, further delays in the delivery of basic commodities at Deir el-Medina occurred; at the same time the influence of the high priest of Amun was growing. Ramesesnakht, holder of that high office, was soon accompanying the state officials when they went to pay the men their monthly rations, indicating that the temple of Amun, not the state, was now at least partly responsible for their wages. The highest state and temple offices were in fact in the hands of the members of two families. Thus Ramesesnakht's son Usermaatranakht was 'steward of the estate of Amun' and as such administered the land owned by the temple, but he also controlled the vast majority of the state-owned land in Middle Egypt. The holders of the offices of 'second and third priest' and of 'god's father of Amun' were all related to Ramesesnakht by marriage. This well illustrates the marked tendency of these high positions, including that of high priest itself, to become hereditary, and Ramesesnakht himself was to be succeeded by two of his sons. The office became more and more independent and the king had only nominal control over who was appointed high priest.

The Final Reigns of the 20th Dynasty

Rameses IV was succeeded by his son, who became Rameses V (1147–1143 BC) upon his accession. A major crime and corruption scandal among the priesthood at Elephantine, which had in fact evolved during the reign of his father, is the main event known from his reign, although he also continued the latter's mining activities in Timna and Sinai. After four years, Rameses V died of smallpox at a young age.

The next king, Rameses VI (1143–1136 BC), was a younger son of Rameses III. He usurped the royal tomb and mortuary temple begun by his nephew, whose burial had therefore to be delayed until an alternative tomb had been found for him in Rameses VI's year 2. It has, therefore, been concluded by some researchers that the succession was accompanied by civil unrest, especially as there are some entries in a necropolis journal that state that the workmen of Deir el-Medina, whose numbers were soon afterwards reduced to sixty again, stayed at home 'for fear of the enemy'. This does not seem very probable, however, although the mere fact that most officials remained

in office from one reign to the next is hardly enough proof to the contrary, for the same had been the case at the end of the 18th and 19th Dynasties, when there had certainly been troubles. The 'enemy' mentioned in the journal is more likely to have been a group of Libyans, who continued to be a nuisance in the area. Rameses VI reigned for seven years; he is the last king whose name is attested in Sinai. During the seven-year reign of Rameses VII (1136–1129 BC), grain prices soared to their highest level, after which they gradually came down again. His successor Rameses VIII was probably yet another son of Rameses III, which might explain why his reign was so brief.

The exact family background of the last three Ramessid rulers is unknown. The eighteen years or so of the reign of Rameses IX (1126–1108 BC) were marked by increasing instability. In regnal years 8–15 we regularly hear of Libyan nomads disturbing the peace in Thebes, and there were also strikes again. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that this period witnessed the first wave of tomb-robberies, known from a whole series of papyri that record the trials of the thieves who had been apprehended. However, the tombs in the Valley of the Kings were not involved; in fact only one 17th-Dynasty royal burial in Dra Abu el-Naga and a number of private tombs were robbed, and various thefts from temples were also investigated. At the beginning of the reign, Ramesesnakht (the high priest of Amun mentioned above) had died; he was succeeded as high priest firstly by his son Nesamun, and then by the latter's brother Amenhotep. In two reliefs at Karnak Amenhotep had himself depicted on the same scale as Rameses IX, a fair indication of the virtual equality that now appears to have existed between the king and the high priest of Amun. One of these scenes commemorates an event in year 10, when Rameses rewarded Amenhotep for his services to king and country with the traditional 'gold of honour'. The many gifts bestowed upon him on this occasion must certainly have been very impressive, but their quantities are nevertheless a revealing illustration of the state of the economy, or at least of the king's wealth. Among the gifts received by Amenhotep were 2 *hin* of a costly ointment; some 200 years earlier, during the reign of Horemheb, one of Maya's subordinates, a mere scribe of the treasury, had contributed 4 *hin* of the same ointment to the burial goods of his master.

Almost nothing is known about the reign of Rameses X, which seems to have lasted for nine years. Rameses XI (1099–1069 BC), on the other hand, ruled for thirty years, although certainly during the last ten years the geographical extent of his power was virtually reduced to Lower Egypt (that is, the Delta). During his reign, the crisis that had

gripped the Theban area in the previous decades deepened even further: persistent trouble with Libyan gangs preventing the workmen on the west bank from going to work, famine (the 'year of the hyenas'), further tomb robberies and thefts from temples and palaces, and even civil war. At some point, in or before year 12, Panehsy, the viceroy of Nubia, appeared in Thebes with Nubian troops to restore law and order, perhaps at the request of Rameses XI himself. In order to feed his men in a city that was already suffering from economic malaise, he was given, or perhaps usurped, the office of 'overseer of the granaries'. This must have brought him into conflict with Amenhotep, the high priest of Amun, whose temple owned the bulk of the land and its produce. The conflict quickly escalated and during a period of eight or nine months (sometime between years 17 and 19) Panehsy and his troops actually besieged the high priest at Medinet Habu. Amenhotep then appealed to Rameses XI for help and this resulted in a civil war. Panehsy marched north, reaching at least as far as Hardai in Middle Egypt, which he ransacked, but probably actually pushing much further north, until he was eventually driven back by the king's army, which was almost certainly led by a general called Piankh. Eventually Panehsy had to withdraw to Nubia, where trouble persisted for many years, and where he was eventually buried.

In Thebes, General Piankh took over the titles of Panehsy as well as styling himself vizier, and after the death of Amenhotep, who may or may not have survived Panehsy's assault, he also became high priest of Amun, uniting the three highest offices of the country in one person. With Piankh's military *coup* begins the period of the *wehem mesut*, the 'renaissance', a term that had also been used by kings at the beginning of the 12th and 19th Dynasties to indicate that the country had been 'reborn' after a period of chaos. In the Theban area documents were now dated in years of the 'renaissance' rather than regnal years of the king. Years 1 to 10 of the renaissance were identical with regnal years 19 to 28 of Rameses XI. After the death of Piankh, his son-in-law Herihor took over all his functions, and after the death of Rameses XI the former even assumed royal titles. In the north of the country Smendes (1069–1043 BC) mounted the throne, and with these two men the 21st Dynasty begins.

After Rameses III the Egyptians finally lost their provinces in Palestine and Syria, which after the invasion of the Sea Peoples and the disappearance of the Hittite empire had broken up into several small states. Problems in the north had been made worse by the gradual sanding-up of the harbour of Piramesse owing to the slow but inexor-

able eastward shift of the Pelusiac branch of the Nile. Nor did the kings of the 20th Dynasty any longer have the power and the resources to mount major expeditions to the gold mines in Nubia. Towards the end of the dynasty the treasury of the temple of Amun sent some small-scale expeditions to the Eastern Desert in search of gold and minerals, but the quantities with which they came back were small. During the years of the renaissance, Piankh and his successors, assisted by the descendants of the workmen of Deir el-Medina who were now living at Medinet Habu, began to tap a different source of gold and precious stones: the very same tombs in the Valley of the Kings that their fathers and grandfathers had carved and decorated, as well as many other tombs both royal and private in the Theban necropolis. Over the next century and later, the tombs were gradually despoiled of their gold and other valuables; eventually they would be emptied out completely, and even the mummies of the great pharaohs of the New Kingdom would be unwrapped and stripped of their precious amulets and other trappings and reburied together in an anonymous tomb in the Theban cliffs. By some strange irony only two royal mummies would escape this fate: that of Tutankhamun (in KV 62) and that of his father, Akhenaten, the 'enemy of Akhetaten' (in KV 55).

The Historical and Social Repercussions of the Amarna and Ramessid Periods

There can be no doubt that the great kings of the Ramessid Period were immensely powerful rulers. Even Rameses XI was obviously still able to mobilize an army that was strong enough to repel his opponent's troops all the way back to Nubia. And yet it is undeniable that royal prestige had gradually eroded in the course of the 19th and 20th Dynasties. As we have seen, political and economic developments, which had led to the breakdown of the central government and the concentration of ever more power in the hands of the high priests of Amun, greatly contributed to this erosion. On the other hand, these developments may themselves be seen as the result, or at least the symptoms, of a much more fundamental change. At the root of this change is yet again the Amarna Period.

Akhenaten had tried to remake society and had failed, even though he had initially enjoyed the support of the army. What was worse, however, is that in the eyes of all but a few of the Amarna élite he had actually wrecked society. We have already seen how burial customs after the Amarna Period reflect a totally different attitude towards the

king, as a reaction against the way Akhenaten had tried to monopolize the funerary beliefs of his subjects. This monopoly was not limited to life in the hereafter, however, but also deeply affected life on earth. Traditionally, access to the god's cult image in the temple was restricted to the king and the professional priesthood representing him; for the vast majority of the population the only means of getting in contact with the gods of their home town, without the intervention of the state or the official temple cult, was during regularly held processions, when the images of the gods were carried from one temple to another on the occasion of a religious festival. These festivals, which were quite frequent, were public holidays, and they played an enormously important part in people's religious and social lives. Most Egyptians had a strong emotional bond with their native town and its god, the 'city-god', to whom they showed a life-long loyalty. The city-god was also the god of the local necropolis, the 'lord of the burial' who granted 'a goodly burial after old age' to his loyal servants.

Akhenaten had not only banned all gods other than the Aten and abolished the daily rituals in their temples, but with them he had also put an end to the festivals with their processions, and in doing so he had undermined the social identity of his subjects. Instead, he had claimed all devotion and loyalty for himself and the prosperity of the country and the happiness of its inhabitants depended on him alone. He was the 'city-god' not just of Akhetaten, but of the whole country, and his daily chariot ride along the royal road at Amarna replaced the divine processions. The history of the 18th Dynasty before the Amarna Period had seen a clear development towards a more personal relationship between the various deities and their worshippers. This development came to a sudden halt when Akhenaten proclaimed a god who could only be worshipped by his son, the king, whereas all individual, personal devotion had to be diverted to the king himself. This total usurpation of personal piety had seriously compromised the credibility of the dogma of divine kingship.

In the period after Amarna, the balance between god and king underwent a dramatic change. The king lost for good the central position he had occupied in the lives of his subjects; instead, the god now acquired many traditional aspects of kingship. In the traditional representative theocracy, the gods embodied the cosmic order that they had created at the beginning of time, while the king, as their intermediary, represented the gods upon earth, maintained cosmic order by means of the temple ritual, and carried out their will by his government. Only very rarely did the gods reveal themselves directly,

and, when they did, they did so to the king.

After the Amarna Period, the problem of the unity and plurality of the gods, which Akhenaten had tried to solve by denying the existence of all but one sole god, was solved in a different way: Amun-Ra became the universal, transcendent god, who existed far away, independent of his creation; the other gods and goddesses were aspects of him, they were his immanent manifestations. This situation is elegantly expressed in a collection of hymns to Amun (preserved in a papyrus now in Leiden), according to which Amun 'began manifesting himself when nothing existed, yet the world was not empty of him in the beginning'. This universal god was now the true king, and, although the pharaoh's traditional titles—which were rooted in mythology and express his divinity—did not change, he had in actual fact become more human than ever before in the history of Egypt. The fact that Ay, Horemheb, Rameses I, and even Sety I had all been commoners before they mounted the throne may have had something to do with the speed with which this change took place. The representative theocracy had become a direct theocracy: no longer was the king the god's divine representative upon earth who carried out his will; rather, the god revealed his will directly to every human being and intervened directly in the events of everyday life and in the course of history.

The new transcendent god had at the same time become a personal god whose will determined the fate of the country and of the individual. Texts express this by bridging the gap between the opposites of being far away and yet nearby: 'Far away he is as one who sees, near he is as one who hears.' Amun-Ra looked down upon his worshippers from afar, but at the same time he was near because he heard their prayers and revealed himself in their lives by the manifestation of his will, by his divine intervention.

This new form of religious experience, usually called 'personal piety', was wholly characteristic of the Ramessid Period, although its beginnings, suppressed by Akhenaten, went back to the mid-18th Dynasty. Penitential psalms, inscribed on votive stelae and ostraca by literate members of the ordinary population, were one form in which this piety was expressed. When an individual had committed a sin, divine intervention could mean divine retribution, particularly when this sin had gone undetected and unpunished by a human court of justice. These penitential hymns attributed illness (often blindness, although this word is probably used in a metaphorical sense) to the state of being guilty of a hidden sin, which once revealed in the text on a votive stele was no longer hidden, so that god would 'return' to his

worshipper and make him 'see' again. It was not only the individuals who could sin, but also the country as a whole. In a text of this type inscribed on a Theban tomb wall (TT 139) at the end of the Amarna Period, Amun is begged to return, and in Tutankhamun's Restoration Stele the gods are also said to have abandoned Egypt.

Another type of votive stela demonstrates that God was also thought to be able to intervene positively in the life of his worshipper—for example, by saving him from a crocodile or making him survive the sting of a scorpion or the bite of a snake. Many gods received specially made stelae or other objects as a thanksgiving for saving their worshippers; there is even a special god Shed, whose name means 'saviour', and who, probably not by chance, appears for the first time at Amarna, possibly in spite of official repression. Some people even went one step further and put their whole lives in the hands of their personal patron god or goddess, even to the extent of assigning all their possessions to his or her temple.

Even the king might appeal to his god in his hour of need. When all seemed lost and Rameses II was about to be captured or even killed by his Hittite enemies at the Battle of Qadesh, he called out to his god Amun, and the arrival of the king's support force at the critical moment was interpreted as proof of the god's personal intervention. This shows clearly that the king no longer represented god on earth, but was subordinate to him; just like all other human beings, he was subject to the will of god, even though in traditional mythological terms he was still viewed as the divine pharaoh and on his monuments this aspect would continue to be emphasized. Clearly the divide between theological dogma and everyday reality had widened considerably.

Once it had been recognized that god's will was the governing factor in everything that happened, it became mandatory to know his will in advance. Oracles, which had originally been consulted only by the king, perhaps as early as the Old Kingdom (and which had during the 18th Dynasty been used to seek the god's approval of a king's accession or a major trade or military expedition), began to be used in the Ramessid Period to consult the god on all sorts of affairs in the lives of ordinary human beings. Priests would carry the portable bark with the god's image in procession out of the temple and a piece of papyrus or an ostrakon bearing a written question would be laid before him; the god would then indicate his approval or disapproval by making the priests move slightly forwards or backwards or by some other motion of the bark. Appointments, disputes over property, accusations of

crimes, and later even questions seeking the god's reassurance that one would safely live on in the hereafter, were thus subjected to the god's will.

All of these developments further minimized the role of the king as god's representative on earth; the king was no longer a god, but god himself had become king. Once Amun had been recognized as the true king, the political power of the earthly rulers could be reduced to a minimum and transferred to Amun's priesthood. The mummies of their royal ancestors were no longer considered the erstwhile incarnations of god on earth, and so, with few scruples, their tombs could be robbed and their bodies unwrapped.