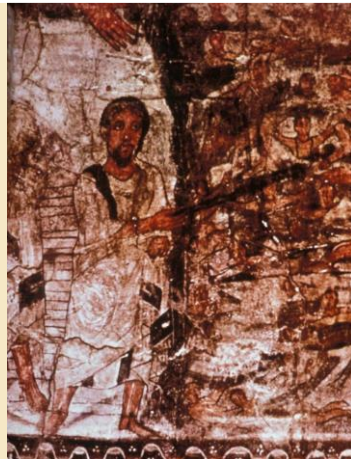


Section 7.1: The Sea-Peoples and Late Egypt

Toward the end of thirteenth century BCE, great changes were afoot in the eastern Mediterranean basin. By now, Egypt had lost all its foreign territories, not that they were ever really part of its empire, but you can be certain things are very different when an Egyptian can't even travel safely in the Syro-Palestinian area. As we'll see at the end of this lecture, there's a story preserved about exactly that. Whole populations were moving and shifting in violent and unpredictable ways. Traditional governments started to fall one by one, some to external, some to internal forces. There was a dark age dawning, which means, of course, few historical records. Of what we can see, the turmoil led to a dramatic decrease in population. It was a tough time to be living, and not many people were.

Fresco of
Moses
refilling the
Red Sea
(Dura-Europus,
ca. 244 BCE)



E7-01

One question about this age, a problem which has fascinated scholars for centuries, is that posed by the biblical story of the Exodus. Is it historical? Was there a large group of Hebrews in Egypt who escaped under the leadership of some prophet like Moses who led them back to their purported homeland in the Syro-Palestinian area? Are the Israelites one of the new nations which arose during the unrest at the outset of this dark age? Even if miracles like the parting of the Red Sea are exaggerations or myths, is there still some kernel of truth in this famous tale?

Map:
Possible
Paths of
the Exodus



E7-02

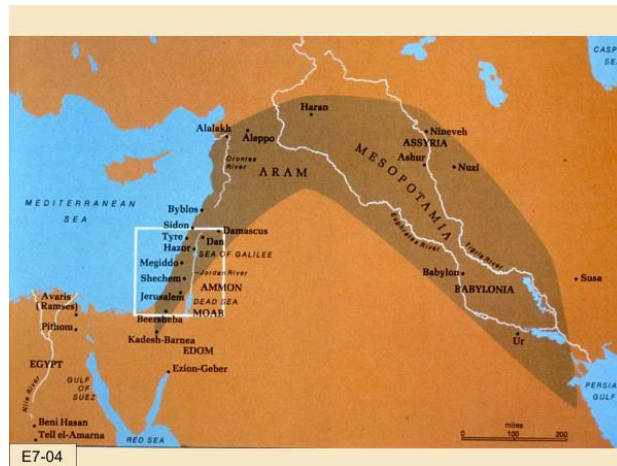
The Sinai (not the moon!)



E7-03

Many scholars believe the story recorded in the Book of Exodus has some historical merit. Most likely enslaved at Pi-Ramesses, Ramses' capital in the delta — whether this happened during Ramses' reign is another question — by one route or another the Hebrews would have had to cross the Sinai Peninsula to get to their destination, the so-called Holy Lands. Scholars have suggested a number of possible paths they might have followed through this barren wasteland, until finally arriving in Canaan.

E7-04 Map: Fertile Crescent, with Canaan in inset box



Other scholars express doubts about the entire historicity of the Exodus. Until recently many pointed to the fact that not only is there no evidence for masses of enslaved Hebrews in Egypt at any time in history, but the very name “Israel” does not even appear in any Egyptian records.

BAENRA-MERYNETJERU (T) MERENPTAH (hetep-her-maat)



Fragment of the alabaster sarcophagus of Merneptah, identified by his cartouches (top left). Height 30.5 cm. EA 49739.

Often said to be the king of the Hebrew Exodus, but on no scientific grounds. The king fought defensive campaigns against northern enemies, and a victory stela of his reign includes the sole mention of Israel in Egyptian texts.

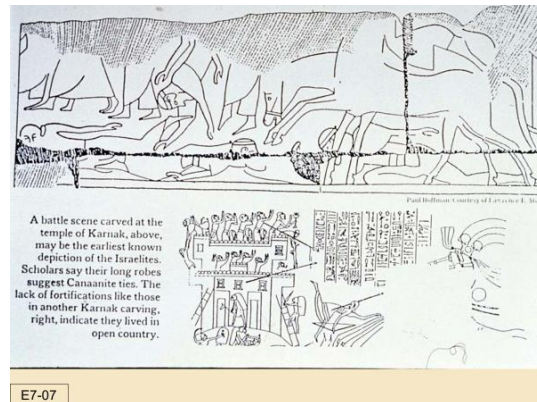
The “Israel Stele” of Merneptah

The so-called "Israel Stele" or "Victory stela of Merneptah", which is inscribed with a list of defeated peoples, including the first known mention of Israel (DUTSNIL ABOVE). The stela was erected by Merneptah in his funerary temple at Thebes. 19th Dynasty, 1213–1203 BC, grey granite, H. 3.18 m. © 2002 JSTOR.org

E7-06

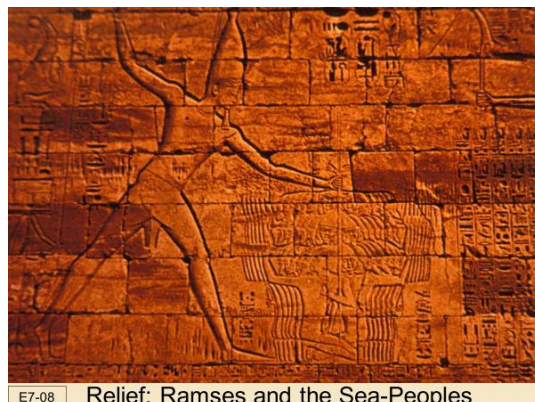
That is, until the discovery of a stele constructed by Merneptah, the son and successor of Ramses II, who boasts of conquering many peoples, one of whom lives in “Israel.” There’s no doubt that’s how the hieroglyphs read. Does this so-called “Israel(ite) Stele,” also known as “Merneptah’s Victory Stele,” prove the existence of a nation called Israel in the Syro-Palestinian

area? It sure sounds like it, but the evidence is not so simple. Egyptian hieroglyphs regularly include symbols called determinatives, icons that show the category or type a word belongs to. The determinative attached to “Israel” on Merneptah’s Victory Stele is one that indicates a tribe, not an organized nation with a government.



E7-07

Other evidence, as seen in the slide above [E7-07], confirms the status of Israelites as non-urban. This is notably different from other proper nouns mentioned on this stele, like Ashkelon and Gezer, both of which are cited as cities. The simplest conclusion is that Israel in this day consisted of nomadic tribes in the southern Syro-Palestinian area, not a community of cities with centralized governments the way the Bible later depicts it. Moreover, the stele definitely provides no proof of any mass migration of Hebrews from Egypt, but it also leaves no question that the word “Israel,” whatever that may have meant in the day, had come into being by the waning years of the New Kingdom.

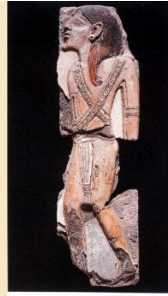


E7-08

Relief: Ramses and the Sea-Peoples

The best documented and most significant development during this age does not concern the Israelites directly (at least by name) but a migration known from Egyptian sources as the invasion of the “Sea-Peoples” (a modern term). From their own records, it’s clear that the Egyptians really did not understand who these Sea-Peoples were, or why they were attacking Egypt, or even where they came from. According to Egyptian accounts of the invasion, the Sea-Peoples’ first appearance occurred during the fifth year of Merneptah’s reign (r. 1213-1203 BCE). A second assault came in the fifth year after Ramses III assumed the throne (r. 1187-1157 BCE), and a third a few years later.

Egyptian Relief: A Captured Libyan



One of several polychrome faience tiles, here depicting a captive Libyan, one of the traditional enemies of Egypt, from a Ramesside palace at Tell el-Yahudiyah. He wears a sash and a penis sheath, both characteristic of his homeland. 20th Dynasty, c. 1170 BC, H. 30.5 cm. n.41100

E7-09

The historical sources for these attacks are blurry at best. They do not even agree on which direction the Sea-Peoples came from, the west (Libya) or the north (the Syro-Palestinian area). It could, of course, have been both. One thing is certain, however. The invading forces were not a conventional army. Egyptian reliefs make that clear. The Sea-Peoples included women and children riding in wagons, some with cattle in tow. It was as much a forcible in-migration as a military onslaught. Needless to say, the Egyptians did not see this as a group of friendly foreigners but as raiders bent on plunder who wanted to capture and settle parts of Egypt.

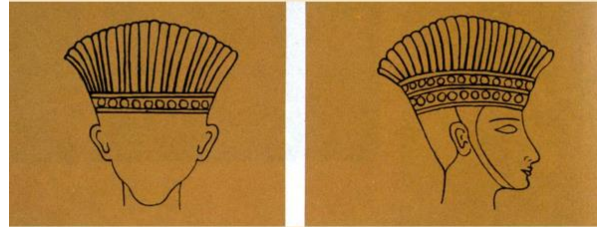


Fragment of the alabaster sarcophagus of Merneptah, identified by his cartouches (top left). Height 30.5 cm. EA 49739.

E7-10

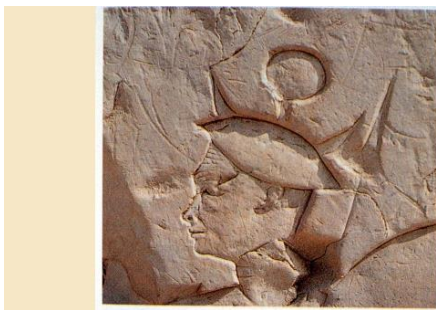
Again, Merneptah's Victory Stele (the one that mentions Israel) provides some critical contemporary evidence for this period, and not just facts about the invasions but interesting details shedding light on the ancient Egyptians' perceptions of the world at large, for instance, that they called the Mediterranean Sea the "great green."

The Distinctive Helmets of the certain groups within the Sea Peoples



E7-12

One thing that caught their eye were their enemies' distinctive helmets and headdresses which they carefully render on reliefs. These allow us to see the different sub-groups within the Sea-Peoples. Another fascinating fact that emerges from these records is that male captives were circumcised as a form of punishment.



Detail of the head of a Sherden soldier from the reliefs depicting the battle of Qadesh on the outer wall of the temple of Ramses II at Abydos.

(I. SHAW)

E7-13

Ramses III
smiting a
foreigner

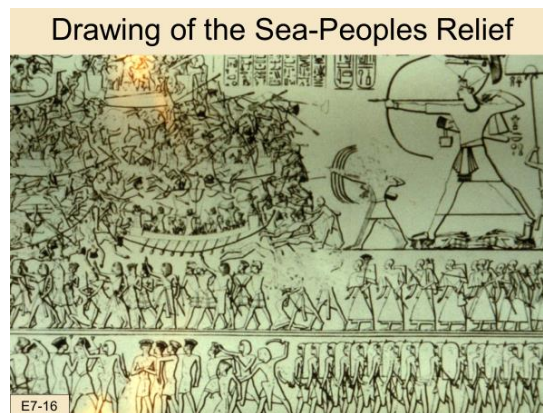


E7-14

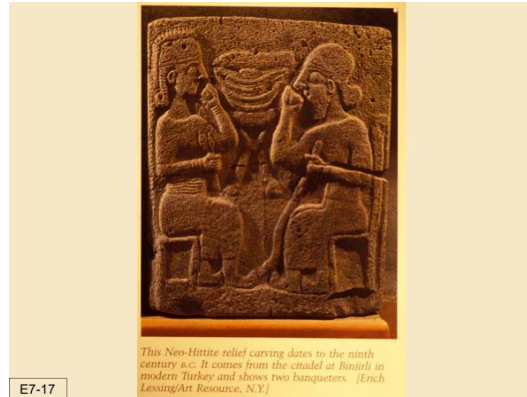
Records from the time of Merneptah also mention the names of some of the groups making up the Sea-Peoples: Sherden (Shardanna), Lukka, Ekwesh (Akawasha), Teresh (Tursha), and Shekelesh. A temple relief dating to the eighth year of Ramses III's reign adds other names: Peleset, Lukka, Tjeker, Denyen and Wesh(m)esh. As your textbook notes, only two of these can be securely identified.



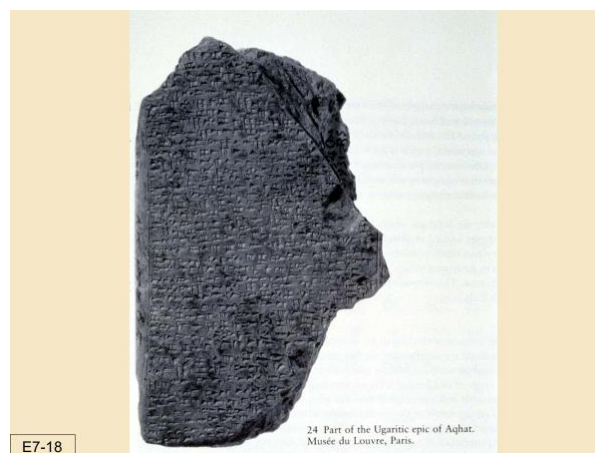
Peleset is clearly another name for Philistine, a word seen often in the Bible. Lukka refers to a people later known to the Greeks as Lycians. It's also highly likely that Shekelesh is synonymous with Sicilian, suggesting that contingent came from the island of Sicily south of Italy, and Ekwesh/Akawasha may be a reference to Greeks who are known in some records as Achaeans. Denyen might be another word for Danaan, also meaning "Greek," which invites the equation of Tursha/Teresh with "Trojan." Some scholars dismiss these cognates as linguistic guesswork, concluding that it's impossible to say anything with certainty about the Sea-Peoples' identities but some of these names really resemble later, well-attested counterparts. Moreover, several of these names are cited in earlier sources as allies of the Hittites or marauding pirates, which confirms their presence in the eastern Mediterranean region as much as a century before the invasions. What's unclear is why they suddenly started a war after having inhabited the area for so long. What pushed them over the edge?



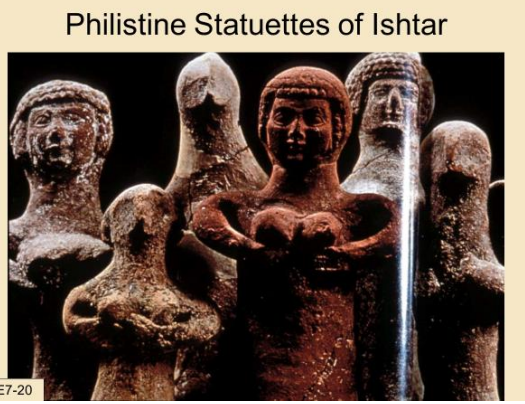
Clearly, the Sea-Peoples were an odd amalgamation of different nations driven from their homelands by some calamity and sent careening through the world looking for a new place to live. What was the force that impelled them on this journey? Was it new invaders from the north like Indo-Europeans pushing them out of their homelands? Was it climate change making their traditional settlements uninhabitable? Was it the slow collapse of traditional governments in the eastern Mediterranean basin, producing a power vacuum that attracted foreigners in? Or was it merely the simplest of reasons, overpopulation leading to famine leading to displacement? Arguments could be made for all of these as driving factors, and there's no need to pick on just one.



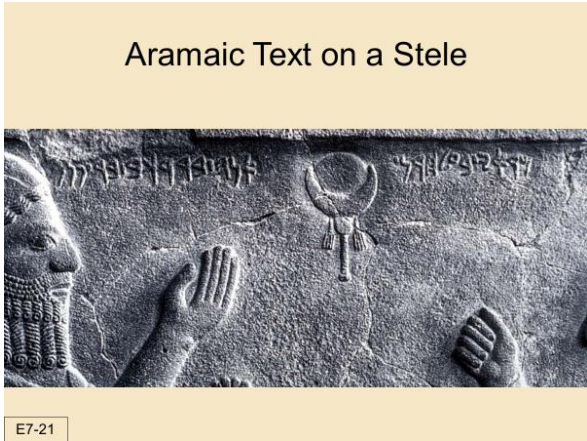
Whatever the cause, the consequence is clear. Empires and governments fell like dominoes all around the region. The Hittites went down, either in a sudden fiery cataclysm, or it could have taken a generation. Scholars disagree. In either case, Hattusas was burned to the ground and temporarily abandoned. The Myceneans in Greece and the Minoans in Crete disappeared. Historians also debate how violent their end was. And the civilization on Alashiya (Cyprus) suddenly went missing too.



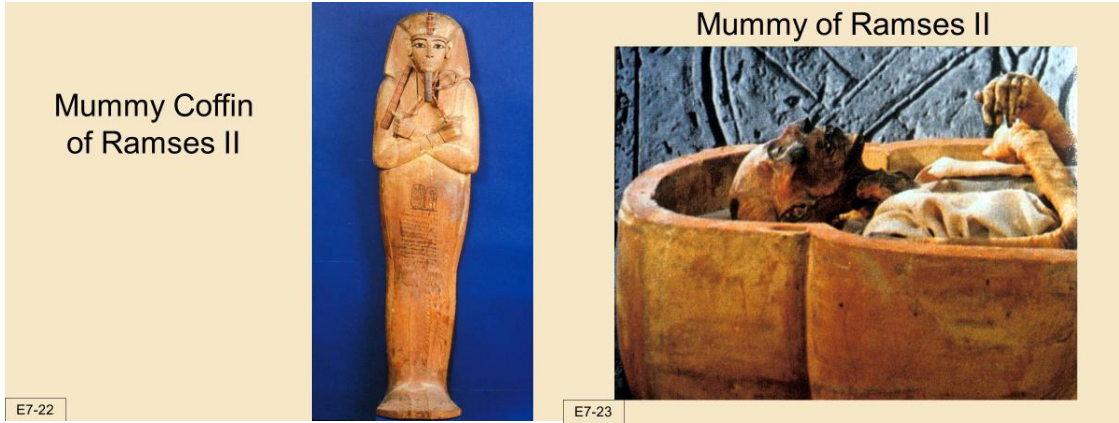
Ugarit on the eastern Mediterranean seaboard fell to some sort of siege, leaving behind a curious record of pathetic pleas for help at the last second. One cuneiform tablet begging for aid was found still in the kiln where it was being fired before being sent out. Even out east, the Babylonians and Assyrians would retreat inside their homeland and emerge only sporadically over the next few centuries. Egypt too withdrew within its borders never to assert itself on the world stage again as it had during the New Kingdom.



The new inhabitants of the region rose from the lower classes, the nomads and shepherders who brought with them little of the learning and literacy that had characterized the preceding age. Some traditions entrusted to them were carried on, like the worship of the deities Ishtar and the storm-god El but not the languages of the old world.



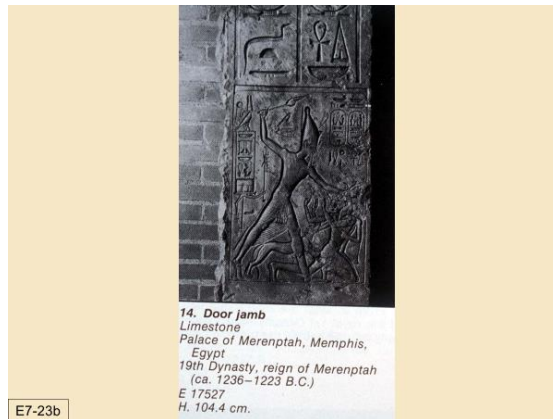
Instead, Aramaic, a Semitic variant and the common tongue used by this proletariat, began to pervade the region. Along with that came the alphabet which was much less cumbersome to write than cuneiform and far easier to learn than hieroglyphics. Having already frozen as a classical language by the early second millennium, Sumerian was now familiar only to academics. Akkadian hung on for a while but was starting to be used less and less. Aramaic indeed won the day and remained the principal tongue through Jesus' time — it's almost certainly the language he used when he delivered the Sermon on the Mount, not the Greek in which the speech is recorded in the New Testament — Aramaic would be supplanted only much later by Arabic during the period of the Moslem conquests in the seventh century CE.



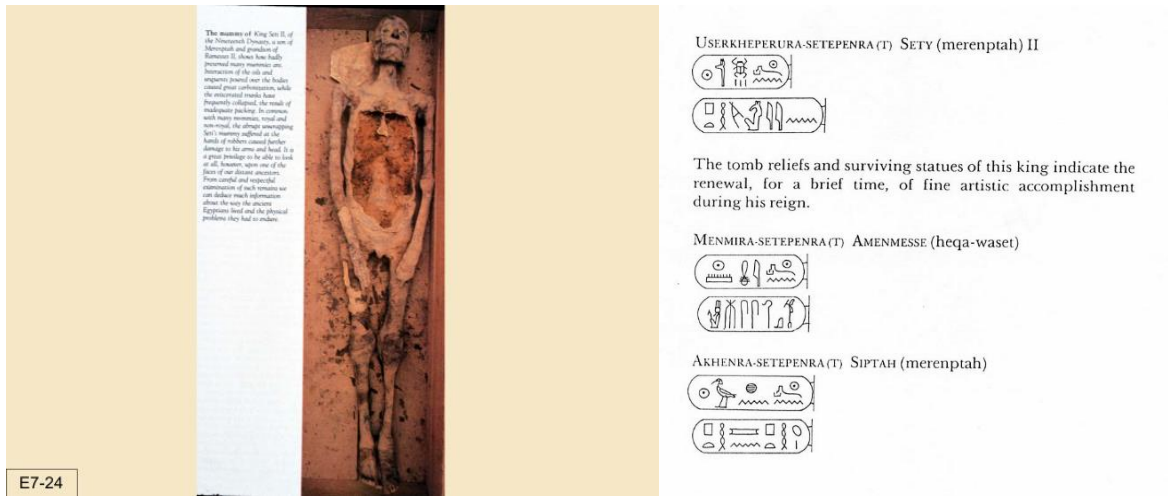
And Egypt, what happened to Egypt? From the glory days of Amenhotep III and the campaigns of Seti I and his son Ramses, it lost ground in a slow but inexorable crash. Manetho marks the end of the Nineteenth Dynasty soon after the death of Ramses II who outlived most of his one hundred children (so they numbered according to him). Indeed, their tomb in the Valley of the Kings could have held as many as seventy bodies and it's still not yet completely excavated.



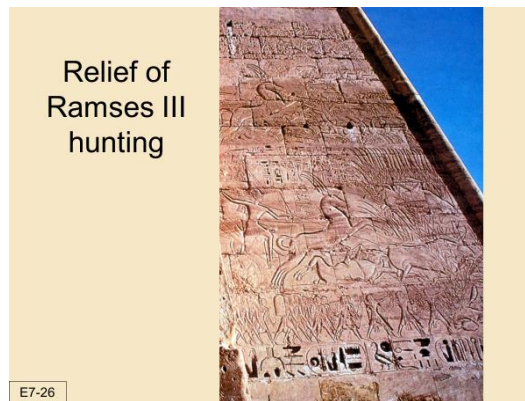
Ramses' mummy preserves his aged, shriveled face. He was finally done in by a tooth infection, say some scholar, but at his age, does it matter?



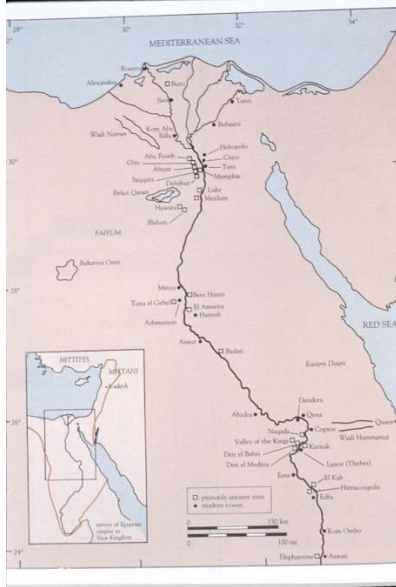
One son, Merneptah, eventually survived and succeeded Ramses II, after, no doubt, a serious struggle for the throne. The ferocious fight amongst Ramses' many wives over whose son was to reign must have made for great viewing.



In quick order, Merneptah and several of his children assumed and left the throne. Records even recall one of them being a woman, Tawosret, who ruled for only about two years. This chaos precipitated a change of dynasty, Egypt's twentieth, bringing a new family into power. For once, Manetho's reason for drawing a distinction between dynasties is easy to see.



This new age brought on a long series of kings named Ramses, the greatest of whom was the first, Ramses III (r.1187-1157 BCE). It was during his reign that the Sea-Peoples attacked Egypt for a second and third time, though some scholars have suggested that he was merely imitating the achievements of his predecessor Merneptah. The coincidence that two of the attacks occurred in the fifth regnal year of their respective kings looks suspicious. Other reliefs show Ramses III defeating Hittites, Syrians and Nubians, none of which he actually did. Other scholars, however, note the many differences in the two kings' accounts, and especially that they give the Sea-Peoples different names, and all perfectly credible ones. In the end, most historians have chosen to stand by Ramses III's claims in this regard.

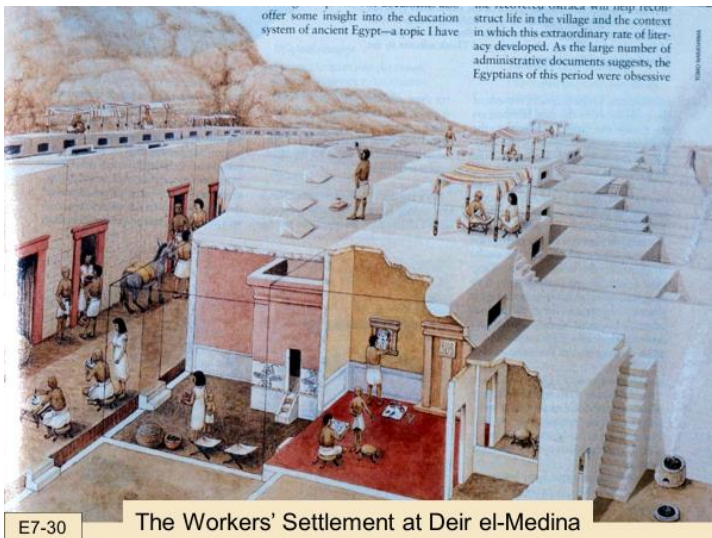


Deir el-Medina: Workers' Village



E7-27

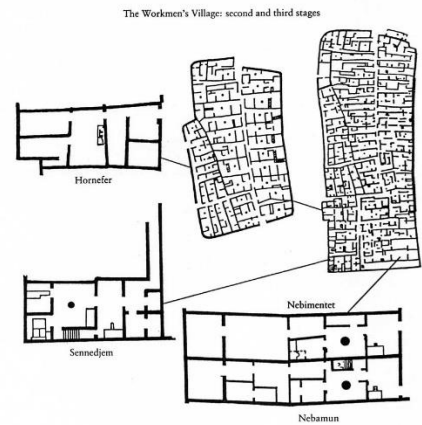
Another notable event took place during Ramses III's reign, a workers' strike at the site of Deir el-Medina on the western side of the Nile near Thebes.



E7-30

The Workers' Settlement at Deir el-Medina

offer some insight into the education system of ancient Egypt—a topic I have construct life in the village and the context in which this extraordinary rate of literacy developed. As the large number of administrative documents suggests, the Egyptians of this period were obsessive

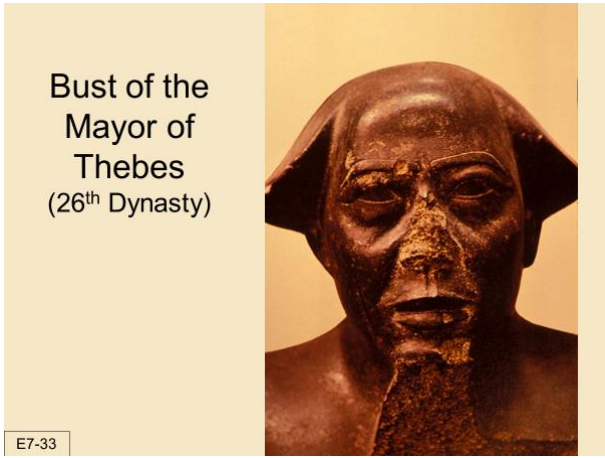


Schematic plan of the village at Deir el-Medina and several houses.

It was a settlement of families who dug the tombs of the pharaohs in the Valley of the Kings, basically a “company town.” Workers lived there year-round excavating burial chambers and raising families of their own.



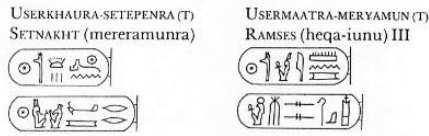
Documents from this site show that there were repeated confrontations between the labor force and the managers overseeing the construction of the tombs. During one crisis after food supplies had not been delivered for two months, the workers walked off the job. Investigations revealed that the officials in charge were embezzling funds. This led to a protest march from the tombs to the mortuary temple of Tuthmosis III. When managers tried to reason with the enraged mob, the strikers broke into the Ramesseum with the intention of stealing the grain stored there to feed the dead pharaoh, in reality the priests. Finally, food arrived and the protesters dispersed. However, when the same thing happened the next month, there was another strike. The king’s Vizier himself had to come and speak to the crowd. The text of his speech is preserved, and it’s just as evasive as you’d expect of a politician.



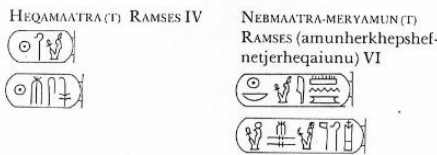
Ultimately, the Mayor of Thebes was forced to resolve matters, if only temporarily, by giving the workers food from the temple of Amun, which led to a counter-protest from the priests. And

there the record ends, but it shows us much about the scope of Egyptian bureaucracy at this time and the growing power of the priesthood. Governmental forces appear to be knuckling under to the power of their religious counterpart, an ominous sign of things to come.

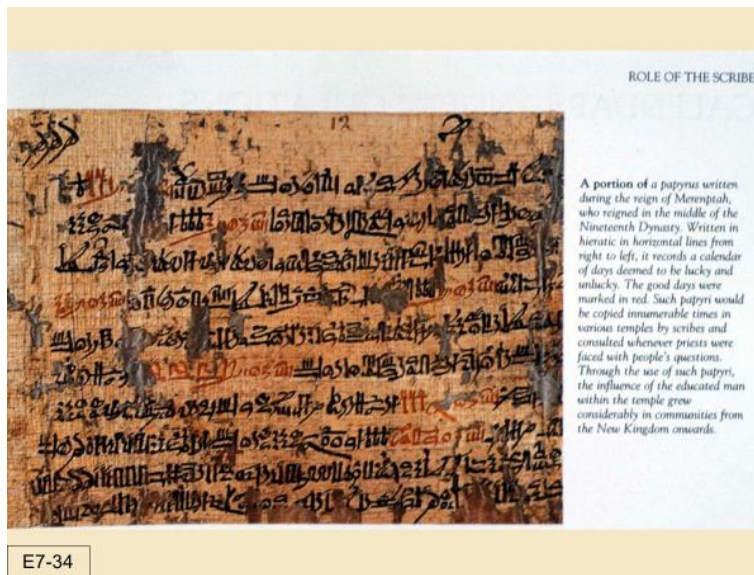
Twentieth Dynasty, c.1200–1085 BC



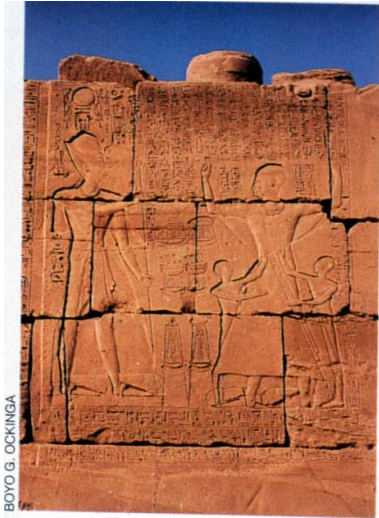
The last great temple builder of the New Kingdom, with a wayshrine for Amun at Karnak and a largely intact royal cult temple at Medinet Habu on the Theban West Bank. The walls of the latter record his battles against northern foes, the so-called Sea Peoples.



Ramses III's reign seems to have ended in a harem conspiracy. He may even have been undone by one of his wives eager to see her son succeed. There was a trial in which the accused were punished with an order to commit suicide or in some cases change their names to “blind slave” or “Ra hates him.” That shows the power of mysticism and word magic in the day. Another controversy followed soon after, in which the judges themselves were charged with conspiracy. One was killed, three mutilated. All in all, it was a complete disaster, unmasking the extreme disarray of the royal court. How the succession proceeded after Ramses III's death is unclear. We know of eleven kings named Ramses, though Manetho cites twelve and even he didn't know their full names. As one historian says, “It doesn't help that they were all called the same name.”



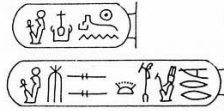
One trend is clear, however, the burgeoning role of priests and mystics. By the end of the New Kingdom the largest landholder in Egypt was not the king, but the Amun priesthood as a collective. It received a greater share of Egypt's economy than any other entity: 86% of the silver mined and 62% of the grain produced.



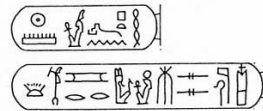
BOYO G. LOCKINGA

⊕ On the outer face of the east wall connecting the seventh and eighth pylons at Karnak, the high priest of Amun presents himself before a statue of Ramses IX. That his figure is on the same scale as that of the king is indicative of the growing influence of the high priests of Amun in the face of the weakness of the later Ramesside rulers.

NEFERKARA-SETEPENRA (T)
RAMSES (khaemwaset-mereramun) IX



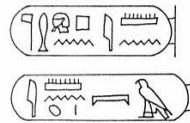
MENMAATRA-SETEPENPTAH (T)
RAMSES (khaemwaset-mereramun-netjerheqaiunu) XI



This king began, but never completed, the last royal tomb to be built in the Valley of the Kings. In year 19 of his reign rebellion by the Viceroy of Kush, Panehesy, brought about a formal rearrangement of the state, the 'repeating of births' or 'Renaissance'. Under the Renaissance Ramses XI continued to reign from Pirameses, but power was held by one Nesbanebdjed (Smedes) in the north and the general Herihor at Thebes. Herihor became High Priest of Amun and claimed royal status.

Theban ruler (with cartouches) at the end of the Twentieth Dynasty:

HEMNETJERTEPYENAMUN (T, meaning 'High Priest of Amun')
HERIHOR (siamun)



By the end of the Twentieth Dynasty, the Amun priesthood was powerful enough to assert an authority independent of the king. It broke away and set up its own "kingship." The pharaoh pushed back and sent troops to occupy Thebes, a siege lasting nine months that ended with the priests evicting the king's forces and creating a separate Theban state. True, the priests of Amun still paid lip service to the king's authority, but in all things that mattered they did as they liked. Egypt splintered into disparate regimes once again, and a new intermediate period was born.

Twenty-First Dynasty, c.1085-945 BC

Kings ruling from Tanis, a new city north of Pirameses. They allowed the Theban rulers to retain control over Upper Egyptian affairs, apparently on amicable terms. Only two Theban rulers, general Pinudjem and High Priest Menkheperra, claimed kingship as Herihor had; all the other Theban rulers held the title High Priest of Amun. They were buried with certain of the royal mummies from the Valley of the Kings in a cache at Deir el-Bahri. The northern kings were buried in the precincts of the Amun temple at Tanis. In 1939 part of the royal necropolis at Tanis was discovered, including the burials of king Pasebakhaenniut (Psusennes) I and king Amenemopet. Their bodies and treasure now rest in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo.

HEDJKHEPERRA-SETEPENRA (T) NESBANEEDJED (meryamun) (SMENDES)

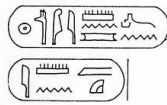


AAKHEPERRA-SETEPENAMUN (T) PASEBAKHAENNIUT (meryamun) (PSUSENNES) I

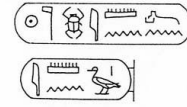


This king seems to have been responsible for moving a city of colossal statuary and granite blocks from Pirameses to Tanis, where most still lie toppled. In his intact burial was found the sarcophagus of Merenptah, which can only have reached Tanis from Thebes with local cooperation. One of his daughters, Istemkheb, married the Theban High Priest Menkheperra.

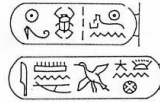
USERMAATRA-MERYAMUN-SETEPENAMUN (T) AMENEMOPET



NETJERKHEPERRA-SETEPENAMUN (T) SIAMON

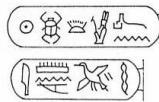


TITKHEPERURA-SETEPENRA (T) PASEBAKHAENNIUT (meryamun) (PSUSENNES) II

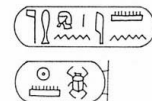


Theban rulers claiming royal status (with cartouches):

KHAKHEPERRA-SETEPENAMUN (T) PINUDJEM (meryamun) (I)



HEMNETJERTEPYENAMUN (T, meaning 'High Priest of Amun') MENKHEPERRA



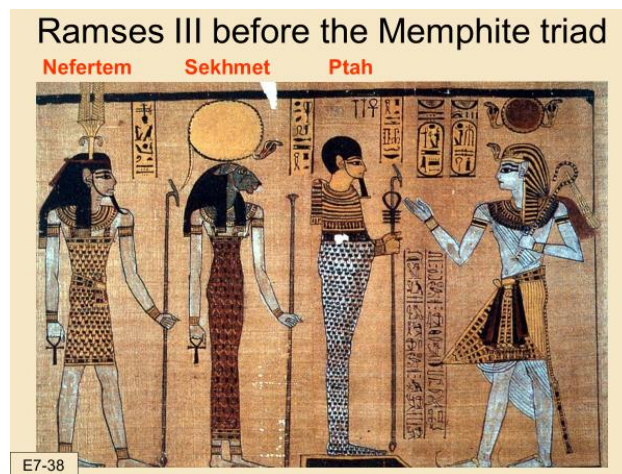
During the Third Intermediate Period, Egypt found itself floundering in confusion and disorder once more. Divided into separate kingdoms in the delta and in both Upper and Lower Egypt, many regions were subject to brigands and mercenaries, often soldiers who were out of work. Travel was hazardous and the economy tanked.



♣ A gold pectoral (breast pendant) from the tomb of the twenty-first-dynasty king Amenemope depicts him offering incense to the funerary god, Osiris. Like those of the other kings of the dynasty, Amenemope's tomb was built, for security reasons, inside the wall of the Amun temple complex at Tanis.

ANCIENT ART & ARCHITECTURE COLLECTION

Out of desperation, Egyptians began regularly looting the tombs of their ancestors. Papyri from the period tell us that robbers, even when caught, could easily bribe their way out of a conviction. Some officials who were paid to guard these holy burial sites actually abetted in their depredation. One text recovered from this age even explains how to rob a tomb: how to dig through which wall, then burn the mummy to get to the precious jewels in its wrappings and to provide light to work by, how to keep hydrated, how to carry out the gold — gold is heavy! — when's the best time of night for robbing graves, and who to trust to help sell the goods on the black market. The Amun priesthood did its best to save what they could. This is the moment when the mummies of various pharaohs were cached in the tomb of Amenhotep II and tagged for future reference, a saving grace, if not for the kings, for archaeology and history. There was clearly a growing disrespect for Egypt's glorious days of yore. Focus on the past gave way to desperation about the present and the future.

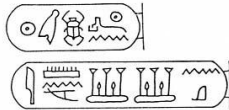


A story set at this time is more revealing than any of the historical documents uncovered. This tale narrates the fortunes — misfortunes really — of a trader named Wen-Amun whom the high priest of Amun has sent north to obtain timber to build a boat for the statue of the god. Humiliated more than once by foreigners who steal from him and then demand payment for the wood, Wen-Amun must appeal to a king in the delta for help and support. In the end, barely able to complete the deal, he tries to return home but a storm pushes him off course. He lands on the shores of Cyprus and is almost killed by an angry mob. Fortunately, a local queen rescues him and tells him “Be at rest.” There the story ends. Whether that's where the original tale concluded or just where our papyrus breaks off is unclear. But notable here is the rough treatment and gross disrespect an Egyptian of this day receives from strangers abroad, almost certainly a picture of its time. Also worth noting is the complete absence of any mention of the reigning pharaoh Ramses XI, a sure sign that the status of the king has declined precipitously.

Twenty-Second Dynasty, c.945-715 BC

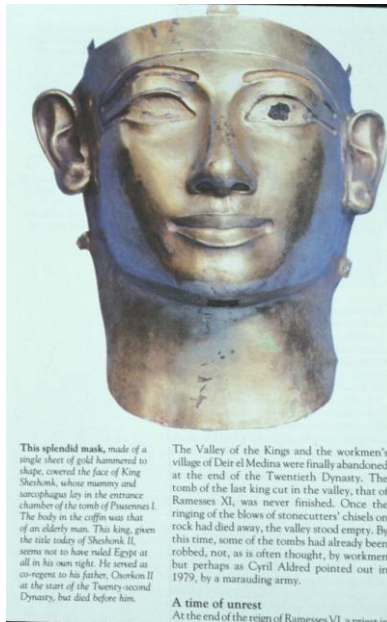
Kings ruling from Tanis, coming from a northwestern tribe, the Meshwesh. Initially they restored royal authority over all Egypt, and even launched military campaigns into Palestine. Thebes retained a certain autonomy, with princes of the royal house appointed as High Priests of Amun. From the reign of Sheshonq III the Tanite kings lost their authority and had to rule alongside a growing number of rival kings throughout Egypt, the Twenty-Third Dynasty. Kings of the Twenty-Second Dynasty were buried in the Twenty-First Dynasty royal necropolis at Tanis, where the burials of Osorkon II, Sheshonq II and Sheshonq III were discovered in 1939. The popularity of the cat, sacred at Bubastis, may be traced to this period.

HEDJKHEPERRA-SETEPENRA (T) SHESHONQ (meryamun) I



Born into a Meshwesh family at Bubastis, Sheshonq I was a general under Pasebakhenniut (Psusennes) II before he became king. He imposed his rule over Thebes by appointing his son, Iuput, as High Priest of Amun. Abroad, he led Egyptian troops into Palestine for the first time since the New Kingdom, and returned with 'tribute' from various cities, including Jerusalem. At Karnak he cut out a great gateway with a relief recording his Asiatic campaign.

Egypt's slide into chaos and confusion was temporarily reversed by the rulers of the Twenty-Second Dynasty (ca. 950-730 BCE). Kings who had Libyan names seized control of Upper Egypt from the Amun priesthood, and ruling from Tanis, a city in the delta, restored at least some degree of central government.



This splendid mask, made of a single sheet of gold hammered to shape, covered the face of King Sheshonq, whose mummy and sarcophagus lay in the entrance chamber of the tomb of Psusennes I. The body in the coffin was that of an elderly man. This king, given the title today of Sheshonq II, seems not to have ruled Egypt at all in his own right. He served as co-regent to his father, Osorkon II at the start of the Twenty-second Dynasty, but died before him.

The Valley of the Kings and the workmen's village of Deir el Medina were finally abandoned at the end of the Twentieth Dynasty. The tomb of the last king cut in the valley, that of Ramesses XI, was never finished. Once the ringing of the blows of stonemasons' chisels on rock had died away, the valley stood empty. By this time, some of the tombs had already been robbed, not, as is often thought, by workmen but perhaps as Cyril Aldred pointed out in 1979, by a marauding army.

A time of unrest
At the end of the reign of Ramesses VI a riotous in-

Under Sheshonq I (r. 943-923 BCE), there were even some military campaigns abroad, but the glory was short-lived. A rival dynasty, the twenty-third, arose and the land was again split into factions, leaving it open to foreign conquest. Eventually the Assyrians moved in, and henceforth

