

## Thebes “Ancient Luxor “

At the early date, the Fourth Egyptian Nome—the Theban Nome—boasted three principal villages. Armant, called Hermonthis by the Greeks, stood on the West Bank of the Nile, near the nome’s southern border. It was the nome capital until about the Fourth Dynasty. On the East Bank two other villages were of importance: Tod, which lay in the south, and Medamud, in the north. Until the Middle Kingdom, the city of Thebes was little more than an inconsequential cluster of rude huts. The Theban Necropolis was in use, however: nomarchs were buried here from the Old Kingdom onward, probably because of the quality and accessibility of its limestone bedrock. We know of five nomarchs’ tombs in the West Bank area of al-Khokha, and several others farther north in al-Tarif. (None is open to the public.)

In Dynasty 9, leaders of Heracleopolis, a nome about 200 kilometers (120 miles) south of Memphis, declared themselves rulers of all Egypt and seized control of Memphis and the royal court. The major threat to the Heracleopolitans was the leadership of the Theban nome, who backed up their competing claim to authority with military forays against Heracleopolitan holdings. For fifty years, Theban rulers including Intef I, Intef II, Intef III, and the succeeding series of rulers named Mentuhetep devoted themselves to building Thebes and expanding its control over Egypt. Nebhepetra Mentuhetep I, for example, worked in Dynasty 11 to create a strong, Egypt-wide bureaucracy with its capital at Thebes. At first he called himself the Divine One of the White Crown, implying that he controlled Upper Egypt, and then Uniter of the Two Lands, meaning that he ruled all of Egypt. At Dayr al-Bahari, he built a mortuary temple and tomb of new design that served as the inspiration for Queen Hatshepsut’s memorial temple five hundred years later. Scenes in his temple provide early evidence that the Thebans were elevating to prominence a little-known local god, Amen, who would soon surpass the nome’s principal deity, Montu, in wealth and power.

### Luxor Islamic Era:

Luxor was a small Village under el-Koss District “ the Capital of upper Egypt after starting the Islamic Era, then it was controlled by Essna City then a city under Quena Governorate.

Human beings have lived at Thebes for at least half a million years. The first discovery of Paleolithic tools in Africa was made in the 1850s on the hillsides above the Valley of the Kings, and today hikers still find chert hand axes, scrapers, and drills lying about on the surface. Paleolithic weather was wetter than that of today, and wild grasses growing in now-arid valleys attracted rabbits, gazelle, ostriches, and other game, plentiful food for the bands of hunters and gatherers that lived here. The Paleolithic population in Upper Egypt was small and culturally conservative. Even after the coming of agriculture around 5000 BC, the hunting of small game and the gathering of wild plants continued to play a major role in Upper Egyptian culture.

Neolithic agricultural settlements lay scattered along the Nile, especially between Hierakonpolis in the south and Abydos in the north. For example, a few kilometers downstream from Thebes lay the large Neolithic village of Naqada, site of a sophisticated pre-literate culture. Examples of its beautiful pottery and stone crafts can be seen in the Luxor Museum of Ancient Art. Evidence of the Neolithic at Thebes itself is skimpy, probably because Nile silts now cover ancient sites. Equally rare are traces of the Early Dynastic (Dynasties 1-2) habitations.

The Egyptian Old Kingdom saw the development of pyramids at Giza, mastaba tombs at Saqqara, an increasingly sophisticated and codified system of writing and literature, and brilliant art, elaborate expression of religious beliefs, the growth of science, complex political and economic structures, and an expanding population. Together, these factors combined to make the Old Kingdom one of the most impressive periods in human history. But these developments mostly took place in a limited geographic area extending only about fifty kilometers (thirty miles) south of modern Cairo. Farther south only a few sites, like Elephantine and Abydos, shared these defining attributes of civilization. Thebes was apparently not one of them.

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Toward the end of the Old Kingdom, the strong central authority of Egypt's capital city, Memphis, began to crumble due in part to the inertia and stagnation that had slowly come to characterize the long reign of Pepy II. As the court's authority declined, local nomarchs quickly moved to assume its powers, and by Dynasty 5, Egypt's central bureaucracy had been replaced by local dynasties that paid little attention to events beyond their borders. Their lack of a broad power base, coupled with a series of disastrously low Nile floods, resulted in the eventual collapse of these nomarchies, and Dynasties 7 and 8 were little more than a rapid succession of short-lived and competing rulers. Officials' tombs were no longer built near the king's pyramid complex in the Memphite nome. Instead, nomarchs chose to be buried at home, and provincial styles in art and architecture offer graphic evidence of the central government's

demise.

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One of Mentuhetep's successors was responsible for an unfinished temple-tomb complex in a small cirque half way between Dayr al-Bahari and Dayr al-Madina. Court officials of the time, most notably Meketre, built tombs nearby. Meketre's tomb contained a number of elegant wooden models of daily life that are among the treasures of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Mentuhetep III was an apparently illegitimate ruler quickly succeeded by his vizier, Amenemhet, the son of a priest from Elephantine. He claimed the throne as Amenemhet I, first king of Dynasty 12, and immediately moved his court from Thebes to a site thirty kilometers (eighteen miles) south of Memphis called Itj-tawy, the modern al-Lisht. Thebes continued to be a principal religious center—the Temple of Amen at Karnak had been enlarged by each of the Dynasty 11 kings—but Itj-tawy remained Egypt's administrative capital for the remainder of Dynasty 12.

Amenemhet I's successors continued to enhance Egypt's economic well-being and contributed to the growing prominence of the priesthood of Amen. His son, Senusret I, paid tribute to Amen by building at Karnak, and his White Chapel, now in Karnak's Open-Air Museum, is one of ancient Egypt's most beautiful buildings. Amenemhet II expanded foreign trade and military activities in both Nubia and in western Asia, and his successor, Senusret II, created extensive agriculture lands in the Fayyum. Senusret III cut a channel through the Nile's First Cataract to speed economic and military expeditions south into Nubia, and

Amenemhet III expanded trade even further. Much of this new wealth went to Thebes and its temples.

Amenemhet I called himself a “Repeater of Births,” that is, the founder of a renaissance, and it is certainly true that he and his successors brought about a remarkable revival of Egyptian culture and society. Agricultural expansion put thousands of hectares of new lands under cultivation. This produce, as well as significant increases in foreign trade and tribute, brought immense wealth to Egypt. The results were dramatic: literature thrived in Dynasty 12 and there were great advances in the sciences. Arts and crafts, especially sculpture and architecture, achieved new aesthetic heights. Dynasty 12 lasted two hundred years and was one of the richest and most creative periods in Egyptian history. But it ended with the death of Amenemhet IV, who lacked a male heir and who was therefore succeeded by his sister, Sobekneferu, perhaps the first woman in ancient Egypt to be crowned ruler. She ruled for just three years before western Asiatic tribes collectively known as the Hyksos, “Rulers of Foreign Lands,” seized control of Lower Egypt. Their occupation marked the beginning of what Egyptologists call the Second Intermediate Period.

The Hyksos had been moving gradually into Egypt for over a century, not at first as conquerors, but as servants and settlers. As their numbers grew, they took control of large tracts of agricultural land and sought to establish their own government in the Delta. As they pushed farther south, the Theban nome under Seqenenra Tao II declared war against them. He was killed in the ensuing battle and succeeded as king by his son, Kames. At first, Kames controlled only Upper Egypt from Elephantine to Cusae, a town near modern Asyut. But he quickly pushed northward into the Delta, and successfully attacked Avaris (Tall al-Daba’a), the Hyksos capital near the site of the modern Suez Canal. The Hyksos brought many new innovations with them into Egypt, including new techniques of pottery making, bronze working, and weaving. In warfare, they introduced the composite bow, more efficient swords and daggers, and most importantly, the horse and war chariot. These presented a formidable challenge to the Egyptian army, but the Egyptians persevered and slowly gained ground. Kames continued to pound at their armies, and after his death, his brother and successor, Ahmes, pushed to final victory. His military success against the Hyksos was coupled with the rapid reconquest of Nubia and its gold mines, and the invasion of Sinai, southern Palestine, and Crete. Ahmes was lauded as the founder of Dynasty 18, and because of his reputation as a military leader, he was deified and worshipped at Thebes well into the Rameside period.

After Ahmes’s death, his son, Amenhetep I, rapidly consolidated his father’s political and military gains. The skillful administration established by the new king led later generations to declare him patron deity of the Theban Necropolis. Amenhetep I’s tomb is thought to be the first royal tomb to be built apart from

its memorial temple. Thutmes I married Amenhetep I's younger sister and succeeded him as king. The new king's military campaigns in western Asia and Nubia were so successful that Egypt extended its control into foreign lands over 1,600 kilometers (1,000 miles) up the Nile and 1,500 kilometers (900 miles) east to the banks of the Euphrates River. The royal architect, Ineni, continued in office and supervised the king's substantial building activity at Karnak and the construction of his tomb, perhaps the first tomb to be cut in the Valley of the Kings. New theological texts appeared during the king's reign, including the *Imydwat* and the *Litany of Ra*, and the god Osiris assumed an increasingly prominent role in Egyptian theology.

The older sons of Thutmes I predeceased their father and the throne fell to his third son, Thutmes II. One of the new king's first acts was to make his half-sister, Hatshepsut, his chief royal wife. It was a decision that would have far-reaching consequences. Thutmes III, the son of a minor wife of Thutmes II, was only six or seven years old when his father died. Because of his youth, Hatshepsut was appointed regent. Within two years, however, she had herself crowned king of Upper and Lower Egypt in an elaborate ceremony described in her memorial temple at Dayr al-Bahari. Texts there proclaimed that she had been born of the gods, and ignoring the reign of Thutmes II, claimed that she was the direct and legitimate heir of her father, Thutmes I. Thutmes III continued to be referred to as if he and Hatshepsut ruled jointly, but for all intents and purposes, Hatshepsut had pushed him into the background and taken control of the country. Apparently one of her principal advisors was her architect, Senenmut, who had served as the tutor of her daughter, and who called himself "the greatest of the great in all the land." Before his death in the seventeenth year of her reign, he had overseen the building of her memorial temple at Dayr al-Bahari, arguably one of ancient Egypt's most beautiful monuments, and made extensive additions to the Temple of Amen at Karnak.

When Hatshepsut died after twenty years on the throne, Thutmes III finally became sole ruler of Egypt. One Egyptologist called him "a Napoleonic little man"—he stood only 157 cm (five feet two inches) tall—and militarily his reign was one of Egypt's most energetic. Over sixteen campaigns in western Asia alone restored lands lost during the more pacific years of Hatshepsut, and in Nubia he solidified Egyptian control as far south as the Fourth Cataract. Memphis was the administrative and military capital of the country during his reign, but Thebes continued to receive special attention as its religious center. The king ordered major construction at Thebes, and his additions to the Temple of Amen at Karnak are among the most extensive ever built there. His tomb, KV 34, is elaborately and beautifully decorated. The tombs of his officials (that of Rekhmire is a good example) are among the finest in the Theban Necropolis, filled with scenes that proudly display tribute from Egypt's growing empire.

Amenhetep II and Thutmes IV continued this military tradition and both led expeditions into Nubia and Syria. They were great supporters of art and architecture, built extensively at Karnak, and dug impressive tombs in the Valley of the Kings.

Amenhetep III, son of Thutmes IV, came to the throne while still a child and arguably contributed more to the growth of Thebes than any other king in Dynasty 18. Although he led many expeditions abroad, Amenhetep III is best known for his work at home. There was a deliberate emphasis on the past, and archaizing styles resulted in many changes in the plans and decoration of tombs and temples. He ordered substantial additions to the temple of Amen in Karnak, including the Third and Tenth Pylons, and to the Temple of Mut. He built a great palace, Malqata, on the Theban West Bank and beside it dug a huge harbor nearly 2 kilometers (1.2 miles) long and 1 kilometer (0.6 miles) wide, used for religious celebrations. He dug a superbly cut and decorated tomb in the West Valley of the Kings (soon to be opened to tourists). But his most impressive

monument must surely be his memorial temple, Kawm al-Haitan, on the West Bank, the largest memorial temple ever built. The Colossi of Memnon that stand at its entrance are among the largest monolithic statues ever carved. Amenhetep III and his queen, Tiy, were deeply involved in theological and political discussions which gave increasing emphasis to the solar cult and the divine nature of kingship, and they laid the foundation for the traumatic religious changes wrought by their son, Amenhetep IV.

Amenhetep IV, who changed his name to Akhenaten in the fifth year of his reign and moved his capital from Thebes to the new city of Akhetaten (Tall al-Amarna), introduced profound changes in Egypt's art, architecture, written language, and especially, religion. Temples to traditional gods were closed; the writing of the word 'god' in the plural was forbidden; aspects of the solar cult were combined and worshiped as the Aten, the solar disk. The king and his family were also given unusual divine status. Thebes suffered because of the temple closures and the move to Akhetaten, and few monuments were built at Thebes after. An exception is an enormous temple to the Aten he built east of the Temple of Amen at Karnak, blocks from which can be seen today in the Luxor Museum of Ancient Art. Equally important for art historians is the beautifully decorated tomb of the vizier, Ramose, begun under Amenhetep III and continued under Amenhetep IV/Akhenaten.

Akhenaten may have been succeeded by a certain Smenkhkara, but we do not know with certainty who this person was or for how long he (or she) might have ruled. The next successor was Tutankhamen, perhaps the adolescent son of Amenhetep IV/Akhenaten, whose tomb in the Valley of the Kings housed the most spectacular collection of objects ever found in Egypt. Its discovery in 1922

guaranteed that Tutankhamen would become the best-known king in all Egyptian history, even though his reign was short, his activities unremarkable, and his Theban building projects few in number (at Luxor Temple, for example).

Tutankhamen's regent, Ay, became ruler when the boy-king died. We know little about him except that he is shown on the wall of Tutankhamen's burial chamber performing the king's Opening of the Mouth ritual, and he was buried in a tomb (perhaps originally intended for Tutankhamen) in the West Valley of the Kings.

Ay in turn was succeeded by a general of the army, Horemheb, the first ruler in over fifty years to build extensively at Thebes. He added to the Temple of Amen at Karnak, often re-using blocks taken from the temple of Akhenaten. His tomb in the Valley of the Kings is one of its most impressive. Horemheb was the last king to use Thebes as an administrative capital, and he boasted about how he had reformed the bureaucracy there by appointing not simply men of high rank "to judge the citizens of every town," but men "of perfect speech and good character."

Horemheb's deputy, the army officer Paramessu, succeeded him and took the name Rameses I. He ruled from the Delta town of Tanis, leaving Thebes to continue as a religious center but not as a secular capital. Rameses I is often considered the first king of Dynasty 19. The kings of this new dynasty took names compounded with those of the Lower Egyptian gods Ra, Seth, and Ptah, not with the names of Upper Egyptian gods Amen and Thoth that had been prominent in royal names of Dynasty 18.

The son of Rameses I, Sety I, conducted several military campaigns in western Asia. As a matter of convenience he too resided in the Eastern Delta, but he devoted substantial wealth to religious buildings at Thebes. His memorial temple on the West Bank and his tomb in the Valley of the Kings became models of design that were highly praised and emulated by later kings. His additions to the Temple of Amen at Karnak, especially the Hypostyle Hall and the decoration of its outer north wall, are among the finest examples of art and architecture to be found in Egypt. Sety I also established the Valley of the Queens as a royal necropolis, and his mother was buried in the first tomb to be dug there. His successor, Rameses II, continued military activity on a grand scale, although there is good reason to believe that he greatly exaggerated his prowess as a military commander. Indeed, many Egyptologists consider some of his boasts to be outright lies. But as a builder, there is no doubt that Rameses II excelled. He may have emphasized quantity over quality, but his monuments were intended to impress and in that they succeed brilliantly. In Nubia, he ordered the carving of two gigantic temples at Abu Simbel. At Thebes, he ordered a huge and spectacular tomb for his wife, Nefertari. He completed work on the Hypostyle

Hall at Karnak; added to Luxor Temple; built for himself a glorious memorial temple, the Ramesseum; and finally carved two huge tombs in the Valley of the Kings, one for himself and another, the largest tomb in the valley, for several of his many sons. His reign of sixty-seven years is ancient Egypt's second longest, and the king lived well into his eighties at a time when the average Egyptian male died before forty-five.

It was his thirteenth son, Merenptah, probably already well into his fifties, who finally succeeded Rameses II. The new king resided at Memphis and undertook several military campaigns in Nubia and in western Asia against the Sea Peoples, Libyans, and Sardinians. At Thebes, he is best known for his tomb in the Valley of the Kings and his memorial temple, which reused hundreds of statues and blocks from structures nearby. The Israel Stela, in which the name of that people is mentioned for the first time in an Egyptian text, was written during his reign and installed in his memorial temple. Some claim that Merenptah was the pharaoh of the biblical Exodus, but there is no evidence for this.

Sety II, a son of Merenptah, was crowned king after the brief reign of a usurper, a Viceroy of Nubia named Messui (who changed his name to Amenmeses) who gained control of Upper Egypt. But the supporters of Sety II easily thwarted the attempted take-over and Sety II ruled for about six years. His tomb is open to the public; that of Amenmeses, KV 10, is currently under excavation.

When Sety II died, his son Siptah was still a child and Sety II's wife, Queen Tausert, served as the young boy's regent. When Siptah unexpectedly died, she then served as sole ruler for two years, supported by the chancellor Bay, a Syrian who wielded great power in the Egyptian court and who was rewarded with a tomb in the Valley of the Kings (KV 14; closed to tourists). She was succeeded by Setnakht, a man of unknown origin who, unusually, usurped and enlarged her tomb.

The only significant New Kingdom ruler after the death of Merenptah was Rameses III, son of Setnakht. Rameses III modeled his reign after that of Rameses II; he named his sons after the sons of Rameses II; and he built a memorial temple, Madinat Habu, that followed the plan of the Ramesseum. He erected a shrine in the First Court of the Temple of Amen at Karnak and began work on the Temple of Khonsu, again following the style of Rameses II. But the similarities between the two kings' reigns are superficial. Unlike Rameses II, Rameses III faced serious economic problems: early in his reign commodity prices quintupled and workmen from Dayr al-Madina, complaining that they had not been paid for months, went on strike. Charges of corruption were successfully leveled against important court bureaucrats. Rameses IV, the king's son and successor, later compiled a list of the donations he claims his father made to Egypt's many temples, perhaps an attempt to counter arguments that

Rameses III was an uncaring monarch who had ignored the needs of his subjects. But there is little doubt that Rameses III's inefficient and increasingly corrupt reign was a major cause of the troubles Egypt was facing.

One of Rameses III's minor wives, Tiy, even conspired with priests and officials to murder the king and have her son installed on the throne. Rameses III was already seriously ill, and the plotters were determined to name his successor. But the conspiracy was discovered, Tiy and the others were tried, found guilty, and forced to commit suicide. Rameses III died before the trial ended and his rightful heir, Rameses IV, ascended to the throne.

The remaining eight Ramesside rulers of Dynasty 20 witnessed the decline of ancient Thebes. Marauders stalked travelers in Upper Egypt, civil wars brought chaos to Thebes, and bureaucratic corruption was rampant. Even thefts in the Valley of the Kings were tolerated for a time because the loot they produced helped to offset rising inflation and economic depression. At the beginning of Dynasty 20, a Nile flood of such severity hit Thebes that three thousand men were needed to repair damage to Luxor Temple. By its end, more corruption scandals so rocked Thebes that a sixty-six day trial resulted in the cancellation of the Opet Festival, one of the country's most important religious ceremonies. Still, Ramesside rulers continued to be buried in the Valley of the Kings and some of their tombs are large and of considerable interest. The tomb of Rameses IX, for example, is elaborately decorated with a prodigious number of religious texts. Priests of Dynasty 21 oversaw the safeguarding of royal mummies, taking them from their plundered tombs in the Valley of the Kings and hiding them in caches elsewhere (in DB 320 and KV 35).

During the reign of Rameses IV, the administrators of the Theban priesthoods had become hereditary appointments whose growing authority posed a serious threat to the king. When the last Ramesside king, Rameses XI, died, most of Egypt was ruled from the Delta site of Tanis. Thebes, in contrast, was controlled by the High Priest of Amen at Karnak and his extended family. The rulers of Dynasty 22 gradually took control of the Temple of Amen at Karnak and appointed their relatives as High Priests of Amen, thereby taking control of Upper Egypt. In Dynasty 23, the Divine Adoratrice of Amen at Thebes became the nome's principal authority, a situation that continued until Egypt was made a part of the Persian Empire in Dynasty 27. The wealth of the priesthood of Amen can be seen in the enormous size of the tombs some of them built in the Theban Necropolis. The Dynasty 25 and 26 tombs of Montuemhat (TT 34) and Pedamenophis (TT 33) in al-'Assasif, for example, are labyrinthine collections of subterranean corridors and chambers. The end of dynastic history saw a brief revival of indigenous Egyptian authority in Dynasty 30, but it was short-lived. Alexander the Great conquered Egypt in 332 BC, adopting Egyptian customs and adding to monuments at Karnak, Luxor Temple, Dayr al-Madina, and other sites

in the Theban nome. Subsequent rulers brought about agricultural reforms that greatly increased productivity and allowed Egypt's Late Dynastic population of about four million to double by early Roman times. Building activity continued at Thebes during the Graeco-Roman period. But the city's great distance from Alexandria assured that it increasingly became a backwater, and frequent feuds between local villagers and their foreign occupiers meant that Upper Egypt did not benefit from reforms as much as the Delta. Thebes, 'The Model for Every City' no longer played a significant role in Egyptian arts or politics. With the coming of Christianity, numerous monasteries, convents, and churches were built in Thebes and their remains can still be seen on the West Bank at Dira' Abu al-Naja, Dayr al-Madina, and elsewhere. (See also the examples of arts and crafts from this period in the Luxor Museum of Ancient Art). The coming of Islam may have initially had less of an economic effect because Thebes lay south of Wadi Hammamat and Wadi Qena, two of the four principal routes of pilgrims to Mecca and traders to the Red Sea and Indian Ocean (the other two lay further north). Indeed, it was not until the coming of European tourists in the nineteenth and more especially in the late twentieth century that Thebes again rose to be an economic and cultural power in Egyptian society.

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