

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: MAPPING THE UNKNOWN IN ANCIENT EGYPT

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#### 'Mystery'

The 'mysteries' reviewed in this volume arise in the gap between what we think we know of the world from archaeology, geography and astronomy, and what we have found in Egyptian written and pictorial accounts of the world. The mismatch begins with the concept of mystery itself. An Egyptian word commonly translated into English as 'secret' or 'mystery' is *stš*, related to the word *stš*, 'difficult'; the initial 's' is generally a prefix with causative meaning, indicating that the meaning of *stš* should be 'caused to be difficult', 'obscured'. This is terrain unknown and, more importantly, rendered inaccessible because it involves what humans should not know. Excessive thirst for knowledge is an ancient Egyptian as well as a modern theme: the god Thoth governed knowledge, and especially communication by writing, and two ancient tales in particular indicate that he was not expected to share all his knowledge with human beings or even with the king. In the 'Tale of Setne Khamwase', known from Roman period manuscripts, the protagonist is a prince who almost destroys himself in his quest for a sacred book (Lichtheim 1980: 125–137); a second tale, 1,800 years earlier, seems to imply criticism of the king for desiring to know the location of chambers of Thoth (Lichtheim 1976: 219).

The lands inhabited by human beings were not part of this deliberately inaccessible terrain; a foreign land at the margin of ancient Egyptian knowledge might be 'land of god', and reaching it might require superhuman effort, but it does not seem that such efforts were considered impious excess. By contrast, otherworld and underworld lands outside living human experience required special access, just as special conditions applied to access by petitioners to the king, or even to his high officials, and as only specially designated individuals were permitted to enter inner parts of temples. From the mid-eighteenth Dynasty, the walls of the royal burial chamber were covered with the *Amduat*, a cycle of captioned images given the overall title 'writings of the hidden chamber which is in the underworld'. The opening phrases specify the content of this composition as knowledge (Forman and Quirke 1996: 117):

To know the powers of the underworld, to know their duties;  
to know their transfigurations for Ra;

to know the secret powers, to know what is in their hours, and their gods;  
to know his (the sun god's) summoning of them;  
to know the doors and the road travelled by this great god (the sun god);  
to know the course of the hours and their gods;  
to know those who sing praises and those who are destroyed.

The European expansionist claim to possess time and space is alive here in the 15th century BC, but as knowledge appropriate to divine kingship. In the 'King as Priest of the Sun god', the detailed intimacy with the cosmos is a cardinal feature of the character and power of the king (Assmann 2001: 64–67). Exclusion formulae on the model 'let no-one see this' recur throughout New Kingdom funerary literature, emphasizing that not everyone should have this knowledge. In the trio sky-earth-underworld, the features and movements of sky and underworld carry too much power to be shared. In their domain the Egyptian writings readily assign the word *šꜥꜥ* 'secret' or 'mysterious', whereas the landscapes and the seasons of earth may merely be *šꜥꜥ* 'difficult'. Evidently our mysterious lands are not the same as those of the ancient Egyptians, and this difference reveals essential differences between our thirst for knowledge, our experience of the world, and the ancient Egyptian experience of being in, knowing, and not knowing the world. A self-critical historiography with archaeological method at its fore requires keen observation of the potential and the limitations of sources. Along with written and pictorial sources, this introduces the vast modern academic literatures of textual criticism and art history.

## Lands and languages

The mapping of the world has been one of the primary expressions of European expansion since the high Middle Ages, when Genoa and Venice competed across the Mediterranean for knowledge of lucrative trade routes to the east, secrets as closely guarded as the highest technology of the 21st century. European 'science' has taken as if its birthright the exploration of all time and space; any obstacle to this quest, any mystery, is at once a defiant and enticing challenge to power, and a comforting reminder that human beings cannot always expect to have all the answers, that there are worlds that we cannot reach. In the archaeology of literate societies, any ancient name of a land beyond our (current) knowledge attracts at once scrutiny and, as can be seen in the scholarly arguments over unlocated lands, a passion that seems far from the claims of 'science' to objectivity. Those literate societies have left written evidence articulating in words their own perspectives on their world (see Allen, Chapter 2), and here modern preconceptions find good testing grounds.

In all human societies, landscapes involve acquired or cultural experience (Layton and Ucko 1999). Relation to the land is developed not only by the physical conditions and by individual psychologies, but especially by the methods developed in preceding generations for life, and more essentially for survival, in those landscapes. Language may illustrate something of the range of possible different personal and social relationships with the land. The syntax and vocabulary of landscape varies from one language to another; different languages offer different methods of appropriation, resistance or empathy – English, without syntactically gendered nouns, cannot deliver quite the same feeling of kinship as a language where the word for earth is

syntactically masculine (as in ancient Egyptian), or feminine (as in modern French or modern German). This is just one part of the complex web of factors informing the way each human being experiences place. Local patterns of shelter and sustenance introduce the fundamental and historically specific conditions of any relation with landscape. Ways of inhabiting space, obtaining food, and communicating with one another and the world, are all so basic to life that it can too easily be forgotten how much historical conditioning goes into each, and how specific and, as is the fate of historically developed conditions, how unnecessary each modern way may be. In examining ancient space, the modern enquirer may have to travel farther than might be expected.

## Lands in archaeology: the curse of writing

Egyptian writings provide plentiful references to foreign lands and peoples at all periods; and distinctively attired 'foreigners' are a recurrent feature in Egyptian art, both formal and informal. Surprisingly, however, some countries or peoples of considerable importance (to judge from what the Egyptians said about them) are documented only in Egyptian sources, and the same is true of many others mentioned, but not allotted particular significance, by the Egyptians. These circumstances are tantalizing to historians of Egypt, Africa and even the Near East and the Aegean, but also challenging and exciting. Archaeological fieldwork in relevant areas will surely locate some, maybe all, of the major 'missing' lands, and the cultures of their inhabitants, and any day hitherto undiscovered, or overlooked, texts and scenes from Egypt may also provide vital new data about some. A primary source of information is the archaeological record for foreigners settled and buried in Egypt itself. Such data have already been recovered about certain Nubian populations, specifically Medjayu – nomads from Nubia ('Pan-Grave' culture; Bietak 1966). C-Group people from northern Nubia (Friedman 2001), and even representatives of the Middle Bronze Age Kerma culture of central or Upper Nubia (Trigger 1976: 97). However, several other major groups of foreigners present in Egypt at various periods remain unidentified as yet in the Egyptian archaeological record.

During the Bronze Age in Egypt, ca. 3000–1000 BC, the lands and peoples who seem to have been most important to Egypt were, in a clockwise progression, located around the Aegean, in Anatolia and the Near East; to the south (Nubia, along the Nile) and south-east (between Nubia and the Red Sea, and perhaps across to Arabia); and finally to the west, primarily the better watered coastal regions such as Cyrenaica but also apparently regions further south, involving less hospitable regions of the Sahara (Figure 1.1). In the first millennium BC, Egyptian geographical knowledge expanded further as part of the Hellenistic, then Roman 'world systems', and one ground-breaking pharaoh – Necho II (ca. 610–595 BC) of the twenty-sixth Dynasty – purportedly sponsored the first known circumnavigation of Africa (Diodorus and Vandier 1962: 584, 678). However, the main focus of this book is on the Bronze Age.

In terms of opportunity for identification on the ground, these lands are divided in two by the presence or absence of writing. As far as the Aegean, Anatolia and the Near East are concerned, many of the relevant regions are locatable because they are documented in other written sources as well as Egyptian ones, and their cultures have

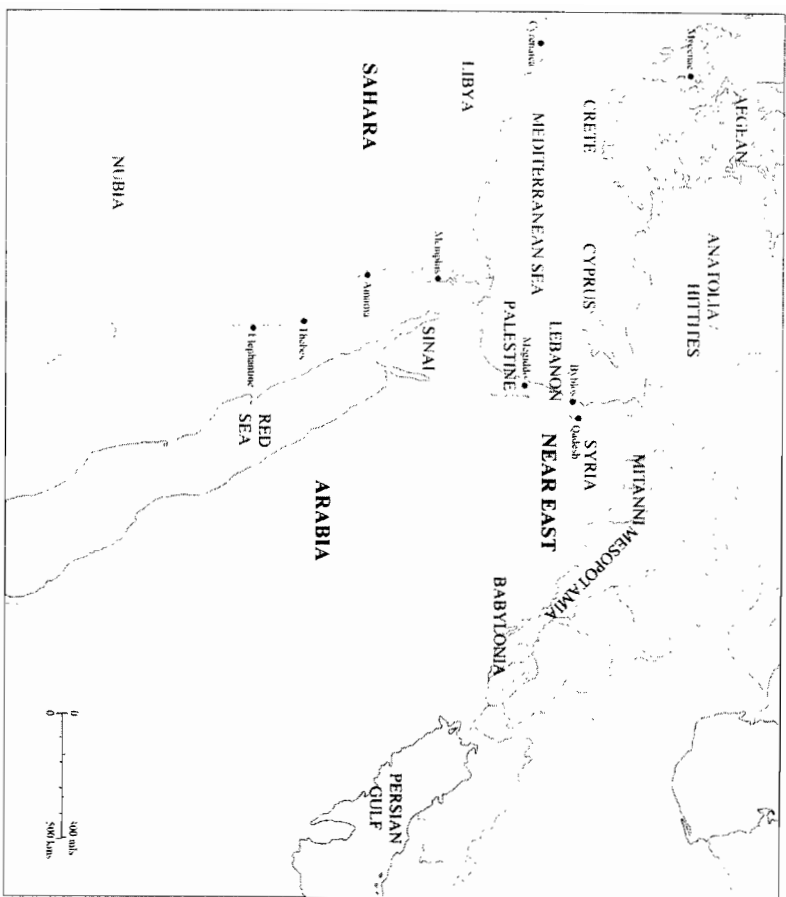


Figure 1:1 Map showing Egypt and its world.

been revealed by archaeologists. The Minoan and Mycenaean cultures of the Aegean were well known to Egyptians of the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1500–1000 BC) and, as regards the former, in at least indirect contact much earlier (Cline 1994; Kemp 1983: 147–149). Anatolia and the Tigris-Euphrates region appear to be *terra incognita* to Egypt prior to the Late Bronze Age, when they play a dominant role in the international relations for which correspondence survives in the form of the Amarna Letters of the 14th century BC and similar material (Cohen and Westbrook 2000; Moran 1992). Closer to Egypt, the lands of the Levant (today Syria, Lebanon, Israel-Palestine and Jordan) were in constant contact with Egypt throughout historic times and earlier (Matthews and Roemer 2003b; Redford 1992). Here, many of the states, places and peoples referred to in Egyptian writing and art can be located with a high degree of probability. Conversely, the available written sources in the Aegean and Near Eastern world refer to Egypt more or less in proportion to the Egyptian references to each land. The world of the written sources seems consistent in itself. The problems of identification multiply when the only relevant writing has come from one source, Egypt.

In the regions to the north-west, west, south and south-east of Egypt, no indigenous inscriptions were produced, or at least survive, until after the Bronze Age.

More seriously, most of these areas have been little explored archaeologically, if at all. Among countries or peoples featuring in Egyptian sources, perhaps the three most glaring examples of the ‘missing’ are Punt, apparently somewhere on the African or Arabian shores of the Red Sea (Meeks, Chapter 4; Harvey, Chapter 5), Irem, a substantial African land upstream of Wawat (northern Nubia) and Kush (central Nubia) (both Wawat and Kush are well known to ancient Egyptians and modern archaeologists alike; Adams 1977: chs. 6–9; O’Connor 1993: chs. 3–5), and finally Libya to the west, which presents a historically complex picture. Originally, the Egyptians referred to ‘Libyans’ as simply the Tjehenu and the Tjemehu, terms originally distinct but often used interchangeably. From about the 14th century BC, however, a medley of names of peoples appears relatively abruptly in the Egyptian records – the Ribu or Libu (ancestral to the Greek name Libya), Meshwesh and others (see Snape, Chapter 6).

Returning to the north, at the time that the Libyan ‘tribes’ begin to feature in Egyptian inscriptions, so do references to what modern historians call the Sea Peoples, identified by the Egyptians as inhabitants of foreign lands ‘of the sea’ or those who are ‘in their islands’ (Cline and O’Connor, Chapter 7). With names such as Shardana, Ekwesh, Teresh, Washosh and Lukki, these peoples joined Libyans in an invasion of Egypt in ca. 1209 BC. This onslaught was driven back, but 20 years later mainly new groups formed a migrating coalition that, some scholars believe, led to the collapse of the Late Bronze Age polities of Anatolia and the Levant, and a determined if unsuccessful attack upon Egypt itself. The homelands of these peoples remain mysterious; they may have extended as far west as Sicily and Sardinia, and may have been scattered through the Aegean and along the Mediterranean coast of Anatolia. Some have been identified as ancestral Greeks, the Danauna or the Danaians, a term later applied to Greeks in general (Redford 1992: 252) and the Ekwosh as the Achaeans of Mycenaean Greece (Gardiner 1961: 270–271). As a group, they seem to break abruptly onto the historical record, and equally abruptly drop out of it. Only one can be identified reasonably certainly with a later people, the Peleset being ancestral to the Philistines, a historically and archaeologically attested people of biblical fame (Machinist 2000). Otherwise, the available Near Eastern writings include only references to the Lukki, as seafarers and sometimes as enemies in the records from Hittite Anatolia and north-west Syria. This is fertile ground for speculation, but with mainly negative evidence in the archaeological record. As a result, there has arisen a rival school for interpretation of the ‘Sea Peoples’, according to which they are not a cause but a symptom of the collapse of the Hittite empire; according to this view, groups of island and coastal seafarers took advantage of the failure in security across Anatolia and the Levant, until the disappearance of the empire on which they had preyed (Kuhrt 1995). These elusive groups highlight the source of the mystery – a gap between the archaeological map and the written sources for it.

## Topographical lists

References to foreign lands occur as early as the third millennium BC, and in the early second millennium BC detailed lists of names of foreign lands and rulers were written out on small clay figurines used in cursing rituals to protect the king and country

(Ritner 1993: 136–142). However, foreign place names are most impressively assembled together in 'topographical lists'. The earliest of these, the stela of general Mentuhotep from Buhen, dates to the early years of Sesostrius I in the Middle Kingdom, ca. 1950 BC. There is then a gap in the record, until the inscription of the great majority of surviving examples in the New Kingdom and later periods.

In their longest versions, the lists are typically displayed upon temple pylons or external wall faces of temples, and consist of long series of place or people names, arranged in vertical columns or along horizontal registers. Each name is set in a cartouche-shaped oval which is a conventionalized representation of a fortified city wall, even if the people in question are non-urbanized nomads. Often, the top of the enclosure sprouts the upper part of a human figure, arms bound at the elbows behind its back, and representing the inhabitants of each place named. Topographical lists in these contexts are usually placed below, or adjacent to, emblematic representations of pharaoh preparing to smite a helpless group of pinioned foreign foes and hence are a statement about the 'world dominion' allotted each pharaoh by Egypt's deities and asserted by the military campaigning such emblematic scenes imply, with or without a basis in historical events (Figure 1.2). Shorter versions of such lists appear in a variety of other contexts: upon monumental stelae, royal throne daises or statue bases and even pharaoh's chariot (Figure 1.3).

These topographical lists sometimes comprise hundreds of people and places, as in the case of the several lists of King Tutankhamun (ca. 1479–1425 BC) distributed

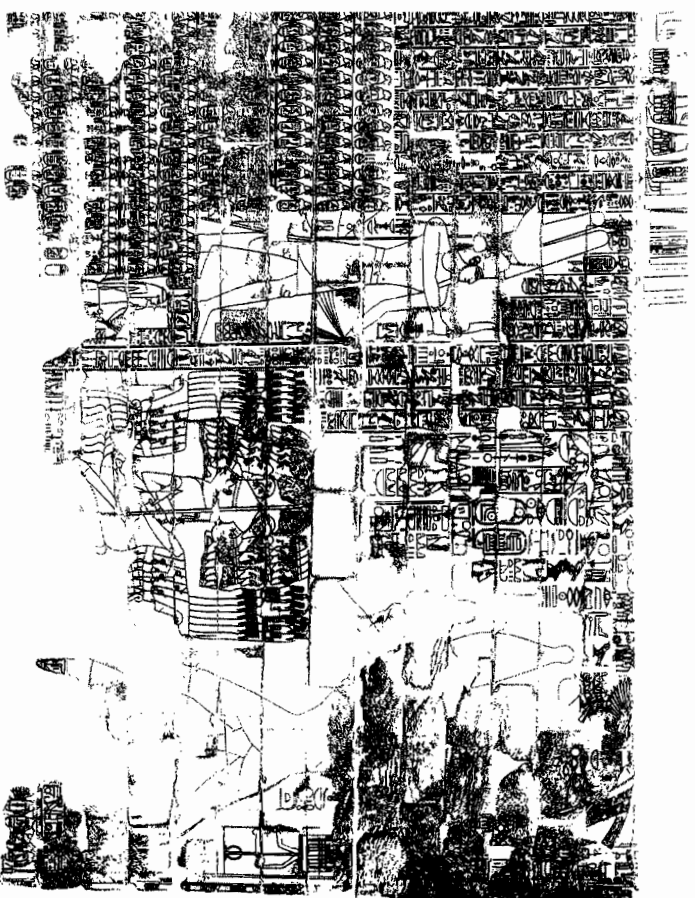


Figure 1.2 A twenty-second Dynasty example of a topographical list, commemorating Sheshonq I's campaign in Palestine (after Shaw 2000: 336; Cairo Museum, 120).



Figure 1.3 Depiction of foreigners on the chariot of Tutankhamun (Fox 1951: pl. 6).

around Karnak temple (O'Connor 1982: 928 n. 4). Typically, the sets of names are organized into geographically distinct groups, roughly 'northern', 'eastern', 'southern', and 'western' (for the Near Eastern category, see Edel 1966; Simons 1937; and for the Punite and Nubian, O'Connor 1982: 928–933); the Nubian or southern group are often placed appropriately on the southern wing of a temple pylon, and the Near Eastern or north-eastern group upon the northern. The lists make no reference to scale: they incorporate a wide diversity of regions in terms of their specific areal and population sizes, without making any obvious distinctions between ones known, on other grounds, to be very disparate. Thus, imperial powers such as Khatte (the Hittite lands), Mitanni (on the upper Euphrates) and Babylon are found, without any special distinction, in lists incorporating more polities, and even places which were quite small but may have marked points along an itinerary (Redford 1992). Places named may lie within larger regional entities named before them in the relevant list. The spatial logic and distribution of each list cannot be assumed, and require decoding.

The geographical complexities within the lists are clear because many regions or places named in their Near Eastern segments have been precisely or approximately identified from cuneiform and biblical sources, and their spatial, distributional and other disparities made evident (Redford 1992). Despite the problems, the lists represent a very wide geographical knowledge about the world surrounding them on the Egyptians' part, even allowing for archaizing reuse of foreign toponyms which no longer existed in practice, and possibly even for fictitious names invented to fill up space and make complementary lists equivalent to each other in compositional terms. These problems probably comprise a minority, and the lists in general can be considered an accurate rendering of hundreds of foreign regions, places and peoples known to the Egyptians at that time.

Given the absence of corroboratory written source material, it is the southern (Puntite and Nubian) and western (Libyan) components of such lists that present the greatest problems in locating regions and peoples named. For example, the information provided about Nubian and Puntite regions by the lists of Tutmosis III (O'Connor 1982: 928–933) is both intriguing and tantalizing. They display a certain underlying coherence and structure, but, as compared to the Near Eastern segments of the same lists, a vast majority of the names cannot be assigned even approximately, let alone precise, locations. The placement of certain key regions in the lists suggests that the lists comprise groups of toponyms within or close to Wawat (northern or Lower Nubia), Kush (central or Upper Nubia), Irem (southern Nubia), Punt (usually located between the Nile and the Red Sea, but see Meeks, Chapter 4), and the harsher, more arid lands occupied by the nomads known as the Medjayu (O'Connor 1993: ch. 3; Trigger 1976) and apparently lying north of Punt (Figure 1.4). An underlying structure is revealed if the Kush and Irem 'groups' are treated as a unit, followed by the Wawat group, a sequence moving along the Nile from south to north, similar to the way toponymical lists of places within Egypt were typically ordered (Gardiner 1947: 40). The compiler would then have moved east, listing first the Punt group, and then – moving from south to north again – the Medjayu group. Moreover, three of the groups are comparable in the number of toponyms assigned them: Kush plus Irem total 23, Wawat 24 and Punt 30, suggesting that toponyms of similar importance, or ones related in some way (e.g. key points along an itinerary), had been selected. Thirty-eight toponyms are found in the Medjayu group, but it is possible that this group actually incorporates another major region which we do not recognize (hence, two toponymical groups of roughly equal size might be involved), or that desert regions and loose tribal structures generate a larger number of relevant toponyms. In the total list of 116 toponyms, only a handful can be located on the ground, or equated with known material cultures (for an overly optimistic attempt, Zyhlarz 1958, for a more revealing compilation, Zibelius 1972).

**Irem – a mysterious land in archaeology**

The name of Irem is attested only, and then quite frequently, in the New Kingdom and later, in contexts making it clear that it is a Nubian region. It is often cited, in short lists, along with entities known to be substantial, such as Kush. Tutmosis III noted that sons of the ruler of Irem were delivered to him as hostages, suggesting that his troops

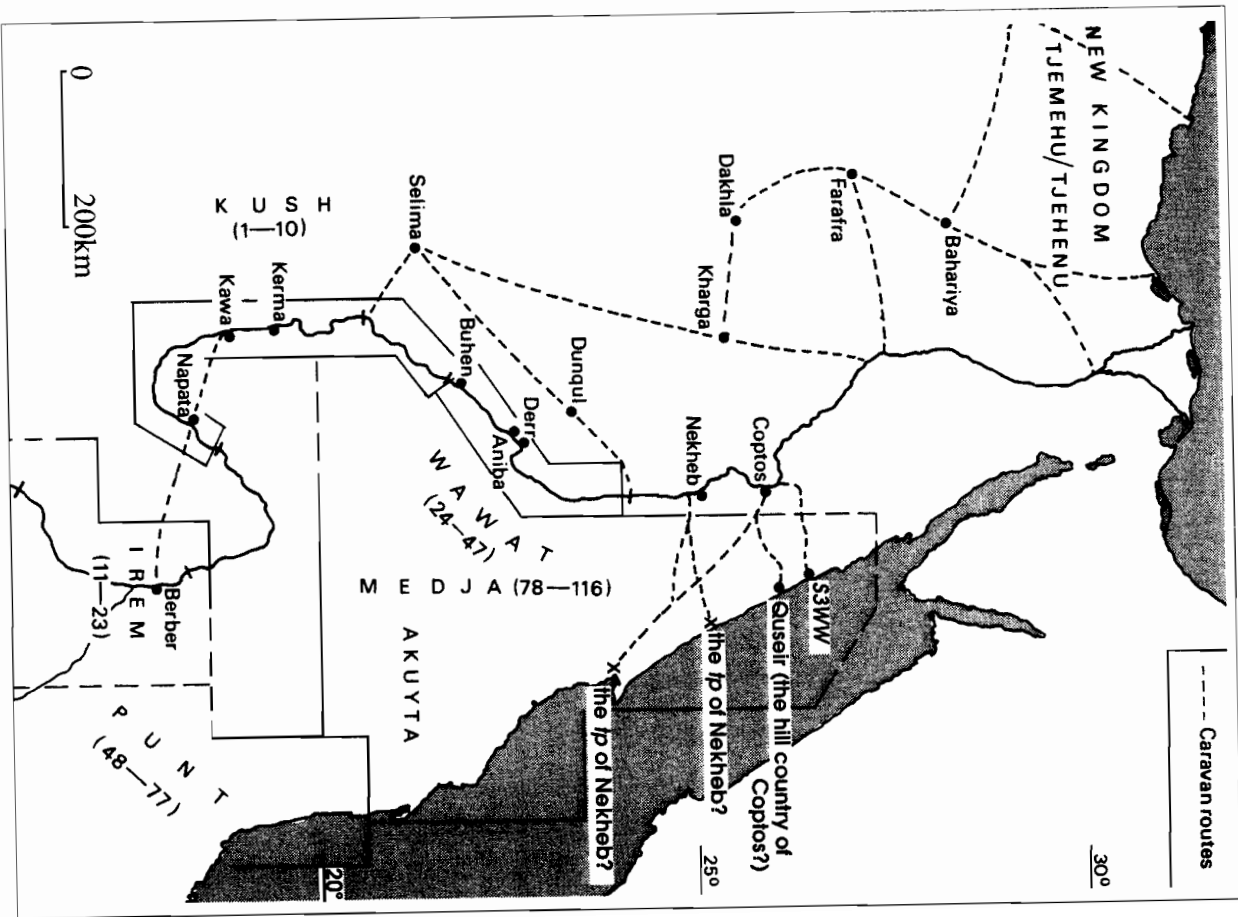


Figure 1.4 Map showing places mentioned close to northern Nubia (O'Connor 1982: 929, fig. 12.28).

may have campaigned there; and Seti I (ca. 1290–1279 BC) and Ramesses II (ca. 1279–1213 BC) certainly fought with Irem, while Amenophis III (ca. 1390–1353 BC) and Ramesses III (ca. 1187–1156 BC) may also have done so (O'Connor 1987). Moreover, Irem survived as a recognizable entity, its inhabitants being referred to as late as the reign of the Nubian king Irike-Amanote (ca. 431–405 BC; Welsby 1996: 208). However,

in spite of the rather detailed description of the Seti I campaign, the location of Irem remains a matter of debate. Some scholars think it a comparatively small, if periodically rebellious, entity within Upper (central) Nubia, which was part of Egypt's Nubian empire during the New Kingdom. However, if Irem lay further south (as may be more likely) – perhaps along the Nile where it is joined by the Atbara – it might have been a relatively large polity, essentially independent of Egypt (O'Connor 1987). Hopefully, the discovery of *in situ* inscriptional evidence, or of a more geographically explicit inscription in Egypt, will resolve the issue.

A further interesting aspect of Irem is that it may be the later writing of the name of a Nubian region, attested much earlier: the land of Yam. Along with other Nubian regions the locations of which appear relatively certain (Wawat, Irtjet and Zefaju: O'Connor 1986), Yam is referred to in a number of Old Kingdom inscriptions, and later may be incorporated into other Nubian regional names of the Middle Kingdom (ca. 1975–1640 BC). Yam seems to have been relatively independent of Old Kingdom Egypt, but was clearly one of its important trading partners and an occasional ally in potential conflicts with other Nubian polities. Despite the importance of Yam, however, its actual location remains uncertain. The best evidence is provided by an early travel narrative, describing several trading expeditions made to Yam by Harkhuf, a high official based on Elephantine near Aswan during the sixth Dynasty (ca. 2325–2175 BC). On each occasion Harkhuf brought back for his overlord, the Egyptian king, a wide range of exotica (in one case, carried by 300 donkeys) such as incense, ebony, elephant tusks and, on one memorable occasion, "a dwarf of the god's dancers from the land of the horizon-dwellers" (Lichtheim 1976: 25–27), presumably meaning a place on the extreme periphery of the Egyptians' then geographical knowledge. The dwarf was therefore apparently not indigenous to Yam (which is never described in these terms), but had been acquired by the Yanites from a more remote region. Some scholars have identified him as a pygmy rather than a dwarf, in which case this might provide a fascinating glimpse of how wide, even if indirectly, Egypt's foreign contacts could be, for in recent times at least pygmies are a central or west, not east, African people.

Harkhuf's trips to Yam and back are stated to have taken seven to eight months, and donkey caravans were always used, not the river, at least insofar as the Nubian Nile Valley is concerned. On this basis, many scholars calculate that Yam lay somewhere in Upper (central) Nubia, and perhaps had the famous archaeological site of Kerma (Bonnet 1990; Kendall 1999) as its centre. However, this theory assumes that Harkhuf's donkey caravans began their trips at Memphis, far to the north, and returned thence. If Elephantine was their starting and return point, then Yam would have lain further south than Upper Nubia, in fact at about the confluence of the Nile and the Atbara, the same general location that can be suggested – on independent ground – for Irem in later times (O'Connor 1986). Again, only new archaeological discoveries, inscribed or otherwise, could resolve the issue.

## Religious contents and contexts

The Egyptian data on these 'missing' foreign lands, as in those with locations which are fixed, are highly selective, and the factors making this so must be understood if the

maximum possible information is to be gleaned from the available sources. These are primarily inscriptions and depictions which belong to religious or ceremonial contexts – temples, royal tombs, elite tomb-chapels and royal palaces. Inevitably, the presentation of the foreign in such contexts is heavily influenced by ideological and cosmological factors – foreign lands and peoples are presented as having a definite, subordinate and relatively powerless position in a hierarchical view of cosmos that assigns superiority to Egypt and its deities. Military records might have presented a different perspective, closer to the requirements of modern historians, but few such records survive (on military and other 'day-books', see Redford 1986: ch. 3).

From Egypt's theological and ideological perspectives, all lands and peoples have value, as products – like the Egyptians themselves – of the creator, so long as they function in accordance with the hierarchical position assigned them in cosmos, the created order often referred to as the personification, Maat (Assmann 1995). That hierarchy runs from the deities and their ruler, the lord of the cosmos – typically, the sun god Ra in a variety of manifestations (Quirke 2001) – down through Egyptians, then foreigners and finally the world of nature. Thus, foreigners, in terrestrial terms, lie on the frontier between human (the Egyptians) and non-human (nature, with its beasts, birds and reptiles). Like the world of nature, foreigners are expected to provide support and sustenance to Egypt and its deities, under whose control they, in theory, lie.

However, any land can be rebellious, i.e. can refuse to service the interests of the Egyptian king; it may resist, perhaps militarily, Egyptian influence, control or attack, and may even take the initiative, attacking Egyptian forces abroad, or attempting to invade Egypt itself. In all three circumstances 'rebels', from the cosmographic and ideological perspective, take on the character of Isfet, the limitless formlessness surrounding cosmos and generating hostile forces – demons and monsters – that ceaselessly attempt to abort the orderly, life-giving cycle of the sun god around cosmos and thus bring cosmos as a whole, and its carefully structured hierarchy, to an end (Homnung 1982a: 163–164; 1982b: chs. 5–7). In these circumstances, rebellious, defiant or invasive foreigners become equivalent to the wild beasts and birds of the natural world, and the demons and monsters that manifest aggressive chaotic force on the cosmic level.

The alien nature of the foreign, and the affinity to that which relates to chaos, is manifest in the generic terms the Egyptians applied to them. A foreign land was a *ḥꜥꜣꜣ*, a word written with a depiction of a three-peaked, desert mountain ridge with a strip of green – the Nile Valley – at its foot (Gardiner 1957: 488, sign N 25). This indicates that foreigners lay beyond the ideal environmental and human order, i.e. the Egyptian Nile Valley and its inhabitants, and hence were on the frontier between order and chaos; and they lay behind the mountains defining the horizon, in a region wherein the sun god prepared himself for his renewal and re-ascent every day, but also had to be defended against the particularly intense attack of the demonic, with which foreigners were to be identified (O'Connor 2003: 174, Figure 9.12). Another term which included foreign lands was "the nine bows", written as a bow with nine strokes underneath (Gardiner 1957: 511, sign T 10), which, however, can also be read as the 'diffuse and multiple lands', highlighting chaotic aspects of foreigners that could be taken to distinguish them from the order represented by Egypt and its people. The

term would imply that foreign lands are endlessly scattered, and foreign peoples uncountable, whereas, in contrast, Egypt is a finite geographical entity, with a specific population that can be counted (O'Connor 2003). These nine bows, however, contain some surprising features that may cause some rethinking of the assumptions brought to the discussion of contacts between Egypt and the world outside.

## The nine bows

The phrase *pdt psdt* 'nine bows' appears in ancient Egyptian written sources on the theme of royal power from the third millennium BC. The bow presumably indicates the potential resistance that must be overcome, and the nine is perhaps an expression of totality (three being used to express the plural, three times three being a plural of plurals, a totality). From the New Kingdom, there is a standardized sequence of the bows specifying nine names of places or peoples (Osing and Rosati 1998: 48):

| Egyptian            | English translation           |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>ḥ3 smʿ</i>       | Upper Egypt                   |
| <i>ḥ3 mḥw</i>       | Lower Egypt                   |
| <i>ḥwmtpw sḥt</i>   | Iuntiu-people of Nubia        |
| <i>mmḥpw mw sḥt</i> | Mentiu-people of Asia         |
| <i>ḥnmw</i>         | Tjehenu-people                |
| <i>pdt šw</i>       | Bow-people of Shu/the feather |
| <i>sḥt ḥmw</i>      | Marshland of Iannu            |
| <i>š3t</i>          | Foreign land Shat             |
| <i>ḥ3w nbw</i>      | Foreign land Hau-nebu         |

In the Ptolemaic Period, the same nine names were listed with explanatory notes on a wall in Edfu temple, and there are remnants of abbreviated versions on papyri of the Roman Period (Chassinat and Rochemonteix 1931: 196 ff):

| added in manuscripts               | added from Edfu temple                                                                                   |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>ḥ3 swt</i> (land of silt-plant) | <i>ḥbḥw</i> (easterners)                                                                                 |
| <i>ḥ3 mḥw</i> (north land)         | <i>ḥ3t ḥ3w</i> (foreign land of Syrians)                                                                 |
| <i>nh3yw</i> (Nubians)             | <i>šyw nh3yw</i> (setiu-Nubians, nehesiu-Nubians)                                                        |
| <i>ḥ3wsw</i> (Syrians)             | <i>p3 ḥ3 n n3 ḥ3w</i> (the land of the Assyrians)                                                        |
| <i>pwḥw</i> (western nomads)       | <i>p3 ḥ3 n n3 pwt</i> (the land of the western nomads)                                                   |
| <i>š3sw</i> (bedouin)              | <i>š3sw</i> (bedouin)                                                                                    |
| <i>wh3ḥw</i> (oasis dwellers)      | <i>wh3ḥw</i> (oasis dwellers)                                                                            |
| <i>not preserved</i>               | <i>p3 ḥ3 n n3 hkr</i> (the land of the Haggians)                                                         |
| <i>not preserved</i>               | <i>n3 m3w n p3 ym ḥwḥ ḥ3swt mḥt š3 wrt</i> (the islands of the sea and very many northern foreign lands) |
| <i>not preserved</i>               |                                                                                                          |

The lists run counter to Egyptological received opinion on the relation between Egypt and the outside world. First and foremost, the nine bows denote not 'foreign lands', but possible resistance to order, that is, to the king and his father the sun god. Egypt is not just a part of this world, but its starting point: the first two 'bows' are Upper and Lower Egypt, in that order. Along with the wetter climate of the Sahara in the fourth

and third millennia BC, and the astonishingly dense network of desert roads either side of the Nile Valley, this inclusion cancels the simpler modern myths that posit ancient Egyptian isolation from its neighbours (and see Matthews and Roemer 2003a). Undoubtedly, then as now, there would not have been any adjacent population on a scale to match that supported by the fields along the Nile from north of Aswan. Egypt was probably always far more densely populated than even the settled lands of Nubia and the Levant, and the intermediate areas supporting nomadic rather than settled life would generally have provided an efficient buffer zone. Nevertheless, that is a condition of the longer term; in the shorter, more localized temporal and spatial horizons, the desert was a partner in life, and the inhabitants of the Nile Valley must have been in constant communication with their immediate neighbours.

Second, the worldview from Edfu temple appears to blur the dividing line between foreign and Egyptian, by aligning Lower Egypt (the Nile Delta and the area of Memphis) with Asia, under the explanatory note "foreign-land of Syrians". This is startling, even from the perspective of Edfu, a religious precinct at the very south of Upper Egypt. The hieroglyphic script includes determinatives, signs placed at the end of a word to denote the type of content, such as verbs of motion or verbs of action, and plants or animals or minerals. Determinatives remain among the most underexploited resources in the study of Ancient Egypt; the potential for using them to understand the Egyptian point of view is well illustrated in Loprieno (Chapter 3). The two commonest determinatives for place names are a circle denoting a town or settled area, for places in arable Egypt, and the triple mountain sign mentioned above, for places in the Egyptian deserts and beyond. These two signs divide the world in two, between the part where settled inhabitants spoke Egyptian, and the rest. The Edfu temple gloss for Lower Egypt seems to run counter to this basic division. Perhaps the note indicates direction, rather than content: Upper Egypt too is 'explained' with the word 'easterners', tying the inhabitants of the Nile Valley between Aswan and Memphis to the east, rather than removing Upper Egypt from the core of the Egyptian experience. In the word 'orientation', European languages also privilege the east and sunrise among the cardinal points. Yet the use of direction, of what is beyond, to explain the first two of the nine bows should be enough to demonstrate that they are all outside some other core. In the Ptolemaic and Roman Period lists cited above, the nine bows follow a series of seven "arrows of the goddess Bast" with their places of origin (Osing 1998: 253). These "arrows" designate physically destructive emanations of divine power: they first appear in the surviving record on an inscription of King Osorkon I of the twenty-second Dynasty at the temple of Bast in Bubastis. Together the bows and arrows represent the potential blows to the good order championed by the king on earth for the sun god: according to a composition revealed by Assmann (1970) as "the King as Priest of the Sun god", "the sun god placed the king on the earth of the living". The core of this operational system is a solar kingship. All hieroglyphic inscriptions and all the depictions in formal Egyptian art belong not to a human geography but to a superhuman or divine cosmography within which landscapes and peoples are treated uniformly as an accompaniment to the perpetual circuit of the sun, maintained by the king. Failure to recognise this, in literal readings of Egyptian written and pictorial sources, disables any useful reading of the past.

## Kingship as the framing context

For Ancient Egypt, despite the survival of the monumental architecture that may be ranked its most overpowering achievement, paradoxically few direct explicit sources survive for the core of the civilization – kingship. Each chapter in this book reveals a dependency on sources and, in each ‘mystery’, a frustration at the missing core. The ‘Book of the Two Ways’, the ‘Book of the Dead’ (Chapters 8 and 9) and the *Amduat* may contain more or less direct echoes of a lost original, the cosmography developed for the Middle Kingdom kings; there are, though, no royal libraries, there is no single manuscript, from the twelfth Dynasty Residence Ithawy, and the tombs of those kings are uninscribed. The evidence currently available does not reveal whether Middle Kingdom kings had guides to the underworld, or maps of any world. The pattern of communicating topography survives in a place removed from the Residence (el-Bersheh), or in periods removed from the Middle Kingdom. The surviving evidence is still abundant, but the absence of the core is a serious complication to modern knowledge about ancient knowledge, and may be fatal to modern knowledge if it is not recognized. The Egyptian view of the world as sky goddess arched over earth does not appear in the surviving record earlier than the reign of Seti I, in the early 13th century BC (Allen, Chapter 2); its contents agree with the general impression given by third millennium BC religious literature, but the articulation as an image is difficult to date, and difficult to assess in terms of its impact on the Egyptian perception of the world. Other elements in the temple of Seti I at Abydos find parallels in the Middle Kingdom, such as the appeal to the deity to come to his meal, on a ritual papyrus fragment from Lahun (Petrie Museum, UC 32091A, published on database at [www.petrie.ucl.ac.uk](http://www.petrie.ucl.ac.uk)). At present it is not possible to determine precisely when the image, and when its worldview, came into existence, and where, and for whom. As a result, knowledge of ancient Egyptian topography of the cosmos remains inexact, prone to generalization and inaccuracy. The damaged pictorial description of Punt in the Hatshepsut temple at Thebes dominates attempts to locate that land (Chapters 4 and 5); this is another source with highly uncertain historical context. Parallels are lacking, but it is difficult to assess whether it is original, or whether it might copy or develop earlier depictions in Theban or other temples of her predecessors in the eighteenth Dynasty. For one prominent inscription in her temple, on the selection of her four new names at accession, there is a poorly preserved parallel from a Fayum temple of the late twelfth Dynasty, four centuries earlier; the first topographical list in a scene of the king triumphant dates from the early twelfth Dynasty. Without clear historical location and diachronic development, the sources for ancient Egyptian geographical knowledge are left highly vulnerable to displacement and translation into foreign contexts: spatial diagrams, pictorial sub-plots and toponyms in art become fodder for the modern map maker, and are easily and conveniently built into the foundations of the next generation of archaeological and historical knowledge. The written and pictorial evidence can drown out the more direct archaeological evidence for human living in a landscape. The ‘Book of the Fayum’ shows how intensely and differently the ancient Egyptians encoded geographical space in two dimensions for a religious context (Tait, Chapter 10); it would be interesting to reconstruct from it a ‘modern map’, and compare that with the modern map of the Fayum. The Book of the Fayum can be appreciated best precisely by moving in the opposite direction, starting from the archaeological map on the ground, and

comparing that with the data on the ancient two-dimensional rendering. The ancient experience of space can only be approached through the specific contexts of its material expression. This lesson has to be learned for the most elusive lands, those where the ancient description seems so close to modern patterns of describing that the ancient context can easily be forgotten. The inscriptions of Merneptah and Ramesses III celebrate defeat of foreign island peoples and western nomads (Chapters 5, 6 and 7); they are anchored in a world of kingship as expressed through the architecture and ritual of the ancient Egyptian temple, but have been set free from that religious environment to become histories of the end of the Bronze Age. The totality of archaeological sources across the eastern Mediterranean, including material culture in all its manifestations, inscribed or not, reveals a great range of factors and, at present, a material invisibility of island peoples outside their islands, with the one exception of the provincial Mycenaean material in coastal Canaanite towns. The power of the sea battle depictions and descriptions blinds the historian to its setting – spatially a temple wall, in genre a development of pictorial narrative cycles beyond the already epic scale and composition of the Battle of Kadesh in the celebration of kingship under Ramesses II a century earlier (Warburton 2003). From this perspective the so-called ‘Sea Peoples’ are another dazzling highlight in the artistic achievement of Ramesside Egypt. Certainly they offer an immense wealth of data on island peoples, whether or not we can identify those in their homelands or destinations. However, strictly speaking they constitute indirect rather than direct evidence. The historiography has to start from the material on the ground.

## Differences of attitude in Egyptian sources: the case of the Libyans

Given the presence of kingship at the epicentre of most written and pictorial sources, it is not surprising to find foreigners assigned very specific and stereotypical roles in literature (including versions of royal victories inscribed on temple walls) and art. Typically, they are presented as gift-givers, representatives of each land or larger region presenting the produce of their land to pharaoh as if all were his subjects. The Egyptian gifts sent in return do not have a space in this formalized view, designed to perpetuate perfect order, but they surface in the 14th century BC correspondence between rulers: the Amarna Letters (Moran 1992). If hostile, foreigners are depicted as rendered helpless by pharaoh’s divinely ordained power and reduced to a terrified mass being slaughtered by Egyptian troops (Heinz 2001; for typical literary equivalents, see Edgerton and Wilson 1936). The topographical lists, as noted above, also conform to this ideology. Despite the generic approach, Egyptian representations of the foreign can reflect their attitudes towards foreigners and the cosmological context they imagined for them in complex and nuanced ways; but, by the same token, these circumstances may impinge upon the reliability of textual and pictorial references insofar as the foreigners concerned are involved. A good case in point is provided by one of the ‘missing’ peoples, the Libyans.

As noted above, foreigners were depicted in art by representative type figures, each of distinctive appearance and accoutrements, and typically – when in groups – including Nubians, Levantines and Libyans, so as to express the universality of

Egypt's dominion (Figure 1.5). In literature and other texts, foreigners of different geographic origins are often treated in the same uniform, almost stereotypical way, for much the same reason. However, closer examination reveals that each foreign type

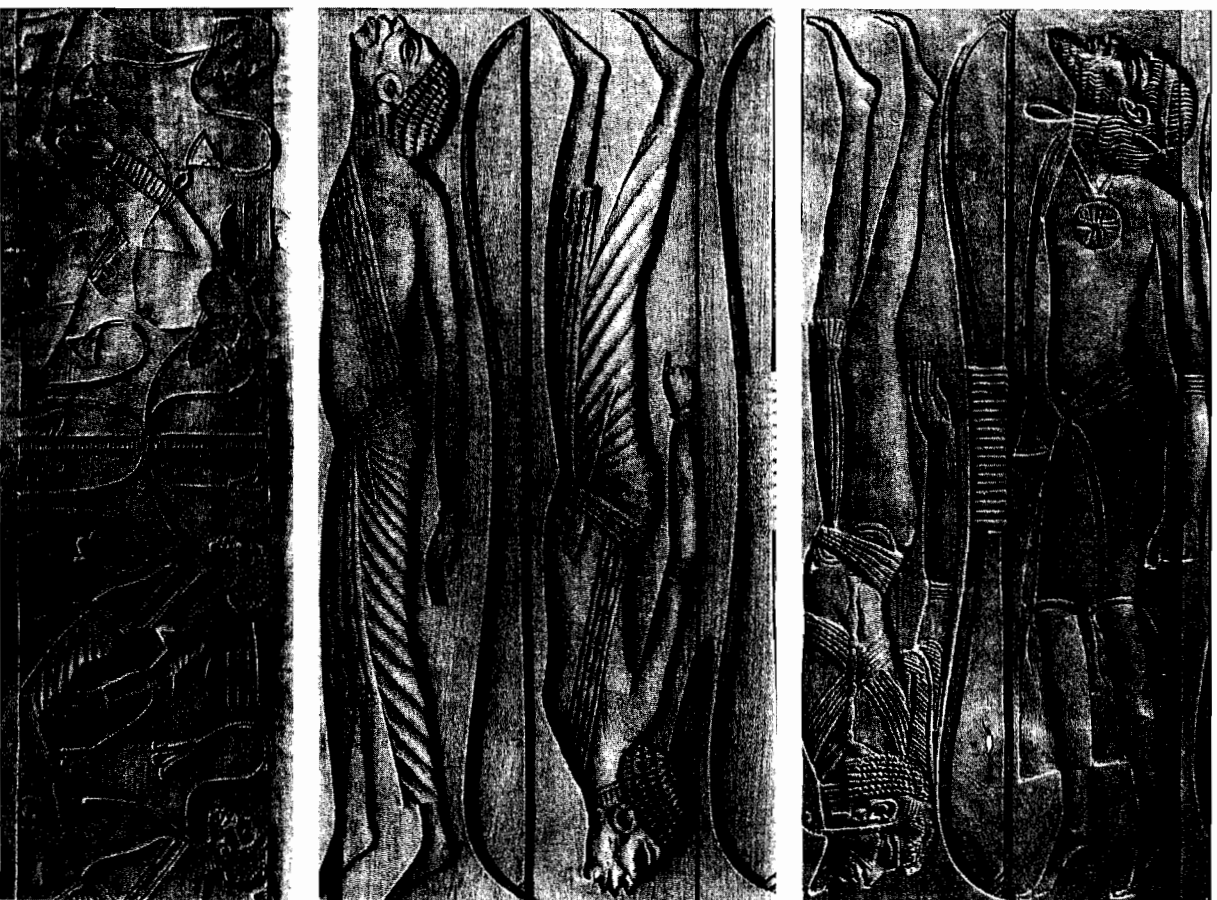


Figure 1.5: A typical collection of representative foreigners (from the 'ceremonial' 'footstool' of Tutankhamun). Note from top to bottom: two bearded 'Libyans'; two 'clean-shaven' 'Nubians'; four kneeling 'Levantine' and 'Nubians' flanking the emblem of Egypt's own unity; tied round their necks with plant-stems (Desroches-Noblecourt 1989: 51, pl. xi).

is associated with a specific constellation of meanings, different from that of the others and derived from the Egyptian concept of *cosmos*, and its interaction with their historical experiences. All foreigners were alien, in that they lacked the normative human characteristics of orderly society – i.e. Egyptian ethnicity, language and culture – but some were more alien than others, according to a subtly structured hierarchy imposed by the Egyptians.

Using Libyans as the example, in terms of verbal metaphorical representation they are, especially in the New Kingdom, subject to a more pejorative treatment than other foreigners. For example, at the mortuary temple of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu, western Thebes, three actual historical events are described at considerable length – two attempted invasions of Egypt by Libyans, and one by the Sea Peoples, a powerful group of probably Aegean and West Anatolian origin (Cline and O'Connor, Chapter 7; Edgerton and Wilson 1936: 4–93). The status of both peoples is expressed metaphorically as well as by direct description, but the Sea Peoples are allotted much fewer metaphors than the Libyans, who are compared to trapped birds; threshed grain or harvested brush, reduced to ashes; demons destroyed by the god Seth, carried off by whirlwinds; ensnared wild cattle; and, most memorably, they are depicted as men turned into women who are giving birth, as a supreme example of the impotence, travail and helplessness their temerity has brought them to (Edgerton and Wilson 1936: 12 n. 116, 79 n. 23e, 81 n. 32d). All of the imagery cited was also applied to other kinds of foreigners, but an excessive amount of it was applied to the Libyans, unusually (although not uniquely) in an extreme form, such as in the references to childbirth.

Standardized Old Kingdom depictions of Libyans differ from those of the New Kingdom, but the two are clearly related. The dress, hairstyles and accoutrements assigned to Libyans are based on Libyan features also displayed in examples of Saharan rock painting of various dates (Hachid 2000: 54–55, 94–97, 106, fig. 120). However, it seems likely that the Egyptians reinterpreted the indigenous meanings of Libyan appearance in terms of their own prejudices and worldview. For example, Libyans were often depicted as nude, except for a so-called 'phallus sheath' (worn also by women! Hachid 2000: 94, figs. 87, 91, 97), whereas most foreigners were, like Egyptians, more modestly dressed. This may have conferred a certain animality upon Libyans, reinforced by their close association with animals as nomads, and the leather accoutrements worn by Old Kingdom Libyans or the leather cloaks worn by New Kingdom Libyans (necklets, chestbands, belt; Hachid 2000: 94, figs. 87, 88, 1st and 4th figs. from left, 91), which made them look like animals (Figure 1.6). Moreover, Libyans' gender was ambiguous from the Egyptian perspective: Old Kingdom Libyans had a slight beard, but wore their hair long and flowing, like Egyptian women (Hachid 2000: 94, fig. 87) or, if shorter – as in the New Kingdom – were elaborately dressed, again a characteristic of women rather than men to the Egyptians (Hachid 2000: fig. 91). These circumstances may explain why the insulting child-bearing metaphor was so frequently applied to Libyan enemies. Finally, the Libyans were, in some cases, uncircumcised, hence somewhat juvenile (and thus again akin to women), for to Egyptians and many foreign groups male circumcision marked the 'complete', fully socialized adult. To reinforce this point, New Kingdom Egyptians normally cut off the hand of slain enemies, in order to easily add up the total killed; but with slain Libyans they, presumably contemptuously, cut off the penises

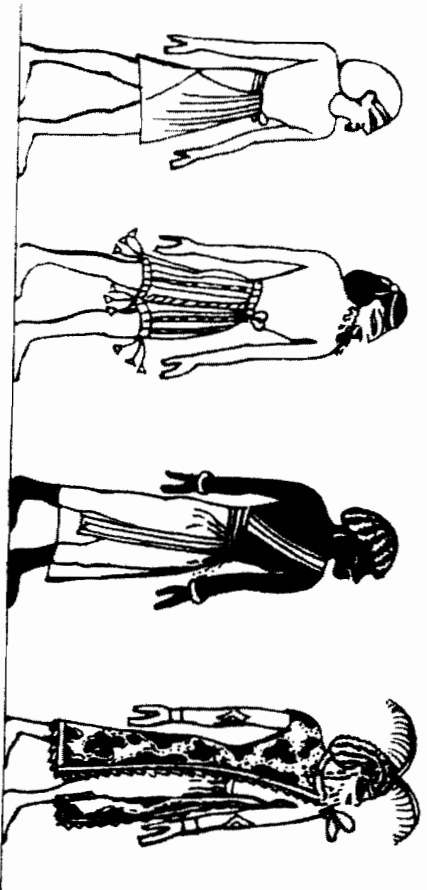


Figure 1.6 Representations from the 'Book of Gates' of New Kingdom Egyptians, Asiatics and Nubians with the Libyan shown as nude under his robe (after Hochhid 2000: 97, fig. 91).

(Edgerton and Wilson 1936: 14, 15, 67), a form of demoralization referring back to the feminine aspect of Libyans discussed above. These views of the Libyans persisted over a long period; in ca. 728 BC the Egyptianized and highly orthodox king of Nubia, Piye, defeated a coalition of Egyptian regional rulers who had resisted the expanding Nubian dominion over Egypt (Kitchen 1973: 363–366). Of the local kings who came to formally submit to him, three, of Libyan descent and still partly Libyan in attire, were barred from entering the royal palace because "their legs were the legs of women (i.e. smooth-skinned) and they were uncircumcised and ... eaters of fish, which is an abomination to the palace" (Lichtheim 1980: 80). The harsh judgment on Libyan ethnicity may be a back-handed compliment; in a sense, these were the most dangerous neighbours of Egypt, and came to be her rulers for much of the first millennium BC.

### Mining the sources

The information on differential Egyptian attitudes demonstrates how much can be learned from these sources, provided the contexts are observed as carefully as the contents. Egyptian representations – textual and pictorial – of foreign lands and peoples must be analyzed carefully, with due regard to the influence upon them of Egyptian ideology, prejudice and historical experiences. Nevertheless, for 'missing' lands and peoples the Egyptian material remains an invaluable resource – our only glimpse, for the moment, into these otherwise lost worlds. Keeping the framing context of kingship and its ideology in mind, Egyptian literature and art do provide important information about foreigners, even when their homelands are as yet unlocatable. Just as Near Easterners and Aegean peoples are provided with distinctive appearances, hairstyles and costumes, so are Libyans, Punites and Sea Peoples. More rarely, intriguing details of material culture are also indicated, but await archaeological confirmation. Did some Libyans really wield immense bronze swords 1.57 m (5'2") and 2.09 m (6'10") long (Edgerton and Wilson 1936: 66 with

n. 27e)? What do the strange helmets of some of the Sea Peoples consist of; feathers, a 'hoplite's plume', natural hair (Redford 1992: 251) or metalwork?

Moreover, important information is provided about the economies, technology and even military and political institutions of some of these as yet unlocated peoples. The pastoral nature of Libyan society is clearly indicated by their economic resource (animal herds), and, if it is not part of the Egyptian assumptions about pastoralists, the characteristic social structure of 'families' or 'clans' (Snape, Chapter 6). The ships of the migrant seafarers of the 12th century BC are to date only visible in an Egyptian depiction of their vessels of a type unique in Egyptian art. Sometimes political leadership is unequivocally described in Egyptian texts (as with Libyan invaders of Egypt under Merneptah and Ramesses III (Snape, Chapter 6, and in more detail, O'Connor 1990: 66–76); at other times leadership may be more obliquely referred to, and only in pictorial terms (Cline and O'Connor, Chapter 7).

The degree of detail is in itself a cautionary reminder of the relevance of context in each instance. The 'missing' homelands are not often described or pictured in any detail, and, when they are, the description may respond to literary requirements (Loprieno, Chapter 3). Thus, the southern Levant can be described both as, in part, a "good land", rich in fruit, grain and animals and with "more wine than water" (Lichtheim 1976: 226); but also, in part, as "short of water, bare of wood, its paths are many and painful because of mountains", its inhabitants nomadic, aggressive and treacherous, "Like a thief who darts about a group" (Lichtheim 1976: 104). Of course, environmentally different regions of the Levant may be involved, but the different descriptions involve selections to fit the mood and purposes of the different literary works involved.

Once, at least, one of the 'missing' lands stimulated production of a highly unusual rendering of a landscape, schematically organized into horizontal registers but incredibly rich in detail. This scene, in the mortuary temple of the female king Hatshepsut (ca. 1473–1458 BC) at Deir el-Bahri, Thebes, is usually taken to represent Punt, and has provided the crucial evidence for an African location for that land. However, it may include other southern territories as well, including the land of Irem, discussed above (Harvey, Chapter 5; see also O'Connor 1982: 934–939). The modern enquirer needs to return to the evidence itself and the circumstances of its discovery and original location. Too often the search starts from wherever the previous enquirer left off, when it should be the privilege and precondition of ancient history that its research begins directly from the primary source material.

### Naming lands

In the enthusiasm for locating archaeological place, a simple distinction may be overlooked – the difference between name and place. The ancient Egyptian sources reveal the names that the Egyptians knew for lands and peoples around them; they do not record the sources for those names, although the other ancient literate societies make it possible to find corroboration, and there may be linguistic clues within the names that reveal a particular language, or language family. While the modern historian may fuse place and name in an archaeological hunt on the ground, the

ancient Egyptian practice of naming implies belief in the identity of name and its object conferring power over the object from the knowledge of the name; the lists of foreign names were collected on cursing figures to be destroyed in rituals in order to disarm any possible threat to order, and the temple wall scenes with topographical lists served the same purpose. A name might be part of an equally powerful but less conflictual experience, as evoked in the literary celebrations of the home town (Loprieno, Chapter 3). These ancient experiences of place, more precisely of existence with intimate knowledge of a place, can scarcely be imagined by a modern city-dweller (Layton, Chapter 11). A different and more recent context offers some idea of the gulf between modern academic 'reportage' and the religious and literary contexts of ancient written sources:

... a modern road-map transmits knowledge of a kind that Celts would have found inconceivably abstract. Places would have been known to them as people were: by face, name and history. The last two would have been closely linked, for, as the Dindsenchas illustrates again and again, the name of every place was assumed to be an expression of its history.

(Bowen 1975–1976: 115)

This comment on the *dindsenchas*, the medieval Irish literary corpus on place names, may also be applied to more recent experience:

Placenames were a source of fascination to Thomas Murphy at all times. There were even some free-floating placenames that he didn't know where they really belonged any more. This was a major source of distress to him. One of them was a place called Sli Uisli, which seemingly was a gap in the cliffs over near where Cuan Iochtarach used to be, which he had heard of from his grandfather but had never been able to identify for himself.

(Ní Dhonnail 1996: 422)

This reflects the inclusiveness and intimacy of experience of the landscape, and the meaning of names in Ancient Egypt. This distant but instructive affinity extends in particular to the world beyond the human. The afterlife and desert creatures 'of the imagination' need more careful consideration than life sciences and earth sciences can usually accommodate:

For the first and only time in his life he apprised me of his belief in merpeople. He was never to do so again, as later in his life he became rather coy and wary in speaking of mermaids or of fairy lore. The fact that I and my generation scoffed at him unmercifully from the heights of our newly acquired knowledge of biology and geology did not encourage him to pass on his knowledge to us. Twenty-five years down along the line, much humbler and more dog-eared, I feel in no position to laugh at him. Actually, I feel that his world view has much to offer us as a middle ground between the severities of scientific abstraction and the loneliness of the individual in contemplation of them.

(Ní Dhonnail 1996: 426)

There may be just such a high-handed tendency among Egyptologists and archaeologists not to take hybrid demons and otherworldly places so seriously, and to exclude the underworld from the series of lands to be studied. Such an omission would destroy the unity of the universe portrayed by the Egyptians. The full range of ancient Egyptian sources embrace a world comprising the earth of the living, the skies

above, and the underworld beneath. The ancient historian tends to focus on compiling 'political history' or history event-by-event, 'short-wave' history. That may not be available for the Bronze Age, with its richer insights into cultural history and the operations of ancient kingship. It may also deflect attention from an experience of the world that was less exclusively focused on the physical, visible or tangible.

The destination of the modern quest for, and journey through, the mysterious lands of Ancient Egypt seems, then, as in most mental and physical journeys, to be the self, or more specifically a self-critical consciousness. Egyptology tends to be lambasted among the social sciences for its over-dependency on writing and art, its isolation from neighbouring disciplines and its disengagement from theoretical archaeology. This volume demonstrates the power of those written and artistic sources, and the need to incorporate them into the study of the past, on condition that their context remains visible and studied at least as much as, if not more than, their content.